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12th Irish Screen Studies Seminar
Dublin City University, 11 May 2016

A Report by Loretta Goff, University College Cork

Since its inauguration in 2003, the annual *Irish Screen Studies Seminar* has acted as a platform for researchers in the area of film and screen cultures to share their work. The seminar is specifically aimed at postgraduate and postdoctoral scholars working out of Irish universities and colleges or with Irish topics, but covers screen culture in the broadest sense, ranging from the audio to the visual, film, television and digital media to transmedia and gaming. This diversity of topic was reflected at the *12th Irish Screen Studies Seminar*, which was a one-day event featuring four panels and a keynote address by Catherine Grant (Sussex).

The day began with the "Screen: Migration, Policy, and Practice" panel, including papers addressing each of the panel's subheadings, with a particular theme of transmediality running throughout them. Cormac Mc Garry (NUI Galway) addressed the topic of media migration with his paper titled "Comic Books in the Digital Age: The Great Screen Migration?", where he explained transmedia approaches to comics in association with the horizontal integration of media conglomerates. The "big two" comics producers, Marvel and DC, are subsidiaries of Disney and Time Warner respectively, who have slated comic film release dates as far in advance as 2020, and who simultaneously produce games, TV shows and even motion and Guided View comics across their various subsidiaries to reinforce viewer commitments across channels. Maria O'Brien (Dublin City University) then shed some light on tax incentive policies (or lack thereof) for video game production, as compared to film, in her paper "Video Games in the 2013 Cinema Communication Negotiations: A Political Economic Perspective". European Commission reports on these negotiations reveal an interest in video games as cultural production, and particularly the crossover and increasingly blurred lines between video game production and that of other audiovisual media. However, not all games could be deemed to qualify as cultural products, and the decision in 2013, due to the lack of a critical mass in favour, was to not grant state aid to their production—a decision likely to be revisited. Paul O'Neill (Dublin City University), in his presentation "Practice What We Preach: An Analysis of Tactical Media as a Form of Networked Art Practice", rounded out the first panel of the day explaining the history and methods of tactical media—opinionated works (often interventions) made possible by technology and produced by those unhappy with, but also very knowledgeable of, the system. He continued by demonstrating some of his own work employing the glitch aesthetic: using computer networks to grab live information from Twitter, he then input bits of this into the code of an image, in this case of Donald Trump, creating glitches in that image. This follows concepts from Tatiana Bazzichelli's book *Networked Disruption*, which puts forth a cyclical approach whereby art, business (the system) and disruption continuously impact one another in what she terms the "Disruptive Loop".

Aaron Hunter (Maynooth) kicked off the second panel of the day, "Gender, Sexuality and Representation", with his paper titled "Designing Authorship: Polly Platt's Contributions to the

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Early Films of Peter Bogdanovich", in which he argued for using a multiple authorship approach to the examination of films. His research seeks to shed new light on the authorial role of women in early Hollywood, beginning with a look at Polly Platt not as Bogdanovich's wife, but as an influential production designer on his films *Targets* (1968), *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972) and *Paper Moon* (1973), as well as her successful career beyond them. Talk shifted from gender roles to sexuality with John Moran (Dublin City University) addressing the role of sexual content in mainstream films, responding to societal anxieties over the "pornification" of culture expressed in a number of books, including Gail Dines's *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, Ariel Levy's *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* and Karen Boyle's *Everyday Pornography*. Sexual content in films can range from product placement of porn magazines or sex toys to explicit sexual acts, but many reports on the increase of sexual content in films utilise only the descriptions of ratings labels, rather than look at how the sexual content is used in the films. Studies that analyse the films themselves contain very small sample sizes that misrepresent mainstream cinema, which Moran seeks to change by examining the content of his own sample of 250 films incorporating 60% of the top films in many Western countries and 75% of top box-office hits in North America. To finish off the panel, Abigail Keating (University College Cork) gave us a closer look at the framing of intimacy in *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015). She noted the use of unseen space in the film and the framing of characters in doorways during particularly heated moments, alluding to the restrictiveness of 1950s America and themes of seen versus unseen—what went on behind closed doors. Carol (Cate Blanchett) and Therese's (Rooney Mara) forbidden romance in the film is constantly under threat of male intrusion, and a theme of surveillance pervades the film, with views of many of the female characters through windows. When we are brought inside the windows of Carol's car, into her world with Therese that occupies this private space, a series of powerful close-ups frames the intimacy within their relationship.

A closer look at particular moments in film and television continued with the afternoon panel on "The Audiovisual Essay". Tony Patrickson (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology) opened this panel by screening his own work, "Kataskopos: The Extraterrestrial View of the Earth in Film" (2015), which combined film clips with paintings, videos, NASA images and voiceover from Patrickson linking the use of the "view from above" in films to historical tendencies, and exploring its function in film. After the screening, he explained his methodology for the creation of both written and visual works out of his research, stressing that for him the video was produced separately from his written material, not as an adaptation of it. Patrickson was followed by Liam Hanlon, Jamie Hooper, Warren Callanan, and Paul Kelly, four students of the MA in Film and Television Studies of Dublin City University, who screened their own audiovisual essay projects on the subjects of, respectively, the characterisation of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, the use of alchemy in *Dr. Who*, influences of German Expressionism in *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2015), and the history of the cinema of attractions, along with its modern developments. While each panellist described his methods for creating video essays, the general consensus was that some parts of the research are better expressed on paper, while others are better conveyed through a visual medium. Part of the hope in creating these audiovisual works is to make use of newer technologies to reach a broader audience (those who might "click" and watch, but not read). While audiovisual essays offer an exciting way forward for the expression of academic ideas, the debate after the presentations questioned what the video

particularly adds to the academic argument in some circumstances and the fine balance between engaging material and glossiness (of production) with no substance.

