



# Three-D

2003, Issue 2

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**HEFCE's proposed changes to teaching funding: media and cultural studies in the fourth division?**

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**You what Guv? Bad academic writing, collected**

Contributing to a newsletter is in some respects a thankless task – as indeed is editing one. These days, the unholy trinity of teaching, research and admin leave little time for academic communities to communicate with each other outside the formal avenues of conferences, book chapters, and journal articles. Journals seem to find little space for debate – let alone, with some honourable exceptions (the *European Journal of Communication* is one) a decent book reviews section.

Of course, there are always e-mail discussion groups. And indeed MeCCSA runs a useful and thriving one for members and non-members of the Association. But most of us will be familiar by now with some of the limitations of such groups: facile and cynical comments, hasty and ill-tempered responses, publishers' spam, and another 20 messages per week added to your already-groaning inbox.

So the MeCCSA executive committee felt that it was time to revive the idea of an Association newsletter. I co-ordinate, on behalf of the committee, a small group of volunteers, who are credited elsewhere in this issue, and to whom I'm enormously grateful. MeCCSA is a young and growing subject association, rather than a long-established and well-resourced one. To be brutally frank, we don't have the resources to produce anything very glossy. Instead, we've simply tried to find space for the kind of writing that isn't available elsewhere, but is relevant to our work as teachers and researchers in the MeCCSA subjects, and hopefully a bit more entertaining than, say, another interminable exposition of the history of cultural studies.

Our first issue was distributed to all members in March, and this is the second. Both are available on the MeCCSA web-site, but we're keeping the faith with paper as well. Because let's face it, reading from a screen is bad for the eyes, and bad for the soul. We hope to repeat the March and September production schedule in coming years. We rely on you, dear reader, for your contributions. It will get you absolutely no credit in the next RAE. And I don't imagine it will do much for your CV either. But if that's all you care about when it comes to the field you work within, then maybe it's time for a career rethink?

***Dave Hesmondhalgh works in the Faculty of Social Sciences at The Open University***

## Stop Press: MeCCSA Conference

Further keynotes have been added to the MeCCSA annual conference for 2003-4, to be held at University of Sussex, 19-21 December. They are Elihu Katz (Annenberg, USA) and three contributors to a special panel on The Future of Film: Patrick Fuery (Sussex), John Hill (Ulster) and Mark Jancovich (Nottingham). By the time you read this, the deadline for paper proposals, publicised via e-mail to all members in May, will have passed. But it's not too late to sign up as a non-speaker. Details are on the web-site at [www.meccsa.org.uk](http://www.meccsa.org.uk)

You will have noticed that the last two annual conferences have been held very close to Christmas. MeCCSA intends to hold all future annual conferences in January. The 2004-5 will take place in that month, at the University of Lincoln. If your department would be interested in hosting the 2005-6 conference in January 2006, please contact one of the officers of the Association (details are on the web-site and elsewhere in this Newsletter).

### David Cardiff

We were very sorry to hear, shortly before going to press, of the death of David Cardiff, formerly of the University of Westminster/PCL, and best known in the media, communication and cultural studies communities for his important work, with Paddy Scannell, on the social history of broadcasting in the UK.

Our condolences to David's family and friends. We hope to publish an obituary in the next issue.

# Hutton, propaganda and the war in Iraq

**David Miller** examines the key British media event of the summer and what it tells us about the key global media event of the year

Watching the antics of the Blair government as they try and spin themselves out of the frame this summer forcefully demonstrates the importance of understanding the relationship between truth, lies and power. Yet the study of propaganda has a low priority in media studies as well as in political science and political sociology. As I write, academics around the world are engaged in the production of numerous books on the media politics of the conflict in Iraq. Many of these will include material on propaganda and misinformation, but the central focus will be on the critique of journalism and media performance. The Hutton Inquiry shows the need to re-engage more directly with the operation and power of propaganda.

