

NEWSLETTER

Winter 03/04

AHRB **Centre for
British Film and Television
Studies**

Partners

Birkbeck, University of London
University of Brighton – South East Film and Video Archive
British Film Institute
Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London Institute
University of Exeter – Bill Douglas Centre
University of Lincoln
Royal College of Art
University of Ulster

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NEWS

Professor Ian Christie took over from Professor Laura Mulvey as Director of the Centre during the summer of 2003, having been a Paul Mellon Senior Research Fellow in 2002/03 while working on Robert Paul and the early moving picture business in Britain. His book is due to appear in 2005, with a DVD of all Paul's extant films to be published by the BFI.

Professor Sylvia Harvey's move from Sheffield Hallam to the University of Lincoln in October 2003 brought a new partner to the Centre, as the project on Film and Broadcasting Policy got under way with the appointment of Kathrein Guenther in October 2003 and Margaret Dickinson in January 2004.

Dr Duncan Petrie will leave Exeter University in January 2003 to take up a chair in the Media and Communications Department of the University of Auckland in New Zealand. His replacement at Exeter is a former Centre Senior Fellow from Sheffield Hallam, **Professor Steve Neale**, who takes over as Director of the Bill Douglas Centre.

University of Ulster has been awarded £3m for a Centre for Media Research under the Department for Employment and Learning's SPUR II (Support Programme for University Research). The project will facilitate research into film and photography history and archives, media policy, cultural issues and emerging digital issues. The general public is increasingly media literate and this innovative project will enable researchers to investigate a wide range of local, national and international historical and contemporary issues.

Major SRIF funding awarded to **Birkbeck** has been allocated to building a new Research Centre in the School of History of Art, Film and Visual Media which hosts the Centre.

The AHRB's newly appointed director of Research Centres, Professor Nigel Llewellyn, will visit Birkbeck on 2 Feb, to meet representatives of the host and partner institutions, including the Master of Birkbeck, Professor David Latchman, and Director of the British Film Institute, Amanda Nevill.

INTRODUCTION

This is the Centre's first Newsletter, intended to bring together some of its many strands and offer a snapshot of recent and future plans.

Explaining what the Centre is and how it works has never been easy, since its activities extend beyond the interests of most individuals. But I believe, like the others involved in setting it up, that there are important links between what can often seem quite separate lines of research. Film policy needs to be able to invoke a vibrant history of British cinema and television to argue its case; so refurbishing that history becomes a priority. But should British 'screen' history not include pre-cinema optical entertainment – and the deliberately marginal activities of artists? And in asking if it can be 'British', do we mean that it should engage with Europe and America, or that it should recognise regional difference?

Sooner or later, the research questions posed within each strand of the Centre's work raise questions within another strand. And important methodological issues are common to all. How can screen history make progress without closer attention to archival research? And how can film archives become more valued by other kinds of historian, such as those of the theatre and architecture?

As well as offering a snapshot of the Centre in action, we want to use the Newsletter to record some of its unique output. Without Centre backing, neither Bryony Dixon nor Patrick Keiller could have carried out the research which is briefly reported here. There'll be more in future issues.

No-one who has been involved with the Centre during its first three years will have any doubt that its successful organisation owes much to Laura Mulvey, as founding Director. Working closely with Sylvia Harvey and Ann Jones, and maintaining close links with all the partners, Laura devoted herself totally to ensuring that everyone has felt included and involved in the Centre's development. That it is in such excellent condition, and now looking forward to the future, beyond the initial funding period, is in large part thanks to Laura's enthusiasm and dedication. - IC



Hot image to go? Malcolm Le Grice showed his avant-garde classic *Berlin Horse* (1970) in the latest of its incarnations, playing on a table-top PDA as he spoke at the 'Film History in Question' conference in November.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2004

EVENTS

GETTING IT MADE: Contemporary Film and Video

Tate Britain – 20 March

Money, technology and the critical questions around creativity have impacted dramatically on the formation of British film and video. This day will explore the various avenues that have changed the production, distribution and look of the moving image. Have artists found new ways of funding their work? How has the ever shifting commercial and public sector relationship affected creative practices? What might the advent of new technologies bring to the making of new film and video? Artists, filmmakers, critics, broadcasters and historians come together to explore the many and varied influences and shifts in contemporary practice.

Key presentations will be given by Mike Figgis, director of *Cold Creek Manor* and *Hotel*, and Lynne Ramsay, director of *Morvern Callar* and *Ratcatcher*.

OFF-SCREEN SPACES: Regionalism and Globalised Cultures

University of Ulster, Coleraine - 28-30 July

This major international conference will explore the relationship between 'global' popular culture and various definitions of 'local' culture. Crucial to an understanding of this relationship is the concept of 'the region' as this has become reconfigured by global economic and cultural forces. Regional cultures exist in relation to and in opposition to dominant national cultures in complex and contradictory ways. National cultures themselves are often posited as regional cultures in opposition to the global and the concept of 'critical regionalism' has been canvassed as a challenge to global conformity. On the other hand, in line with the strategies of multinational corporations more generally, multinational software manufacturers have divided the global market into 'regions' for the purpose of controlling the DVD market. This would suggest that, despite the fact that regional cultures seem to offer alternatives to the global market there appears to be nothing intrinsically challenging or radical in the concept of the region.

