Conference Reports – June 2011

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Flow Conference 2010

University of Texas, Austin, 30 September–2 October 2010

A Report by Kelly K. Ryan and Heather Muse, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

The third biannual Flow Conference was hosted by the Radio-Television-Film department of the University of Texas at Austin, which, in 2004, launched the online journal *Flow t*o provide a 'critical forum of television and media culture'. True to the journal's mission to encourage accessible scholarly exchange among academics and media analysts, the conference was structured around roundtable discussions engaging position papers on various issues in television and mediated culture. In the call for responses, organizers requested position papers addressing specific themed questions, and discouraged the presentation of fully articulated academic papers. This format allowed for an unusual degree of exchange between presenters and those attending the panels, and the informality of the proceedings was particularly useful in facilitating dialogue between more seasoned scholars and early career scholars. Though the conference participants were primarily scholars from across the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia were also represented, providing an opportunity for international exchange that is sometimes lacking in smaller U.S. conferences.

The conference consisted of a full program of thirty panels held across eight sessions, ranging thematically from more conceptual panels about the direction of television and television studies to considerations of various television genres and their current (primarily American) exemplars. Issues of new media and media convergence also took center stage with panels, including 'TwitterTube', which considered the ways in which celebrity microblogging may be changing the relationship between celebrities and fans, and 'Rethinking the Audience/Producer Relationship', which problematized fandom and fan empowerment in an increasingly complex media landscape. In the latter panel, Eve Ng (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) offered a particularly compelling caution against overly optimist views of user-generated content, arguing that the highest quality fan cites, such as Television Without Pity and After Ellen, have frequently been appropriated and institutionalized by larger media outlets, with the end effect of limiting the ability of all but the most talented to have their voices heard.

One of the great strengths of the Flow Conference is that it invites commentary from both academics and journalists. The final day's panel entitled 'The New Criticism?' included participants from both realms of television criticism and discussed the erosion and construction of boundaries between the popular and academic, as well as how this new age of online television criticism allows for a wider conversation across disciplines and the possibility to think about television in different ways. Roundtable convener Jason Mittell (Middlebury College) had four overarching questions in his rationale for the session: 1) Where is television

criticism being published? 2) Who is the audience for criticism? 3) Who is doing the criticism? and 4) What is the object of criticism? He began the roundtable by musing on what academics bring to the table with online criticism, especially since non-academic work can be seen as a distraction from loftier, peer-reviewed pursuits that actually count toward getting tenure. This rumination on what does and should count as scholarship among those who study media artifacts was a recurrent theme in several panel discussions.

Also in the panel titled 'The New Criticism?' Sudeep Sharma (University of California, Los Angeles) argued that current TV criticism in newspapers is poor. Using *Washington Post* columnist Tom Shales and *New York Times* critic Alessandra Stanley as his two main examples, Sharma noted that this type of criticism subscribes to Jay Rosen's 'view from nowhere' (2003), an attempt at an even-handed 'middle ground' that does not actually exist. Sharma argued that television criticism in newspapers is a product of and for people who do not know that much about the medium and that online television criticism is much less likely to subscribe to the 'view from nowhere'. Sharma also explained that some television critics, such as Alan Sepinwall and Maureen Ryan, are shifting from newspapers to the Internet.

The shift to online criticism was addressed by every panelist. In 'Critic 2.0:', Laura Crestohl (The New School) examined how the critic's role has shifted from that of 'help[ing] navigate the popular culture landscape, to help[ing] the public make an informed decision when investing time and/or money in a cultural product', since the Internet has made just about everyone a critic. There is now a need to foster conversation between the consumers of popular culture and the more traditional critics, as both have their own forms of expertise.

Noel Murray, critic for *The Onion*'s A.V. Club section, represented the journalistic side of the critical spectrum. His presentation addressed the new and possibly problematic relationships forged in the world of online criticism. Through outlets such as blogs and Twitter feeds, critics can receive instant feedback from fans, other critics, and even show runners. Could these relationships produce a chilling effect on critics? Would they be less likely to write a negative review of a show if they know that the producers or an especially vocal fan base is reading? The immediacy of feedback in the digital age has the ability to stifle discourse, and enforcing boundaries will allow critics to continue to do their job well. Myles McNutt (University of Wisconsin, Madison) also examined the online television critical landscape and found that divisions are more pronounced than Murray had acknowledged. McNutt argued that the blogosphere can enforce the divide between the professional and amateur critic by emphasizing differences and noted that the world of online criticism is more meritocratic than democratic.

The panel was incredibly enlightening and certainly fulfilled the mission of the conference: to promote conversation among academics, media industry members, and others. It was nice to see people grapple with the divide between the ivory tower, the media establishment, and the online 'criterati', a somewhat artificial divide that is not as large as some may presume. Discovering the similarities and differences between the academic and the popular can help to eliminate redundancy and to provide new perspectives to both canons of work.

The conference format encouraged similar cross-pollination in other panels, and it was frequently remarked upon, both during and outside of the panel discussions, that the structure allowed for an unusual degree of dialogue between those who might not ordinarily find themselves on the same panel. For instance, in the second of the two-part panel, 'The Pitfalls of Positive Representation' (in which one of the authors took part), panelists addressed the issues of representation from different perspectives. The panel convener Esteban del Rio's (University of San Diego) position paper considered 'the benefits of symbolic annihilation of Filipinos' on American television, which served as an interesting foil to others in the panel engaging with the media representation of gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Victor Evans (Thiel College) called attention to the growing, yet still limited, trend of male and female gay characters of color on American television. Both position papers, in association with those of others on the panel, highlighted the need for more exchange among scholars working in various categories of representation, though it was noted that the two parts of the Positive Representation panel were clearly programmed such that the first part almost exclusively dealt with race, and the second more clearly with sexual and gender identity. Perhaps a future conference might allow for even more overlap between these thematic concerns in representation.

In lieu of a keynote speaker, the conference was to feature a screening of an episode of the newly launched series *Lone Star*, which was based in Texas, to be followed by a question and answer session with the creator of the series, Kyle Killen. Unfortunately, the series was cancelled the day before the viewing was to take place and could not be screened. Nonetheless, Killen graciously attended the question and answer session, affording participants unique behind-the-scenes insights into the realities of television production.

Overall, this conference was large enough to allow for an array of interesting panels from which to choose, but maintained the intimacy of a smaller conference, with ample formal and informal opportunities to network with other media scholars at various points in their careers. We would strongly recommend the Flow Conference to those engaged especially in television studies seeking opportunities for rigorous dialogue about issues in the field.

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Women's Filmmaking in France 2000-2010

Institut Français, London, 2–4 December 2010

A Report by Sarah Forgacs, King's College London, UK

Nearly ten years after Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet's groundbreaking study of women's filmmaking in France, *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*, scholars from within the field of French studies gathered to examine the progress that has been made in French women's filmmaking during the 2000s.