In the case of Iraq the line of the UK government was that Iraq posed a threat to the west by virtue of its programme on Weapons of Mass Destruction and (latterly) by virtue of its links with international terrorism. Both of these lines were categorically false. The key question is only whether those at the top knew that they were false. Was the case against Iraq 'an honourable deception' as former Cabinet Minister Clare Short has said of Tony Blair's state of mind? Or was it as Paul Wolfowitz has put it, for reasons of bureaucracy that 'we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on'?

One of the key claims – mentioned four separate times in the dossier and again by Blair in the House of Commons as he launched it – was that WMD could be 'ready within 45 minutes of an order to use them'. This is not the only false claim made by the

US and UK governments in the attempt to justify war. Glen Rangwala has produced a briefing paper identifying some 36 separate falsehoods (see <http://middleeastreference.org.uk/ios030711.html>). But it illustrates the key point. The dossier claimed that 'much information about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction is already in the public domain from UN reports and from Iraqi defectors. This points clearly to Iraq's continuing possession, after 1991, of chemical and biological agents' (page 5) and Iraq has 'continued to produce chemical and biological agents'. The problem with these statements is not

that they are false but that they are fundamental misrepresentations of the source cited by the government, notably UN reports and evidence from the key defector, Saddam Hussein's son in law, Hussein Kamel. Briefly, these sources indicate that the Iraqi government had verifiably destroyed 90-95 per cent of their chemical and biological agents and that any that may or may not have remained (including

Anthrax and VX nerve agent – with the single exception of mustard gas) was in a form which would have degraded to uselessness within 10 years. In the case of mustard gas there was potentially enough to contaminate an area of 5.2 square kilometres. UN sources also indicate a complete lack of evidence that new production had occurred (see Rangwala's website).

So the notion that there was any significant threat from Iraq from chemical and biological attack was wrong and they knew it was wrong. On the possibility of using the weapons within 45 minutes the dossier noted that Iraq 'can deliver chemical and biological

## The Hutton Inquiry shows the need to re-engage more directly with the operation and power of propaganda

agents using an extensive range of artillery shells, free-fall bombs, sprayers and ballistic missiles... The Iraq military are able to deploy these weapons within 45 minutes of a decision to do so' (page 17). This neatly conflates the alleged 'intelligence' on 45 minutes with long range ballistic missiles. In fact Iraq did not have any such missiles and the original intelligence assessment was only, according to John Scarlett of the Joint Intelligence committee that 'battlefield mortar shells or small calibre weaponry' could be deployed in 45 minutes. Again, both Blair and Campbell were in a position to know this since it was their own intelligence. In other words the 45 minute claim involved at least three separate deceptions: on existence of the agents in weaponised form; on existence of the delivery mechanism; and on the application of the 45 minute claim to long range delivery systems. Weaving these various deceptions into a wholly false picture of a 'current' Iraqi threat required deliberate deception, but deception with a purpose; the purpose was to present the deception in such a way as to encourage the media to draw the obvious conclusion. That it did so is more than evident in the headline in the *London Evening Standard* that day ('45 minutes from Attack', 24 September 2002) or in the *Express* the next day ('Saddam can strike in 45 minutes', 25 September 2002).

These show that ministers and officials – in this case Alastair Campbell and Tony Blair – take considerable care not to be caught out lying. But at the same time they stretch language so that it appears to mean the opposite of the words used. This can be seen in their use of off-the-record and confidential briefings and leaks, but also in the extreme care taken in the use of language in set piece – on the record – encounters.

One thread in the web of deceit, exposed at the Hutton inquiry, illustrates the seeming inability of those in power to do anything but dissemble. Campbell claimed before the Foreign Affairs Committee that the first draft of the September dossier had been seen by him on 9 September and had included the controversial 45 minutes claim. At the Hutton inquiry, it emerged that he had

chaired the meeting on the 5th September at which an earlier draft was discussed. Asked to explain, Campbell replied simply that the previous draft was a different document.

