

NEWSLETTER

Summer 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

The Centre is applying for Phase 2 funding, with a range of new projects and, potentially, additional partners. The second phase of application will be completed by 1 October with interviews and results of the competition for Phase 2 funding expected by the end of the year.

One of the Centre's original architects, Professor John Hill, is leaving the University of Ulster, where he has been based for over twenty years, to take up a new chair at Royal Holloway. He intends to maintain close links with the Centre at RHUL as well as continuing his association with Ulster.

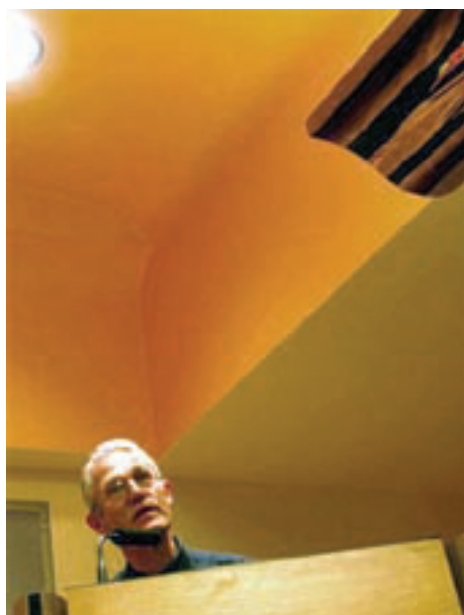
Following the appointment of Luke McKernan as Senior Research Fellow and Jonathan Davis as Senior Research Advisor to the London project at Birkbeck, Simon Brown will be joining the project as a part-time Research Fellow from August.

The Broadcasting Policy Research group led by Professor Sylvia Harvey at Lincoln has made a number of recent submissions to the government's new super-regulator Ofcom. For details see p.3.

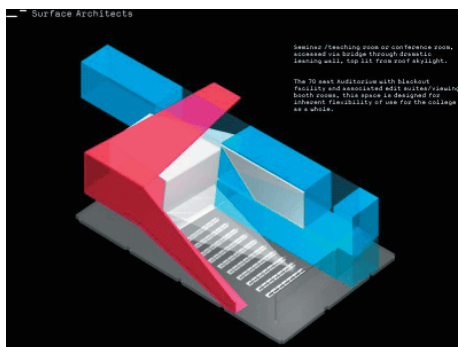
Postgraduate training has become a steadily increasingly priority for the Centre, responding to the AHRB's own initiatives in this field. With institutions under pressure to mount substantial research training programmes and form consortia to develop these, as a condition of receiving bursaries for research students, the Centre has taken a lead in experimenting with new ways of giving students 'real world' experience. In April, the Centre mounted two innovative postgraduate 'sidebars' within existing events. Students working on early British cinema were funded to participate in the Nottingham British Silent Cinema Festival and benefit from the array of specialists attending through a series of special lunchtime seminars. Meanwhile, the University of Ulster organised a special forum for postgraduates working on 'National and Regional Film and Television', attached to its annual cross-border Irish Postgraduate Film Research Seminar. Feedback from both events indicates that such initiatives are welcomed by research students seeking experience in presenting their work publicly.

The future of the Centre has also been an important concern during the first half of 2004, following the first formal visits of the AHRB's Director of Research Centres, Professor Nigel Llewellyn. At meetings with the Master of Birkbeck, Professor David Latchman, on 2 Feb and with the Vice Chancellor of Lincoln, Professor David Chiddick, on 13 May, Professor Llewellyn heard at first hand about the strong commitment of these two institutions to the work of the Centre and its federal structure. Sylvia Harvey and I both attended the Board's London away-day for Centre directors, at which experiences were exchanged and new guidelines for centre management vigorously debated.

Finally, at the end of June, details of the competition for Phase 2 centre funding were released. Partners have been preparing for this opportunity to develop our centre for some time, devising new strands of research, considering how these could deliver synergy and greater critical mass, and how the Centre might respond to approaches from other institutions who are interested in joining forces with it. The initial 'expression of interest' has now been sent, and we look forward to laying out plans for the Centre's future in greater detail. - IC



David Curtis, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre's British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, speaking at 'Getting It Made' at Tate Britain in March.



Birkbeck's new Film and Media Research Centre moves on, with the recent appointment of Surface Architects, whose partners have been involved with innovative conversion and extension of historic buildings at Queen Mary, and previously with Will Alsopp's landmark Peckham Library. The new extension to 43 Gordon Square will house the Centre's headquarters and provide research offices, a seminar room and a digitally-equipped screening auditorium.

