Changing of the Guard in St Andrews

As Film Studies is a relatively new discipline at St. Andrews, Prof. Hjort’s tenure here will make a substantial contribution to developing new academic skills within the institution. All members of the Film Studies department, as well as members of the Centre for Film Studies employed in other departments of the University will greatly benefit from the presence of this renowned leading scholar. Because other academics linked to the Centre for Film Studies also specialise in issues of transnational cinema, an area which Prof. Hjort is a leading world expert; this will no doubt provide a vibrant and exciting new angle for the MLitt programme being offered in Film Studies here.

Several of our PhD students are also currently working on topics of direct relevance to Prof. Hjort’s expertise and knowledge. Students will therefore profit from auditing the seminars she will give, attending her talks, and possibly from individual meetings. The talks which Prof. Hjort plans to deliver at various Universities around the UK will no doubt additionally benefit a great range of Film scholars and academics working around the country.

Prof. Hjort will arrive in St. Andrews in mid-September 2007. She will begin teaching the MLitt module on Transnational Cinema at the end of the month; this teaching involves around ten weekly sessions and will conclude in early December. In October and November Prof. Hjort will make two four-day trips to England to give talks at several Universities there. During the same period she will visit three more Scottish HE institutions to give talks, these visits will most likely be organised as three separate day trips. Prof. Hjort will be based at St. Andrews for the duration of her tenure. She does not envisage foreign travel during this period and will return to Hong Kong in mid-December 2007.

David Fleming, Serazer Pekeman

Mette Hjort currently holds two full-time professorships, one in Hong Kong (Department of Philosophy, Visual Studies Program Lingnan University), and another in Denmark (Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies Aalborg University). She is currently on leave from the Danish position and is a Film Scholar whose area of expertise is Transnational Cinema with a special emphasis upon minor cinemas and interactions among small national cinemas.

Unfortunately this edition bears some sad news, and so in an attempt to deal with these bitter issues first we must regretfully announce that Film Studies founder and head of department Prof. Dina Iordanova will be leaving us at the end of term for a year’s work out with St Andrews. Admittedly, hard-working Dina deserves this well-earned sabbatical but the department will definitely miss out on her inspirational aura and boundless energy. Dina will be spending much of next year in Berlin where she will be predominantly studying film festivals. Everyone here at the department wishes her the very best of success for this upcoming project and hopes that it provides her with much stimulating and fruitful research.

In an attempt to counter balance this bad news with good, the silver lining for the upcoming year is that although the department will be losing one senior member of staff, it will gain another through a timely visiting Professorship. Each year the Leverhulme Trust offers a limited number of Visiting Professorships to enable outstandingly distinguished academics from overseas universities to spend some time with UK universities. This year, in the Fall Semester we are delighted to announce that Prof. Dina Iordanova successfully co-ordinated the arrival of prolific Film Studies academic Mette Hjort.
Meeting the New Faculty Faces

There have been many changes and developments in the Film Studies department during the last year both behind the scenes and in terms of the department's public face. Perhaps the most noticeable changes though can be attributed to the addition of two brand-new faculty faces to the department. Thus, Serazer and I took the opportunity to catch up with these two new members of staff at the city's West-Port gate for an end of term discussion about life in Film Studies and time here in St Andrews.

We first met Dr. Elisabetta Girelli (Dr. EG) in the West-Port garden on a post-term Thursday afternoon, it was a warm May day outside but slightly overcast; the barman was mumbling something about being out of Bloody-Mary-mix so Dr. EG ordered an Espresso, Serazer (our designer/photographer) a green tea, and I took a white coffee with a cigarette. Elisabetta, who joined our department at the beginning of the academic year began by telling us how she only set foot in Scotland for the first time for her departmental interview, and had initially found the idea of living in St-Andrews an apprehensive far-cry from life in the bustling and labyrinthine cities of Rome and London to which she had become accustomed. Over her first year though Elisabetta has actually found herself becoming a far more settled and calm person, even dropping some of those deplorable big-city habits through now happily making eye-contact with passers by on the street (although the big-city detox perhaps continues to manifest itself in Elisabetta’s lingering Roma-London-esque Espresso habit).

Although born in London, Elisabetta grew up in Italy, and lived there until she was 21. Finishing her schooling in Rome at seventeen and opting to initially drop out of education, Elisabetta thereafter took an interesting and unorthodox route toward becoming a Film Studies scholar and academic. Spending her early diasporic life hitchhiking and travelling around different parts of Europe, Elisabetta would often take in sporadic stops in places such as Sweden, Denmark, and Spain. It was to be while teaching English as a second language in Madrid that Elisabetta would first realise her love of teaching, which would in turn signal a return to academic shores for Elisabetta. Thereafter, beginning a four year BA at the University of Westminster and Madrid with the Modern Languages departments of Spanish and English. Elisabetta would then move on to gain a Masters in European Culture and Thought, adding critical theory to her academic bow, in particular representation and postcolonial theories. Here Elisabetta also first discovered film as an object of academic analysis and interest, and shortly after unearthing cinema’s liberating potential was published on Pedro Almodóvar’s Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (1988). Elisabetta then undertook a PhD in film at Queen Mary’s in London, engaging with British cinema through post-colonial and interdisciplinary paradigms. Engaging with issues of National Identity, stereotypes, self and other, and the functions of cultural Othering, Elisabetta began researching how Italianess was represented in different socio-political periods of British filmmaking.