*That is not what I define as the WMD dossier... these were different products that were being prepared in different parts of Government. The one that mattered was the one that John Scarlett was putting together... I think in my mind, certainly, they were always separate.* (Transcript of Alastair Campbell's evidence, 19 August 2003, <http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk/content/transcripts/hearing-trans12.htm>)

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This playing with words characterised the whole affair. It is clear that Blair was at some level aware of what he was doing in his very careful use of language which exploited the media thirst for dramatic threats. In a key address to the House of Commons Liaison Committee, Tony Blair said: 'I think it is important that we do everything we can to try to show people the link between the issue of weapons of mass

destruction and these international terrorist groups, mainly linked to al-Qaeda'. Seconds later Blair acknowledged that 'I know of nothing linking Iraq to the September 11 attack and I know of nothing either that directly links al-Qaeda and Iraq to recent events in the UK.' (Select Committee on Liaison, Minutes of Evidence, 23 January 2003, <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmliaisn/334-i/3012102.htm>)

The final position seemed to be that although there was no connection, it was dangerous to leave weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Hussein in case at some future date these ended up with terrorists. The 'link' in other words is a hypothetical one. Via the medium of spin this is deliberately translated into a 'real' link. As Blair put it in the House of Commons: 'at some point in a future not too distant, the threat will turn into reality. The threat therefore is not imagined. The history of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction is not American or British propaganda. The history and the present threat are real' (House of Commons, Tuesday 24

September 2002). Note the dishonesty of the language here as Blair appears to say the threat is both 'real' and 'current' while at the same time a potential threat in the 'not too distant' future which will 'turn into' reality.

On the strength of this hypothetical future risk up to 40,000 Iraqis were killed. This does seem to me to elevate the Iraqi threat story into the premier league of big lies. These were deliberate calculated lies in order to achieve a US/UK objective of invading Iraq before the weapons inspectors could give it a clean bill of health.

The attack on Iraq shows the integration of propaganda and lying into the core of government strategy. It shows how such a strategy, planned and executed by a relatively small group of people (in Downing Street, the White House and the Pentagon), in the face of opposition within their own ranks, to invade and occupy a sover-

eign country by means of deception, can be successful. This need not mean that the public are won over by the propaganda, simply that the authors of the propaganda can implement their plans.

Studying these phenomena may be tricky, but it is not impossible to track and trace misinformation and lying. Two key components of such research are investigating the institutional form of propaganda organisation and the distortion and ideology present in its content. If we want both to understand and challenge propaganda and the power it confers, studying how it works is an important starting point.

*David Miller is the editor of Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and media distortion in the attack on Iraq (Pluto 2003, in press).*

**Want to get something off your chest? Three-D welcomes ideas for Soap Box**

## *Letter from... Iberia*

Each issue, Three-D aims to publish a report from a sister association in another country or region, in the form of a letter to British-based colleagues. Our first contribution comes from **David Walton**, chair of the Iberian Association of Cultural Studies.

Dear Colleagues,

As some of you may already know, in 1995 a small group of scholars working in Spain established the annual Culture and Power seminars, which tried to establish a recognisable tradition of cultural studies in Spain. It also provided, through publications based on the conference themes, a forum for written debate. Little by little the 'Culture and Power' group managed to interest more and more academics and cultural workers (in Spain and abroad) in its conferences and publications. By 2001 Spanish and Portuguese colleagues had united and, at its Seventh International Seminar, held at the University of Alcalá de Henares in 2001, the decision was

taken to create an institutional framework that would promote cultural studies on the Iberian Peninsula.

Thus, the Iberian Association for Cultural Studies (IBACS) was formed. What this means is that cultural studies scholars, workers and students on the Iberian Peninsula now have an institutional framework to give both their research and their intellectual practice a new sense of purpose and legitimacy. However, the association is open to all who are interested, and it has already attracted members outside the peninsula's borders. Our aims are much more extensive than can be outlined here; however, these are included in our constitution, which now appears on our official website (which

includes membership details). Although it is still in its preliminary stages and not fully functional, the site can be found at: <http://ibacs.do.sapo.pt/>

