

Studies Beyond the Screen

Symposium Report

Studies Beyond the Screen was held at the University of Exeter on March 25th, 2009. The event was organized by Exeter postgraduate students Andrew Nelson, Lisa Stead and Matthew Flanagan. Embracing the call to host an event focused on the investigative procedures and research activities that go into the production of academic work, *Studies Beyond the Screen* featured a line up of established screen studies scholars speaking on their own use of archival and extra-textual materials.

In addition to the funding received from *Screen*, the Department of English at the University of Exeter awarded additional financial support for the organization of the event. The organizers would like to express their gratitude to both *Screen* and Exeter's Department of English for helping to make this event possible.

Planning for the symposia was carried out by the organizing committee in coordination with the School of Arts, Languages and Literatures Research Office, who offered assistance with budgeting, registration, room booking and catering. The Bill Douglas Centre generously offered us the use of its seminar room without charge. The symposia was widely advertised on-line, and notices were emailed to over thirty film studies departments across the country, as well as to various screen studies-related listservs. Andrew liaised with the speakers in the months leading up to the event.

During the week prior to the symposium a press release promoting the event was released by the University of Exeter's Press Office, the text of which has been included at the end of this report. At the close of registration, 30 attendees were expected for the symposium, the majority of which were postgraduate students.

On the 25th, registration opened at 9:30AM with coffee and what one delegate called an "impressive selection" of pastries. Despite some rail-related concerns, all of the day's speakers arrived with time to spare. Conference packs were distributed to attendees. In addition to materials from *Screen* and The University of Exeter, a visual culture catalogue from I.B. Taurus was included in the packs.

The event began at 10AM with Andrew Nelson introducing the symposium and thanking *Screen* and the University for hosting the event. Andrew then handed over to Lisa Stead who gave a brief introductory talk, discussing her own PhD research within the Bill Douglas Centre archive and the overall ethos of the event as an opportunity to foreground the research approaches of established scholars in order to promote new work within film histories beyond the screen.

Lisa then introduced the first speaker of the day, Professor Ian Christie, whose paper was entitled 'Circling the Square: sources and approaches to the screen history of London's Leicester Square.' Professor Christie began his presentation with a short video piece, shot on a handheld camera around Leicester Square in order to draw attention to traces of its detailed cinema and pre-cinema history. Professor Christie went on to discuss his approach to both researching and teaching early cinema, illustrated with numerous photographs and screen images, but also with several objects selected from the Bill Douglas Centre collection displayed at the front of the lecture theatre.

Professor Christie gave a unique presentation, moving between these different media, inviting the audience to look in detail at Filoscopes and Leicester Square cinema programmes. Professor Christie focused upon the need to reconsider and broaden our approach to cinema histories, in particular the value of exploring first-hand the lived spaces of these histories as city sites. At the conclusion of his talk Prof. Christie invited

the audience to explore the objects on display, in particular the filoscopes, which held versions of lost early films able to be digitized and reconstructed.

After a short break, the programme continued with Exeter's Professor Steve Neale, who presented a paper entitled 'Missing Links: Researching the History of Film Distribution in the U.S.' Professor Neale discussed how research into trade and industry distribution records opened up new lines of interest in his research, helping to illuminate the varied practices of exhibition in U.S. film history. Professor Neale discussed the road-showing of films in particular, exploring how this practice developed and how it was eventually displaced, and the impact it had upon which films dominate film history. Professor Neale drew attention to the value of trade journals as crucial extra-textual resources in bringing the missing links of film distribution practices to bear on a more detailed understanding of the history of film exhibition.

After a break for lunch, Andrew and Lisa led delegates to the Old Library site to attend a talk at the Bill Douglas Centre with its co-founder and collector Peter Jewell. The talk took place in the Old Library seminar room where Peter, with the assistance of BDC Curator Phil Wickham and Curatorial Assistant Mike Rickard, displayed and discussed a range of objects from the collection.

Peter's talk represented a unique voice within the day's events, expounding upon the role of the collector and the relationship a donator has with the materials academics use. Peter's talk spanned the full range of the BDC's collection, selecting individual examples from different periods and offering anecdotes about the unique acquisition history of each piece—explaining how he and Bill approached collecting, where they sourced these objects, and which particular materials they personally found the most valuable. Peter described the way in which a collector makes links between materials and the fluid nature of this type of collection, whereby one piece shed lights on a network of other fragments of information. Peter drew particular attention to the original Lumiere Cinematograph that the Centre holds; inscriptions written in star autobiographies; original copies of significant cinema texts, and examples of the difficulties of correctly attributing images and signatures, whereby false names may accompany early star portraits.

Peter then handed over to Phil Wickham, who led delegates on a tour of the BDC museum's displays, highlighting several objects related to Peter's talk and enabling those attending to operate the mutoscope and replica optical toys. Phil discussed the recent redisplay of the galleries as a strong example of new undergraduate and postgraduate work with the collection and with the Centre as a whole. Delegates were then given a brief period to explore the displays and chat with Peter before returning to the main lecture theatre.

