

## **Screen Studies South West meeting**

September 30, 2008 at 2:30PM

The Bill Douglas Centre at The University of Exeter

Present:

Phil Wickham, Chair (Bill Douglas Centre, University of Exeter)

Helen Hanson, Will Higbee, Dan North (University of Exeter)

Sarah Street (University of Bristol)

Anna Masiak, Jason Whittaker (University College, Falmouth)

Martha Blassnigg, Michael Punt (University of Plymouth)

Trevor Hearing (Bournemouth University)

Elayne Hoskin

Andrew Nelson, minutes (University of Exeter)

Apologies:

Sarah-Jane Meredith (South West Screen)

Danielle Hipkins, Joe Kember, Song Lim, James Lyons, Steve Neale (University of Exeter)

Wendy Everett, Brian Neve (University of Bath)

Terry Rodgers, Margaret Shaw (Bath Spa University)

Chris Rodrigues (University of Plymouth)

Tico Romao (University of Gloucestershire)

Charlotte Crofts, Kathrina Glitre, Andrew Spicer, Sherryl Wilson (UWE)

Karl Phillips (University College, Falmouth)

### **1. Welcome**

Phil Wickham (PW) called the meeting to order shortly after 2:30PM and offered welcome to those in present and apologies from those unable to attend. He recapped the minutes from the first meeting and restated the Network's aim of forging links between those working in screen studies in disparate departments in various Universities, colleges and institutions across the South West. An email list of members has been established, and an announcement of the Network's formation was sent out on the MeCSSA mailing list. Paul McDonald had approached PW about possibly setting up a similar group in the south/southeast of England.

Members present were all content with communication about and within the Network to this point.

### **2. Research round-up.**

#### **Bristol**

Sarah Street (SS) gave an update on the upcoming "Colour and the Moving Image" conference to be held on 10-12 July 2009. The CFP is now closed, and received a healthy number of abstracts. SS is also co-ordinating Screen Research@Bristol, a group of academics doing film research in the West. The group has a number of ideas for the upcoming year, including a series called "Screen Conversations" that would offer short papers on screen studies topics from both theoretical and practical points of view. The first such event, on the close up, is to take place in the spring. Also, the Bristol modern languages department is organizing a spring event on pedagogy and an autumn event on Francois Ozon. SS said she would pass along Bristol faculty email addresses and research interests to the group, including those of Bristol's new faculty members.

### **Plymouth**

Michael Punt (MP) said that Plymouth's departments are in the process of being restructured. His interest is in cinema as a model of technology that is transformed when the public becomes involved. This has led to an interest in early cinema, and also has possible applications to other media.

Martha Blassnigg (MB) is working on issues of memory and perception in the archiving of audio-visual material. She is currently in discussions on the possibility of international partnerships.

MP added that Plymouth has just appointed a new staff member to work on a software project used to recall film objects from a digital archive. The application will enable users to work with and manipulate multiple clips at the same time. MB said that the software will allow users to create new meanings through the juxtaposition of multiple images and film clips. MP said that while this was dealing with the "technological front end," he was interested in how people view such images.

PW said that this application brought to mind Video Active, a funded project run through Royal Holloway College at the University of London to put national television from across the European Union on a database, supplemented with context information.

### **Bournemouth**

Trevor Hearing (TH) mentioned two active bids: a joint bid with Bath to form a centre for postgraduates working in computer animation, and a joint bid with the University of East London and the National Film School to fund postgraduates. Bournemouth has also won awards for two projects: "No Such Thing as Society," looking at how Thatcher's project to roll back the state was reflected in drama in the 1980s, and a project with Lancaster University examining the bystander effect. TH is putting in a bid as part of the AHRC Beyond Text scheme for a project on documentary practice.

### **Falmouth**

Jason Whittaker (JW) wished to clarify statements made by Karl Phillips at the previous meeting by asserting that research *is* a priority at Falmouth.

