

A Regenerative Effect

Time And Relative Dissertations In Space: Critical Perspectives on *Doctor Who* Conference, 1 July 2004, University of Manchester

A report by Lincoln Geraghty, University of Nottingham, UK

With the impending return to our screens of *Doctor Who* (1966-1989) in 2005 it was with great enthusiasm that this conference was organised and held in the School of Music and Drama at the University of Manchester. Not only were there eleven original papers through which the myriad characters, stories, monsters, Doctors and companions were discussed but there was also a large diverse audience made up of academics, fans, writers, and enthusiasts. The coming together of such a devoted and well-read fanbase and an intellectually stimulating range of papers caused many heated debates and raised a plethora of questions, so many in fact that a whole day was not long enough to get all the answers. *Doctor Who* is alive and well, both in public and academic circles, and is eagerly awaited by those in attendance at the conference.

The first panel addressed the standards and beliefs found in the *Doctor Who* text and had a particular focus on the earlier incarnations of the Doctor -- from William Hartnell to Tom Baker. Alec Charles' (Tallinn International University) paper, "The Missionary Position: The Ideological Anachronism of *Doctor Who*", identified *Doctor Who*'s standing alongside other classic BBC television productions such as *Fawlty Towers* (1975-1979), *Monty Python* (1969-1974), *Dad's Army* (1968-1977), and the *Quatermass* (1979) serials as being typically British. *Doctor Who* perpetuated themes explored in the late imperialist fantasies of Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker, dwelling nostalgically on Victorian glories, but also readopting the moral, psychical and sexual paternalism of the British Empire. Because the Doctor represented the liberal benevolence of an over civilized explorer -- a missionary whose ambitions transcend the physical -- the series grappled with the conflicts between nation and empire, coloniser and colonised. Jon Pertwee's Doctor was cited as being the most colonial Doctor and therefore a disturbing development in the usually liberal-minded series.

David Rafer (DeMontfort University) offered a paper on "Mythic Identity in *Doctor Who*" which examined the mythical elements behind many of the most successful, and least successful, storylines. With a background in anthropology and religion, Rafer was able to trace a development in mythical style from the adventures of the Third Doctor to the last few episodes of the Seventh; he was particularly interested in how the series portrayed many different national myths in a coherent and alien timeline. For example, the Timelords (the race to which the Doctor belongs) were given a more detailed back-story as the series progressed, eventually this history became myth as the Seventh Doctor had to battle supernatural figures supposedly encountered by the Doctor in previously uncharted adventures. The myth of the Doctor's origin became entwined with previous characters and stories, so much so that the Doctor had become just as much a part of mythic legend as those he defeated. The myths used and adapted in the series were often based on the pagan, Viking, Christian, and Eastern belief systems.

The final two papers in this panel looked at the series in the 1960s, Jonathan Bignell (University of Reading) on "The Child Addressee: Consumer and Viewer in mid-1960s *Doctor Who*" and Matthew Kilburn's (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography) "A Bargain of Necessity? *Doctor Who* and the Burden of History". Bignell's paper drew on archival research, analyses of programmes and theoretical approaches to the notions of childhood and children's culture. It discussed three aspects of *Doctor Who*. Firstly, he analysed the design of the programme format for children watching with their parents, and identified the child as addressee. Secondly, he showed how the character of Susan Foreman (the Doctor's granddaughter) in particular, but also other human characters and 'monsters', offered patterns of identification which constructed the place of the child as a valued proto-adult, but also an alien creature. Thirdly, he discussed children as consumers of *Doctor Who*-related merchandise, especially products relating to Daleks, and how the concept of consumption redressed his two preceding arguments. Kilburn's paper countered the commonplace assumption about the early years of *Doctor Who* -- that stories of the first few seasons were intended to teach children alternately about 'history' and 'science'. According to some, the didactic nature of the series was allegedly compromised by the introduction of the Daleks, but, as Kilburn pointed out, the historical story survived for three years, and period settings remained a permanent part of *Doctor Who*. Kilburn's paper re-examined the conventional assumptions about the historical stories. He explored the notion that topics were chosen to support the requirements of teachers in the classroom; that the historicals were 'boring'; that they were only sustained to excuse the escapist space adventures in the face of an attitude at the BBC that thought *Doctor Who* insufficiently educational and therefore unworthy of the corporation. Underpinning all these suggestions is the belief that the 'historicals' were a clearly defined sub-genre. Challenging these assumptions, Kilburn's paper looked at the last 'historical', *The Highlanders* (1966-1967), summarising the changing rules that governed historical settings on *Doctor Who*, and commented on how it complemented depictions of the Jacobite rebellion on television in the mid-1960s -- in particular Peter Watkins' *Culloden* (1964) -- and suggested where the legacy of the historical might truly be found in post-1967 *Doctor Who*.