The three-day conference began with a roundtable discussion with the conference organisers, Prof. Carrie Tarr (Kingston University), Dr Kate Ince (Birmingham University), and Dr Julia Dobson (Sheffield University). Tarr began by sharing some interesting statistics on the productivity of women within French filmmaking: in the 1980s, women produced roughly 10 films a year; in the 2000s, this number had risen to roughly 36; and in 2009, women produced 48 films. In percentage terms, in the 1980s, roughly 6.4% of French films were produced by women; in the 1990s, this had increased to 13.7%; and by 2009, this was estimated to be close to 20%. In box-office terms, five films made by women have grossed over £1 million (the most successful being Agnès Jaoui's *Le Goût des autres*, 2000) and women have won three Césars for best film. Discussion then moved to tensions between auteur and genre filmmaking and to the problems of attracting funding and securing distribution opportunities. The table then set a series of questions, which it was hoped would be answered over the course of the conference: What progress have women made in terms of filmmaking? What challenges they still need to overcome? This was then followed by a screening of Isabelle Czajka's *D'Amour et d'eau fraîche* (2010).

The main conference began with a keynote lecture from Prof. Martine Beugnet (Edinburgh University) entitled 'Encoding Loss – (Dis)embodiment and the Digital in the Work of Contemporary Women Filmmakers'. Beugnet discussed Marina de Van's 2002 film *Dans ma peau* in terms of its emphasis on the corporeal and visceral against the modernised world of electronics. She then discussed these issues in relation to Kristin Ross's study *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1996), in which women are seen as the incarnation of modernisation and in which the female body becomes materialised and corporealised. Using a clip from Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000), Beugnet highlighted how the film details Varda's refusal to equate ageing femininity with refuse, loss and waste. Beugnet finished by charting the rise of installation art, with filmmakers, such as Sophie Calle and Chantal Akerman, creating a space to remediate the female body and highlighting a gendered aspect of haptics and embodiment. Finally Beugnet illustrated how the female body seems to be caught between the spectacular and the hyper-corporeal.

The first panel followed on from this in its examination of haptics and the body. Films, including *La Naissance des pieuvres* (Céline Sciamma, 2007), *Les Brodeuses* (Eléonore Faucher, 2004), *Lady Chatterley* (Pascale Ferran, 2006), and *Dans ma peau* (Marina de Van, 2002), were discussed in their relation to an

exploration of the sensuality and materiality of the female body. As Dr Sophie Belot (Sheffield University) highlighted in her discussion of *La Naissance des pieuvres*, childhood/adolescence and the adolescent female body is a common starting place for women filmmakers. Belot suggested that the swimming pool, in particular, forms a common locus for burgeoning female sexuality and referred to the work of Luce Irigaray to suggest that aquatics/fluids constitute a space for the feminine imaginary. Ros Murray (King's College London) offered up Marina de Van's *Dans ma peau* as an example of the inter-corporeal experience of film and asked the questions: How do we perceive images of the body? Whose skin are we in? Murray suggested that the film was an example of a female reclamation of the body, with the images of bloodied, mutilated, and wounded skin all coming together to challenge the limits of representation. Using the work of Vivian Sobchack, Murray finally suggested that the film body is an ungraspable presence and that viewers still react to the film's images of self-mutilation, even though they know they are not real.

The second panel entitled 'Staging the Self' looked at the rise of the *autoportrait* and the female filmmakers turning to the documentary mode. Here filmmaking becomes a form of catharsis and personal discovery, as the camera is turned back on the filmmaker. The lines between auteur/actor/protagonist all become blurred. As Prof. Richard Neupert (University of Georgia) argued in his paper '*Persepolis* (2007): 2D Animation and the Melancholy Self-Portrait', women filmmakers are becoming more prolific in the areas of animation and he revealed that France is the world's third biggest producer of animation films. Examining Marjan Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Neupert highlighted how the film is an example of the melancholy self-portrait and of the saddened, suffering woman within French cinema, following on from Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985). Neupert argued that the film engages with issues of feminist autobiography, while avoiding any acknowledgment of Satrapi's creative persona (unlike self-portraits by Varda and Jean-Luc Godard) and relies instead on 2-D graphics and stars, such as Chiara Mastroianni, to provide the voiceovers.

The third panel, entitled 'Modes and Genres of Women's Filmmaking in France 2000-2010', examined the often overlooked area of popular women's filmmaking that is comedy, and more specifically the rom-com. Mary Harrod (King's College London) charted the rise of the rom-com and suggested the successful *Amélie* as a precursor. She argued that universal appeal of US rom-coms to all ages and sexual preferences ensures their success in France. Women's systematic exclusion from the auteur canon means that the genre of comedy, and more specifically the rom-com, provides a fertile ground for women filmmakers to succeed at the box-office.

The second keynote lecture by Prof. Ginette Vincendeau (King's College London), entitled 'The Rise and Rise of Women Filmmakers in France; Victory for Feminism or French Exception?' opened with statistics highlighting the growing position of women filmmakers in France. Vincendeau suggested that the small rise over the last ten years was evidence of a plateau: at the 2010 Cannes film festival only three out of the 53 films shown were directed by women. The initial rise was accredited to the openness of film schools to women. For example, women account for 50% of the student population of La Fémis, the largest and most prestigious films school in France. Vincendeau then raised the question: 'If

there are as many women as men in the French film industry, why are we still singling out women as a group?' The majority of female directors in France seek to distance themselves from the labels 'woman filmmaker' and 'feminist cinema'. The case studies of *Tout ce qui brille* (Hervé Mimran, 2010) and *L'Autre côté du lit*, (Pascale Pouzadoux, 2008), which attracted 1.7 million and 1.3 million spectators in France respectively, were discussed in relation to the success that women filmmakers have experienced in the comedy genre. Here, women filmmakers can explore female identity/desire, gender stereotypes, and family configurations within popular culture, which appeals to audiences.

The second day of the conference began with a panel entitled 'Auteur Women's Filmmaking 2000-2010'. Dr Laura McMahon (Cambridge University) explored the role of dance in the films of Claire Denis, perhaps France's most prolific female filmmaker. For Denis, filmmaking itself is becoming a form of dance between filmmaker and actor, actor and spectator. The infamous dance sequence with Denis Lavant at the end of *Beau travail* (1997) can be read as a monologue, an appeal/address to communicate a sense of solitariness. This dance highlights, in particular, how the body stretches beyond the limits of the frame, with the dancing body a figure of non-possession/non-assimilation. In 'The New Eve; Feminising the Fairy Tale in Breillat's *Barbe bleu* (2009)', Dr Catherine Wheatley (University of Southampton) discussed the feminist streak in the story of Bluebeard (as highlighted by Marina Warner), which keeps in line with Breillat's thematic of female sexualisation. Wheatley suggested that the film can be read as a take on Adam and Eve: the young bride enters into the forbidden, Bluebeard's locked room enclosing his dead wives, and Bluebeard's discovery and threat of death are her 'fall'. Yet ultimately, as Wheatley argues, it is the men who fall, not the women. Bluebeard dies while his young bride survives her transgression. Likewise, in Breillat's *Anatomie de l'enfer* (2004) She seduces Him, until he breaks down and she apparently falls to her death. Wheatley ended by commenting on the ubiquity of Christian iconography and the growth of films with a religious thread, with films such as *Lourdes* (Jessica Hausner, 2010), *Hedewitch* (Bruno Dumont, 2009), and more recently *Des Hommes et des Dieux* (Xavier Beauvois, 2010), suggesting that this may mark the start of a growing trend within French cinema.