Falmouth is planning a conference for June 2009 titled "Image to Digital Futures and Digital Culture." In addition to a traditional CFP for academics, the conference will also have a call for creative work with the aim of allowing students and media practitioners to showcase digital-based works and encouraging encounters between academics and practitioners. Anna Masiak (AM) said the intent was to make the conference as large as possible, and they are in the process of trying to get local galleries to provide exhibition space. They would like to expand the conference into a larger arts festival, but this will be contingent on funding from the Arts Council SW.

JW said that a research network was growing out of the recent Metre Matters conference, with the possibility of building towards an AHRC bid on social networks, specifically platforms for enabling electronic networking for research. In essence, the aim of the project would be to develop a "Facebook for research networks."

## **Exeter**

Will Higbee (WH) detailed three small research bids coming out of the modern languages department: diaspora and new digital media, focusing on east asian cinema and director Tsai Ming-liang; the figure of the prostitute in post-war Italian cinema; digital cinema/new media in the African diaspora in France. Director Mike Figgis has also been invited to give a lecture and workshop, with the date still to be finalized (either late November or in the spring).

Andrew Nelson, an Exeter postgraduate, spoke about "Studies Beyond the Screen," one of *Screen* journal's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary postgraduate events. It will be a one day symposium on the use of archival and extra-textual materials in screen studies research, held at Exeter on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Speakers include Steve Neale, Sarah Street, Andrew Spicer, Susan Hayward and Ian Christie. Publicity for the event will be going out shortly.

Dan North (DN) briefly detailed Steve Neale's plans for a collaborative project on acting and performance. The project will be open to interdisciplinary discussion, and could turn into a larger research network.

DN is also interested in cinema and puppetry. He may also develop a research network on virtual performance, tied into Neale's broader project but said this was all at the earliest stages of development.

SS noted the links between the close-up and acting and performance as a possible point of contact.

Helen Hanson (HH) is presently at work on a project on the history of sound effects in American cinema, focusing on 1931-1950. She has submitted a small research bid to the British Academy to cover travel. As part of this work, she is interested in meeting with practitioners working with optical sound technologies. HH then mentioned Joe Kember's current project with John Plunkett (Victorian Studies, Exeter) on the history of projected screen entertainments in the SW. A conference is to be held next April. The CFP is open.

PW mentioned that there is a conference in London next summer on researching film history. SS noted that this conference clashes with Bristol's colour conference but we have subsequently learnt that the 'Researching Film History' conference has been moved to avoid this clash.

PW spoke about recent happenings at the Bill Douglas Centre. He intends to begin hosting regular events in the BDC that will involve visiting academic speakers and those who have been involved in screen heritage. He has also begun a number of community outreach initiatives, including working with pre-school children and older people.

PW said that Terry Rodgers (Bath-Spa) has expressed interest in hosting a symposium for the network at some point next year.

PW said that the MECSSA practice section, an initiative of Charlotte Crofts and others, is presently dormant, but the Facebook group is discussing how to revive the group.

### **3. Issues in the field**

PW opened the floor to discussion about any issues facing screen studies scholars and scholarship.

SS noted the increasing difficulty in procuring funding, and that many had been taken aback by recent cutbacks. She said that Screen Studies South West was a good resource for mutual support and encouragement, and as a venue to reformulate bids and projects so as to be confident that research will be get out in some form.

PW said that collaborative ventures were possibly one way of getting funding. He asked whether the common feeling was that there was a need for more money, but that less was available.

SS said academics need to learn to diversify, and become aware of funding bodies other than the AHRC, and look outside of traditional disciplinary areas (e.g. science, social sciences).

PW asked for funding suggestions in this vein.

SS mentioned the Economic Social Research Council, which has no closing date. Projects on digital media may qualify, for example, as they deal with issues on technology.

MP noted that 25% of academics in UK are in the arts and humanities, but only get 2% of the available government funding. He also said that the AHRC was unlikely to allow resubmissions. Academics may need to invent new criteria other than funding to measure accomplishment.