The final panel of the day, "Ireland on Screen", began with my paper, "Express Shipping Ireland Straight to American TVs/DVDs", which took a closer look at the production of straight-to-TV movies made in Ireland for a North American market (in 2010 alone nineteen of these were produced by MNG in Dublin), along with smaller budget productions released on DVD in North America. Seeking to incorporate these lesser-known productions into the context of their Irish setting (and the corpus of Irish film), I also examined the representation of Ireland, and Americans in Ireland, in three of these productions: Kevin Connor's *Honeymoon for One* (2011) and *Chasing Leprechauns* (2012) for Hallmark, and Lisa Mulcahy's *The Legend of Longwood* (2014) released on DVD. This segued smoothly into Denis Murphy's (Dublin City University) paper "It Came to Connemara: Roger Corman and the Irish Film Industry", which weighed the positives and negatives of Hollywood B-movie legend Roger Corman's film studio (Concorde Anois) in Galway, which produced twenty films over a five-year period in the 1990s. The studio benefitted from both Section 35 tax incentives and additional regional industry support (it was ultimately found to be abusing these in a Revenue audit, and was ordered to repay) and represents one example of an international corporation working in Ireland provisionally, based on these incentives, and drawing on the young workforce of recent graduates. While Corman's studio did provide a boost to the film industry in Ireland, with training and employment, Murphy noted that these employees worked long hours for low pay: sixteen-hour days, six days a week for £100. Attempting to trace the subsequent careers of the Irish employees of Corman, Murphy questioned the success of the training Corman's studio provided. Deirdre Molumby (Trinity College Dublin) completed the panel with a look at a more recent Irish film in her paper "Urban Spatial Practice in Donal Foreman's *Out of Here* (2014)". The film follows protagonist Ciaran (Fionn Walton), who returns to Dublin after a year of travelling, in his seemingly aimless wandering around the city as he adjusts to returning home. Molumby suggested that he is actually utilising this city space to enact a sense of agency that he doesn't have in the domestic space, where he is framed by windows and doors, creating an aesthetic of entrapment. Walking allows Ciaran to overcome his state of liminality (caught between childhood and adulthood, the familiar and unknown) by giving him authorial control over the city, deciding where he will go and bringing us with him. Molumby sees this film as decidedly reflective of post-crash Ireland, and as part of the mumblecore movement of films with low budgets, naturalism, improvisation and straight, white, middle-class characters, noting Ciaran's struggle with returning home broke to live with his parents.

To end the day of engaging research presentations, Catherine Grant brought us back to the topic of video essays with her keynote address, "'Dissolves of Passion': Materially Thinking through Editing in Videographic Compilation". Grant screened her own video essay "Dissolves of Passion: A Film Within a Film", which is comprised of all the dissolves she could extract from David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945), in chronological order, and revisited the process of creating it—also the topic of her recently published contribution to Christian Keathley and Jason Mittell's *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image*. Grant's reassembly of the film did not dramatically alter the work of the original—she applied a slow-motion effect to both the video and audio, extending about four minutes worth of clips to eight minutes, and added a midnight blue filter to the images—but, in decontextualising the clips from the film, and without

some of its most iconic scenes, her video destabilised the film's "correct syntax", thus providing a new way of looking at *Brief Encounter*. Grant noted the ways in which newer technology has changed our viewing process, affording us the opportunity to pause, fast-forward, rewind and ultimately control what we see and how we see it, citing Laura Mulvey's concept of the "pensive spectator" in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Beyond spectatorship, these technologies also change how we can interact with what we see, as evidenced by Grant's own work.

All in all, the day's proceedings demonstrated the wealth and range of screen research ongoing in Ireland, including various practice-led research approaches. The supportive atmosphere at this event made it an excellent platform for discussion and collaboration, bringing together scholars and perspectives from various areas of the field. Following a particularly successful year for Irish film on the international stage, the announcements of plans for new film studios in Limerick, Galway, and Dublin, and the sustained production of large-scale films and television series in Ireland, the continued development of film and media studies in Ireland is apt. The seminar's change in name a few years ago from the *Irish Postgraduate Film Research Seminar* to incorporate broader screen studies marks some of the changes in this field over recent years, and the particular focus on audiovisual essays at this year's seminar further highlighted these developments. The success of this annual event, and participation of new scholars each year, speaks to the growth of this field in the country and the discourse of this seminar suggests a bright future for it. I found all the presentations engaging and informative, and look forward to future *Irish Screen Studies Seminars*, where we could soon be adding virtual reality to the compendium of material covered.

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