Ever since the first publication in 1995, Felicity Hand and Chantal Cornut-Gentille's *Culture and Power*, right up to the present there has been a continuing interest in the multiple permutations related to themes of culture and power. The annual conferences have, more often than not, focussed on distinct aspects of these two nominal terms. Hand and Cornut-Gentille's volume carried no subtitle; however, in the years following a series of volumes has extended the thematic scope of these terms. 1996 saw the appearance of *Culture and Power: Institutions* edited by Rosa González. In 1999 two further volumes were published: *Culture and Power: Cultural Confrontations* (edited by Chantal Cornut-Gentille) and *Culture and Power: Business* (edited by Matilde Paredes et al.). *Culture and Power: Challenging Discourses* came out in 2000 (edited by María José Coperías Aguilar) and *Culture and Power: Ac(unofficial)Knowledgeing Cultural Studies in Spain* surfaced in 2002 (eds. David Walton and Dagmar Scheu). Further volumes from the universities of Alcalá (Madrid) and Tarragona are expected in the near future.

The kind of cultural studies that is emerging on the Iberian Peninsula is one which is interdisciplinary and anti-doctrinal in approach and which includes an open-ended attitude in terms of method and strategy. As I explained in the volume I co-edited,

## References

Coperías Aguilar, María José (ed) (2000) *Culture and Power: Challenging Discourses*, Valencia: Universitat de València.

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González, Rosa (ed) (1996) *Culture and Power: Institutions*, Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona.

Hand, Felicity & Cornut-Gentille, Chantal (eds) (1995) *Culture and Power*, Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Paredes, Matilde et al. (eds) (1999) *Culture and Power: Business*, Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza.

doing cultural studies on the Iberian Peninsula 'is ultimately a question of participation in a continuing, open and politically slanted debate whose object is the production and assessment of forms of critique directed at an understanding of (mainly) contemporary cultural conditions' (Walton & Scheu, 2002:13). We hope that in the future we will be able to cooperate with MeCCSA members and, indeed, with cultural studies scholars and workers from all over the world. We would like to welcome any enquires or suggestions for collaborative work between our associations.

Finally, we would also like to draw to your attention our upcoming conference 'Cultural Studies in the World Today' which will take place at the University of Lisbon (November 4 – 7, 2003). Professor Zygmunt Bauman (Emeritus Professor of the Universities of Leeds and Warsaw), Doctor Chantal Cornut-Gentille d'Arcy (University of Zaragoza) and Professor Lawrence Grossberg (University of North Carolina at Chapel) will be keynote speakers. Those who would like to visit the official conference website may do so using the following address: <http://www.mundiconvenius.pt/cultural/home.htm>

We look forward to collaborating with you. Very best wishes,

*David Walton (IBACS Chairperson)*  
*Departamento de Filología Inglesa*  
*Universidad de Murcia*  
*Spain*

Walton, David & Scheu, Dagmar (eds) (2000) *Culture and Power: Ac(unofficial)Knowledgeing Cultural Studies in Spain*, Berne: Peter Lang.

# The State We're In: Media Studies

Three-D asked ten prominent media studies academics a simple question: What is the state of media studies today? Is it thriving or stagnating? Six responded – not a bad rate for questionnaire survey research. And the replies are, like all the best research, inconclusive.

## **Simon Frith, University of Stirling**

I'm not sure if media studies are really stagnating or if it just feels that way. This is hardly surprising given the pressures. On the one hand, the RAE, which has meant a vast increase of publications which add little original to existing debates; on the other hand the transformation of academic publishing into textbook publishing (particularly in this field) and the endless reduction of ideas to lecture notes. There are good and important media PhD theses out there, but nobody gets to read them but their examiners. Add the continuing effects of populism and vocationalism and it's hardly surprising that much current media studies teaching seems rooted in old polemics and introverted paradigms. The same is true of most academic disciplines, of course, but the particular problem for media studies has been its failure to establish its intellectual importance, not just to the media themselves, but also within the academy, where its concerns are still regarded as marginal to the grand social science and humanities questions.

## **Nick Couldry, LSE**

British media studies thrives, judging by December's MeCCSA conference with sessions on fandom, celebrity, alternative media, the World Summit on the Information Society, to name just a few. The quality of papers and range of topics was striking.