HH asked if anyone had applied to the Knowledge Transfer Fund (KTF)?

MP said Plymouth had one application running, but that the process seemed to be running late, as they were still waiting to hear a result.

PW asked for suggestions of other small funds.

SS mentioned that the David Lean Foundation had funds available for publication projects – better if there is a Lean connection, though.

WH asked if anyone was familiar with Euromedia, which funds practitioners. There seems to be money available, but it is still difficult to find match funding. Gabriella Giannichi (Drama, Exeter) does work in new media, and is involved in the Presence Project (<http://presence.stanford.edu/>). The drama department have an AHRC-funded artist in residence, a photographer who also works in digital video.

PW asked for comments on the move from Research Assessment Exercise to the Research Excellence Framework.

HH reiterated SS's point about the value of research networks for support.

PW said it would be worth tracking how the REF is interpreted in different institutions.

MP said that AHRC was moving away from dates to open, rolling applications.

#### **4. Screen heritage in the SW.**

PW noted that Elayne Hoskin was no longer director of the SW Film and Television Archive. He detailed how, as part of the Screen Heritage Initiative, each region was charged with creating a nominated archive. This is a large process, involving both a national board and regional advisory boards. Sarah Jane Meredith (SJM) of South West Screen is managing this process for the southwest.

PW read the following statement from SJM:

South West Screen has been charged by the UKFC to come up with a SW delivery plan for Screen Heritage. As you may know, the DCMS has

allocated £24m towards this, with a proportion of that sum to be allocated to revitalising the regions, which in essence is to preserve significant regional collections. Since the announcement of this award, South West Screen has been working at national level (SJM sits on the regions' project team) to devise a business plan, whilst at regional level we have consulted with key organisations to arrive at the best solution for the region.

Following a draft business plan submitted by the project team to the programme board, the programme board has now requested each RSA to undertake further work, namely a survey of collections in the regions. This was completed by 22 September 2008 and will inform a business plan which each RSA will submit to the programme board by 10 October 2008.

On 30 September 2008, SWS will be meeting with an Expert Panel set up by the programme board to discuss draft plans before submission of the plan.

At the time of writing, South West Screen has been working closely with MLA SW and SWFTA to ensure that we arrive at a realistically costed plan to deliver a series of activities which will result in regionally significant collections being preserved and conserved with the final aim of ensuring the collections are accessible in the most appropriate manner. The regionally significant collections have yet to be identified but given the amount of money available and the costs incurred, we will not be in a position to secure all regionally significant collections.

The management of the delivery plan will lie with South West Screen who will enter in service level agreements with the appropriate organisations to deliver against the plan. It is envisaged that the bulk of this will be with SWFTA.

PW noted that discussions are complex, and involve a great deal of money. That said, the impact of the funds will be small, but significant as the needs of the collection are urgent.

Elayne Hoskin (EH) said it was worth remembering that all regional archives have been in states of crisis for some time, and all have called for on-going funding to be administered in a sensible way. The specific problem is that archives have become dependent on project funding, which is inappropriate for heritage aspects.

The new plan is to only provide two years of funding, which is not enough even enough time to create a catalogue of the materials in the SWFTVA. The SWFTVA is the largest of the regional archives by 60%, which brings challenges. There has been no core

funding since 2001. Like other archives, they are dependent on project funding, which is difficult to get, and also on regional broadcasters, which brings other issues.

There is concern nation-wide as to what is the appropriate next step. The SWFTVA faces long-term challenges, but the present backlog of issues, many relating to the material conditions of the collection and its housing, are at odds with the push towards new technology. EH doesn't believe the two-year timeframe is realistic, noting that we are already well into this period without decisions yet from the Screen Heritage programme board.

PW noted that the SWFTVA operates on a different model than other regional archives, which are run through universities, whereas the SWFTVA is tied to the local broadcaster, meaning the funding model is even less secure. Plymouth University have been involved with the Archive, but they are only one of many stakeholders. There was a plan to merge the Archive with the city history council, but PW is unsure of the status of this initiative.