The second panel's papers discussed variations on the alien: the experimental incidental music in *The Sea Devils* [1972]; audience appreciation for *An Unearthly Child* [1963]; the Daleks and their human allies; and finally the Cybermen. Kevin J. Donnelly's (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) "Between Prosaic Functionalism and Sublime Experimentation: *Doctor Who* and Musical Sound Design" provided a historical perspective on the range of music and sound design in the series. He emphasised how *Doctor Who* functioned as the herald of the BBC's modernity and the repository of the television medium's imagination. Since the sound and music had to carry a lot of the 'imagining' for a programme beset with cheap sets, basic lighting and unconvincing special effects, its music had a more prominent role than in many other areas of television, inspired by having to span time and space. In "How to Pilot a TARDIS: *Doctor Who*, Audiences and the Fantastic" David Butler (University of Manchester) examined *Doctor Who*'s awkward status as science fiction by drawing on the work of Tzvetan Todorov and Darko Suvin. Incorporating audience responses to the two pilot episodes, 1963's *An Unearthly Child* and the 1996 *Doctor Who* television movie, the paper argued that *Doctor Who* is most effective when it embraces the fantastic, that uncertain space between the real and unreal, rather than genuine science fiction. This paper was insightful, allowing a rare opportunity to see how today's generation of teenagers and undergraduates understand *Doctor Who* and how they see it fit within their defined boundaries of blockbuster and big special effect science fiction film. Surprisingly, preliminary results showed that young people preferred viewing the older pilot rather than the

effects driven movie -- suggesting that Butler's theories about the fantastic were not so far off the mark.

The third paper in this panel, Fiona Moore (Kingston University) and Alan Stevens' (Magic Bullet Productions) "The Human Factor: Interpreting the Daleks through their Human Allies", focused on the 'evil human' character, a scientist, politician or other individual who takes the side of the Daleks. For Moore and Stevens, the 'evil human' provided a focus through which the audience could interpret and assess the Daleks' own actions and motivations. Perhaps more importantly, the changing place of the 'evil human' in the Dalek narrative from the 1960s onwards reflected changes within the series as a whole and the Daleks' role within it.

Because of the sheer amount of questions, and tangential discussions arising from points made by the delegates, the panels ran over significantly; thus highlighting the enormous amount of energy and time *Doctor Who* enthusiasts put into watching their show. Although fans in the audience welcomed academic criticism of their beloved series, and participated in it, it became apparent that a few fans believed it obvious what many of the papers were supposed to be saying. Of course, as fans they have spent many years analysing and critiquing their favourite stories, often developing their own theories and stories to help explain plot oversights (a few fans have become involved with the actual *Doctor Who* writing process thereby moving from "textual poachers" to become "textual game-keepers"). In the third panel, Matt Hills' (Cardiff University) "Televisuality without Television: The Big Finish Audios and Discourses of 'Tele-centric' *Doctor Who*" and Steven Duckworth's (Brunel University) "*Doctor Who* Fans as Textual Game-Keepers" looked at this trend in detail (see also Matt Hills' *Fan Cultures* (2002) for a discussion on the nature of academic, fan, scholar-fan, and fan-scholar). However, in an academic setting, where *Doctor Who* is still a relatively untouched resource, debates about the series have not been discussed at such great lengths. Consequently, those fans who saw the papers as simply stating the obvious were not aware of the importance these papers had in the creation of an academic arena for *Doctor Who*. For example, Lincoln Geraghty's (University of Nottingham) second panel paper "Totalitarian Tin Men: Assimilating *Doctor Who*'s Cybermen", an examination of how the Cybermen fit in (or not) with current debates on posthumanism compared with *Star Trek*'s The Borg, was largely overlooked in the proceeding question session because some of the delegates felt that the Cybermen's origin story has been looked at in depth in previous *Doctor Who* tie-in publications and therefore anything else said on the matter was rendered obsolete. Of course, the paper was not intended to be a retelling of the origin of the Cybermen, rather a preliminary look at why The Borg have been sanctified over the Cybermen by those studying the cyborg in popular culture.