The conference will explore the complex and contradictory relationships among the local, the regional, the national and the global and assess the implications for both media representation and local, national and transnational audio-visual policy. Central to discussions will be the concept of comparative film studies and a number of papers will address the rationale and theoretical implications of comparative media research.

PROJECTS

FILM AND BROADCASTING POLICY MOVES TO LINCOLN

Following Sylvia Harvey's appointment to a new chair at the university of Lincoln, the final phase of the Film and Broadcasting Policy strand will be based at Lincoln, with Margaret Dickinson as Senior Research Fellow and Kathrein Guenther as Junior Fellow.

This phase will cover the period 1985 to 2000, from the point when the Conservative Government effectively dismantled the post WW2 structure of film support and regulation, through the beginnings of co-ordinated European media policy under the MEDIA programmes, up to the formation of the UK Film Council as a new unitary body. It will cover the appearance of Channel 4 as a new force in British production, becoming a major player in brokering international co-productions (such as *Secrets and Lies*). The steady fall in domestic cinema attendance reversed in the late 80s as multiplex construction spearheaded a revival of confidence in exhibition, despite the emergence of home video as a potential competitor. Interpreting the dynamics of this period of British film policy promises to be a fascinating subject.



Paradoxes of identity. Brenda Blethyn and Marianne Jean-Baptiste toast their new relationship in Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies* (1996), a quintessentially English film largely financed by France.

THE LONDON PROJECT

By a timely coincidence, the London Assembly's report on current cinema provision across London boroughs, *Picture Perfect?*, appeared just as the Centre's 'London' project got under way at the end of 2003. This project will study the growth of the moving picture industry during its first twenty years, from 1894-1914, within the area which saw its most explosive development. One important feature will be the correlation of knowledge about exhibition as well as production, and studying the emergence during this period of distribution as a distinct sector of the trade.

By mapping the growth of this dynamic new industry and entertainment medium, year

by year, it will become possible to trace for the first time how moving pictures were shaped by the economic and social geography of the capital – and how they in turn helped shape the 'imperial metropolis' of Edwardian London. Such a realization has been largely missing from the accounts of London's historians, beyond a token acknowledgment of the spread of 'super cinemas'. But film was already an important business, transforming lives and fortunes for a decade before these appeared.

It has also been missing in any systematic form from the work of British film historians, ever since Rachael Low drew attention to the wide disparity of contemporary estimates as long ago as 1948. Most subsequent studies have concentrated instead on the work of individual producers (John Barnes), or on pervasive aspects of exhibition such as the shift from music halls and 'penny gaffs' to purpose-built cinema halls (Michael Chanan). As a result, we have only an impressionistic view of *how* production and exhibition actually developed during the period up to 1914 – a period that was crucial in witnessing Britain's early lead in both production and exhibition decline, to the point where foreign suppliers were the majority suppliers to a burgeoning exhibition sector by 1914.

The study will involve, first, collation and assessment of existing published materials, both primary and secondary. These will include the early film trade press, and major works of synthesis such as Rachael Low and Georges Sadoul; as well as sampling of contemporary newspaper and ephemera sources. A second phase is envisaged as the study in depth of selected areas of London, using local history archives, to determine through 'micro studies' the pattern production and exhibition development, together with associated factors such as transport and housing density. Where were cinemas created? And how did audiences reach them? Why did studios move and how did they develop, as production became more elaborate.

Presenting the results will involve tabulation and databases. But it should also include an accessible visual display, which will allow trends to be seen, year by year, and compared. There will be issues of coverage to decide. How far beyond Central or Greater London should the study reach? What attention should be paid to the parallel development of other forms of mechanised or 'mass' entertainment, such as music hall, theatre, dance halls? A series of seminars will convened during 2004 to canvass expert opinion on these matters; and also to identify likely members of the Advisory Panel. It is hoped to appoint a Senior Research Fellow to lead the project by March.

THE CITY OF THE FUTURE

Patrick Keiller

The City of the Future is a research project that attempts to develop a critique of present-day and possible future urban landscapes by exploring archive film of the past century. Patrick Keiller is currently an AHRB Research Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the Royal College of Art.

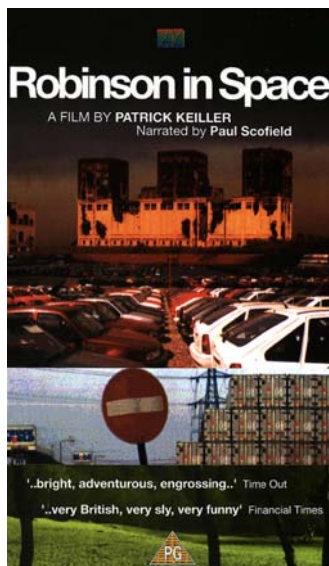
During the 1990s, I made three films about the UK's urban and other landscapes. *London* (1994) attempted a re-imagining of already-existing spaces of London, suggested by various literary and other treatments of Paris. A sequel, *Robinson in Space* (1997) explored landscapes outside London in which the newness of spaces characteristic of a computerised, international consumer economy contrasted with the dilapidation of much of the rest of the built environment. A third film *The Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000) examined the future prospects of the UK's housing stock, and included some archive film. It was partly suggested by a study commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which pointed out that the rate at which the UK's stock of dwellings were being replaced was so low as to imply that every dwelling would have to last for several thousand years.¹