Throughout the last year I took the opportunity to see Elisabetta give a paper on this very subject, within a humorous and intricate presentation given to the department of Modern Languages here in St Andrews. This presentation granted me some valuable insight into this exciting area of research and allowed me to revisit some classic British studio films with interesting and codified Italian characters working within their narratives. In this presentation Elisabetta demonstrated how in examples of late 1940s and early 1950s British cinema, Italy and Italianess were consistently represented and used as narrative devices, employed to counterbalance British constructions of national identity and codify cultural Otherness. Over and above this period of interest, Elisabetta is also currently working with two other broad socio-political epochs of British filmmaking for her monograph which will investigate similar themes and also consider newer waves of British filmmaking from the mid 1960s and 1980s.

For now, Elisabetta is currently working on the uses and depiction of space within a comparative study of Jiri Menzel’s Closely Observed Trains (1966) and Bryan Forbes’s The L-Shaped Room (1962), in the hope of unearthing a perceived blurring of private and
public spaces within both films. Elisabetta hopes she can use this study to demonstrate how New Wave films drawn from different socio-political contexts somehow manage to articulate similar discourses of social resistance through their use and depiction of cinematic space. At present Elisabetta hopes to continue working and researching European and British cinema and investigating the construction of identity on screen, especially in terms of nationality, gender, and sexuality, and also engaging with transnational cinema and its associated debates. For the foreseeable future Elisabetta cherishes the opportunity to experience the calming effect of the local Scottish environment, work intimately on her all-time favourite film (Closely Observed Trains), and continue working within a department that she describes as a friendly and welcoming place.

Next up we met Dr Leshu Torchin (Dr. LT), who joined the department just after the new year and has likewise witnessed a life-changing shift from a big metropolitan international city to a wee Scottish medieval one. It was on a scorching Monday afternoon that we met up with Dr. LT at the West-Port and it was a busy bustling garden that greeted us that day as post-exam-marking staff and post-exam-sitting students intermingled in an array of tables drenched in uninterrupted sunshine and beer. Amongst the celebratory aural envelope and in an interview preamble Dr. LT attempted to prematurely apologise for what would be a shifting and complex life and academic history. Not to worry, we assured her, we’ve dealt with the likes before, and with worries dismissed, we settled down to our beer and chat where we began to learn that Dr. LT wasn’t always a professional academic, in fact, work-wise she has done just about everything. As well as the normal spray of part time jobs, summer work, and office experiences that most can claim, Dr. LT has also worked as a researcher and intern at the Washington DC Holocaust Museum, as an events manager at the Smithsonian, worked in production ‘sweat shops,’ and been employed to list and catalogue product placements within backlogged television and film archives. During this hectic life Dr. LT has also made various moves around the US and taken in a life-changing move from Washington DC to New York City where she relished in the opportunity to study in the oldest running cinema studies department and program in the world. It is perhaps ironic then that Leshu now finds herself coming from the oldest cinema studies department in the world to such a fresh-faced one on the other side of the Atlantic.

This kind of cognitive shift may be nothing new for Dr. LT, since she had previously made a similar huge transition from studying one of the oldest and most established academic disciplines as an undergraduate (Classics) to studying one of the newest most radical ones as a post-graduate (film). This early interest in the Classics may have sprung from Leshu’s high school language study of Ancient Greek and Latin, and was a good fit. Her undergraduate career began with an interest in Early Christianity and early philosophical theology, but she soon moved on to focus on the Attic comedies. Leshu particularly enjoyed the genre experimentation of Euripides’ Alkestis, a tragedy that manages to end happily, with a brief intrusion by Heracles and a Satyr play. The tragedy brought many forms of border-crossing (generic, gendered), all of which may have set the stage for Dr. LT’s later transnational and interdisciplinary interests. While studying, the texts itself provided great pleasure, and Leshu was introduced to the potential of considering their social history—how did these texts reflect the context in which they were made? It proved quite maddening, though, in terms of reception studies, since—at least at the time of Leshu’s schooling—there was little knowledge of the audience itself—who could watch the performances. It was while finishing her degree at PSU that Leshu had the opportunity to take film studies classes, a discovery that was pure revelation. She took classes on experimental film, documentary, and African-American films.

The interest in text and social history happened to emerge alongside the release of the film Schindler’s List (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and a new wave of Holocaust interest, also evidenced by the newly established United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where Leshu soon took a research internship. How was the story of the Holocaust being told? As a Belgian-born Jew raised in America, with families on both sides of the Atlantic, Leshu was particularly sensitive to the different ways in which this story was told, and how these different ways reflected different contexts and experiences. Approaching one’s work from such a reflexive angle suggests that a different line—and perhaps further study is necessary. Although, it would still be a few years, Leshu eventually did what was only logical: she applied to NYU Cinema Studies for a Masters Degree, and later a certificate in Media and Culture—a combined programme of Anthropology and Cinema Studies, and a PhD. The anthropological interests reveal themselves in Leshu’s focus upon the social practice of media. She spent her first year studying the epiphenomena around Schindler’s
List, looking at its use as an educational tool, the representational and publicity strategies used to prove its authenticity, and the stories of its international distribution. That all of this happened while other genocides and grave human rights catastrophes took place did not escape Leshu’s attention. Inspired by such observations Leshu broadened her academic interests to representations of the Holocaust and other genocides: “My approach to film is one that takes special interest in film culture, the social practices of film, and the way film has been used to produce understanding of and political response to social suffering. How do films construct human rights claims and mobilise action.”