Putting conflicting opinions aside, the conference achieved a level of profound and diverse analysis from delegates and presenters that is a rarity in one-day conferences. *Doctor Who*, as one would think, has a strong following in the public domain, but it also has a strong following in the academic world. Scholars are becoming aware of the significant mark *Doctor Who* leaves on television, audience, and cultural studies and as a result the series continues to evolve -- to regenerate. The more people look closely at the text the more the Doctor is able to speak to our desire to investigate the popular and its effect on society. The conference was a perfect example of this regenerative effect.

It Happened One Day

Love Maybe: A Romantic Comedy Study Day, 19 August 2004, University of Nottingham, UK

A report by Kathrina Glitre, The University of the West of England, UK

What a joy -- after seven long years in the wilderness -- to finally meet a substantial group of people interested in romantic comedy. I'm so used to having to explain *what* Happened One Night to baffled faces that to be surrounded by nodding heads was actually quite daunting. It was also very exciting.

The study day aimed to widen the scope of debates around romantic comedy, questioning the centrality of screwball comedy to current understanding, and hoping to extend discussion beyond the text into production, marketing, distribution and reception. There was a good mix of doctoral candidates and lecturers (roughly half and half) and I was pleasantly surprised to find a sizeable male cohort (at least a third of delegates), as well as a number of non-academics attending because they were just plain interested. The event was expertly organised by Nottingham postgraduates, Rayna Denison, Kerry Gough, and Sophie Cartwright. Denison introduced the day, setting up some aims and areas of debate, creating a sense of purpose. A single strand was broken into three sessions, and although this provided a jam-packed day, the intensity of the occasion was very productive. Ideas bounced back and forth, and themes and connections emerged quite naturally.

The opening session focused on the relationships between romantic comedy and the Hollywood star system. The first keynote speaker was Martin Shingler (University of Staffordshire). Best known for his work on melodrama, Shingler appreciated the opportunity to rethink his understanding of a favourite star: his paper, "Laughter and Tears: Bette Davis's romantic comedies of the 1930s and 1940s", discussed each of Davis's ten comedies, placing them into the contexts of romantic comedy production. Rebecca Feasey (Bath Spa University College) then spoke about Hugh Grant, recognising the Divine Brown incident as a turning point in his persona -- from asexual fop (*Four Weddings*) to sexy cad (*Bridget Jones's Diary*). She noted that both types are perfectly suited to romantic comedy, but the cad is equally appealing to women and men. Rayna Denison's paper on "Women's Star Power in Hollywood" focused on Sandra Bullock's relationship to romantic comedy, arguing that Bullock's production company has moved into the genre as a way of managing Bullock's star image, reinfusing warmth into the controlling status of 'producer'. This provided an interesting point of continuity with my own paper, "Equality and Romantic comedy: Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy", since the pairing was part of Hepburn's deliberate strategy to retake control of her career. The paper was also concerned with distinguishing between articulations of equality in screwball comedy and the career woman comedies of the forties. The session provided a suitable serendipity, in which all four papers articulated issues around stardom and genre to suggest that romantic comedy can work as a way of actively reshaping star images.

After a very friendly lunch, the second session on Space and Identity: People and Places to Fall in Love With began with the second keynote speaker, Celestino Deleyto (University of Zaragoza). Deleyto's work on romantic comedy is well known, and his paper, "Enough of the happy ending: romantic comedy, humour and ideology", injected some useful theory into the proceedings. Concerned that recent work on the genre has focused too heavily on romantic elements, Deleyto sought to redress the balance by thinking about comedy and narrative. While approaches to comedian comedy have foregrounded the 'transgressive' potential of gags and jokes to interrupt and arrest linear narrative, approaches to romantic comedy have tended to privilege elements of narrative -- especially the happy ending -- as the source of meaning. Deleyto argued that, on the contrary, laughter is not a by-product of romantic comedy, but an essential element that makes a crucial contribution to the narrative in terms of character and thematic development (an argument he illustrated with *Manhattan Murder Mystery*). In effect, he recommended paying much closer attention to the neglected middle sections of the narrative -- placing the happy ending into context, rather than fetishising it as the one and only source of meaning.