The final plenary lecture by Prof. Emma Wilson (Cambridge University) entitled 'Precarious Lives: On Girls in Mia Hansen-Love and Others' focused on Mia Hansen-Love's 2009 film *Le Père de mes enfants* and its representations of girlhood and the process of subject formation. Wilson's paper raised questions such as: How do we come to be who we are? Do we ever assume an identity? How do we relate to one another ethically? Wilson argued that the bourgeois family unit is seen as a field of constraint, with the girls grappling for their own agency. Two clips from the film were shown: one of the family visiting a church, which Wilson argued was proto-cinematic in the way the camera mimics the act of looking; the second showing the youngest child thrown into the water by her father, seen as a baptism. Finally, Wilson suggested that the film offers a new version of the mourning child, as the children come to terms with their father's suicide.

The final session, 'Women's Careers in the French Film Industry 2000-2010', began with a paper by Prof. Brigitte Rollet (ULIP) entitled 'The *Avance sur*

Recettes and Film Schools in the Careers of French Women Filmmakers'. Rollet detailed how, in 2008, 47 women registered at La Fémis for *réalisation* (directing) and six for *scénario* (screenwriting). She also noted that all the films nominated for the best debut-film prize during the 2008 César award ceremony, were made by women. This was related to the institutional investment available for debut films. Finally Rollet noted the longevity of the careers of female filmmakers, including Agnès Varda, Claire Denis, Catherine Breillat, and Coline Serreau. In the final paper of the conference, 'A Place Behind the Camera: Women Working as Cinematographers in France in the 2000s', Dr Alison Smith (University of Liverpool) suggested that cinematography is one area in which women are making progress. 63 women are credited as chief camera operator and ten (out of a total of 107) are registered to train as cinematographers at the Institut Français de la Cinématographie.

Final remarks revealed that significant progress has been made in terms of the position of women in French cinema, particularly in the fields of animation, romantic comedy, and cinematography. However, it was noted that there is still some way to go before women are able to gain equal status under the dominance of male auteurs.

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MeCCSA Conference: Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association

University of Salford, 12–14 January 2011

A Report by Greg Bevan, University of Salford, UK

Since its 2007 merger with the Association of Media Practice Educators (AMPE), the MeCCSA conference has been the UK's leading academic forum for media, communication, and cultural studies, with membership representing higher education teaching and research across the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Delegates joined in one of the six initial parallel panels, which included 'Digital Gaming', 'Media Education', and 'Cultural and Creative Industries'. Those with an interest in media practice headed for the tantalising 'Practice and Screenings I' panel. Starting with 'Image Events in Bil'in', Simon Faulkner's (Manchester Metropolitan University) paper, illustrated with photographs, explored the concept of political demonstrations as performance in the West Bank. Whilst interesting, the paper seemed an odd precursor to Ann Latimer's (Bucks New University) presentation of a DVD-in-progress, designed to instruct students in video lighting techniques. This was followed by Tony Richards's (University of Lincoln) discussion of panoptech clairvoyance in 'Immediation: Towards the Selfless Other', resulting in a panel which was perhaps too widely-conceived for useful cross-fertilisation between papers.

Another six parallel panels followed, including offerings of comedy, news and reporting, identity, entertainment, and public service broadcasting. The latter brought together two papers: Vana Goblot (Goldsmiths) discussed the status of BBC Four and its implications for a changing public service ethos in her paper 'BBC Four: "Everybody Needs a Place to Think" - Cultural Value in Response to Digital Opportunity', while Yuwei Lin (University of Salford) discussed the shifting notion of 'participatory audiences' in 'Re-using and Re-purposing Open Content from the BBC', with specific reference to the BBC's Backstage venture, which encourages audiences to re-mix and re-motivate BBC content.

Thursday morning offered delegates a choice of up to six parallel panels, including (post-)communism and media, ethics, and media policy. The panel 'Practice and Screenings II' achieved an eclectic yet rather more harmonious synthesis than its precursor. Andrew Bevan delivered his vision of a definitive academic video archive called 'Mediahub', while Ian Macdonald (University of Leeds) took on the task of delineating a poetics of screenwriting. Tony Steyger (Southampton Solent University) concluded the panel with a presentation on his recent practice-based video project, the autobiographical documentary *Home Sick*, in which he examines his role as a 'normal' child growing up with two brothers, one of which has a severe mental illness, the other being physically disabled. Meanwhile, in the simply-named 'Film' panel, Virginia Crisp (Middlesex University), Nico Meissner (University of Salford) and William Proctor (University of Sunderland) showcased the scholarly standard of postgraduate research

taking place in the field with their presentations on the distribution of East Asian cinema, defining sustainability in independent filmmaking, and the film reboot phenomenon respectively.

Interested delegates could then embark on a free tour of the MediaCityUK site before attending the afternoon's selection of panels and the second keynote lecture given by Prof. Colin Barnes, director of the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds. Barnes was invited partly in recognition of the creation of the Disability Studies Network within MeCCSA. His talk, 'Disability in Cultural and Media Studies: A Cause for Concern?' explored changing definitions of disability and key questions for analysts and practitioners about media representations of disability and disabled people. Barnes clarified distinctions between impairment and disability, highlighting that according to the World Health Organisation, baldness is an impairment. Barnes explained that the Social Model approach to disability focuses on disabling environments, barriers and cultures and not simply on medical issues. He concluded that disability is a complex mix of economic, political, and social disadvantages, and delegates were left to consider the thought that the dominant view of disability defines it as an individual rather than a social or political problem.

Stimulating papers on the conference's final day included Thomas Austin's (University of Sussex) reading of the social and aesthetic agendas in Gideon Koppel's 2008 documentary *Sleep Furiously*. His paper, 'Figures in a Landscape: Work and Beauty in *Sleep Furiously*', identified a picturesque aesthetic discourse which simultaneously engages with issues of class and power, particularly in terms of the property relations between members of the filmed community. David Kreps (University of Salford) offered a thought-provoking exploration of the social networking site Facebook and the sinister hegemony of capitalist ideology. There were also panels on media aesthetics, representations of women in the media, the challenges of television production, as well as more provocative and often under-represented subject domains such as onscenity.