The film asked whether the application of computer and other new technologies – which had transformed so many aspects of manufacturing, food distribution etc., and was very visible in the landscape of *Robinson in Space* – was likely to alter this outlook, and concluded that in the short or medium term it was not, and that the predicament was more likely to intensify. A few years later, it appears that (at least in the UK) the housing stock of the future will be composed of nearly all the dwellings that already exist, and a few new ones not unlike them. This longevity of the built environment (not all buildings are dwellings, but 70% of urban land is residential, and much of the rest of the built environment appears to be almost as permanent) contrasts with expectations of the early twentieth century, when there seems to have been a relatively widespread anticipation that new technologies and social structures would – or at least should – give rise to a radical transformation of urban space in the decades that were to follow. About half the UK's dwellings have been built since 1945, but most of these were additions to the stock, and much of the built environment that existed in, say, 1910 survives today.

In the last hundred years, city life has probably changed rather more in other ways, often in ways that involve perception and imagination. The subjective transformations of Surrealism and Situationism – that prompted the first of this series of explorations, the film *London* – were the prototypes of a process in which the 'discovery' of previously undervalued

spaces by artists and other creative types has become the sought-after preliminary to urban regeneration.

When viewing archive film for *The Dilapidated Dwelling*, I was struck by a contrast between the familiarity of many of the spaces glimpsed and a feeling of distance from the lives of those who formerly inhabited them. It was also intriguing that the onset of the apparent relative stasis of the built environment – which seemed to have occurred, at least in the UK, during the decades either side of 1900 – should coincide with the beginning of moving pictures. It seems highly unlikely that there might be any direct connection, but moving pictures are just one of many communication and transport technologies that were developed or became wide-spread at about the same time, which was also the peak period of European emigration. These social and technological changes might be seen as the beginning of a rapid expansion of virtual space, which has continued with radio, television, telecommunications and the use of computers. One can



also imagine that this expansion of virtual space might have disadvantaged actual space.

At the same time, during the last 100 years the cost of building does not seem to have decreased relative to average earnings, and has probably increased, whereas food, most manufactured goods and transport have become much cheaper.² Much of this increased productivity has been achieved through mechanisation, automation and economic activity in the virtual realm, in which building has lagged far behind. In most respects (life expectancy, for instance) the majority of people in the UK now are much better off than the majority of the early twentieth century, but there are some ways in which the present is impoverished.

In the 1980s, I tended to assume that the increasing dilapidation of the built environment was visible evidence that the places in which one encountered it were becoming poorer. By the mid-1990s however, it was clear that similar dilapidation was just as likely to be found in prosperous areas. Somewhat inadvertently, I began to use the word 'Orwellian' to refer to the

expansion of virtual space, and to describe dilapidation that was not a result of economic failure, but merely an aspect of the prevailing economic reality. There was a similarly 'Orwellian' aspect to the landscape of the film *Robinson in Space*, in the contrast between the spaces of global finance and consumerism – new office towers, airports, shopping malls, supermarkets and so on – and the increasing neglect of so much of everything else.

I had not read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* since leaving school, but recalled its protagonist's conversation with an old man in a pub who has tried to insist on being served a pint of beer, by then sold only in litres and half-litres, following which:

Winston sat for a minute or two gazing at his empty glass, and hardly noticed when his feet carried him out into the street again. Within twenty years at the most, he reflected, the huge and simple question, 'Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?' would have ceased once and for all to be answerable. But in effect it was unanswerable even now, since the few scattered survivors from the ancient world were incapable of comparing one age with another.³

For us, 'the huge and simple question, "Was life better before the Revolution than it is now?"' might suggest, if anything, a comparison with the mid-1970s. The revolution – whether a digital revolution, the onset of neo-liberalism or the 'shift in the structure of feeling' with which modernity gave way to postmodernity, or all of these – is usually located around the time of the 1973 oil crisis.⁴ In advanced economies, reductions in the cost of consumer items, air travel and so on might suggest that people are generally better off now than during the 1970s, but is not difficult to argue otherwise.

Later in the novel, when Orwell's protagonists present themselves as recruits to a rumoured underground resistance, they drink 'to the past'. Their contact sends them a copy of *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, by Emmanuel Goldstein, which includes:

The world of today is a bare, hungry, dilapidated place compared with the world that existed before 1914, and still more so if compared with the imaginary future to which the people of that period looked forward. In the early twentieth century, the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient – a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete – was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person.⁵

Even in this dystopian context (and Goldstein's book is a fiction within a fiction, as it turns out to have been written by a member of the *Thought Police*) the comparison with 'the world that existed before 1914' might seem surprising,⁶ but Orwell does appear to see the

Another version of this article will appear in the Nottingham British Silent Cinema Festival volume for 2004 (Flicks Books)

past as subversive, even if its material attractions are a trap.⁷ If one is a film-maker, one might wonder how a film of the past – as both an artefact of the past, and a record of people and artefacts of the past – would qualify these ideas.