CURRENT ACTIVITY

EVENTS

OFF-SCREEN SPACES: Regionalism and Globalised Cultures

An international conference on film, television and media: Cultures and policies

University of Ulster Coleraine – 28-30 July

The 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 it has become reconfigured by global economic and cultural forces. Regional cultures exist in relation and in opposition to dominant national cultures and interact with them in complex and contradictory ways.

National cultures are themselves 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 or homogeneity. 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 potential of regional cultures to offer alternatives to the global market, there is in fact 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.

Keynote Lectures and Plenary Sessions:

John Tomlinson: Globalisation and Cultural Identity

Ang, Ien: Changing Meanings of Asia and Asianness in Contemporary Global Culture

World Premiere Screening: *Rebel Frontier*, Desmond Bell, (2004, 64 mins.) Desmond Bell will attend the screening and answer questions afterwards.

Toby Miller: The People of the United States Cannot be Trusted: Globalised Hollywood 2

Panel Discussion: Film Policy in the UK: Four Years of the Film Council with **David Steele**, Senior Executive Researcher, UK Film Council; **Prof. Sylvia Harvey**, University of Lincoln; **Prof. John Hill**, University of Ulster and member, UK Film Council and **Richard Williams**, Director Northern Ireland Television Commission

Pat Loughrey, Director, Nations and Regions, BBC: Local Identity in the Global Village: the BBC's Regional Policy

PROJECTS

THE LONDON PROJECT Mapping the Metropolis

The London Project, as reported in the last Newsletter, has been getting under way. Luke McKernan's appointment as Senior Research Fellow in May (on half-time secondment from the British Universities Film and Video Council) has kick-started an intensive process of assessing the available information about the early film business in London and identifying sources of new data. Also appointed is Jonathan Davis, a senior consultant to the UK Film Council, who will advise on presentation of the London project's findings in ways which may be of particular interest to today's planners.

The Project was formally launched with a Press release on 20 April, coinciding with the launch of Film London, the new government-backed agency intended to coordinate services to production and all other activities that foster the presence of film in the capital. Ken Livingstone was one of the speakers at the City launch of Film London, and the only one to remind the large audience that film isn't only about economic benefits, but has long been a vital cultural experience, especially for the poor. As Film London looks to develop schemes to make film more varied and accessible throughout the city today, with grants to specialist festivals and projects, the Centre's London Project will be unearthing evidence of how film spread rapidly as a new industry and entertainment during the late Victorian and early Edwardian era.

A first Advisory Seminar for the project was held at Birkbeck on 16 June, with some twenty invited experts from many fields. These included Richard Gray and Allen Eyles from Cinematograph Theatres Association, which has done much to promote awareness of the surviving material history of cinema-going through publications and campaigns on historic cinemas; the economic historian John Sedgwick and film historians Richard Brown, Nicholas Hiley and Stephen Herbert; and Vanessa Toulmin, research director of



Allen Eyles (l.) and Luke McKernan at the London Project's first Advisory Seminar at Birkbeck in June, with Montagu Pyke's words on screen.



An early shop-front cinema in London's Old Kent Road

the National Fairground Archive at Sheffield University. Also present were Jude Cowan, a Birkbeck research student working on early British cinema, and Patrick Keiller, filmmaker and currently AHRB Research Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the Royal College of Art.

Luke McKernan outlined the project's aims as:

- to provide a comprehensive assessment of the early film business in London
- to produce a summary of existing knowledge and to create new resources for further the study of early film in and beyond London
- to establish the physical, social and economic presence of film in London between 1894-1914
- to establish a methodology for the socio-economic analysis of early film
- to obtain a new recognition of film as a social factor among historians of this period

He then offered an impressive synthesis of existing knowledge before spelling out how much remains to be discovered. Much of the seminar was profitably devoted to discussing how little is known about many aspects of the business, from questions of topography to the cost and means of film transport, and how admission prices related to disposable income for different classes. The recent example of the mobile phone phenomenon seeming to have no obvious economic rationale provided a striking reminder of how unexpected yet dramatic shifts in media consumption continue today.

Among current research that will inform the project, Jon Burrows' recent major study of 'penny gaffs' and other early types of exhibition venue in London (published in two parts in Film History vol 16, nos 1 and 2) challenges received wisdom about these equivalents of America's 'nickelodeons'. Making use of a wider range of licensing and other records, Burrows questions previous estimates of their numbers and dating, proving how fundamental research is urgently needed in this field. The seminar contributed strongly to identifying both refined research questions and methods and sources that may help answer them.

Luke's presentation ended with a 1910 quotation

from Montagu Pyke that strikes a balanced note amid the claim and counter-claim that surrounded early cinema. 'It forms in fact – I like the word – a diversion. It is in some respects what old Izaak Walton claimed angling to be: An employment for idle time which is then not idly spent, a rest to the mind, a cheerer of spirits, a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of passions, a procurer of contentedness.'