Dr. LT also discussed with us some of the fascinating implications and issues her research in these areas has thrown up, like the idea of a dual rise of a global visual culture hand-in-hand with the rhetoric and discourse of basic and sovereign human rights.

While living in NY Leshu also grew to love the vibrant film culture scene that the city offered, with film and visual festivals seemingly happening all year round and spontaneous events often working to reshape and re-imagine the cinema. Although now happily settled in St Andrews, Leshu still reads New York magazines and film-publications associated with this scene in order to stay aware of the films influencing her friends back there. The plan now is to replicate some of the vibrant academic and film culture she experienced in New York for the University of St Andrews.

Because Dr. LT’s interest in film and media can be broadly summarised as an interest in the way they inform our social and political worlds, her interest can seem quite wide-ranging. Indeed, anything can become a subject of study for her as she demonstrated through chatting about tracing the evolution of L337-speak and memes on the internet. However, this hews to her main focus: “the place of film and visual culture in social life, and more specifically in the intersection of film and social/political action.” Currently examining the work of film and visual culture in shaping public response to genocide and human rights issues, Dr. LT’s research goes beyond representation to include production, distribution/marketing/publicity, and exhibition. In terms of the latter, “this means that George Clooney and Don Cheadle’s use of Cannes and the exhibition of Ocean’s 13 as a means of gaining publicity for their Darfur campaign is very much within my realm of study. My research has uncovered celebrity activism from the very beginning of film culture, with Jackie ‘The Kid’ Coogan, working as a representative of Near East Relief in response to the Armenian crisis.”

Dr. LT’s predominant focus upon these Crimes against Humanity — an international crime — also allows her to explore the impact of global media circuits with the formation of transnational political subjects (or witnessing publics). “Although genocide was criminalised by the UN in 1948, no treaty bodies were formed to ensure global compliance with the law — at least not until rather recently.” In the foreseeable future Leshu also wishes to imbricate film studies approaches with an investigation into its now symbiotic partner, the internet, examining what this relationship means for contemporary film culture: with the internet presenting itself as the most interesting new frontier for film and at once being a site of production, distribution, publicity and a new non-theatrical site of exhibition.

(We wrapped up the West-Port interviews about here and proceeded to the end of year garden party where the rest of the Film, Philosophy, and Anthropology departments were waiting with wine, nibbles and more chat.)

Serazer and I thoroughly enjoyed meeting both Leshu and Elisabetta, and in our short time together feel we only just began to scratch the very surface, of the tip, of the proverbial ice-berg. Both interviewees seemed to have settled well into their new lives and roles around St Andrews and are certainly already hard working and cherished members of the Film Studies family and department. Check out our events lists throughout the coming year to see when you can catch either Dr. EG or Dr. LT presenting on their latest research.
With funding from the British Academy I recently attended a conference on Gilles Deleuze, at the University of South Carolina. There I presented a paper which used Bollywood cinema to challenge some of the more Eurocentric assumptions behind the image classifications in Deleuze’s cinema books of the 1980s.

This was the 9th annual Comparative Literature conference, and an extremely enjoyable experience. It brought together a number of eminent Deleuze scholars (Constantin V Boundas, Ronald Bogue, Elisabeth Grosz, Eric Alliez) and its broad focus on all and any manifestation of “texts and images” ensured it was an extremely interdisciplinary gathering. For film studies scholars like myself there was a chance to catch up with several scholars there who have already established reputations for the study of cinema and Deleuze. These included, Steven Shaviro, Greg Flaxman, Patricia Pisters and Anna Powell, to name but a few. Speaking purely subjectively, there were also extremely interesting papers by Scott Durham (on the time-image in Raul Ruiz’s Time Regained (1999)), and Ingrid Emmelhainz, who gave a fresh perspective on some of Godard’s work with the Dziga Vertov group. However, the outstanding highlights for me were undoubtedly Angelo Restivo’s paper on Wong Kar Wai’s In the Mood for Love (2000) and Thomas Lamarré’s paper which gave Deleuze’s taxonomy of images a biological slant. This achievement was all the more brilliant considering his paper was mislaid along with his luggage, and he spoke mostly from memory and reconstructed notes.

In the main I had a sense that there was a great deal of activity around the world, generating new and interesting ideas on Deleuze and cinema. If we are to believe a fraction of the rumours wildly circulating during the conference that over half the proposed abstracts were rejected, then there would seem to be some truth in this. Certainly it would be hard to see how the extremely diverse papers on Deleuze and cinema that I saw could be accommodated in a single volume (as was possible in 2000 when Flaxman’s anthology The Brain is the Screen was published), and perhaps this conference marks a moment when critical mass has been reached. From now on it may be necessary for Deleuze scholars using film (be they in film studies or elsewhere) to look for more specific synergies than in the past. There may now be enough momentum for conferences and anthologies on topics such as Deleuze and the documentary, Deleuze and art cinema, Deleuze and the digital image, and so on. Whilst the good natured carousing of the final night temporarily put paid to all such speculation on my part (as everyone got on with the important Deleuzian task of “becoming-somewhat-inbrieated”) once we have all reterritorialised ourselves I am sure there will be more to say on this matter. If I had one criticism of the conference as a whole, there was not as much on Deleuze and text or Deleuze and image as there was on Deleuze and Deleuze. Even so, a very interesting few days in what was for me, coming from Scotland, lovely sunny weather!