The international feel continued, with Karen Bowdre (University of Southern California) delivering a much needed paper on "Romantic Comedies and the Raced Body". While the whiteness of classical romantic comedy has often been noted, the continued absence of interracial and non-white romantic comedies (certainly within Hollywood) raises questions about the genre's conservative functions in contemporary culture. Bowdre noted various differences between white-centred and black-centred romantic comedy, arguing that stereotypes of African-Americans as oversexed feed into these differences: in black romantic comedy, desire is immediately consummated, pre-empting romance and sidelining female characters. While (white) romantic comedy conventionally places a good deal of emphasis on the possibility of change and transformation, she concluded that the discourses of race refuse such possibilities for non-white characters, who remain true to stereotype. Further issues around representation and ideology were elaborated by Ewan Kirkland (Sussex University), in his paper on "Romantic Comedy and the Construction of Heterosexuality". Noting the ease with which *Love Actually* cut a lesbian plotline, Kirkland explored the ways in which 25 contemporary romantic comedies managed to critique *and* perpetuate the hegemonic norms of heterosexuality by self-consciously presenting the heterosexual happily-ever-after as tenuous. A similar theme was developed by Sophie Cartwright, in an insightful paper on "New York, New York: Nora Ephron and Manhattan Magic". Also referring to *Sex and the City*, Cartwright argued that New York has become a privileged site, offering the promise of romantic *possibility*: the city's 'unfinished' state allows a binding of authenticity and romance, a simultaneous sense of attainability and fantasy -- in contrast to West Coast artifice and Hollywood's empty promise of dreams. Lincoln Geraghty (Nottingham University) considered an altogether different kind of space: "The Biology of Love: Crossing between Science Fiction and Romantic Comedy in *Innerspace*". While most critics have treated the film as a male buddy movie, Geraghty argued that Lydia (Meg Ryan) plays a vital role in enabling both men to transform their behaviour to meet acceptable heterosexual norms, bringing the film closer to the themes of romantic comedy.

The final session returned to questions around 'Narrating the Romantic Comedy'. Deleyto's paper would have worked even better here, partly because the third keynote speaker dropped out at the last minute, but more particularly because James Walters (Nottingham University) discussed the ending of *Groundhog Day*, precisely to examine the film's use of romance *and* comedy as essential narrative elements. Walters pointed out that Phil's (Bill Murray) flaws at the beginning of the film are also the things we find funny: to expel these flaws would run the

risk of removing the comedy. Instead, the film uses romance to transform and temper his mean spirit, while allowing him to retain his sardonic humour. Melanie Selfe (University of Nottingham) presented an engaging paper on *Holiday*, exploring the film's construction of an alternative model of heterosexuality based on compatibility and play, rather than oedipal conflict. María del mar Azcona (University of Zaragoza) began to theorise the development of "Multi-protagonist Romantic Comedies in the Nineties", arguing that -- while multi-protagonist narrative structures were nothing new -- there had been a proliferation of the form, specifically within romantic comedy, since such films as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. She linked its prevalence to changing expectations of love, from a long-term commitment to one person (heterosexual marriage) to a more transitory state in which people float from one relationship to the next (alternative possibilities). As a consequence, the plots of such romantic comedies take place over a much longer period of time and the resolution tends to be more contingent. Nonetheless, as she projected images from *Love Actually*, one thing struck me: for all the possibilities on show in this film, they are all still articulated in terms of the couple. Nigel Mather (Kent University) also discussed the film, asking "If Love is the Answer, What is the Question? Notions of National and Transnational Romance in *Love Actually*". The film stresses its Britishness through cultural references, but it also questions British allegiances to the US and privileges relationships to Europe (well, Portugal at least).