Our third speaker of the day was Dr. Andrew Spicer of UWE, whose paper was entitled 'Productive Research: Approaches and Sources to Uncovering the Role of the Film Producer.' Dr. Spicer provided a fantastic handout pack for the audience, which represented a portfolio of images and materials used in his research into the career of producer Sydney Box. The pack included a detailed filmography and bibliography; lists of research centres; copies of handwritten reports by Box; cost and box office revenue figures for Box's films; balance sheets from Box's production company; newspaper and magazine clippings relating to his film *Christopher Columbus*, and press book material for the film. Dr. Spicer focused upon the problems film academics face when trying to make sense of archival sources which extend beyond the field, such as business and financial documents, underscoring the need for stronger interdisciplinary links and approaches which help expose a wider range of sources.

After a short break we reconvened with our final speaker of the day, Professor Sarah Street from the University of Bristol, with her talk entitled: 'Archive Fever and Film Studies.' Professor Street talked about the problems of how we read the archive and the dangers of imposing a system of meaning onto materials in order to make them fit a determined academic narrative. She highlighted the need to allow archival research to reconstruct and revise research questions and projects as a whole as materials arise, which

challenge a researcher's preconceived idea of what they want to find or what kind of history they want to tell.

Professor Street looked in detail at the set design drawings of production designer Alfred Junge, exploring the impact of his design work on the creation of specific scenes and the direction of the narrative in films such as Hitchcock's *Young and Innocent*, and the incorporation of his design drawings directly into the filmed image in *A Matter of Life and Death*. She went on to discuss her work in colour, and the upcoming conference at Bristol related to this.

The speakers reconvened after a short break for the final section of the day given over to a roundtable discussion with Steve, Ian, Sarah and Andrew. The panel discussed the importance of using source materials and objects first-hand, and some of the problems that arise in digitization relating to the status of an archive and knowledge of collections.

The organizers are pleased to report that the event went off without a hitch. The facilities were unlocked and ready for use, the food and drink arrived on time, and, most importantly, each speaker delivered a fascinating presentation. The response to the symposium was extremely positive, both from attendees on the day and in subsequent email correspondence. From this feedback, it is clear that the symposium offered attendees a unique insight into the methodological approaches of established scholars. The day also made a valuable contribution towards strengthening awareness amongst postgraduate researchers of archives like the Bill Douglas Centre, whose resources offer the potential for hundreds of as-yet-unwritten papers, projects and thesis.

Press Release: *Studies Beyond the Screen*

Inventive PhD film students have won a national competition enabling them to stage a special event featuring established cinema scholars.

Leading film studies journal '[Screen](#)' requested bids to create a symposium as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations.

University of Exeter students triumphed with a unique proposal focusing on research methodologies, linking into the extensive archival resource at the University's [Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Film and Popular Culture](#).

The University of Exeter will host the event on Saturday 25 April and is open to members of the public who register in advance. The importance of archival research and the sources that have been used in research will be discussed at the [conference](#) by influential film experts such as Sarah Street, Ian Christie, Steve Neale and long term contributor to the BDC Peter Jewell.

Lisa Stead, PhD and [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#) scholarship student who helped support the bid to 'Screen' focuses heavily on archive material such as fan magazines for her research. By looking at fan writing as it appears on letters and poetry pages in fan magazines, she has been able to piece together a stronger sense of what female audiences had to say about the stars they adored and loathed in the 1920s.

Lisa explained, 'Female cinemagoers preferred American stars, whom they saw as being more glamorous and essentially modern both on and off the screen than their British counterparts. The most popular stars are those able to balance ideas of 'New Woman' against traditional norms of appropriate feminine behaviour; suggesting that women used these stars personas to reflect upon their own experiences of changing and conflicting ideas of contemporary femininity in twenties Britain.'

The symposium will highlight the importance of primary sources in conducting postgraduate research. [Professor Steve Neale](#), Chair of [Film Studies](#) at the University of Exeter explained, 'It differs from other events in being focussed on the topic of research itself though in doing so it will also highlight gaps in

existing knowledge. The success of Exeter's students in winning and devising such a valuable event is a tribute to their enthusiasm, knowledge and skills.'

Andrew Nelson, PhD film student, is confident that hearing the way in which senior academics approach their research will be beneficial to students and academics alike. He said 'It will be an opportunity to learn more about the research activities of leading academics. Rarely do we get to hear about the process of undertaking a major research project, as opposed to the product of those efforts.'

He added, 'The day will also give us a sense of the breadth of archival and extra-textual resources available to scholars at all levels. From trade journals and interviews with filmmakers to technical manuals and cultural artefacts like fan magazines and movie merchandise, looking beyond the film opens up new possibilities for screen studies research.'