David Martin-Jones

Belén Vidal attended the 2007 Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference in Chicago, where she chaired a panel on Contemporary Spanish Cinema and presented a paper on melodrama in the films of Isabel Coixet. This research piece will appear in the collection CONTEMPORARY SPANISH CINEMA AND GENRE, forthcoming from Manchester University Press in 2008. In May she will be participating in the symposium 'Eminent Europeans', an international conference at King’s College London. She has recently published articles on aesthetics and gender politics in the costume film in the Journal of European Studies (issue 36/4, December 2006) and Screen (issue 48/1, Spring 2007).
This year witnessed the largest gathering in the history of SCMS, the primary international professional organisation in the field of film and media studies. According to SCMS president Professor Stephen Prince (2005-2007), they had received 877 proposals this year compared with 845 last year and 708 the year before from various film and media scholars around the world. Participants this year hailed from 24 countries across Europe, Asia, Asia Pacific, and the Americas. The University of St Andrews was one of the best represented universities from the UK in this year’s conference, which is no small feat for such a new and emerging department. Indeed, three faculty members and three PhD students (including myself) presented on six different panels ranging from film festival networks to cinemas and films drawn from different periods and countries.

Similar to previous SCMS events, this year had many interesting yet concurrent panels to choose from and there was just too little time available for interested attendees and delegates to sit through them all. Hence, it became an event which tested attendees’ strategies of selection and choice. For example, after listening to two thought-provoking papers on a panel about Asian diasporic cinemas, I chose to dash across the hallway and attend the second half of another simultaneous panel on Arab cinema. Then, following a short break, I again rushed to my next choice which was situated two levels below within the beautiful Hilton Hotel. Official records stated that there were as many as twenty-one panels, workshops, film screenings, and meetings in each of the slots spanning the four hectic days of conference activity. Presentations covered almost every hot topic currently being explored and debated in the field, ranging from the ontology of the body to genre reinterpretations, and spanning historical periods that ranged from the pre and early cinema days through to the modern mechanics of videogames. The ‘physical exercise’ of running around to attend different panels proved somewhat tiring, yet the total experience of the conference was hugely rewarding.

Two personal highlights received a very enthusiastic response from the conference participants: one being the plenary session in which Professor Chuck Kleinhsans from Northwestern University was awarded the first ever SCMS Pedagogy Award and Professor Richard Dyer from King’s College was awarded a Lifetime Membership Award. Both Professors addressed the plenary audience with warm and lively respective speeches, and the laughs served to draw the audience even closer together in the spirit of camaraderie. The second highlight for me was the Bollywood Night which provided the culinary delights of authentic Indian food followed by a screening of the thriller *Black* Friday (Anurag Kashyap, India, 2004). These events marked the two pinnacles of this Chicago conference for me, and already the SCMS is calling for papers for its next conference which is due to be held in Philadelphia in March. I look forward to this and hope to see you all there in 2008.
Notes on a Conference: 2007 Film Studies
PG Conference

Funded by the department and organized by the students themselves, the 2nd Film Studies Postgraduate Conference was yet another testament to the diverse and thriving research interests contained within the Film Studies department of St Andrews. The event was made even more memorable and special this year through Prof. Tim Bergfelder of the University of Southampton attending as an academic guest who would challenge students with insightful questions and comments, and also give a guest presentation entitled ‘German speaking émigrés in British Cinema 1925-1950: Cultural Exchange, Exile, and the Boundaries of National Cinema’.

The student papers engaged with various cinemas and issues in film studies and were divided into three sessions. In the first session, ‘Cinema at the Periphery’ (a title whose validity itself was questioned), Canan Balan illustrated the characteristics of Turkish Shadow plays and their engagement with the audience through fascinating visuals. Yun Mi Hwang introduced the new South Korean popular costume films and reflected upon their possible classification as Korean Heritage films. The final presentation in the first session was given by Vlastimir Sudar who summarized the life of filmmaker Aleksandar Petrovic in terms of his relationship with his political milieu. The second session ‘Film Theory in Action’ consisted of papers that engaged with various theories and theorists. Using psychoanalysis and notions of performativity, James Stedman began by analyzing the relations between the male figures within Wim Wenders’ *Lightning Over Water* (1980). David Fleming then grounded his paper on Deleuzian theory in a reading of Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain* (1973), an ‘experiential’ LSD-film and example of body cinema, full of bodily forces. He analysed how within a scene showing literal bodies-without-organs the film attempted to affect its audience’s mind/bodies. Last in this session Serazer Pekerman compared *Dogville* (2003) by Von Trier with a Turkish film from the 70s called *Emine the Declined* in order to demonstrate how female heroines can be recognised as becoming-woman within these films. After lunch where many lively discussions ensued, Lars Kristensen opened up Session 3 ‘Transnational Cinema’ with the report from his research trip to Israel (see this issue), which led to heated discussion about the terms ‘Russian Israeli diasporic cinema’ and ‘exilic filmmaking’. Finally, Ruby Cheung analysed transnational aspects in Fruit Chan’s *Dumplings* (2004) and examined the reasons behind alternative endings in two different versions of the film. Ruby ended the afternoon by showing two visceral clips that resulted in some uncomfortable bodily reactions in the assembled audience.

After the student presentations, Prof. Bergfelder then led a sum-up discussion on the whole conference and provided a forum wherein interesting areas of research overlap and contrast could be discussed. He then followed this with his own presentation on German speaking émigrés in British Cinema (1925-1950), where he argued although transnational cinema has become a rather fashionable way of referring to national cinema, cinema has always been transnational in its nature. His talk appropriately engaged with and recapitulated various issues that had arisen from the previous student presentations, including Hamid Naficy’s concept of an accented cinema.