Through the course of the day, some important themes emerged: relationships between romance and comedy; genre hybridity and reading pleasures; the changing meanings of love, textually and culturally. I'm not sure we managed to meet the day's stated aims -- most papers were still quite focused on the textual, rather than industrial and reception factors -- but we certainly opened up a much wider range of debates. I fervently hope this leads to bigger things: there was talk of an online forum, and possibly a second conference. Such developments would enable closer attention to market forces, but would also (hopefully) encourage a move beyond Hollywood, whose output still dominates the field.

Meet Me Down the Local

Off-Screen Spaces: Regionalism and Globalised Cultures, 28-30 July 2004, University of Ulster, Coleraine

A report by Stephen Woollock, University of East Anglia, UK

Conferences are ephemeral, essentially snapshots of a specific subject taken from a specific perspective and discussed in a specific period. As such they can never hope to encompass a whole sub-discipline (or topic) or attempt to answer the underlying debates of the given subject area (let alone answer the questions the conference itself develops) in a short span of three days. Such was the case with the Off-Screen Spaces conference jointly administered by the AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies and The Centre for Media Research at the University of Ulster. Aiming to, "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", the conference highlighted the complexities inherent in such an endeavour whilst also producing many enlightening papers attesting to the survival of the 'local' despite (not due to) the advance of the 'global'.

Mirroring the current vogue for placing the minutiae of the local in relation to the predominance of globalisation, the conference was structured around four keynote speakers, two screenings and twelve panels (forty-two papers), with the former providing the context within which the latter were situated. Given the conferences' championing of local and emergent forms of articulation in relation to global considerations, it may prove relevant to begin with discussion of the panel papers, as, after all, today's panel may well be tomorrow's plenary.

Issues of identity and hegemony, current in the fields of Film and Media Studies due to the rise of globalisation, and related to the global flow of capital, images, ideologies and access, have in recent years legitimised the study of the local. This engagement with the local was articulated in a number of papers that addressed the notion of identity in relation to specific regional and local conurbations. In "'...and to a lesser extent, Wales' New Cinema in Wales", Kate Woodward (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) highlighted the changing face of Wales presented by the 'New Cinema' of the 1990s which, although abandoning the stereotypes often associated with films from the 1940s, have perhaps traded in old stereotypes for new tropes. Often neglected in relation to the other nations of the UK, Welsh cinema has responded to this disregard by appealing to notions of control, confidence and a shift from old industry to new technology, resulting in a break from the past that time will judge the merits of.

Concern with representation and expectation was echoed in Kelly Davidson and Peter Bolan's (University of Ulster) paper concerning, "The Hyper North: A Tourist Guide to Northern Ireland". Addressing the 'rebranding' of Northern Ireland in the bid for European City of Culture status, the paper focused upon use of the Internet to attract tourists to a Small Market

Economy such as Northern Ireland . Defined as a 'post-conflict' society, the tourist initiative seeks to attract customers through an apparently contradictory policy involving images associated with heritage in a strategy aimed at promoting Northern Ireland as a modern and forward-thinking nation. Both papers proved that in a bid to (re)present cultural identities to those on the 'outside', recourse to discourses associated with the stereotypical and prejudicial are often reformulated. The concern with representation to those outside specific locales was nicely countered by a number of papers dealing with how strategies for speaking to those within a region effect the production and reception of film.

In a typically insightful paper, "The Role of the Provincial Film Society in Mediating National Cinema Discourse", Melanie Selfe (University of Nottingham) succinctly demonstrated how the provincial Nottingham and District film society mediated post-war discourses surrounding French national cinema through the programming of less acclaimed instances of French cinema and countered the accepted (London-centric) discourse which in turn re-set the debates concerning canonical texts in a provincial setting. Continuing the theme of inter-regional discourse, James Caterer (University of East Anglia), in "Playing the Lottery Twice: the Dual Nationality of *Stella Does Tricks*", focused upon the complex production history of the film and how wider policy initiatives can lead to a conflicted identity. Gaining lottery funding from both England and Scotland , the resulting film can be seen as the product of many disparate entities, all claiming particular roles in its production and subsequent meaning. Playing with various notions of local and regional identity, it was claimed the resulting film was neither English, Scottish nor British but one attempting to compete on a global stage nevertheless.