ALL CHANGE IN BRITISH BROADCASTING

Sylvia Harvey

When the Chairman and the Director General of the BBC both resigned in the wake of the Hutton Report in January 2004 there had not been such a politically-motivated culling of senior BBC staff since the enforced resignation of Alastair Milne in January 1987 – despatched by a Tory grandee who had been appointed by Margaret Thatcher. By strange coincidence, or perhaps by action of some sardonic higher power commenting on the continuities between Thatcherism and Blairism, both Alastair Milne and Greg Dyke walked the plank out of Broadcasting House on the same date: 29 January.

There are some important differences, of course, as well as some similarities in the causes and consequences of these events. The cull of 2004 took place during the early stages of the debate about the renewal of the BBC's Charter. And the attendant storm of publicity seems to have had the effect of increasing public interest in what has previously been a rather un-noticed and elaborately esoteric ritual, namely the review by government of an organisation (the BBC) operating under the provisions of a Royal Charter. Taken in conjunction with the emergence, also in January, of the new regulatory body, the Office of Communications – 'Ofcom' – designed to oversee both telecommunications and television, and the first few months of this year have been a busy time for politicians, journalists, media historians and policy theorists.

Milne's resignation was a consequence of government anger at the BBC's coverage of the American bombing of Libya, allied with controversies over the investigation of war and terror in Northern Ireland (some will remember the 'Real Lives affair') and the BBC's attempt at investigating the secret services (Duncan Campbell's famous or infamous series: *Secret Society*). Dyke's disappearance was a consequence of disagreements about coverage of the war in Iraq. Both men were effectively sacked as a result of direct and indirect pressure from the government of the day. Michael Grade (long before his recent appointment as the new Chairman of the BBC) was to refer to the removal of

Milne as an example of the 'brutalisation' of the BBC.

But what do these affairs of state and of front-page newspaper coverage have to do with the more sober pace and objectives of scholarly research? The Public Policy and National Identity strand of research within the AHRB Centre has been attempting to keep abreast of current changes in public policy, to analyse and assess these changes and to contribute – where appropriate – to the shaping of policy.

This work began with a response to the government's White Paper on the Future of Communications issued in December 2000. Prepared by no less than two government departments (the Department of Trade and Industry together with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) the White Paper and its subsequent legislation represented the biggest shake-up in the regulatory framework for broadcast communications in the United Kingdom since the ending of the BBC monopoly and the creation of commercial television in the 1950s. The White Paper outlined the sometimes conflicting objectives of support for the development of dynamic markets in the communications industries and recognition of the role played by public service broadcasting in the political and cultural life of a nation. Our response highlighted some of the difficulties of combining the regulation of communications infrastructure (and issues of competition related to the provision of telecommunications services) with the regulation of television content (with all of its attendant controversies around issues of quality and diversity in programming, the maintenance of impartiality in news and current affairs and the desirability of support for indigenous production). We noted the cultural and political significance of television and its role in facilitating informed citizenship, and expressed some concern that any approach which appeared to prioritise issues of economic competition above those of cultural significance might result in a reduction not an expansion of real choice for viewers and listeners.

As the Communications Bill passed through Parliament and a strong controversy emerged about the government's proposal to enable American ownership of British television companies – for the first time in the history of UK broadcasting – the Centre organised a well-attended public meeting to debate the issues. Around seventy people met in Sheffield to listen to politicians representing the views of government and of opposition, to contribute their own views and to hear, also, proposals coming from the community media sector.

Since the Communications Bill became law in July 2003 and both Ofcom and the DCMS have swung into action with their reviews of public service television and the BBC's royal charter, the Centre has continued to make written submissions in the various public consultations

and to participate in an ever-growing number of mainly metropolitan-based policy seminars. Throughout this process we have been asking to what extent and in what ways academic research into communications policy might contribute to the framing of public interest principles and objectives. Our most recent written contribution to the debate about Charter Renewal has suggested that licence-fee payers might take on the responsibility of electing the governors of the BBC, thereby both improving structures of accountability and strengthening the BBC's independence from the government of the day.

We shall never have the resources to match the treasure house of statistics and the detailed analysis of audience trends being assembled by Ofcom, DCMS and the BBC, but we may be able to make a modest contribution to re-framing the key questions that underlie public debate about the social, cultural and political significance of broadcasting in the twenty-first century.

Film and broadcasting policy submissions to a variety of public bodies can be found on the Centre's website at www.bftv.ac.uk.