The conference did not suffer from any technical difficulties (thank God!) and everything went according to plan and provided an exciting locus where students could share and update each other on their latest ideas and research and also receive helpful feedback from staff and academic delegates. In all, it was a rather encouraging opportunity for training us young researchers and provided a lovely dinner and occasion to let our hair down afterwards. I personally hope to see this tradition in Film Studies continue for many years to come!

Yun Mi Hwang

Prof. Tom Bergfelder
Issa Clubb’s visit

The Criterion Collection is renowned for their outstanding DVD releases. The impressive catalogue of films from around the world, the exceptional digital transfers, the commitment to supplementing each film with context from scholars and filmmakers, and the plentiful extras of deleted scenes and additional short works make Criterion DVDs fetish objects for cinephiles everywhere.

Given this outstanding reputation, Criterion producer Issa Clubb’s visit to St Andrews was quite an honour. He came with the express purpose of making a documentary with Film Studies Chair Dina Iordanova, as a special feature for the upcoming release, Sweet Movie.

Indian Cinema Study Day 10 May 2007

The Centre for Film Studies hosted an Indian Cinema Study Day, organised in response to demand from postgraduate students, which focused upon Indian films and their cultural reception both domestically and abroad. Following the screenings of Awara (Raj Kapoor, 1955), Pyaasa (Guru Dutt, 1957), and Bombay (Mani Ratnam, 1995) in the build up to the event, the study day began with Prof. Dina Iordanova’s presentation on history and historiography, entitled “Narrative Convention and Indian Film/Indian Cinema Abroad: Historiography of Transnational Cinematic Exchanges” in which she mainly followed “the hero” in various places and through various experiences. In the teaching workshop “Teaching Bollywood: Troubleshooting Techniques” hosted by David Martin-Jones, PhD students were offered a chance to discuss the reception of Bollywood films among their own students and think through some solutions and ideas for future class groups and provided a forum to share their encounters with more experienced staff members. After eating excellent Indian Cuisine for lunch and catching up on some Bollywood gossip mags there then followed three further talks which all provided a different perspective on Indian Cinema. Elisabetta Girelli, following autorship theories gave a presentation on Guru Dutt entitled “Indian Auteur Cinema: Guru Dutt”. This was followed by a presentation by Rosie Thomas from the University of Westminster, where we experienced a new perspective on Miriam Hansen’s concepts while watching images of an early Indian-cinema heroine ‘Nadja’ whipping men. The talk entitled; “On Booted Females and Flogging Gangsters: Other Histories of Indian Cinema” Rosie presented some of the findings from her old and new research in what was a very lively and colourful presentation. Chandrika Kaul, from the Department of Modern History finished off the day’s academic events through provided a detailed background for us to draw a more complete contextual history of the region; “Indian Cinema under the British Raj with a Special Emphasis on the Partition of India.” The event was then officially rounded up wait a pleasant and informal Indian dinner at a restaurant on South Street.

Denis Chouinard’s visit:

On March 20, the Centre for Film Studies welcomed Quebecois filmmaker Denis Chouinard to St Andrews. Mr Chouinard offered a master class open to all University students through the Film Studies department and later that evening hosted a screening of his first feature film Clandestins-Stowaways (co-directed with Nicholas Wadimoff, 1997) at the New Picture House Cinema.

Students relished the opportunity to speak with the internationally acclaimed director who has amassed an impressive collection of awards from film festivals across the world. Chouinard told stories of the filmmaking process, granting insight into the realm of production. He also shared the impact that film viewing has had on his life. Indeed, it was the Czech New Wave film, Closely Observed Trains (Jiri Menzel, 1966) that inspired Chouinard to look beyond the suburbs of Laval in Montreal. This film not only inspired his travel across the globe, but allowed him to recognise the power of film in animating dialogue between world cultures and introducing audiences to worlds too often neglected by mainstream media.

The discussion extended later into the evening after a screening of Clandestins, a marvellous, if harrowing, drama that follows stowaways making their way across the Atlantic in a cargo container. (A copy of the film is available in the university library.) His keen sense of cinematic storytelling and his awareness of the political possibilities of art make him one of the more exciting filmmakers working today. We look forward to seeing more of his work.
Extracts From a research trip to Israel:

Having decided to undertake research in the field of Russian Israeli filmmaking some key questions started to play heavy on my mind. Would it not be dangerous to travel to Israel (as my mother asked)? What are the political consequences of one’s academic actions (with the tag FYI, my supervisor sent me an initiative to boycott Israeli academia)? And is it possible to stay politically indifferent when entering one of the most contested countries of the post-World War era (a question I asked myself)? Notwithstanding these questions, I packed my bags with Ella Shohat’s book, *Israeli Cinema* (1987), and some postgraduate candidness and went on a research trip to Israel for two weeks in January, when I needed some sun the most.