Further mining the field of regional representation, Lez Cooke (Manchester Metropolitan University), in "'Regional' British Television Drama in the 1960s and 1970s", chronicled the remits and productions of regional drama producers in the north-west (Granada Television) and midlands (BBC English Regions Drama, Birmingham) during this period. While the former interpreted its remit in the guise of representations of local culture and identity, the latter commissioned regionally-based writers to dramatise local and regional themes, leading to varying productions in terms of both the identity and reach of regional representation. This discussion of regionally-centred and consumed productions also highlighted a problem the conference as a whole brought forth, that of the gap often found between policy and practice.

In this vein, a number of papers dealt with the practicalities of production shorn of the idealism of theory. In "Distillation: The Short Film as Critical Space", Eileen Elsey (University of the West of England, Bristol), promoted the short film as unique in its capacity to convey specific places liberated from the dictates of a longer and, perhaps more crucially, financially directed form. In this format, filmmakers such as Lynne Ramsay and Damien O'Donnell can present work linked to immediate notions of location, place and identity that refract the specificities of the 'local'. The issue of place was also addressed in the paper, "Charting New Territories : Imagining Autobiographical Cross-Cultural Journeys for a Global Age" by Julia Healey (Napier University , Edinburgh). Refreshingly incorporating elements of her own work in seeking to discern a way to document the journey (as undertaken by diasporic and globalised movement) through lens based media, the paper complicated the notion of 'the journey'. Rather than simply movement from one location to another the paper sought to advance a position whereby meaning is fluid and identity is negotiated as much through psychological issues of space and journey as thorough place. In a welcome addition to these practice-based papers, two screenings were scheduled that further compounded the

conferences theme of how the local can be liberated by the attention that the global engenders.

Compiled using video footage culled from over one-hundred cameras that made up the temporary Genoa Independent Media Centre Collective protesting the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, Eamonn Crudden (Napier University, Edinburgh) presented his film, *Berlusconi's Mousetrap* (2002). *Berlusconi's Mousetrap* documents events from a diverse range of traditionally marginalised positions that utilise the global democracy offered by the Internet to voice local and personal viewpoints. The emphasis upon the mobility and freedom of new technology to capture local stories was also prevalent in Desmond Bell's (Napier University, Edinburgh) *Rebel Frontier* (2004). Using archival footage to document Irish and Finnish attempts to prevent munitions production in Butte, Montana during the First World War, this highly engaging documentary told their story through the use of a Pinkerton Agent, (modelled upon Dashiell Hammet -- a suspected agent himself) who becomes disillusioned by the use of violence to halt the local miner's attempts to unionise and speak out against a global war. As an adjunct, the documentary ably spoke of the gulf between practice and theory in that it raised questions of authenticity in which pre-copyright material can substitute for non-extant footage and fictionalised narrative devices such as the Pinkerton Agent vie for attention with the legitimisation that the Martin Sheen voice-over provides. This gulf was one of the main themes to arise, perhaps unintentionally, from the conference.

With keynote papers by John Tomlinson (Nottingham Trent University -- "Globalisation and Cultural Identity"), Ien Ang (University of Western Sydney -- "Changing Meanings of Asia and Asianness in Contemporary Global Culture") and Toby Miller (New York University -- "The People of the United States Cannot be Trusted: Globalised Hollywood 2") all conducting various précis upon both the positive and negative effects of globalisation, the conference as a whole raised far more questions than it answered. Admitting that the complication of subjects and the dialogue generated is one of the primary functions of conferences such as this, it is perhaps a failing (not primarily restricted to this conference but to all) that there appears no opportunity to discuss the issues raised from the meeting of those working in a particular topic area. Each retire to continue their work independent of the framework that such conferences provide, only for the pulse of the topic to be taken at other similarly themed conferences at a time when the subject may have undergone yet more subtle shifts in emphasis. Looking at the state of a subject such as globalisation and media in 2004 provides a very precise view of a subject that is in constant flux due to new technology and changing methodologies. In this regard, the Off-Screen Spaces conference provided much to stimulate debate, however, raising issues demands the opportunity to address these issues which will in turn hopefully provide a snapshot that is far from ephemeral.