RECENT SUBMISSIONS ON FILM AND BROADCASTING POLICY

Broadcasting

Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting, invited submission from Professor Sylvia Harvey. Submission title: *Defining, Maintaining and Strengthening Public Service Broadcasting*, 21 January, 2004

Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting, submission from Professor Sylvia Harvey. Submission title: *Public Service Television: Everyday Life and the Political Process*, 30 March, 2004

Response to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport Review of the BBC's Charter from Professor Sylvia Harvey. Submission title: *The BBC in the Twenty-First Century*, 31 March 2004

Ofcom Review of Public Service Television Broadcasting, submission from Carole Tongue and Professor Sylvia Harvey. Submission title: *Citizenship, Culture and Public Service Broadcasting*, 14 June, 2004

Film

Response to the enquiry of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the House of Commons: *Is There a British Film Industry?* Response title: *Developing a Sustainable Film Industry: the Role of Film Culture*, submitted by Sylvia Harvey and Margaret Dickinson, 2 March 2003

Response to the British Film Institute's consultation document: *A Good Time for Action*. Submitted by Sylvia Harvey and Margaret Dickinson, 20 February, 2004

Response to the UK Film Council's Consultation Document: *Three Years On*. Submitted by Sylvia Harvey and Margaret Dickinson, 20 February, 2004

Cultural Policy/Film

Response to the paper *Government and the Value of Culture* by the Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell. Submitted by Sylvia Harvey and Margaret Dickinson, 19 July, 2004

CEMENTED WITH LOVE – AND STRIFE

Sam Thompson and the BBC in Northern Ireland

Andrew Hill

The controversy over Sam Thompson's 1965 television play *Cemented With Love* fore-shadowed Ulster's later political and sectarian troubles. Discovering its behind-the-scenes history has been one important focus of the University of Ulster's research strand on the development of television drama in the regions.

Sam Thompson was a shipyard worker who came to writing relatively late in life. The BBC in Belfast, and in particular the producer Sam Hannah Bell, played a key role in nurturing Thompson's talent. Bell was anxious to bring local voices to the Northern Ireland Home Service and worked closely with Thompson on a series of early radio pieces about life in East Belfast and the shipyards. These early commissions provided Thompson with a springboard for his first stage play, *Over the Bridge*, which became a landmark in the history of Northern Ireland theatre when staged in 1959 for the way in which it confronted the province's sectarian tensions. It was subsequently produced in a television version by Granada, and radio version by the BBC in Belfast.

Cemented with Love was developed through close liaison between Thompson and the BBC drama department in London. At the time the Northern Ireland region lacked the resources to produce television drama itself. Thompson promised a play about elections in Northern Ireland for the year of the 1964 Westminster elections, and was encouraged by his producer in London to write a piece that would fully confront the sectarian politics of the province. The capacity of television to address contemporary socio-political concerns was to flourish over the next ten years – the so-called Golden Age of television drama – and *Cemented with Love* was to appear as one of the first of the 'Wednesday Plays', a series that would become synonymous with this type of drama.

Thompson delivered a powerful black comedy about bigotry and corruption on both sides of the sectarian divide. The long-time Unionist MP and leading Orangeman John Kerr has been forced for 'health reasons' (actually corrupt business activities), to resign his seat, and his son William has returned from Canada to contest the election as his father's successor. William wishes to distance himself from the bigoted, sectarian politics of his father, and the gamut of corrupt election tactics, including gerrymandering, personation

and bribery, that his father has previously employed. Thompson juxtaposes the attitudes and tactics of the Unionist party with the equally bigoted views and corrupt practices employed by the Nationalist candidate Sean O'Byrne. Much of the play's comic force and satirical power derives from the way in which both parties mirror each other in the rhetoric they deploy and the justification they find for their prejudices and corrupt activities. Both candidates are double crossed by insiders close to them, who bare them grievances, but what decides the election result is the revelation that the wife William Kerr has back in Canada is Catholic. The shock this registers hands victory to O'Byrne. John Kerr reacts with outrage to the revelation, but William is encouraged by the amount of votes he received despite what has happened, and vows to stand again when the opportunity arises.

The BBC in Belfast only found out about the play a month before its intended broadcast in December 1964, and demanded to see a script before quickly moving to have the showing of the play postponed. This move was indicative of the position of the Corporation in the province. In the period from 1924 (when the BBC began broadcasting in Northern Ireland) through to the Second World War, the Corporation had played an integral role in promoting the values of the Unionist political establishment, largely ignoring the presence and opposing views of the Nationalist community. Across the Fifties the BBC had become more willing to acknowledge the presence of divisions in the province, however it remained under intense pressure not to deviate from the prescribed Unionist vision of the province, and not to draw attention to the nature of these divisions.