One of the first films I encountered that recalled such questions was *Panorama of Ealing from a Moving Tram*, photographed by William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson in 1901 for the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company. This is a view looking forward from the upper deck of an electric tram passing east along The Broadway, The Mall and Uxbridge Road alongside Ealing Common, a short length of the former Oxford to London coach road in the neighbourhood of Ealing Broadway railway station. The National Film and Television Archive's viewing copy is a 35mm print, but the original was photographed with the 68mm Biograph electric camera which ran at 40 frames per second, and in bright, clear sunlight.

The left side of the street is visible, lined by what look like plane trees about 30 feet tall, behind which most of the shops have awnings. There are a great many flags and banners, some of them very large Union flags, others less easy to decipher, and a lot of people out walking who appear rather smart, as if the day is a public holiday or weekend of some national or other significance.

Near the beginning of the film, the tram passes the London and County Bank (previously the Town Hall), which has put out two large flags, and later a music shop with a sign 'pianos'. Towards the end of the film, an open-topped electric tram passes in the opposite direction, fairly full on top, with several of the passengers carrying parasols, as are many people in the street. There are cyclists on the road, a pony and trap and other horse-drawn vehicles, but not many tradespeople and no motor cars. The non-panchromatic stock probably exaggerates the brightness of the weather a little, and Dickson might have used a red or yellow filter, but the people's dress, the large number of parasols carried, and the degree of movement of the flags and the leaves of the trees, together with the celebratory atmosphere, suggest an unambiguously euphoric, breezy non-working day in summer. The unusually sharp definition of the image – which I assume is a result of both the original large format and the good condition of the archive's 35mm copy – together with the extraordinary lighting effect, create a degree of heightened photographic realism, so that it is not difficult to imagine that the film might be a fragment of a costume drama made in the 1940s.

It is easy to forget how little of the actuality of the past is documented in films. Even today, whether in fiction, documentary, news or even the recordings of surveillance cameras, very little of ordinary, everyday life appears in moving pictures. Exceptional circumstances – if only those accompanying the camera – will almost certainly have attended the making of any film. Even in the 26 hours of the Mitchell

and Kenyon collection, the motives of the film-makers nearly always condition and sometimes create the events seen in the films.

The first three electric tram routes in London began operating on 4 April 1901, from Hammersmith to Kew Bridge, from Shepherd's Bush to Kew Bridge via Chiswick, and from Shepherd's Bush to Acton. With the completion of the latter route's extension to Ealing and Southall, the entire network was inaugurated on Wednesday 10 July, which was also the day on which Ealing celebrated its Charter of Incorporation as a Borough, the first in Middlesex. Electric trams were popular both as public transport and as representing the benefits of electrification and modern technology.⁸ As moving camera platforms, they offered film-makers the possibility of striking spatial simulations, which in return publicised the trams and identified their modernity with that of cinema. The film is one of four Biograph films that recorded the Ealing tram inauguration on 10 July.⁹

In 1901, Ealing was a well established suburb, as the tree-lined streets seen in the film suggest, but still new enough not to offer much evidence of decay. As 'Queen of the Suburbs' it was also relatively prosperous, probably more so than it is today. Like much surviving domestic architecture of the period, the landscape of the film appears to confirm the relative prosperity of the late Victorian and Edwardian middle class. All this might be said of a number of films of the period, but few seem to suggest that the summer of 1901 was an enjoyable time to be alive in the way that the Ealing film does. I suspect that this is as much a result of the film's cinematography, especially the unusual quality of light, as of anything else – there is a similar emancipatory feeling in Pissarro's paintings of Bedford Park in 1897.

About ten days after first seeing the film, I was travelling upstairs on a bus which unexpectedly diverted eastward along Uxbridge Road, and found myself passing through the space depicted in the film. It was a dull day in November. The bank is still a bank, now a branch of the NatWest, and many other buildings on the north side of the road survive, but the view from the bus certainly suggested that something other than mere age had impoverished the landscape. Ealing is still a prosperous, successful London suburb, so, as before, one wonders what to make of this apparent impoverishment. In 1901, poverty was often shocking and never very far away – Dickson's film of Ealing is approximately contemporary with Jack London's account of the East End in *The People of the Abyss*, published in 1903.¹⁰ Ten years later Maud Pember Reeves's *Round about a Pound a Week* detailed the domestic conditions, child mortality and inadequate budgets endured by women in north Lambeth whose husbands earned between 18 and 30 shillings (£0.90 - £1.50) a week, not unusually low wages for unskilled workers.¹¹ In 1914, skilled workers – bricklayers, electricians, engineering pattern-makers, shipwrights, engine drivers – earned