Friday morning also delivered what was perhaps, for many film-orientated delegates, the conference highlight: 'Avatar: Audiences and Attitudes'. Proposed by and comprised of staff members from the University of East Anglia's department of film and television studies, each paper offered an alternative reading of James Cameron's 3D epic to the overwhelmingly negative responses that have permeated academic criticism since its release. In his paper, 'Look at the Shiny Shiny! Narrative Deficiencies and Visual Pleasure in Avatar', Vincent Gaine enthusiastically argued (with some assistance from youtube and Frankie Boyle) that *Avatar* expresses its meaning through its style. Peter Kramer ('Between Hollywood and Copenhagen: James Cameron, environmentalism and Avatar') explored the film's impact in terms of environmental issues, specifically in light of the 2009 UN conference on climate change in Copenhagen. He also demonstrated a persuasive case for Cameron to be considered an auteur filmmaker due to his penchant for 'global threat narratives'. Finally, Rupert Read ('On Avatar's Deus Ex Gaia: A Therapeutic Work at Work') soundly defended the film from accusations of being anti-disability, anti-American, imperialist, and pro-violent. The discussion that followed revealed the extent to which the panel members had individually and collectively provoked and irritated the assembled delegates. The three consistently (and convincingly) defended their arguments,

with Kramer in particular calling for a radical overhaul in how academia approaches and interprets big budget, high-grossing Hollywood blockbusters.

The diversity of presentations over the three days reflects the reach of MeCCSA across academic departments, over university faculties, colleges, disciplines, and beyond. Such an expansive dominion may seem unwieldy to some, but the depth and breadth of stimulating, quality research was exemplary and irreproachable. And so, as Salford awaits MediaCityUK's grand unveiling later this year, we look towards MeCCSA 2012 and the University of Bedfordshire.

¡Documentary Now!

University of Westminster, London, 28–30 January 2011

A Report by Philippa Daniel, Roehampton University, London, UK

In its fourth year, ¡Documentary Now! 2011 had expanded into the new, larger venue of the University of Westminster, on Regent Street. Designated 'a conference on the contemporary contexts and possibilities of the documentary', this lively event pointed in many directions and testified to the diversity and relevance of the field. The programme highlighted the theme of film sound in the panels 'Musical Docs' and 'Dis/Embodied Voices', as well as in a closing roundtable discussion 'Music Documentaries + Soundtracks', while the Friday evening screening of Susana de Sousa Dias's *48* (2009), the opening event of the conference, powerfully focused upon the political use of tension between soundtrack and image.

De Sousa Dias's film is a feature length documentary portraying the 48 years of dictatorship in Portugal (1926 to 1974) through the harrowing stories of former political detainees. Visually, this film is a slow sequence of photographs, the mug shots taken at the time these political prisoners were arrested. On the soundtrack, in present-day interviews, the contributors recount details of their arrests and the torture they subsequently underwent. The soundtrack of De Sousa Dias's documentary therefore reveals a previously untold, unofficial history, one that seems inexplicably absent visually from the detached, official photographs.

Her original concept for *48*, De Sousa Dias explained, was to simply use stills and clean sound, but during the making of the film, the process became more complex. She had found it necessary to conduct the interviews in people's homes, producing sound recordings that captured physical presence, corporeal sensations, breathing, sniffing, and silences, and these elements, she realised, were crucial to the integrity of her soundtrack. Also, the stills, she explained, are not still, they move almost imperceptibly: 'Had it just been speech and stills', she said, 'it wouldn't have been a film'. An audience member commented that during the screening of the film, she had become acutely aware of the corporeal nature of the audience, 'a community of vulnerable bodies'.

In the panel 'Television and the Everyday', the following morning, Brian Winston (University of Lincoln) revisited Griersonian Documentary. Winston examined what he argued to be 'the stilted nature of performance' the Griersonians obtained from their subjects when shooting with synchronous sound, linking this lack of authenticity with the movement's failure to deal with the urgent social problems of the time, that of the 1930s economic depression and later the Second World War. Winston's contention was that even as the films were being presented as uncompromisingly realistic, the scripted presentation of self, 'the behavioural code' within these documentaries, worked to support a 'reformist, placatory meaning' and a 'central propaganda thrust of one nation'. He queried how this could be otherwise given the realities of sponsorship.

In the same panel, Ieuan Franklin (University of Portsmouth) discussed 'The Uses of Montage Sound in the Post-War BBC Television Documentaries of Denis Mitchell and Philip Donnellan'. Franklin described how, coming from radio, Mitchell used a mobile tape recorder and relied on wild-track (non-synchronous) sound to record spontaneous conversations and everyday effects. Out of these recordings, Mitchell created impressionistic montages of vernacular voices, which became known as his 'Think Tape Technique', exemplified in *Morning in the Streets* (1959). 'I've fallen in love with the human voice', Mitchell could be heard to say in a screened interview clip, 'It wasn't what they said, it was how they say it. Actors can't do it'.

In the final paper of this panel, 'Documentary and the Commercialisation of Television', Anna Zoellner (University of Leeds) discussed how the commercially driven search for ever more extreme programme content, within television production, pressurises documentary producers into demanding performance ability from ordinary contributors. This system preference for the extraordinary and the bizarre, Zoellner argued, raises concerns for documentary's claim to be about real life, truth and authenticity. This, she said, excludes ordinary people from television coverage and creates odd conclusions about cultural norms. In the discussion that followed, Brian Winston commented that exclusion of ordinary people was not just a matter of commercialisation, as 'there has always been an overwhelming bias against inarticulacy'.

The panel 'Dis/Embodied Voices' ran concurrently with the above and so, was one I had to miss. Patricia Zimmerman, however, reviewed this panel in her excellent blog on the conference as 'outstanding and provocative', and 'suggesting documentary form as a philosophical, rather than representational, enterprise'. Zimmerman's blog also covers the panel 'Open Space/New Media and New Documentary Forms'.[1]

The panel 'Abstractions of Space: from Urban to Rural' included a paper by Adam Kossoff (University of Wolverhampton) discussing the experimental films of William Raban, and in particular Raban's most recent stop frame, cityscape film of East London, *About Now MMX* (2010). Kossoff described an overcoming of the subjective/objective divide by conveying 'otherness through technique'. His analysis included theoretical notions of 'thick space' and 'thin space', in which the former claims the realism of a 'lived-in' depth and the latter exposes the artifice of film language, such as when the image becomes the equivalent of a pictorial map through the flattening effect of a long lens. In reply to a question on 'thin space' he explained how the experimental and reflexive nature of the image forces the spectator away from a feeling of 'being there' to view the screen for what it is, a flat space.

In 'Musical Docs' Iván Villarmea Álvarez (Universidad de Zaragoza) looked at compilation films that use popular songs 'as commentary on historical images'. He discussed how the two different discourses produce a dialectic between soundtrack and image referring to such sequences as 'détournements' and palimpsests. Annelies van Noortwijk (University of Groningen) explored the emotional use of Chopin's romantic music in *Forever* (2006), a documentary she argued was a paradigm shift into post-postmodernism, whilst Julian Savage (Brunel University) discussed his multi-voiced documentary, presently in post-

production, *UPA TANGI REKA (The Music's Great!)*, which traces Tahitian ukulele music as a site of cultural exchange.