The response to this postponement came swiftly. The play's producer led a campaign to get it transmitted, highlighting the distance between the more progressive elements of the BBC in London and the hierarchy of the BBC in Belfast. And the press in Northern Ireland and London picked up on the controversy, making much of the way in which the play had effectively been censored. The debate around the censorship of the play prefigured the debates around media censorship that would surface with regularity during the Troubles.

Under mounting pressure the BBC gave way, and in May 1965 the play was at last shown to a highly favourable response from the audience. By this time however, Thompson, who had long suffered from a heart condition, no doubt exacerbated by the controversy around the play, was dead. In highlighting the political corruption in the province and the persisting intensity of sectarian divisions, Thompson's play presented a warning of the type of tensions that would come to the

surface a few years later with the eruption of the Troubles. The play was also prescient in another respect: it demonstrated the capacity of television drama to engage with contemporary social and political concerns in a way that would mark the most striking output from the Golden Age of television drama.

Researching television drama presents many difficulties, not least due to the loss of many productions. But even when tape or film no longer survives, much valuable material has often been preserved in the BBC Written Archive at Caversham, Berkshire, which is the source of much of the above material on Thompson and the *Cemented With Love* affair.

TERROR OF THE BLANK SCREEN

Twenty years of artists' film and video on UK television

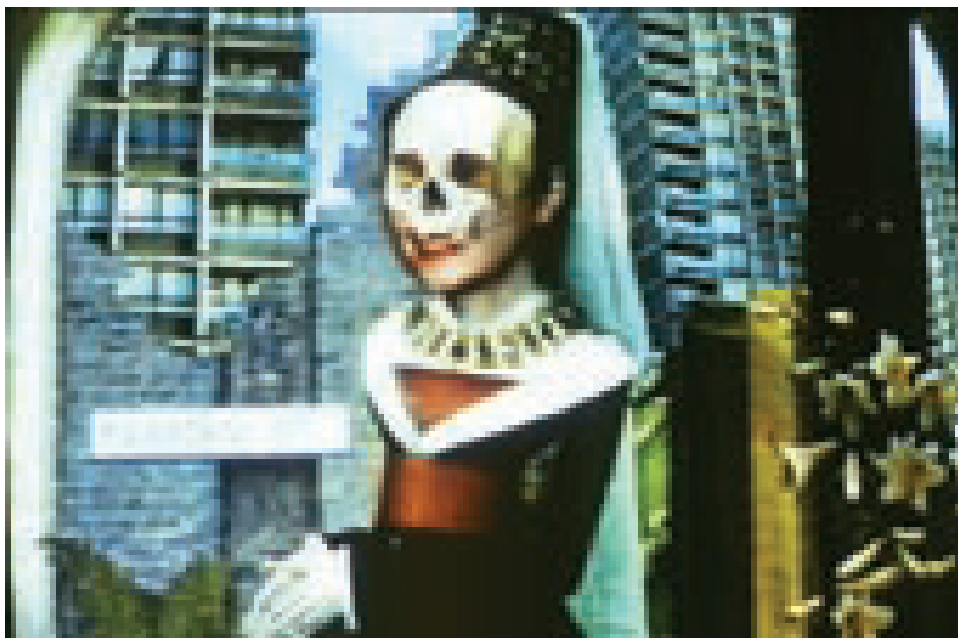
David Curtis

Channel Four was surprisingly slow to risk giving airtime to work by artists, given its charter commitment to 'encourage innovation and experiment'. Unusually in the British context, the Channel was designed as a publisher-broadcaster with no studios or production staff of its own, and was instead largely dependent upon ideas submitted by independent producers. One of the first artists' series on-air was *Alter Image* (1983), a showcase for visual and performance art assembled by Jane Thorburn and Mark Lucas, commissioned by the Youth Programmes editor, Mike Bolland.

Michael Kustow, the Channel's first Arts editor and former director of the ICA, was probably its most adventurous, if infrequent, patron of artists. His commissions included Anna Ridley's series of original works for television *Dadarama* (1984) with contributions from John Latham and others, and her multi-episode version of Ian Breakwell's diaries, *The Continuous Diary*, which started its transmissions in the same year. He also commissioned John Wyver's series *Ghosts in the Machine* (1986) which included the first showing in any British context of videotapes by Bill Viola, Gary Hill and others, and Peter Greenaway's



A Short History of the Wheel (1992) by Tony Hill



Luminous Portrait, Judith Goddard (1990)

innovative graphic 'video-paintbox' collaboration with the painter Tom Phillips *A TV Dante* (1987).