Why Russian Israeli cinema? My research concentrates on cinematic representations of Russians abroad and from the outset of the research I was on the search for a field that explicitly dealt with the post-Soviet Russian diasporic filmmaking. The choice of focusing the Russian Israeli Diaspora was taken, because of its manageable size, its has a relatively small cinematic output and has geographical approximates to Europe. For these reasons Israel was chosen instead of venturing into the field of Russo-American Diaspora cinema. I had set my targets on two filmmakers, Leonid Gorovets and Arik Kaplun, and I had the fortune to conduct interviews with both of them while I was there. These interview experiences were the principal aim of the trip, but also the most un-Israeli encounters. Besides discussing their films and their filmmaking in the Israeli context, we talked about contemporary Russian cinema, Russianness and cinema modes. As such we could have met anywhere (including Russia) and had the same kind of conversation. The context of our discussion could have been anything else than Israel – Argentina, China, or Spain. In short, anywhere Russian Diaspora has emerged. This was also my overall approach to the research trip. That I could be consciously ‘naïve’ to the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict was due in part to my research on purely Russian Israeli cinema, a cinema that at first hand did not speak of the armed conflict in the Palestinian territories. That said, Russian Israeli cinema by virtue of being part of a Jewish Israeli cinema cannot, and does not, stand outside this conflict. Indeed, conflict the size of the one Israel has with the occupied Palestinians will permeate any action of cultural production that appears out of the area. I read this out of Ella Shohat’s book and could not agree more. Israeli films are allegorical to conflicts contained within the state of Israel, first and foremost Palestinian vs. Israeli, but also to large extent European Askhenazim vs. Oriental Sephardim, Jewish Israeli vs. Arab Israeli, Orthodoxy vs. Secularism, etc.

Visiting the Cinematheques in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, one is acutely aware of the particular Israeli feeling of being under siege from terrorism as one is subjected to bag searches and questions about whether you carry guns. Just as taking a bus, entering university campus or boarding the plane to and from Israel entitles prominent security checks. The paradox is that contrary to Israeli mythology, Israel is the military Goliath of the region, rather than the underdog David fighting the giant. The geopolitical aside, then, the cinema production in Israel is quite small, but buzzing with energy. From interviewing the producer and head of Transfax Films, Marek Rozenbaum, one gets the feeling that Israeli cinema has entered a boom. Rozenbaum’s own company has a string of noteworthy productions, such as *Late Marriage* (2001) and *Circus Palestina* (1998). Indeed the cinematic production has risen in the last five years, but while Israeli cinema, as any other minor cinema, are being been recognised at home, at the same time it lacks the big international auteur that can take the mediocre across national borders. At present only Amos Gitai seems to embody this figure, but his rather European style and controversial topics is not always popular with the Israeli viewers.

The rise of Russian Israeli cinema might help in this regard. A second generation of Russian immigrants is starting to emerge within the Israeli film industry. This was reflected in a special program at the 2005 Jerusalem Film Festival, where short films by Russian Israeli film students showed that they have vigour for the cinematic means of expression. Both documentary films and fictional films underlined that these filmmakers are concerned with contemporary problems of Israeli society: migration labour, social decline, and the search for, and question of, a national Jewish Israeli identity. The Russian Israeli filmmakers are part of the recognition that the modern Israeli state of the 21st century is becoming increasingly multicultural and multiethnic.

The Russian speaking Diaspora in Israeli enjoys the benefit of being supported by the authorities and they constitute now the largest Jewish ‘ethnic’ group with 17% of the population of Israel. However, Arab-Israelis are still by far the largest group (20%) and also the most neglected in Israel. I visited the Cinematheque in Nazareth and had the chance to talk to Ehab Salty and his producer. Salty is an Arab-Israeli filmmaker, who graduated from Film studies at University of Tel Aviv, where he also met his producer. While both are educated with the Israeli establishment, their filmmaking is positioned in a precarious situation within Israeli context. The inability to show their work in their native city, force them to form El Sana – Nazareth Cinematheque five years ago. That it is in Nazareth is not coincident – Nazareth is the largest Arab city in Israel. El Sana aims at providing forum for cultural expression for the Arab population of Israel. Receiving no funding from Israeli government or Palestinian authorities, they run their filmmaking workshops for children, film production company and festival programs from entirely private sources. Therefore they are in constant need of financial backers to recuperate the half-a-million dollars it cost yearly to run the place. Beside that, they encourage festival volunteers to contact them and were prepared to hire a festival director, who would be able to take their main yearly Film Festival to the next level of recognition (for more information, see www.elsana.org).

Lars Kristensen
Festival Report: 36th International Film Festival Rotterdam 2007

The city of Rotterdam, one of the most exciting European cities in terms of contemporary architecture, served as the stage for an even more exciting International Film Festival earlier this year. Considering the extent of the cold north wind and the perpetual rain and sleet that helped define this late January event, all main venues remained lively throughout and full of audiences who displayed vibrant enthusiasm towards the films.

This year, the festival’s continued commitment to cultural diversity was in evidence with the committee opting to open the festival with the Argentinean film La Antena (Aerial). Here, director Esteban Sapir who debuted with his film Picado Fino in 1994 and was a pioneer of the new Argentine Cinema of the 1990s, marked his welcomed return to feature filmmaking. Supported by IFFR’s Hubert Bals Fund, this magical film contains a stunning combination of silent-cinema inter-titles to convey its sparse dialogue, a stylish black and white aesthetic, and an array of imaginative animation techniques used to develop and tell the story. The fairy tale narrative centers around a young girl and boy who live in a city where people no longer have a voice due to a dictator’s (Mr. TV) attempts to establish a totalitarian regime through his TV network. In this way the film can also be read as a critique of the influential and pervasive role of the media in our contemporary world and delivers a harsh message within a beautifully crafted surrealistic film.

IFFR appears to be the festival that filmmakers love to go to, but question were raised for me regarding the audiences. It was slightly problematic for me when I noticed a number of spectators leaving the auditorium after the film screenings when the Q&A sessions with directors were about to get underway; although perhaps they were merely trying to catch up with other simultaneous screenings. I do recall however a volunteer member of staff asking me ‘what kind of films I like’ when issuing tickets, and although on the surface this appears to be a very basic question, it serves to demonstrate that the IFFR is taking audience opinion into account and plan to develop their future selections and agendas in-line with audience desires.