The Child in Film and Television

Screen Studies Conference: The Child in Film and Television, 2-4 July 2004, Glasgow University

A report by Ewan Kirkland, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, UK

This year's Screen Studies Conference assembled at Glasgow University's Gilmorehill Centre under the banner 'The child in film and television'. While far from encompassing all papers and panels, the issue of children and childhood in visual media was introduced in the opening plenary by keynote speakers Marsha Kinder (University of Southern California), Máire Messenger Davies (University of Ulster at Coleraine) and Emma Wilson (Cambridge University), indicating the wide range of texts and approaches to be explored and employed throughout the conference.

Kinder's paper discussed Neil Jordan's *The Butcher's Boy* (1997) and Lund and Meirelles' *City of God* (2003), two films featuring young people who kill, and asked some discomfiting questions about the relationship between fictional representation of child murderers, and the media demonising of their real life counterparts. In contrast, Messenger Davies' paper examined television for children, primarily TV drama *The Demon Headmaster*, arguing that such shows provide potentially subversive fictional spaces where adult political and social institutions can be criticized. *Lilua-4-ever* (2002), Lukas Moodysson's film on children's sexual exploitation, was the focus of Wilson's paper, in which she questioned the extent of the film's eroticization of children, and misogynistic depiction of young women suffering. The representation of children in world cinema, the complexities of children's visual culture, discourses surrounding childhood, sex, violence and the innocent child, pointing to the profoundly ambivalent symbolic status of children in adult culture: these were recurring themes throughout the weekend.

Subjects covered in the following day's sessions ranged from the construction of race through sound, to digital film technology, to Iranian cinema. The child as performer was the focus of a panel featuring Josephine Dolan (University of the West of England), Amber Watts (Northwestern University) and Steven Peacock (University of Kent). Dolan combined histories and sociologies of childhood with star studies theories in an interrogation of the peculiar qualities of *child* stars. Child actors, Dolan argued, primarily constituted a performance of childhood, one which served to naturalise dominant constructions of what it means to be a child. Complementing Dolan's paper, Watts discussed the American media's obsession with former child stars, a fascination combining 'nostalgia and nastiness'. The treatment of 1980s child actor Corey Feldman (*The Goonies* (1985), *Stand By Me* (1986)) in US reality show *The Surreal Life*, in which various faded celebrities share a Los Angeles mansion, received particular attention. Video clips provoked laughter and discomfort in unequal measure, while the speaker avoided simplistic condemnation of such popular entertainment, using the show to discuss the relationship between audience childhoods and the media. Both papers' reflection on the cultural insistence of child stardom as somehow reprehensible and corrupting was indicative of antagonism towards one of the few remaining

forms of legal child labour within Western society. To follow, Steven Peacock delivered an extremely focused textual analysis of Douglas Sirk's *There's Always Tomorrow* (1956), exploring the physical interaction between adult and child characters, the visual construction of the narrative's toymaker protagonist, and the film's reflection on the meaning of adult playfulness. Indeed, in a conference focussing on childhood, Peacock's was one of the few papers I attended to conspicuously address the social construction of its counterpart, adulthood.

On Saturday afternoon, with the majority of delegates deserting childhood for the 'Reality TV' panel across the corridor, a group from Lancaster University presented an inspiring session on animation and children's films. Adopting a historical approach to Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Kirsty L. Stevenson illustrated how discourses of childhood innocence, issues of class, race, and particularly gender, combined in the drawing of the film's heroine. For Stevenson, the fetishistic creation of Snow White as an idealised child/mother figure, facilitated by the painstaking construction process of animation production, embodied Disney's transformation of the fairy tale, designed to exploit, or construct, an emerging children's market and 'family' film audience. Marketing was also the concern of Leon Gurevitch. In a paper which, despite its title's reference, featured no mention of Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Gurevitch examined product placement in more recent animated features. Many films' critique of commercialisation and consumerism contrasted with the conspicuous promotion of, for example, *Toy Story's* (1995) merchandise-based cast of characters, or the appearance of Nemo in *Monsters Inc.* (2001) two years before the fish's film debut. Gurevitch's paper represented a revealing study of contemporary merchandising techniques, the construction of children as consumers, and the media-savvy child spectator, often considered to be naïvely oblivious to 'adult' in-jokes and film references. Finally, Bruce Bennett examined the recurring theme of child-robot relationships in films such as *Terminator 2* (1991), *The Iron Giant* (1999), and the lesser-known *Star Kid* (1997). In contrast to the negativity characterising adult relationships with film and TV robots, Bennett argued child characters often have an empathic understanding of their mechanical friends, presenting viewers with the possibility of an emotional engagement with technology largely absent in mainstream fantasy. Stylishly illustrated with clips, stills and PowerPoint pyrotechnics, the panel provoked lively and productive debate. In the words of one attendant, those at the 'Reality TV' panel did not know what they were missing.