Ethical issues for sound artists and television producers were raised in the panel 'Authenticity or Artifice'. 'From "Viewsers" to Activists' included a historical view of British video-activism by Steve Presence (University of the West of England), and Tina Askanius's (Lund University) discussion of the aesthetics of dissent in the demonstration video. The panel 'Critical Perspectives' included a paper by Elias Grootaers (University of Ghent) entitled 'Position of the Documentary Maker – inspired by the writings of Walter Benjamin', in which he discussed philosophical concepts of time in relation to documentary practice. A paper by Charlotte Govaert (University of Aberdeen), in the same panel, addressed the thorny issue of documentary definition and proposed a process of analysis based on the sender/receiver communication model of Jacobson's paradigm.

Prior to the plenary session on Saturday afternoon, everyone gathered in the Old Cinema for a live video performance by Keith Marley (John Moores University) and Geoff Cox (Huddersfield University). Using club culture, VJ technologies, they produced a cut up and randomized audio visual piece. Elements of this included a filmed presentation on Vertov and the city symphony, and documentary material about Toxteth housing problems. Part of the impetus for this piece was to make academic presentation 'strange'.

This year's plenary 'The Compilation Film: The Chorus of Bits and Pieces', was given by Michael Renov (University of Southern California). Renov traced an historical overview from the 'propaganda' of Soviet montage to the digital 'mash-ups' of today. 'This culture of remix and reactivation', he argued, 'is the life-blood of the current moment of the YouTube generation'. The occasion for writing his paper, Renov said, was the centenary of Jay Leyda's birth, whose book *Films Beget Films* (1964) was the first serious study of the compilation film.

A Saturday evening screening of *Nyman with a Movie Camera,* a new work by Michael Nyman, hit problems when Nyman was questioned about the representation of women in the film. He has reworked Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), creating a shot by shot remake with his own video footage and using the score he wrote for Vertov's film in 2002. The comparison to be made, as Michael Chanan (Roehampton University) pointed out, is of Vertov's utopian pre-Stalinist vision of the communist city and Nyman's dystopian images of global post-communist capitalism. Interesting though this idea might be, tireless images of commodified female breasts makes for depressing viewing for women. Nyman said he was considering a return to the edit suite to tinker with shots.

AVPhD sessions took place the following morning. 'To whom are we as ethnographic filmmakers responsible?' was the question posed by Anne Marie Carty (University of Manchester) in the panel 'Shared Authorship and Participation', which looked at issues arising from community based filmmaking and Carty's specific experience of re-edits. At the blurred boundary of documentary and science fiction, Eirini Konstantinidou (Brunel University) discussed her present film production *Mnemophrenia.* Within her doctoral project, the film serves as an analytical device to look at the promotion of

artificial memories by film media. Structurally, she explained, this is a film within a film in which the main character is making a documentary about the psychological disorder 'mnemophrenia', a condition that promotes artificial memories from film media. By contrast, Reina-Marie Loader (University of Reading) was concerned with the memory of real events, through experimental docudrama, theorized in her paper as 'documemory'. She demonstrated how her film project, *Sarajevo: Shelved Memories*, will reflexively reveal the construction of its own media and narrative images in order to unpack the 'documentary effect'. As an AVPhD student myself, I found this Sunday morning session both informative and stimulating, and it was reassuring to see others tackling problems similar to my own.

Running concurrently was a 'Video Activism Workshop', a late addition to the programme in response to the current proliferation of anti-cuts videos posted online. Participants included Ann Burton, an education officer at the TUC and Richard Hering from VisionOn.[2] Michael Chanan (Roehampton University) introduced the session with a screening of his own anti-cuts video, a report on the Netroots UK conference January 2011,[3] which is part of Chanan's documentary project 'Chronicle of Protest'.

Overall, the success of iDocumentary Now! 2011 was in the wide range of issues addressed and the fruitful crossing over between theory and practice positions. The focus on film sound and music, whilst occupying a relatively small part of the programme, had trickled through into much of the discussion with issues surrounding the human voice of particular interest. In her closing remarks, organiser Alisa Lebow (Brunel University) referred to 'the music of sound, disembodied and embodied sound, soundscapes, and the temporality and spaciality of sound'. She also mentioned the inadvertent emergence of activism as a conference theme and the demand for visual documentation that surrounds activism. To date, Lebow and Chanan have together run this important conference at no charge to participants, but, as this year's event drew to an end and the Anti-cuts movement gathered pace across the country, Lebow's closing words to iDocumentary Now! 2011 were: 'We may not be able to continue running the conference for free, but we'll keep trying!'

Notes

[1] http://documentarynow.wordpress.com/2011/02/21/patricia-zimmerman-blogs-about-the-conference

[2] http://visionon.tv

[3] http://putneydebater.wordpress.com/2011/01/11/the-writing-on-the-wall-is-on-the-web

Rendering the Visible Conference

Georgia State University, 10–14 February 2011

A Report by Drew Ayers and Steven Pustay, Georgia State University, USA

Scholars around the world are quickly coming to terms with the impact of digital technology across a range of media forms, reflected by the wide variety of issues raised during Georgia State University's *Rendering the Visible Conference* under the unifying theme of digital renderings. Throughout the weekend, scholars discussed and debated a series of topics related to the effect of digital media on traditional media studies, including digital aesthetics, geopolitics, embodiment in digital environments, interfaces, and much more. Sponsored by the Communication Department of Georgia State and organized by Drs Jennifer Barker, Alessandra Raengo, and Angelo Restivo, the event drew delegates from universities all over the United States as well as Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Israel, and New Zealand. The truly international reach of the conference clearly reflected the importance of its theme and the increasing relevance of digital media for film and media studies programs all over the world. The scope and quality of the papers presented at *Rendering the Visible* were a reflection of the contemporary state of the field.[1]

The conference began with a special screening of experimental filmmaker Phil Solomon's *Grand Theft Auto Series* (2005-2009) in Atlanta's Rialto Center for the Arts, followed by a question and answer session with the filmmaker. The series consisted of four short films of increasing complexity, all created entirely in the digital gamespaces of Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto games. *Crossroad* (2005), co-directed with Mark LaPore, explores the emptiness, solitude, and stillness that exists within the cracks of online spaces through a haunting series of repeated imagery. Following LaPore's death, Solomon decided to dedicate a series of films to his friend, beginning with *Rehearsals for Retirement* (2007), followed by *Last Days in a Lonely Place* (2007), and concluding with *Still Raining, Still Dreaming* (2009). *Rehearsals* vastly increased the complexity of Solomon's digital images, drifting through a series of open spaces littered with the decayed remnants of digital ephemera, while *Last Days* incorporated a stunning mix of found sound and haunting black and white 'cinematography', and *Still Raining* highlighted the inertia of persistent digital space.

During the question and answer session, Solomon revealed his motivation for abandoning chemical photography in favor of digital filmmaking, arguing that gamespaces allow him to present his own unique vision onscreen without the compromises that inevitably occur when dealing with other human beings. In a way, the fictional gamespaces captured some subjective truth about the experience of grief that seems unavailable or inaccessible in objective reality. Solomon proved to be a relaxed yet engaging speaker, whose interest in the digital revolved not around issues of self-identity or indexicality, but rather the sense that the human stain echoes across the digital diversions of gameplay.