around two pounds a week,¹² seemingly about average earnings. Skilled workers today tend to earn rather more than the average, and the middle class is much bigger and relatively less well off, but reduced wage differentials or increased scarcity of certain skills seem unlikely to be the underlying causes of a change in the material quality of the built environment. The qualities of space one seems to see in Dickson's film are those that attract tourists to less 'advanced', or socialist economies. Given that the UK's economy in 1901 was less 'advanced', it is hardly surprising that one should detect such qualities in the film. Perhaps their absence from the space today can be seen as a predicament of the local in a culture in which power is increasingly located elsewhere. The disempowerment of local government, for example, leads to dilapidation, so that it seems appropriate that Dickson's film might have been partly suggested by Ealing's becoming a borough. London's public transport flourished under the control of the London County Council, and public transport is a major priority for its successor, the Greater London Assembly. On 29 May 2002, Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, announced the decision to construct two new tramways, one of them from Shepherd's Bush to Uxbridge, via Ealing.

Notes

1. Philip Leather & Tanya Morrison, *The state of UK housing* (Policy Press, 1997). In the 1970s, a similar calculation produced an implied life of 250 years, then considered problematic.
2. Earnings have increased about three times as much as prices. A study by Encyclopaedia Britannica published in 1999 suggested that between 1899 and 1999, retail prices increased by a factor of 57.5, while average earnings rose from £1.95 (39 shillings) per week to £384.50.
3. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Penguin, 2000): 96.
4. See, for instance, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). The early 1970s also saw the end of large-scale urban redevelopment, at least in the UK, as with the successful resistance to the GLC's plan to redevelop Covent Garden.
5. Orwell: 196.
6. Orwell was born in 1903. During much of his childhood, his family lived in the Thames valley near Henley, a landscape which appears in positive contexts in the novel.
7. The space in which these are encountered – the junk-shop 'to the north and east of what had once been St Pancras Station' (pp85-86) – is the site of the novel's protagonists' entrapment.
8. Though Ealing's council had opposed the introduction of the trams. As cheap public transport, they were perhaps seen as a threat to the suburb's exclusivity.
9. The other films were *Distinguished Guests Leaving the Power House*, *The First Trams Leaving Shepherd's Bush for Southall* and *Panorama at Ealing Showing Lord Rothschild Declaring Line Open*. See Richard Brown and Barry Anthony, *A Victorian Film Enterprise – The History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company 1897-1915* (Flicks Books, 1999), 295. This gives the date 10 July 1901 for all four titles.
10. Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Pluto, 2001).
11. Maud Pember Reeves, *Round about a Pound a Week* (Virago 1979).
12. *British Labour Statistics, Historical Abstract 1886-1968*.

MUSIC HALL AND BRITISH CINEMA BEFORE 1930

Bryony Dixon

Supported by an AHRB Research Exchange award, this project aimed to produce a comprehensive overview of moving image and associated materials held in the National Film and Television Archive that relate to music hall and popular theatre in Britain before 1930. Outcomes will eventually include an academic article, a catalogue of titles to foster further research, a DVD, and public screenings with commentary, which began at the National Film Theatre in May 2003. Bryony Dixon is Archival Bookings Officer in the Access Department of bfi Collections.



Betty Balfour in *Life, Love and Laughter*, 1926

The parallels between music hall and early cinema are obvious. Both 'music hall' and 'cinema' describe places as well as forms of entertainment. Both are specifically 'popular' entertainment. Both became organised as mass entertainment industries with their own peculiar codes of practice and traditions. Both were driven by the demand for novelty. Both developed 'star' systems and encouraged an increasingly homogenous, family oriented product as the industries became more integrated.

Music hall and early cinema shared content, an aesthetic, personalities and programme structure. For many years, film and variety were seen in the same programme, by the same audience at the same theatres, sharing the stage and the orchestra. Structurally the film programme reflected in microcosm the music hall programme with its mixture of topical, interest items, novelties, humorous and dramatic songs and recitations. The newer industry inherited much from music hall then, gradually superseded it, and one could argue that for several years it kept it alive as mixed film and variety bills were briefly popular. In business terms the cinema developed along similar lines to the music hall, as a series of interconnected private businesses run for profit, unlike radio (and later television), which were spawned by technological innovations like film,

but in Britain were co-opted by government for public service use, despite being ultimately conveyors of mass popular entertainment.

There were other similarities too. Music hall appealed to the same audiences that subsequently became interested in cinema; broadly speaking the urban working classes, although that appeal cut across the classes at times. The glamour of the cinema, as with the music hall before it, provided a welcome escape or diversion from the confines of crowded city dwellings. Both industries were in general politically conservative, in their structure and in the content which they encouraged. They shared a sense of humour, which encompassed the specific and the individual within the 'type'. They shared desires for popular music, dance, novelty, spectacle and colour, for fantasy, storytelling. In terms of text and the treatment of that text the similarities between music hall and early cinema are striking.