Alan Fountain, the Channel's Independent Film and Video editor, was an Independent Filmmakers Association member and former Film Officer for the East Midlands, and was responsible for the Channel's substantial workshop investment. While the majority of his commissions went to social and political filmmakers, one early commission (made through the partnership with the Arts Council) resulted in four interview-based profiles of artist filmmakers shown in 1983, each followed by the transmission of several of the artist's works,¹ Fountain's workshop funding had included equipment given to London Video Arts, and the series *Video 1.2.3* (1985) assembled by Terry Flaxton and critic Sean Cubitt, featured the work of many LVA artists.

Rod Stoneman, as Fountain's assistant, proved more open to work by artists. From 1988-94 the Arts Council and Channel Four jointly ran an open submission scheme that funded four or five works each year, *The 11th Hour Awards* (named after the 11pm graveyard slot in the evening schedule into which most of Fountain and Stoneman's commissions were shoehorned).² Open submissions were nothing new to the Channel, but here the novelty was that the selection of projects was made by a group of artists and critics, with Stoneman as the Channel's sole representative, in a position to be outvoted, (though the Channel of course retained the ultimate veto, which was not to transmit). Some forty works resulted from this partnership, which provided the model for the Channel's 'new talent' scheme with the BFI, the *BFI New Directors*, which incidentally funded work by some artists, despite its emphasis on narrative and even – in its final incarnation – response to a given theme.

The diverse collection of material that resulted

from these schemes was showcased in the more alluringly titled transmission slots *Midnight Underground*, *The Dazzling Image* and (less happily), *The Shooting Gallery*. Commissions to artists remained rare outside these schemes, but Stoneman notably directly-funded Gad Hollander's *The Diary of a Sane Man* (1985), David Larcher's *EETC* (1986) and *Granny's Is* (1989) and Le Grice's *Sketches for a Sensual Philosophy* (1988). Other partnerships with the Arts Council included a scheme for experimental animation *Animate!* (1990-to the present), the High Tec Awards which involved brokered access to professional digital post-production technology, and *Black Tracks* (1995) which commissioned music-related subjects from new Black artists and filmmakers.

In these partnerships, there were surprisingly few 'no-go' subject-areas for the broadcasters. Erect penises worried them, but less so than total silence, or (the ultimate taboo) no image. But to its credit, Channel Four even permitted that as it transmitted Derek Jarman's last work *Blue* (1993) - 70 minutes of an empty blue screen, but with a rich soundtrack – which also remarkably involved a simultaneous broadcast in stereo by BBC Radio 3. For their part, artists tended to bring to these schemes whatever projects they were working on at the time, grateful for the exposure to a wider audience, but rarely showing real interest in the television context. An exception was the unfailing attraction to artists great and small of the idea of making false adverts to be placed among the real ones, or 'advert'-like unexplained interruptions to the flow of TV's evening schedule. Artists were often surprised to discover these were not new concepts, having been achieved in 1969 by David Hall and others.³

Advert-scale works were, however, the subject of the Arts Council's first funding relationship with BBC television, *One minute Television* (1990-93), which commissioned eight works

each year to be dropped into BBC2's late night arts programme *The Late Show*. This was followed by several partnerships with the BBC based on the idea of pairing creators from different disciplines, which include *Dance for the Camera* (1991-2003) and *Sound on Film*, to which artists such as John Smith, Jayne Parker and Mike Stubbs contributed. One of the last of these was *Expanding Pictures* (1997 only), ostensibly pairing film artists and performance artists, which memorably provided the first broadcast outing for three artists of the YBA generation, Gillian Wearing, Sam Taylor Wood and Mark Wallinger. The fragility of the concept of a 'limited edition' – the convention that restricts the copying of photographs, prints and tapes to a fixed number to protect their monetary value – was nicely demonstrated when a number of the works resulting from this scheme were offered for sale in West End galleries in editions of three or five copies, in the same week as their BBC transmission. Half a million viewers saw them on the box, and no doubt many legally recorded them off-air for their own personal collections, slightly expanding the authorised edition.

Notes:

1 Jeff Keen Films, Margaret Tait Filmmaker, *Normal Vision: Malcolm Le Grice, Seeing for Ourselves: Women Working in Film (Circles)*, directed by Margaret Williams for Arbor International.

2 From 1992 called *Experimenta*; the Channel contributed three-quarters of the budget and gained rights to two transmissions. The artists retained copyright. There were no obligatory themes or required lengths; just a maximum budget.

3 Proof that interruptions *could* still happen in the ratings-conscious 90s included David Mach's *The Clydeside Classic* for Channel Four (1990), four apparent inserts into the evening schedule, David Hall's spots for MTV (1993), and more surprisingly, Tyne Tees TV supported *Search* (1993) by Wendy Kirkup and Pat Naldi.