Throughout the weekend, many of the papers presented at *Rendering the Visible* returned to the originary questions of the field of film and media studies — questions of ontology, perception, and experience — and the conference's opening keynote address certainly kept with this spirit. Entitled 'Surrendering Images, Unimaginable Rendition', the keynote was delivered by Prof. Akira Mizuta Lippit of the University of Southern California. Playing off the conference's theme of 'rendering', Lippit returned to that most basic of renderings: the visual perception and apprehension of color. Using Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993) as a starting point, Lippit explored the ways in which something as primal as color perception can impact and inflect our interpretation of audio-visual works. In revisiting the fundamental questions of visuality, Lippit (like many of the conference's presenters) demonstrated the extent to which rendering — the act of bringing into being — serves as a useful concept for understanding contemporary visuality. Drawing on C.S. Peirce's concept of 'firstness', Lippit worked towards an understanding of the semiology of the color blue. Faithful to Peirce, who describes firstness as an initial reaction, impulse, or feeling about something, Lippit maintained a pre-interpretive stance towards his object in an effort to show the ways in which metaphor, analogy, cliché, and idiom inflect our cultural understanding of the color blue, an understanding that relies as much on feeling as it does cognition. The text of Lippit's paper was closer to poetry than to prose, and his deployment of a series of phrases incorporating the word blue was a fine example of the theoretical leverage that can be gained by marrying form to content. In tackling an object through the language of the object itself, Lippit's opening keynote provided an example of the kinds of work being presented at *Rendering the Visible*, emphasizing the importance of understanding how a visual object both renders and is rendered by its interaction with a viewer.

While the first keynote addressed the ways in which the rendering of an image 'colors' our relationship with that image, the closing address tackled the issues of rendering temporality and the construction of time in digital media. Through an analysis of David Fincher's 2008 film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Prof. Vivian Sobchack (UCLA) argued that digital aesthetics present a new spatialization of time within the cinema in which private time and public time have converged to create a heterogeneous depiction of temporality. In the film's opening moments, a master clockmaker, grieving the loss of his son during the first World War, unveils his latest creation at a New Orleans train station: a massive timepiece that runs backwards. In reference to Fincher's subsequent montage, in which footage of trench warfare is reversed so that the dead seemingly return to life, Sobchack argued, following Stephen Kern, that analog time is shown to be perspectively affected – that the subjective nature of the backwards clock allows for the time itself to be reversed within memory and image. However, digital technology (i.e. the very technology that created the images of old and young Brad Pitt as the reverse-aging Benjamin Button) has, Sobchack contended, extroverted private time. The subjectivity of time has been replaced by the exactitude of the digital, so that mortality — as seen through the death of the backwards-aging man — becomes concretely a thing of the past and not the future. Thus, Sobchack argued, *Benjamin Button*'s narrative can only end when the subjective time of the analog clock is replaced in the present with a digital clock, while the older technology is literally washed away by Hurricane Katrina.

Outside of the keynote addresses, the strength of a conference like *Rendering the Visible*, which was strongly united by its theme of 'rendering', is that panelists see reflections of their own work in the papers of the other panelists. As the conference progressed, it became increasingly common for presenters to cite the work of previously presented papers. This not only established a sense of continuity among the panels, but also created a camaraderie and collegiality that represents the work of academia at its best. Question and answer sessions were invariably lively, and discussions continued on after the panels were over and spilled into the more informal events held during the evening.

The centrality of the theme of rendering also established some major thematic throughlines in the conference as a whole. Key among these is the issue of indexicality and its relationship to medium specificity, which most of the papers strove to understand in more expanded, less deterministic, terms. Rather than viewing indexicality as a primarily material phenomenon, tied to medium-specific modes of production, indexicality was understood in terms of virtuality, metaphysics, style, presence, and duration. For example, in panels dealing with 'Digital Aesthetics' and 'The Work of Phil Solomon', presenters conceptualized style as distinct from its material limits. Faith in indexicality was viewed as a metaphysical position, and style was understood in terms of use and instrumentality rather than bound by its material origins. Using visual objects such as *The Kids are All Right*, *Dead Ringers*, and protest 'book shields', these panels also emphasized the role of intermediality and convergence in the digital turn, questioning whether digital imaging technologies operate according to logics of translation or logics of exchange.

Several panels addressed the issue of the ontological status of digital images. 'Interfaces' questioned the role of platforms and rendering systems through a series of presentations that dealt with the translation of one medium or expression into another (such as the visualization of sound in editing software or the transference of photochemical film into digital formats). Taking this further, a discussion of programming languages brought about the question of the linguistic structure of digital aesthetics. In the 'Decay' panel, the flesh of digital mediums played a central role, as panelists examined the role of death in digital games (including Playdead Studio's *Limbo*) and the manner in which movement and stillness expose the interplay between life and death in digital images, particularly those that present extinct creatures such as dinosaurs. Considering the issue of disc rot, digital texts were juxtaposed with the decaying physicality of the medium of books (paper) and cinema (celluloid). Finally, the 'Adaptation' panelists bridged these previous panels by offering archives and curation as a process of adaptation and translation that preserves the decaying past in the context of the digital future.

Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and D.N. Rodowick, issues of virtuality and actuality informed many of Saturday's presentations, specifically within the 'Hauntings', 'The Body Geopolitic', and 'Archival Labor' panels, which confronted the relationship between materiality and expression. The materiality of non-time-based art works like painting and photography was theorized as existing as a virtuality in digital arts (digital film included), and papers drew on the work of Peter Greenaway, David Cronenberg, and Hungarian artist Péter Forgács. Style, therefore, is not medium dependent but rather the virtual expression of an

approach to mediums and materiality, with digital art viewed as appropriating the ontological markers of other mediums. The virtuality of space was also discussed, both in terms of rendering architecture in Brooklyn and in terms of the digital rendering of the exchangeability of global spaces in *Miami Vice*.

During the 'Vicissitudes of the Face' and 'Sensorium' panels, presentations frequently addressed the impact of digital image-making processes on the ontological thickness of the visual field. Digital design issues such as pixel width, haptic and tactile interfaces, interactive information flow, and orientation within animation served to foreground questions of indexicality, while simultaneously recognizing the role of spectacle in structuring a recognition of the 'real' (the photochemical) within the imagined spaces of digital imagery. This line of thought continued in 'Mnemo-Technics', where digital restoration was shown to cause anxiety over the 'originality' of photographic images (in films like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*), while the structure of computer 'memory' displayed the random and fragmentary nature of our own recollections of the past, even within the supposedly indexical images of celluloid cinema.

Finally, presenters also related the tension between virtuality and actuality to issues of time and duration. The 'Unfolding', 'Bodies that Scatter', and 'Belatedness' panels all addressed the relationship between digital virtuality and the material actuality of rendering. The mediation of the present through the use of digital imaging technologies was articulated in terms of a Deleuzian process of enfolding, and concepts like 'liveness' and 'presence' were understood as processes of mediation, not pre-existing material categories. Drawing on objects including *Minority Report*, *Air Doll*, examples from 1970s American television, and the work of Agnès Varda, liveness was connected to death, and papers discussed both the ways in which technology mediates death and the ways in which the virtuality of digital objects brings those objects to life.