As always in film and media conferences, panel titles frequently failed to convey the diversity of papers they contained. Under the heading 'Mechanical Children', my own piece on technology in children's cinema was accompanied by two excellent papers. Chris Holmlund's (University of Tennessee) psychoanalytic reading of Robert Rodriguez's *Spy Kids* trilogy (2001-3) applied Freudian psychology, industrial practice and racial politics to the series, while circulating action figures among the conference audience. Mary E Pagano (Northwestern University) explored the child automaton in *A.I.* (2001), considering the film's protagonist as the combination of two ambivalent mythical figures: the child and the robot. More incongruous was the juxtaposition of Jonathan Bignell's (University of Reading) accomplished postmodern reading of *Teletubbies* with Matthew Jacobsen's (Queen Mary, University of London) informed reading of Japanese horror films in relation to *Pokemon*, *Beyblade* and Japanese social organisation. Despite their lack of common ground, attendees forged meaningful links between the two, and both papers received some perceptive questions.

But it wasn't all children and childhood, and with the majority of panels addressing different matters, early cinema, film music, television history, it was possible for delegates to avoid the subject altogether. One panel on popular television considered, in turn, BBC natural history programmes, popular archaeology, and American television specials. *The Blue Planet* was the subject of Glyn Davis' (Edinburgh College of Art) paper, illustrating the ways in which breathtaking visuals and technological virtuosity combined to impose a colonial discourse onto the coastal landscapes and marine life featured in the documentary series. Jan Richard Kjelstrup of Oslo University looked at the 'special event episode' in US popular drama. Focusing on musical episodes from *Chicago Hope* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Kjelstrup discussed these heavily promoted episodes as constituting disruptions of routine television aesthetic conventions, while simultaneously functioning as spectacular promotional vehicles for the television networks. Julianne Stewart (University of Southern Queensland) looked at 'the sub-genre of archaeological-entertainment', considering issues of genre, law, television documentary and racial politics, together with the problematic ethical implications of exhuming and commodifying long-dead bodies for the television audience.

The Screen Studies programme provided an indication of emerging texts within film studies, with papers delivered on *The Matrix* (1999), *Timecode* (2000) and *Memento* (2000). The popularity of the 'Reality TV' panel suggests the significance of the genre within contemporary media studies, while panels on adaptation and digital film also show areas of growing interest. More specifically, the conference signalled important texts in the field of cinema images of childhood. Anna Claydon (Edge Hill College of Higher Education) presented on *Amelie* (2001) and *The City of Lost Children* (1995), Nicole Cloarec (Rennes 1 University) on the child in films directed by Peter Greenaway, while Mark Browning looked at Kronenberg's *Spider* (2002). Children in Swedish, Scottish and British cinema (*Billy Elliot* (2000) being a frequently-cited film), and 1930s American cinema were well-covered, with a session devoted to the subject of childhood and adolescence in the films of Martin Scorsese. At the same time, theoretical shortcomings in this area were also revealed. 'Children' and 'childhood' received comparatively little scrutiny as social, cultural or historically-produced institutions. The reproduction of common sense views of childhood repeated throughout the weekend, and with a few notable exceptions, there was no engagement with childhood as a political issue, in stark contrast to comparable conferences on other identity formations.

Overall, however, papers were diverse and insightful, debates were lively and good humoured, and the proceedings characterised by a sense of fellowship and community which belied the participants' differing disciplinary perspectives. Many useful links were forged, both professional and personal, facilitated by the decision of organisers to publish a list of delegates' emails in the programme, and the many opportunities throughout the conference for participants to meet and discuss matters academic. As my first time at a Screen Studies conference, I was greatly impressed, and look forward to next year's event with anticipation.