It was not inevitable that cinema should have developed from the music hall and fairground businesses. As Nicholas Hiley has observed:

If celluloid had been only a fraction more expensive to produce, or just a little more fragile, it would have been impossible for travelling showmen and entertainers to adopt the new moving pictures. The film camera would have remained a scientific instrument, and there would have been no impulse to develop dramatic narrative or to appeal to a mass audience. There would have been film, but not film history as we understand it [which is] the story of how that medium was adapted to the needs of a paying audience.¹

However, the two industries began to diverge in the years just before the WW1, that great watershed in this as in all other areas of life. Yet it was not the rise of narrative filmmaking which split the music hall from the cinema - music hall already had plenty of narrative forms easily adapted to the screen - but rather the rise of the feature film, which would become the dominant form in the cinema industry.

This project was designed to make accessible the resources of the National Film and Television Archive at the British Film Institute to shed light on the complex relationship between music hall and cinema. Current research into the important contribution made by the music hall to the development of British cinema is hampered by a lack of awareness of key archival resources. As the major national collection of moving images, and as the most important site holding relevant material, bfi Collections was the necessary point of departure for this programme of work. The project's ultimate objective is to contribute to interdisciplinary debate about this significant area of British popular and film culture while also stimulating future research. The starting point was to catalogue four types of material:

- Films of music hall artistes, including actualities.
- Films featuring music hall artistes in comedies or dramas made as original works for the cinema.
- Film based on music hall sketches or plays, including foreign renditions of British acts.
- Later fictional films about the traditional music hall.

In addition to identifying these specific film materials, the project contributes to a number of broader areas of current film and media research, such as:

- Technology. What sound systems were used for filmed theatrical performance before the coming of synchronised sound?
- Aesthetics. What can be learnt from film records about the music hall's performance modes? And what was their influence on early cinematic performance?
- Economics. How did the companies involved in the production and exhibition of these films function? And how were their products received by contemporary audiences?
- National identity and popular culture. How does early cinema contribute to the study of British national identity? What is the place of British cinema in the wider frame of international film culture?

The context for this programme of work is provided by a recent convergence of interest on the subject of early cinema. As well as the growth of international interest in silent cinema, of which the present increase of work on British silent cinema is a part, scholars in theatre and performance studies are undertaking significant work on the inter-textual relation between film and their fields.²

Notes

1. Nicholas Hiley "'At the Picture Palace': The British cinema Audience, 1895-1920", John Fullerton, ed., *Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema* (John Libbey, 1998), p. 96.

2. The interest in this field is evidenced by regular conferences and festivals on British Silent and Early Cinema such as the annual British Silent Cinema Festival (organised by the BFI and Nottingham Broadway Cinema) and Visual Delights, a biannual conference organised by a consortium of Northern Universities. Many UK independent cinemas have regular programmes of silent film (including the NFT, the Barbican, the City Screen circuit, Nottingham Broadway, The Festival Hall, and the Hyde Park Leeds). New studies are published every year by the academic press and there is a lively internet scene.

International interest continues to increase, with specialist film festivals and conferences (Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, Sacile; Il Cinema Ritrovato, Bologna; the annual University of Udine conference, and biannual Domitor Congress). Research on American comedy is also often concerned with British music hall, in Frank Sheide's work on Fred Karno.

LOOKING BACK AT 2003

Centre partners organised two one-day conferences and a major three-day event during 2003.

MOVING HISTORY: FILM ARCHIVES AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Birkbeck, University of London
10 June 2003

Organised by Frank Gray (Brighton) in collaboration with Laura Mulvey and Ian Christie (Birkbeck), this well-attended one-day conference addressed one of the Centre's main themes: how to stimulate greater academic awareness of archival holdings as a major focus for research – and how to help archives become more involved in setting the media research agenda.



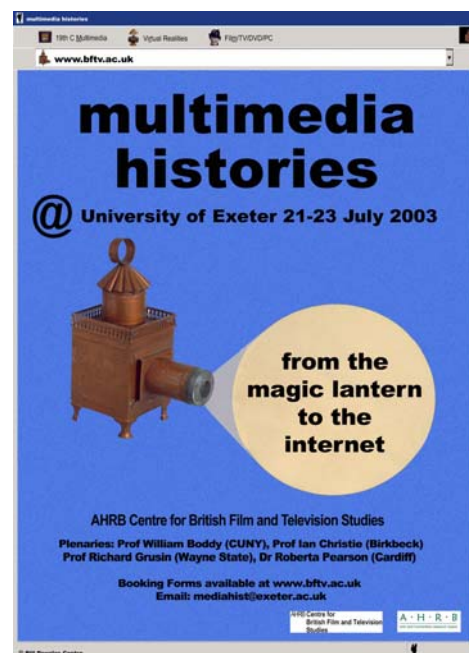
Jan-Christopher Horak, founding vice president of Association of Moving Image Archivists and curator of the Hollywood Entertainment Museum was the keynote speaker at Moving History.

In the first session, 'The Moving Image and History', two speakers surveyed the current landscape in which moving image archivists are developing their collections and working with scholars to understand their cultural and intellectual meanings. Jan-Christopher Horak, editor of the Association of Moving Image Archivists' journal *The Moving Image*, has an informed knowledge of the issues facing archivists in the digital age, and also of the challenges presented to archivists and academics by images from such diverse producers as the studios, television, artists and amateurs (having worked at Eastman House, the Munich Stadtmuseum and Universal Studios). Nico de Klerk (Nederlands Filmmuseum) has long been interested in the archival and scholarly questions posed by non-fiction material, examples of which he showed. Much of this material is anonymous, has become detached from specific histories of production and consumption, and as a result has been kept outside of film/cultural history and scholarship. How can we re-attach these 'orphans' to history?