Rendering the Visible brought together an impressive group of scholars from around the world, united by their shared concern with the state of visuality after the digital turn. The innovative theoretical approaches taken by the presenters demonstrate the breadth of scholarship being produced in the field of media studies, and if the excitement of the presenters at the conference is an indication of the state of the discipline, then we can all look forward to some innovative work being published on the digital turn in the near future.

Notes

[1] A full conference program can be found at http://www.movingimagestudies.com/

Erotic Screen and Sound: Culture, Media and Desire Conference

Griffith University, Brisbane, 15–18 February 2011

A Report by Michelle A. Mayefske, University of Limerick, Ireland

On the opening night of the Erotic Screen and Sound conference, organizer Dr Jody Taylor (Griffith University) stated that the conference was 'dedicated to culture, media and erotic desires'. This strikingly multidisciplinary conference examining the erotic in culture delivered on all fronts. With close to thirty panels, including 'The Erotic Feminine', 'Music and Sexuality', 'Sexuality and Youth', and 'Erotic Industries', there was an array of erotic topics discussed from a variety of academic fields.

The opening evening began with artist Luke Roberts's exhibition 'AlphaStation/Alphaville' and an address from Roberts at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Roberts, whose exhibition included recent as well as older works, is a prominent figure in the Brisbane art scene. His 1983 film *Nazissus* was also screened and then discussed. The evening ended with a screening of *Flaming Creatures* (Jack Smith, 1963), hosted by the Griffith University Centre for Cultural Research and OtherFilm.

The second day of the conference began with an engaging keynote address from Professor Alan McKee (Queensland University of Technology): 'Putting the Entertainment into Adult Entertainment'. McKee argued that pornography is indeed a form of entertainment, providing examples of key elements common to other forms of entertainment, such as seriality, adaptation, and interactivity, suggesting how these can be applied to pornography, and more specifically to pornographic images.

The day continued with further interesting sessions, including 'The Erotic Feminine'. Nicola Pitt (Monash University) discussed the sexualization of motherhood in her paper 'The Pornography of 21st Century Mothers: An Eroticisation of Contemporary Mothering Processes?', in which she examined the dominant discourses surrounding the image of good mothers and how this projected representation is often that of a sexualized mother, a 'yummy mummy'. During the 'Sex, Violence and Passivity' session, David Gizzi (University of Wollongong) discussed a type of violent fetishization that is becoming more predominant in western society. In his paper entitled 'War Porn: Australian Perspectives', Gizzi examined images of combat, suggesting how they can be categorized as pornographic. Gizzi highlighted that while these images are often not sexualized in their representation, they nonetheless provide a voyeuristic view of taboo acts, provide gratification for viewers (sexual or otherwise), and range from softcore to hardcore, as do mainstream pornographic images.

The final panel of the day, 'The Erotics of Consumption', featured Carody Culver's 'Whores d'Oeuvres and Sparrow's Brains: Exoticising Food and Sex in Erotic Cookbooks'. Culver used narrative theory to examine the interplay between author and reader in two erotic cookbooks, *Venus in the Kitchen* (2002) by Norman Douglas and *Fanny Hill's Cookbook* (1972) by Lionel H. Braun and William Adams. Culver illustrated how both texts use strong textual and visual descriptions to capture readers' attention and link food to the senses. Through the use of language, the authors created an erotic framing for the reader. Philip Birch (University of New South Wales) provided an entertaining reading of his research in 'Understanding Men who Purchase Sex: The Accounts of Sex Workers'. Birch presented the empirical data collected through interviews of female sex workers, questionnaires, and a content analysis of over 100 international newspaper articles, thus providing an insight into the motivations and experiences of men who purchase sex.

The third day of the conference was similarly interdisciplinary and began with a session on 'The Erotics of Restriction and Excess'. Tiziana Ferrero-Regis's (Queensland University of Technology) paper 'From Liberation to Appropriation: Corsets and Eroticism in Australian Film' was particularly interesting. Ferrero-Regis discussed the role of the corset in two Australian films, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975) and *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001), arguing that the fashionable corset has undergone both a sartorial and symbolic transformation within women's dress, having evolved from a symbol of submission to a socially accepted form of erotic display.

The highlight of the third day was arguably the special panel session entitled 'Perverse and Fetish Queer Play', which was presented by members of the local BDSM community, who gave personal accounts of their entry into the BDSM world. This session, which allowed questions from eager audience members, had the highest attendance of the conference. Vic Ogilvie's outline of the 'BDSM basics' and norms within the community was very informative and appreciated by those unfamiliar with the subculture. Ogilvie also provided insight into her involvement with both the kink and lesbian communities and the challenges that arise when one is a member of a subculture within a subculture. Steven Todd's speech, read in his absence by Ogilvie, addressed the gay leatherman community, as did Pierre Brand in his discussion of his role as both a gay leatherman and a master. Paige Phoenix discussed his role as a performer and how trans often induces anxiety. Ms. Red's performance, during which she discussed and countered the traditional negative representations of BDSM, was intense and passionate.

The final session of the day, entitled 'Erotic Industries', complimented previous panels. Hillary Caldwell's (University of Sydney) paper 'Self Perceptions: Clients Who Access Commercial Sexual Services in Australia' echoed Birch's earlier paper. Caldwell's phenomenological analysis interpreted the experiences of men who purchase sex within the context of their daily lives. Caldwell provided a historical look at previous scientific sex research and identified how most male clients are seen as deviant and/or pathological. Caldwell's paper examined both the motivations of male clients and the risks associated with their behavior. Pornographer Karen Jackson's (aka Ms. Naughty) paper 'Girly Smut: A Brief History of Porn for Women' began by deciphering the difference between

mainstream pornography and porn for women. She then covered the history of various women's magazines, including *Playgirl*, *Filament*, *For Women*, and other types of porn for women.

Thursday evening concluded with 'Abnormal Love', a special screening hosted by OtherFilm at the Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane. The screening aimed to illustrate how avant-garde cinema has engaged with the erotic. The 16mm films included Naomi Uman's *Removed* (1999), Martha Colburn's *Secrets of Mexuality* (2002), Gunvor Nelson's *Take Off/The Stripper* (1965), amongst others.

A complaint voiced by some delegates during the conference related to the failure to warn them about potentially offensive or distressing material. At such a conference it is of course assumed that there will be sexual images and potentially offensive material both shown and discussed. However, some delegates felt that more sensitivity could have been extended towards depictions of sexual violence (for example, a warning of the rape scene could have been given before the opening night screening of *Flaming Creatures*). However, overall, the event exceeded my expectations, since it provided a valuable interdisciplinary engagement with the erotic, and I look forward to attending the next conference.