Nagisa Hikino


Representation forms a fundamental part in how we construct ideas of ourselves and others, it often also lends credence to the myths we tell ourselves of our origins and our place in the world. However, as the conference Representation and Effect: The Roma in Politics, Art and the Academy ably demonstrated, it equally has the power to shatter these conceptions. As “a people without a history... in the memory-scape of Europe”, the Sinti and Roma have for the most part always been exoticised, marginalised as criminals, or just simply forgotten. The papers, discussions, and films during the three day programme went some way to revisiting these common misconceptions.

A central theme of this project was a reconsideration of what many perceive as the modern European creation myth – the Holocaust. Whilst the horror and enormity of its impact on the Jewish community is in no way to be disregarded, the received wisdom of a popular narrative can sometimes homogenise the experience for other groups who suffered in its wake. Katrin Seybold and Melanie Spitta’s taboo-breaking film Das Falsche Wort (The False Term) (1987) releases Sinti subjects from being mere forgotten statistics in the history of the Holocaust so that they can tell the extraordinary everyday tales which function to shed light on their persecution before, during, and after the Second World War. In addition, Susan Tebbut’s discussion of the artist and writer Ceija Stojka demonstrated how art can help redefine the self-image of Sinti and Roma communities decimated by the Third Reich.

The Sinti and Roma are still marginalised within contemporary European society. This leads to a perpetuation of economic, social and educational disadvantages, all of which were addressed during the conference. However, it is not a question of merely recognising this disparity, but rather re-imagining the discourses which permit these discrepancies to endure.

James Stedman
Festival Report: The 30th Gothenburg International Film Festival

The biggest film festival of the region, with 450 films from at least 60 countries and screenings attended by 115,000 people, the GIFF aims to bring the World to Sweden's second city and form the major meeting point for the Nordic film industries. This year was the final festival by artistic director Janneke Ahlund, who ran the festival successfully since 2002 handed over the ever expanding festival to Marta Kapla. Kapla will have her work cut-out to increase this expansion craze, with over two thousand more viewer's this year alone but there are well established programs that help ensure a glowing future, e.g. the Film Festival Fund which supports young "locally based" filmmakers together with the Swedish State Aid Agency or the Bergman Week on Færö. The latter includes a week of talks and seminars on the Baltic Sea island in the presence of the grand-old-man of Swedish cinema, Ingmar Bergman, who is the Honorary President of the Film Festival.

The renowned filmmaker has also given name to a new festival award, which was inaugurated at 30th anniversary celebrated this year. The Ingmar Bergman International Debut Award (TIBIDA) was given to "a director making his or her debut with a film dealing with, in a broad sense, existential issues and displaying a dynamic or experimental awareness of the cinematic means of expression." The competition hosted five films: Marta by Marta Nováková (Czech Rep.); Reprise by Joachim Trier (Norway); I by Ágnes Kocsis (Hungary), Red Road by Andrea Arnold (Scotland); and Free Floating by Boris Khlebnikov (Russia). The candidates reflected a strong presence of female directors and of films from Eastern Europe (if we include Russia in this term), and also the inclusion of the 'local' Nordic cinema. The stylistic overtones to these films are subtle or mute expressions on a canvas that hardly moves or contains movement in capturing their isolated characters. In particular Kocsis and Khlebnikov contributions mirror these aesthetic affinities, which leads one's thought to the Finns Mika and Aki Kaurismäki.

Ágnes Kocsis' Fresh Air (Friss levegő) centres on the mother-daughter relationship the endless everyday routines and minimal progression. The lonely mother, Viola, working as a toilet-attendant, struggles with finding a life companion and her talented teenage designer daughter, Angéla. The attempt to travel (to progress) is floored when Angéla hitchhikes to Italy, only to wake up in the car of a Italian family back at her starting point (the family was travelling from, not to, Italy). In Boris Khlebnikov's Free Floating (Svobodne plavanje) the main character, Lyonia, is also formed by chance and circumstance, as well as the drabness of the post-Soviet Russian village life. Khlebnikov's camera movements come to a complete stand still in this film and are reduced to tripod photo stills in which the characters enter and exit. As a Turgenev-hero-of-four-time character, Lyonia floats around from one boring job to another, but he refuses to give up and eventually manages to escape his post-communist condition. While Angéla regresses to assume her mother's place as a toilet-attendant, Lyonia gets hired on a riverboat as a final resolution, taking him further afield. But even he might return one day.

The first TIBIDA, an engraved stone from Færö, was given to Andrea Arnold for Red Road, the first instalment of three from the Advance Party, the Scottish-Danish production company. (The Advance Party was the subject of Mette Hjort's talk at the Cinema at the Periphery conference last year at St Andrews, in which she termed the production company a homophilic co-operation between Scottish Sigma Film and Danish Zentropia.) While aesthetically the Red Road is different from the two previous films, it does have a similar narrative axe forming around a lone and isolated character, here Jackie, from her position of CCTV camera operator discovers the released killer of her family and stands between revenge and rapprochement.