Yet we face many challenges. Let me mention two. First, it is time to review our conceptual frameworks and their boundaries. If

major figures in sociology (John Urry, Ulrich Beck) can argue that sociology needs a new conceptual framework no longer based on an assumed national horizon, then maybe we should do the same. Beck's call for 'methodological cosmopolitanism', rather than 'methodological nationalism', deserves thought. Reinforcing this, Britain's political and policy environment during the run-up to an Anglo-US Iraq war looked increasingly parochial. The impetus for comparative work, particularly with the rest of Europe rather than necessarily the US, is greater than ever.

This relates to a second challenge. The media studies profession must consider urgently its response to the New Labour government's plans to narrow the range of research institutions and research voices. Since this plan will almost certainly have negative impacts on media and cultural studies research, how can we effectively challenge it for what it is – an anti-democratic closure?

## **Sally Munt, University of Sussex**

The first challenge that Media Studies faces is that in many respects its identity is so polysemic. It is disciplinarily challenged as far as current governmental policy on Higher Education is concerned, and we are going to suffer if the Roberts Review is implemented in its current form, due to its intention to evaluate research through a more concentrated panel structure. There is little room for creative ambiguity in New Labour's plan for worldwide university excellence, which is a design flaw to say the least. The second

challenge is that Media Studies is mistakenly perceived to be restrictively vocational, something which 'English' has avoided, despite there being many parallels between the two subjects. This is partly a result of class prejudice, allied to the contempt that Media Studies attracts for being a 'Mickey Mouse' subject. Interestingly this condemnation was also rampant in the initial formation of 'English', which was seen as the 'Thickies' subject designed for those who couldn't hack classics (an earlier twentieth century rendition of 'dumbing down'). Having said that, being constantly under pressure to prove oneself can produce a strong sense of intellectual and pedagogic purpose and accountability. So my third point is this – if Anthropology creates Anthropologists, and Sociology creates Sociologists, what are we making, and why? It's an unashamedly functionalist view, but I think it's important to have some handle on how effectively our subject(s) engage with wider society.

### **Nick Stevenson, University of Nottingham**

A few years ago I attended an international conference on the future of media and cultural studies. At one point, in between sessions, I sat down to drink a cup of tea. At the table next to me were a well-established male professor and a young female lecturer who had recently finished her PhD. They attracted my attention as they were engaged in a passionate argument. Oblivious to eavesdroppers like myself they articulated seemingly irreconcilable positions in respect of the future direction of Media Studies. They had both attended a session that aimed to deconstruct *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The male professor argued at great length that the session on *Buffy* was indicative of a deep malaise that had entrapped British Media Studies. In his view the discipline had seemingly become so myopic that it was unable to map the ways in which media cultures were connected to global injustice and inequality. To dramatise his account the professor used a global array of examples from the plight of homeless Brazilian children to the underclass in the United States. In his mental map, to write and deliver a paper on *Buffy* was self indulgent and indifferent to questions of material suffering. Equally engaged, the female lecturer argued that the papers they had both witnessed were not actually about *Buffy* but about gender, identity, sexuality and transgression. This, she pressed, was undoubtedly an agenda that male academics found deeply uncomfortable. Whereas the professor articulated an agenda driven by the links between media, class and justice the lecturer offered a politics of respect and recognition. If we had time I am sure we could say much about the gendered

nature of this argument and the fact that it has a long history in the study of media and culture. However, what struck me most was the impossibility of choosing between the two positions. In other words, what neither the professor nor the lecturer was able to see was that they were both right. By this I do not simply mean that Media Studies needs to find a way of respecting both positions and work towards a synthesis. Such a move would drain the argument of its passionate investment; this debate is so fundamental to the future of the discipline it is unlikely to be conjured out of existence by bland calls for unity. Instead, I would argue that this is a discussion we need to continue to have with ourselves at the conferences we attend and within the institutions in which we work. Questions of justice, respect and media cultures will continue to motivate the best work in our discipline. However, perhaps we would be better served by a form of contestation that leaves space for both positions in a way that does not become polarised.

### **Justin Lewis, University of Cardiff**

Thriving or stagnating? It depends, of course, on who you ask. It's hard to dispute the success of Media Studies in recent years. And yet, having returned to Britain after 12 years in the United States, I'm struck by the enduring contempt that exists in some influential quarters. MeCCSA has done its best to counter this prejudice, but all of us need to do more to promote the importance of what we do.