Hoi Polloi (1990) by Andrew Kotting

GETTING IT MADE

Tate Britain

27 March 2004

Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy was in the air at 'Getting It Made', a sold-out one day conference organised jointly by the Centre's British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins and Tate Britain. The critic Michael Archer opened the proceedings with a meditative account of the 'short history of video art' – poised, he suggested, between the physical and the philosophical. But where to see it? How to re-see works that were installations, and are no longer on show? While Matthew Barney's lavish *Cremaster* film cycle 'seemed to be everywhere' – and a poll of the audience confirmed that most had seen at least part – Archer lamented the demise of such resources as the ICA's Videotheque and its forerunner at the Arnolfini as early sites of pilgrimage for video art.

More conspiracy, or at least competing ideologies, in a session with artists Emily Richardson, Lucy Gunning and Duncan Reekie – although Reekie would no doubt resist the label (one of his 'rant-performances' is entitled *Fuck Off Avant Gardist*). While Richardson and Gunning discussed their own experiences of surviving in the space between film-making and art-making, Reekie expounded sharp distinctions between the avant-garde, the independent sector and the underground. The former categories depend on subsidy, on investment and on gate-keepers of many kinds; while the underground – typified by 'Exploding Cinema', of which Reekie is a mainstay – prefers to work collectively, spontaneously without dependence on anything other than self-funding.

With Reekie's vigorous and entertaining account of the survival of underground tactics, the conference became more animated. Some muttered about anarchism; others about striking attitudes; but the gauntlet was clearly visible – why not do it yourself if you can't get funding from someone else? The period when television actually commissioned and transmitted film and video artists' work – mainly on Channel Four in the 80s and early 90s (see David Curtis's account on pp.4-5) was recalled by Rod Stoneman, a former executive who presided over much of the channel's most provocative output. Was it really possible that tens, even hundreds, of thousands of viewers had watched such work on broadcast television in living memory? If it was, how had television changed so utterly? A commercial conspiracy to subvert Channel Four's mission to innovate?

Mike Figgis put the conspiracy theory bluntly and with engaging candour. The director of over a dozen features made mainly within the commercial film industry, he explained that 'there is an economic conspiracy to keep the truth from the public'. The 'truth' being that it is now entirely possible to make high quality films with consumer-level digital equipment which can be bought for a few thousand pounds on Tottenham Court Road. Yet film companies and cinema chains insist on maintaining 'standards' which effectively ensure that all involved keep their jobs.

Figgis told of his own determination, after the experience of making *Timecode* (2000) with four digital cameras, to make another film using only consumer-grade equipment, which became *Hotel*. To the delight of the Tate audience he explained in detail the pitfalls of 'timecode' as the film industry's panacea for synchronisation – it transpires there are many different timecodes – and his solution of using individual minidisc recorders for actors to record their own dialogue. With his back-



Mike Figgis at *Getting It Made* (above), still from *Timecode*, Mike Figgis, 2000 (below)



ground in experimental theatre, served with the People Show, and a continuing parallel career in improvisatory music, Figgis is clearly an unusual figure within the film industry. But his willingness to mock and demystify, even within the halls of Hollywood, brought further cheer to the conference.

A final session involved, among others, the digital artist Susan Collins and video-maker Mark Aerial Waller. Waller showed work shot to professional standards, then carefully degraded to evoke amateur and bootleg quality; while Collins explained her creation of long-range digitally based installations which played with aspects of surveillance technology. Back to conspiracy – the way forward for artists determined to get it made?

Getting It Made, based on the report from Michael Maziere's Centre fellowship on the funding and distribution of artists' film and video, was co-organised by Heidi Reitmaier at Tate Britain.



Michael O'Pray, Emily Richardson, Lucy Gunning and Duncan Reekie (left to right) at *Getting It Made*

EARLY CINEMA

7th British Silent Cinema Festival
Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham
 15-18 April 2004

The inspiration for a postgraduate training scheme piloted at this year's Nottingham British Silent Cinema Festival was a feature of the Giornate del Cinema Muto, or Pordenone Silent Film Festival as it is informally known, the leading international event of its kind. For some years, since the Italian festival was forced to relocate to the nearby town of Sacile in the Veneto, its director David Robinson has run the Collegium Saciliensis, in which a group of young scholars and researchers are welcomed as guests of the festival, and treated to a daily lunchtime seminar from some of the visiting early cinema specialists. So popular have these sessions become, that the margins of the seminar room are packed with festival visitors hoping to join in.