Although the Danes were involved in the production of the TIBIDA winner, the winner of the main prize of the festival, the Nordic Prize, was the home grown Swedish film, Darling. A film by Johan Kling that redirects the cinematic focus onto upper-class life of Stockholm, which is currently enjoying increased attention from Swedish writers and filmmakers. Kling fuses his story of the hollow high society with the parallel story of a near-retirement-aged unemployed engineer, superbly portrayed by Michael Segerström. The catalyst for this character's troubles are his troublesome ex-wife and kids, young job interviewers and petty like-mindedness. Segerström's work more than just explores the rich and beautiful and resembles the work of another (forgotten) Swedish auteur, Roy Andersson and his Songs from the Second Floor (2000).

That said, Roy Andersson's form of visceral social critique is missing in Darling, where well-known American fast food chains and corner-shops signal society's last carriage, picking up subjects that are thrown off at the speed of progress. Needless to say loneliness and social isolation are also main thematic threads interwoven into the film. But then again, who can say that loneliness and social isolation were not - apart from sexual explicitness - the trademark of the Bergman film?

Lars Kristensen
Pick of the Presentations: Three PhD students were asked to reflect upon their favourite selections from the previous year’s events list.

The winter term’s edition of talks at the Centre for Film Studies was crowned for me on 17 October with a lecture by film studies royalty – Professor Thomas Elsaesser, currently of the University of Amsterdam. Elsaesser, truly one of the few giants within the field, whose work on cinema over the decades has been inspirdingly broad, on this occasion decided to return his attention to ongoing debates still at the very crux of film studies. His lecture entitled ‘European Cinema: Face to Face with World Cinema’ revisited the widely debated issues revolving around the concepts of national and trans-national cinema. Deep at the heart of this debate are fluidly resilient notions of identity, which Elsaesser analysed in a lucid and razor sharp manner simultaneously. His idea that a new European identity will inevitably revolve around common feelings of ‘guilt’ was illustrated by contemporary Germany’s relation to the Holocaust, which is both a burden, yet also a viable commodity in the modern age of hyper-capitalism. Thus, a film like ‘Downfall’ (2004) which at once probes deeply into uncomfortable and sensitive issues from within the cultural unconscious also serves to replenish the national film industry and help it receive Oscar nominations. Future Europe will thus probably ground its founding myths on historical disasters – like Serbs have on Kosovo – as Elsaesser reminds, but will also expect an equal acceptance of the same from the prospective state members. Elsaesser thus points out that Turkey’s denial of Armenian genocide is the cause for its inadmissibility, as the new Europe’s identity, it appears, will be linked to the processes of admitted atonement.

Vlastimir Sudar

Although last term was packed full of interesting and exciting presentations which I immensely enjoyed – including Ms. Pauline Small’s presentation on ‘Sophia’s Journey of Desire’ and Dr. Berys Gaut’s presentation on ‘Digital Cinema and Artistic Control’ – my own favourite presentation had to be the end of year presentation I co-organised with Dr. Mark Brownrigg from the University of Stirling: a favourite lecturer of mine from my undergraduate days in Aberdeen. Here in a lively and funny final departmental seminar for 2006 Brownrigg presented on his main area of expertise with “The Mojo is in the Music: Music and Textual Unity in Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me.” With a plethora of amusing clips Brownrigg demonstrated how amongst other things, the Austin Powers movies seem deeply fragmented viewing experiences that are organised around principles of comic digression and haphazard, self-conscious narrative progression. His paper worked to demonstrate how music is used on numerous levels within the film from the practical to the allusive and to unifying the text through rendering editing smoother, adding a sense of narrative continuity, foregrounding the structured repetition of thematic material and displaying a coherent conceptualisation behind the motivation for “needledropped” pop tracks. Engaging with issues of music use as pastiche, leitmotif, mood-enhancer, and codifier of National tradition amongst other things, Brownrigg outlined how although this film threatens to career off at any moment in any number of directions, the musical can be demonstrated to form a solid musical system which provides an opposing force pulling back towards textual unity. This presentation formed the highlight of the winter program for me, as it was not only a very funny and informative way to spend an hour, but a cherished opportunity to meet up again with an old friend and acquaintance.

David Fleming

The seminar I would choose as my favourite actually comes from this term’s list and was the talk delivered by Prof. Ginnette Vincendeau, who as a charismatic and captivating film scholar provided an exciting talk on filmic representations of a New Paris. It was a cold Scottish day, when Vincendeau, of the King’s College, invited us to escape for an hour or so into a cinematic Paris. After establishing the privileged position Paris traditionally holds in terms of city representations within film and other arts, Vincendeau formulated a totally new set of questions that are needed for adequately representing the new Paris. Vincendeau engaged with issues of the outskirts for example, which is a new domain and darker dimension which still functions on a humanistic-scale, not too unlike the flâneur who is always desperately in love with Paris. Her presentation explored how contemporary French ‘neo-noir’ cinema engaged with the social world through its representation of the city and introduced a corpus of crime films from the last 15 years or so ranging from Bertrand Tavernier’s ‘L627’ (1992) to Olivier Marchal’s ‘36 Quai des Orfèvres’ (2004) as well as urban dramas, from ‘La Haine’ (1995) to Jacques Audiard’s ‘De battre, mon cœur s’est arrêté’ (2005) and Xavier Beauvois’s ‘Le Petit lieutenant’ (2005). Focusing on how French neo-noir films such as these re-visit and reconfigure the iconic representations of the Parisian ‘lower-depths’, which appeared as populist microcosm of the French community in classic French films from the 1930s to the 1960s; Vincendeau examined the way the cinema reacts to, and constructs, the increasingly multi-ethnic nature of French society, and inscribes social relations narratively and spatially within the metropolis.

Serazer Pekerman