The second session brought together three researchers with different interests who have each drawn directly on film archive

collections and generated new knowledge about these, as well as fostering interdisciplinary studies. Tim Boon is Head of Collections at the Science Museum, and was previously its Curator of Public Health. As well as writing on the history of health publicity, he has studied key British documentary films of the 30s to reveal the ideologies of history, industrialisation and society which they articulate. Elizabeth Lebas is senior lecturer in Visual Culture and media at Middlesex University, where she leads the MA in Architectural and Spatial Culture. Her research interest in urban ideas and projects between the wars led her to write the first major article about the Bermondsey health promotion films which are held by the Imperial War Museum and the NFTVA, and so amplify the understanding of 'documentary' in the 20s and 30s. Bert Hogenkamp, head of research at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision in Hilversum and a professor at Utrecht, is well known as an historian of British left and labour film; and on this occasion he talked about archival discoveries of amateur film from the 50s which show a continuing radical aspiration in unexpected quarters.

Three archivists took the platform in the final session: David Pierce, curator of the NFTVA, David Cleveland, director of the East Anglian Film Archive and Vanessa Toulmin, of the National Fairground Archive at Sheffield University. Characterising their collections, they underlined the view that many potential researchers know little about the holdings, beyond familiar material, and each gave examples of issues and materials that would repay further research. A welcome feature of the symposium was the presence of a number of historians and interested parties not from within the film archive community. Equally welcome were the practical examples given of 'discoveries' and of interpretive approaches to specimen material. Most present felt that the potential of archival research had been well argued, and that more of such events would usefully carry this message to a wider constituency of historians.



MULTIMEDIA HISTORIES

University of Exeter
21-23 July

The Bill Douglas Centre collection houses, as its website proclaims, the second largest such collection in Britain, with a wealth of technology, literature and ephemera spanning the whole history of optical entertainment and cinema. But even a collection as rich needs research of different kinds to realise its potential. Following a symposium on 'Early Screen Practice', organised by John Plunkett during his Centre Fellowship in 2002, which provided some useful experience, 'Multimedia Histories' was an ambitious international conference focused on the impact of multimedia culture, understood as having a long genealogy stretching back long before contemporary multimedia. Among the themes examined by some fifty-six speakers were the relationship between screen technologies, optical recreations and popular culture, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, leading on to consideration of such relationships being reconfigured by the electronic and digital technologies of the later 20th and 21st centuries. Many of the presentations focused on specific historical moments of convergence and hybridity, or on speculative parallels – as in, for instance, Alison Griffiths' (CUNY) 'Woven Spectacles: medieval Tapestries as Precursors to IMAX', Lauren Rabinovitz's (Iowa) 'History of Somatic Visual Culture through Hale's Tours, IMAX and Motion Simulation Rides' and Michelle Henning's (UWE) 'The World-Wide Web as Curiosity Museum'.

Video gaming, interactivity and the impact of recent 'new media' on conceptions of narrative and spectatorship were also recurrent

themes of the conference, which began with a stimulating plenary lecture by Richard Grusin (Wayne State), co-author of the influential *Remediation: Understanding new media*, entitled 'Cinema of Interactions: DVDs, Video Games and the Aesthetic of the Inanimate', and ended with a 'show and tell' presentation by Ian Christie, 'Toys, Machines, Instruments', using examples of kaleidoscopes and stereoscopes from the Bill Douglas collection to explore the history of terminologies and perceived uses that have determined how new media are categorised.

New forms of theorisation of pre-cinema practices were in evidence, with an account of the android as 'synthespian' by Dan North (Exeter) and a new approach to Reynaud's Praxinoscope by Cathryn Vasseleu (Sydney). Non-visual media were also not forgotten: William Boddy (CUNY) contributed another plenary on 'Early Wireless and Multimedia History', and Charlie Gere drew suggestive parallels between John Cage and the development of defence technologies.

Above all, the conference demonstrated the continuing potential of themes such as intermediality, interactivity and hybridity to provide a strong conceptual base on which many detailed and specific studies could be fruitfully pursued, and historians of different periods can find common ground. Media history and theory seem to be alive, increasingly in dialogue, and thriving. A publication based on the conference and edited by James Lyons and John Plunkett, is in preparation.



FILM HISTORY IN QUESTION

Senate House, University of London

21 November 2003

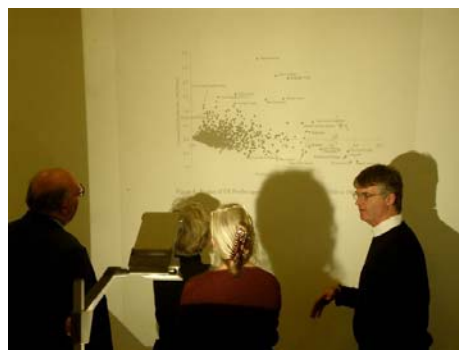
This study day was organised jointly with the Screen Studies Group, affiliated to London University's School of Advanced Study, and comprising Birkbeck, King's College, Royal Holloway, Queen Mary College, University College.