Nottingham's annual silent festival is the only one devoted to exploring Britain's still-unknown silent legacy, and is a collaboration between Laraine Porter, director of Broadway Media Centre, and Bryony Dixon of BFI Collections (and a former centre exchange fellow). Increasingly it has become an important date in the international silent cinema calendar, now attracting visitors from far afield. This year, with due acknowledgement to Pordenone/Sacile, the first Nottingham 'collegium' took place. Four research students received bursaries

through the Centre's postgraduate training fund to attend this year's event, built around the theme of the Great War on screen, and held discussions with specialists over lunch each day. Among the tutors were Frank Gray, Luke McKernan, David Robinson – professing his delight at the new initiative – and Ian Christie. From modest beginnings, a continuing programme is envisaged.



Postgraduate students (l to r) Jane Bryan (UEA), Jude Cowan (Birkbeck) and Clare Watson (UEA), with Ian Christie, at the 2004 British Silent Cinema Weekend

Early war hysteria: Will Barker's *The German Spy Peril* discussed by Jude Cowan at Nottingham



RESEARCHING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION

University of Ulster, Coleraine
(Portrush site)
 29 April 2004

The University of Ulster's main project within the Centre concerns regionalism, in both film and television (a report from its work on Ulster television appears on p.4), and this provided the theme for a research day on 29 April aimed primarily at postgraduates. Held at the university's Portrush campus, on the spectacular Atlantic coast of Northern Ireland, the day was divided into three parts.

Morning and early afternoon sessions were addressed by a combination of senior and junior researchers, providing case-study examples of work in progress, and drawing out methodological and scoping implications of these cases. In addition to John Hill, Martin McLoone and Centre research fellow Andrew Hill from University of Ulster, discussing their work on Irish material, Valentina Vitali spoke about

regionalism in Indian cinema and Ian Christie about 'micro-history', taking the reception of Robert Paul's Anglo-Boer War films in North London as his example.

Then followed two parallel sessions in which invited postgraduates from Trinity College Dublin, Limerick, Bristol, Nottingham, Nottingham Trent, Leicester and Antwerp, gave short presentations on their doctoral projects, ranging from studies of Nottingham's film societies and 'fantasy Ireland' to issues of national/linguistic identity in Belgian television, and in Balkan and contemporary Russian cinema. Discussion was lively, with the audiences more than ready to contribute comments on scope and method, and to offer suggestions for new frontiers to be explored.

The third part of an already busy day consisted of a keynote lecture by the Australian-born scholar and writer Meaghan Morris, currently teaching at Lingnan University, Hong Kong, 'On the future of Parochialism: Globalisation, Culture and Cinema Studies in Tuen Mun'. This offered a typically wide-ranging and engaging survey of the shifting parameters of 'local'

and 'global' from the Pacific vantage point that Morris occupies.

Undaunted, the postgraduates continued their exploration of cultural difference over a well-earned drink later in the evening (below).

On the following day, the all-Ireland Postgraduate Film research Seminar took place, providing two days of intensive interchange on research addressing the intersection of the national and the regional – another example of the Centre aiming to provide high-quality research training.



Postgraduates at Portrush after the University of Ulster's research day.

PUBLICATIONS

Papers by Simon Brown, 'Narrative and Pictorialism in Post-Pioneer Hepworth Films'; Jude Cowan, "'A plucky girl' and 'a pigeon to pluck': Character, Location and Entertainment in Rogues of London'; Patrick Keiller, 'City of the Future'; and Ian Christie, 'R W Paul and the Boer War in North London', appear in the proceedings of the 2003 Nottingham British Silent Film Conference, *Location, Location, Location*, eds. Alan Burton and Laraine Porter (Flicks Books, 2004). Simon is joining the Centre's London project as a part-time research fellow in August 2004; Jude is completing her PhD on the careers of the early British filmmakers G. B. Samuelson and Will Barker at Birkbeck, attached to the Centre; and Patrick is an AHRB Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the Royal College of Art.

Ian Christie, 'The Magic Sword: genealogy of an early English trick film', *Film History*, vol 16 no 2, ed. Richard Koszarski.

CENTRE RESOURCES

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.studycollection.org.uk

DIARY SUMMARY FOR 2004

JULY

Off-Screen Spaces:

Regionalism and Globalised Cultures

An international conference on Film, Television and Media: Cultures and Policies
28-30 July – University of Ulster, Coleraine (Portrush site)

www.bftv.ac.uk/events/osshome.htm

NOVEMBER

Practice-based research – is it?

A Postgraduate training event is being planned for late November on 'practice-based research', with Patrick Keiller confirmed as one of the speakers. This will bring together practitioners and supervisors – as well as current students – to discuss how practice and research can support each other, and how the outcomes measure up as 'research' in a dominantly academic-theoretical culture.

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arts and humanities research board

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.