MP asked if other universities were not interested.

PW said that the investment needed was so substantial that universities might think twice about taking on the Archive. EH added that the sheer size of the collection means universities simply wouldn't have the space. Digitization is seen as a way forward in terms of access, but central storage of materials is still at issue. EH foresees pressure to split the collection up. She also said that we mustn't lose sight of the opportunities that come with new funding, which will enable the SWTVA to bid for larger scale funding. If the future becomes more secure, it may be possible to go to the Heritage Lottery Fund for match funding.

## **5. Future activities of the network.**

PW brought up the possibility of symposia or conferences to be held in 2009.

JW said that Falmouth is willing to host a SSSW symposium and provide buildings. He recommended that the symposium be held on a specific topic.

PW said one idea would be to hold two symposia, one at Bath-Spa and one at Falmouth.

The group agreed that two conferences would be good.

PW said that screenings and exhibitions may come up across the region where it would be appropriate for SSSW to be involved.

MP mentioned a series of silent film screenings in celebration of the centenary of British scientist J.S. Haldane, famous for his investigations into human respiration (and

invention of the gas mask, among other things). The screenings will be accompanied by live music. There is the possibility of linking the event to a symposium.

SS asked if Bristol Silents had been contacted. MP said he had, but received no response.

SS said there seems to be a great deal of interest in early technologies and pre-cinema, and brought up the idea of developing themed strands within the group and organizing events around those themes.

MP brought up the subject of exhibition resources, and noted that Plymouth has opened a new arts building with 35mm projection facilities.

PW said it was useful to know what facilities were where, and was available for use.

MP asked if anyone teaches with 35mm.

PW said that Warwick, Kent and Birkbeck Universities do. The Student Union at Exeter has a 35mm projector, and there is the possibility of using 35mm in the future for teaching. PW noted that, unlike some other leading screen studies institutions, Exeter does not have a culture of screening 35mm prints.

AM said Falmouth had held a world cinema module in a local cinema, using new films, which the cinema ordered and screened on the condition that the lecture be open to the public.

## **6. Screen Practice in the region.**

TH is keen to encourage practice-based research, happy to link up with other institutions.

JW noted that in Falmouth's media school photography is very strong.

AM said Falmouth is in the process of transforming work placement into research by having students write a proper research report after work placement.

TH said that Bournemouth is very strong on computer animation.

PW mentioned the Animated Exeter festival. He noted that the BDC has large collection of animation-related items, including a recent large donation of Disney materials.

DN asked if there was a way to get involved in festival.

PW said that the BDC was involved in community projects, including supplying animation materials to a group in Honiton. He is also doing animation projects around early-years and young parents.

DN asked if it was worth getting Paul Ward (AIB) involved in the festival ? Animated Exeter have done round table discussions at the festival in the past; not quite symposia, but it may be seeing if the group could host one of those.

SS said the Brief Encounters Short Film Festival (Bristol) is keen to hold public discussion events. One at this year's festival will debate the value of film festivals. The Network could propose to host one such event at next year's festival.

PW added it was good to have a presence at film events in general.

## **7. Other business, next meeting.**

TH asked if it would be useful to hold screenings or short presentations at future group meetings to showcase what members were doing.

The group was in agreement.

HH asked if members could circulate information about film screenings and events to the group. PW added that he will circulate notices to the entire network, so please send them to him.

MP added that it was useful to know about events taking place across the region in order to send students to events and screenings. PW asked members to please pass along anything postgraduate-related.

SS stated that it makes sense for members to pool efforts in general, to get more people at events. She noted that Bristol, UWE and Exeter were once part of a postgrad training scheme.

PW raised the subject of the next meeting, suggesting December – either the week before or after term ends. The group puts the onus on PW to choose the date. PW proceeded to describe the difficulty of picking an optimal date.

HH asked if Wednesday afternoon was convenient for everyone. The group agreed.

PW said he will float December 10<sup>th</sup> as a possible next meeting date.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15PM.