In a round-table setting, the aim was to create a forum for discussion of broad issues in the conception and writing of 'film history', with speakers organised in three panels and each invited to present a brief polemical statement as a prelude to debate. The questions at issue were outlined as follows.

A decade after David Bordwell identified the 'basic story' of film history, with its attendant aesthetic assumptions, does this still hold sway in Britain? Has the history of cinema taken account of other historians' debates? Has it had any impact on their work? Can film history be regarded as a legitimate field of historical inquiry, or is it merely a branch of criticism? Could it be part of art history, or of 'comp. cin.' on the model of 'comp. lit.'? And finally, where does the venerable organising principle of national cinema history stand today?

2 The history of *what*, exactly?

Film texts, genres, periods, aesthetic positions, makers, audiences, industries? Perspectives on what objects and processes film history can or should study – from Richard Brown (independent scholar; co-author, *A Victorian Enterprise: the British Biograph Company*); Christine Gledhill (Staffordshire; *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928*; co-ed, *Reinventing Film Studies*, etc); John Sedgwick (author of *Popular Film-Going in 1930s Britain*, seen below explaining his cluster graph of film success to fellow panellists). Chair: Ian Christie (Birkbeck).



2 Where do we put the avant-garde (and where do we find it)?

Fringe or foundation? Avant-garde film occupies different places in different national traditions, with Britain as chronically ambivalent

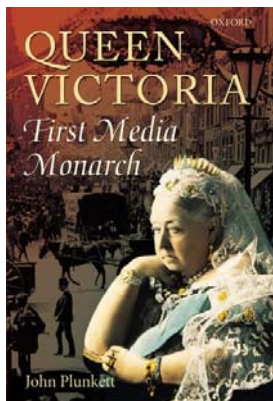
about film as about its other art-forms when these are compared with other cultures. Is avant-garde film best kept apart from histories of the commercial medium, or does it need to be integrated? Discussion by David Curtis (*Experimental Film*; programmer and head of the Centre's British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins); Malcolm LeGrice (Central Saint Martins; author, *Abstract Film and Beyond* and leading film artist); and David Mellor (Sussex; curator and editor of the catalogue, *A Paradise Lost: Neo-Romanticism in Britain 1935-55*, etc). Chair: Laura Mulvey (Birkbeck).

3 Britain in the world; the world in Britain

Do national cinema histories still make sense? Did they ever? How should British film history reflect European affiliations as well as American indebtedness? How does film history relate to national history: can we read the latter in the former, and vice-versa? Discussion by Claire Monk (De Montfort; co-editor, *British Historical Cinema*); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Luton; editor, *Oxford History of World Cinema*). Chaired by Peter William Evans (Queen Mary College). *Pictured below.*



Discussion was lively during the day, with a welcome number of postgraduate students present and participating. Among the most striking contributions were John Sedgwick's account of his economics-based approach to measuring film popularity and success, using a range of data largely ignored by traditional film historians; and David Mellor's questioning of the idea of 'avant-garde' in relation to British traditions of whimsy and subversive comedy. This investigation of current attitudes towards film history in Britain and the history of British film was intended to contribute to shaping both the 'London' strand of the Centre programme, about to start at Birkbeck, and a proposed new history of British cinema, which might become a future Centre project.



John Plunkett's *Queen Victoria, First Media Monarch* (Oxford University Press, 2003), appeared in March 2003 and quickly attracted reviewers' attention.

Jamie Sexton, "Televerite' hits Britain: documentary, drama and the growth of 16mm filmmaking in British television", *Screen* Volume 44, number 4 (winter 2003)

Moving History

An online guide to UK film and television archives in the public sector.

Moving History was created at University of Brighton as part of the Centre's research strand on archives.

www.movinghistory.ac.uk

British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection

A unique study collection at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design dedicated to the work of British film and video artists.

The Study Collection houses a wealth of material relating to British artists' film and video. Researchers are welcome to make an appointment to visit and browse the collections of paper documentation, images, posters and videotape copies of artists' works.

www.bftv.ac.uk/avantgarde

MARCH

Getting It Made: Contemporary Film and Video

27 March – Tate Britain

APRIL

Films Beget Films

Royal College of Art

Postgraduate training event:

Regional/National Cinemas

29 April – University of Ulster

JUNE

Postgraduate training event: Early Cinema

19-23 June – during Domitor Conference in Utrecht and Amsterdam

JULY

Off-Screen Spaces: Regionalism and Globalised Cultures

28-30 July – University of Ulster

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AHRB

The Arts and Humanities Research Board funds postgraduate and advanced research within the UK's higher education institutions and provides funding for museums, galleries and collections that are based in, or attached to HEIs within England. The AHRB supports research within a huge subject domain – from traditional humanities subjects, such as history, modern languages and English Literature, to music and the creative and performing arts. The AHRB makes awards on the basis of academic excellence and is not responsible for the views or research outcomes reached by its award holders.