SCMS 2011: Media Citizenship

Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Ritz-Carlton Hotel, New Orleans, 10–13 March 2011

A Report by Shana MacDonald, York University, Toronto, Canada

The 51st annual Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference was structured around the theme of media citizenship, reflecting the association's shift towards the inclusion of scholarship on diverse media practices beyond the traditional study of film. Media citizenship considers how our ever-changing mediascapes impact citizenship at the level of the individual but also more broadly at the level of community. This concept was successfully addressed in a variety of ways throughout the conference. The range of panels dedicated to the theme offered an expansive sense of what is meant by the concept of media citizenship. The conference featured panels on the popular uses of social networking, on the different histories of media citizenship in cinema and television, on mainstream media and consumerist citizenship, on alternative media consumption, and on national and global instances of media citizenry. 'These Revolutions Have Been Televised: Reconsidering 1989 in European Media Representations' examined media representation in a specific, historically resonant moment of social revolution, while many additional panels examined media representations of war and conflict across the globe. 'Engaging Media: Media, Spectators, Publics' focused on different forms of participatory media, while other panels explored contemporary screen culture, celebrity culture, online subcultures, and the spatial politics of video games. In addition there were several panels focused on documentary as a key site of citizen engagement, as well as panels on media literacy, media and militarization, and the history of surveillance.

Of particular interest was a selection of panels dedicated to media citizenship in the specific context of New Orleans, where the conference took place. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the politics of media representation in relationship to the city's citizens has become a pertinent and pressing question. To this end, three separate panels ('*Treme's* Promise: The Authenticity and Potential of David Simon's New Orleans', 'Place and Representation in HBO's *Treme*', and 'Do You Know What It Means to Represent New Orleans? David Simon's *Treme* and Mediated Citizenship') addressed the politics of representation in the popular HBO television series *Treme* (2010–), situated in post-Katrina New Orleans. Further, there were two panels titled 'Visualizing New Orleans' presented on two separate days, the first of which looked at post-Katrina media representations of New Orleans from a variety of critical lenses, while the second looked at how specific films engage with the city of New Orleans as a cinematic subject. An additional related panel, 'From the Treme to Memphis to Bon Temps to Harlan County' examined representations of the southern United States within the genre of slow television (a term referencing the renewed focus on the atmosphere and cultural millieu of the American south in television).

One notable panel, 'Screen Dynamics: Utopian Technologies of Cinema at Mid-Century' chaired by Erica Robles (New York University), provided three distinct and engaging case studies on developments in twentieth century screen technology. Robles's talk 'Windshield Worship: The Visual Culture of the Drive-In Church' traced the development from the windshield screen of Robert Schuller's Orange County drive-in church in the 1950s to the mega-screen of the Crystal Cathedral built on the same site in the 1980s. Haidee Wasson (Concordia University) spoke to the history of screens at several early twentieth century World Fairs in her paper 'The World of Tomorrow and Cinema's Small Screens'. Janine Marchessault (York University) focused on the 1951 Festival of Britain in her paper 'Utopian/Oblivion: 3D Cinema and World Expositions', which addressed the desire for public engagement underscoring the development and display of early 3D technology. The panel was complimented by respondent Barbara Klinger's concluding insights, which opened up a session of engaging questions.

Alongside programmed panels, each session included workshops designed to foster forum-like discussions in place of traditional paper presentations. A variety of workshops looked explicitly at questions of media citizenship: for instance, in the workshop 'Towards an Urban Approach to Cinema and Media Studies', participants discussed the representation of urban space in cinema and contemplated what forms of methodology would best suit the study of media in the urban environment. The workshop titled 'Let me Tell You a Story' focused on the legacy of Teshome Gabriel's theory and pedagogy. Several workshops were dedicated to questions of pedagogy and media citizenship in both local and global contexts. Other workshops considered the future of new media, questions of copyright within the learning environment, and the building of online communities via blogs and Twitter. There were two workshops dedicated to Game Studies, the first examined the pedagogical value of video games within media courses and the second outlined the need for a feminist critical framework within the discipline.

In addition to panels and workshops, SCMS 2011 scheduled a wide selection of film screenings and special academic events throughout the conference. Each of the fifteen sessions included a screening option. The films selected by the programming committee included many contemporary documentaries as well as features and experimental films. Many of the screenings were sponsored events by a Special Interest Group (SIG) or Caucus, affiliated with the SCMS association. The African/African American Caucus sponsored three screenings during the conference. The first, Christine Acham and Clifford Ward's *Infiltrating Hollywood: The Rise and Fall of the Spook Who Sat by the Door* (2010), documents the fraught exhibition history of the film *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Ivan Dixon, 1973). The second film sponsored by the caucus, *Nothing but a Man* by Michael Roemer, is a key independent feature from 1964 set against the backdrop of the civil rights movement. The program notes credit the film as being the earliest fiction film with a predominately black cast to address an integrated audience. The third film, *Karmen Gei* (2001) by Senegal's Joseph Gai Ramaka, was co-sponsored by the Francophone SIG. The film screening was related to a panel devoted to Ramaka's filmic oeuvre. Two additional panels examining contemporary Mexican media and Latin American cinema, respectively, were complimented by the screening of the documentaries *El*

General (2009) by Natalia Almada, and *Return to Bolivia* (2008) by Mariano Raffo. The Experimental Film and Video SIG sponsored a selection of collage films by experimental filmmaker Jaimie Baron. Several of the screening programs were also dedicated to New Orleans. One poignant screening was a retrospective of experimental filmmaker Helen Hill, who was an important figure within the city's artistic community until her untimely death in 2007.

There were two special events scheduled during the conference. The first included a panel discussion with media archivists working in New Orleans, who discussed the extensive local media archives and screened two short films developed through an interdisciplinary project devoted to documenting Cajun and Creole culture in the region. The second special event, tied to an earlier panel and artist talk, was held off-site at the Zeitgeist Multi-Disciplinary Art Center. The event included two projection performances by artists Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder. The performance was an important example of contemporary experimental media that reflected several of the key themes found across a series of panels on experimental film and media.

One final area where SCMS sought to engage with the concept of media citizenship was through the launch of a new website that included space for live blogging and tweeting from the event. This interactive element of the SCMS conference website was aimed at fostering a virtual community forum to compliment the discussions occurring in the actual spaces of the conference itself. Responses to the addition of these social networking devices at the conference were mixed amongst the association's members. The twitter feed seemed to be most useful for communicating logistical information between conference participants as well as offering a space to extend lively discussions well after a panel had finished. The inclusion of blogs and a twitter feed on the website placed participants firmly into dialogue with the critical discourses around contemporary social media practices developed at the conference.

Over the course of four days, the conference held fifteen sessions, each including on average twenty-two concurrent panels and workshops. The vast size of the conference program makes it impossible to encapsulate its scope in a comprehensive way. However, the range of topics included at SCMS underscores the vitality of the ever-expanding discipline of film and media studies. The diversity of topics included in the conference program offered scholars the opportunity to engage with colleagues sharing similar research interests and with colleagues situated in other research fields encompassed by the broader frame of the discipline.