We could start by insisting that one of the reasons for the growth of Media Studies is its intellectual relevance. To suggest, as some do, that we can live in a media saturated society without bothering to analyse what's around us is a deeply anti-intellectual position. To understand the role the media play in the formation of identities and democracies is one of the most complex and vital issues of our age. If Leonardo da Vinci were around today, he'd be doing Media Studies.

Why? Because Media Studies is now an integral part of the humanities and social sciences: you can't understand politics, sociology, social psychology, modern history or contemporary culture without it. Even the natural sciences are becoming aware that their significance depends partly upon their media representation.

And when it comes to respect, we need to remind our critics that Media Studies has been one of Britain's most successful intellectual exports in recent decades. So, for example, Media Studies tradi-

tions developed in Britain have transformed Communication Studies in the United States. Not bad for a 'Mickey Mouse' degree (and we'd know all about him too, by the way).

### **Yvonne Tasker, University of East Anglia**

A colleague recently mentioned to me that there wasn't much of a film studies presence in MeCCSA. I wasn't sure how true this was, but then it occurred to me that there is a distinction between film/television/media studies and film studies. However much the study of cinema has benefited from, and indeed contributed to media and cultural studies, the field in Britain can seem at times inward-looking – with some wary of acknowledging any affiliation at all with a wider discipline. In response to attacks on Media Studies, it has been understandably tempting for film studies to present itself as a traditional subject invested in cultural and aesthetic values. Most fundamentally this takes the form of a discourse of film as art set against the ephemeral character of other forms of popular culture (but also champion of treasured national culture against the pervasive force of global – i.e. US - media). If

defending film as art ironically performs a similar function to the apparently more aggressive presentation of film studies as a serious and difficult subject some decades ago, it is also counter-productive. As a feminist researcher, defining the importance of film studies in relation to ideas about art or value holds little interest or relevance to me. Yet recent scholarship in areas such as popular genre, celebrity culture, cinema history and spectatorship has contributed effectively to what we can term cultural history in its broadest sense. Overall, if film studies can be a bit stuffy, film as media studies is still an exciting place to be working.

**In case you're wondering about the bias towards media theory and 'old' universities in this sample, we asked media practitioners and academics in 'new' universities to contribute, but they were too busy. Future forum pieces will follow on the state of media practice as an academic subject, on cultural studies, and on other issues.**

## *Doing the Business*

### **Closing the Centres: Birmingham and Leicester**

**A**s we reported in the March edition of Three-D, two of the most important institutional centres of cultural, media and communication studies have either been closed down (Birmingham) or they are being dismantled (Leicester).

Below, Michael Green, of the University of Birmingham, reports on a dayschool devoted to addressing questions raised by the increasingly managerialist and oligarchic nature of university governance.

We are also reproducing a letter to *The Guardian* from students at Leicester University from earlier this year about the situation at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester.

### **Whose University?**

**Michael Green**

**A** one day workshop on Whose University? was held on 10 May 2003 at Birmingham, organised jointly by Birmingham AUT and Guild of Students, and by the campaign group on behalf of the 'restructured' Birmingham Cultural Studies and Sociology.

There was also representation from a group representing students from the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester.

The day attracted a good turnout from a variety of universities and disciplines, marking the absence of spaces for critical reflection on what is happening to higher education (though it was clear that universities are placed and managed differently).

A major theme in panel discussion and in a workshop led by Miriam David (Keele) and Deborah Steinberg (Warwick) concerned

the implications of the White Paper. These included a focus on research as 'big' projects in science; a willingness to contemplate a steeper hierarchy of universities, many losing a research function altogether; student fee issues; and a variety of attacks on the professionalism of academics. Miriam and others are preparing a critique of the White Paper and an alternative paper.

Meanwhile Richard Johnson (Nottingham Trent) and Ann Gray (formerly of Birmingham, now of Lincoln) led a workshop on the situation and future prospects of work in cultural studies.

Closing plenary speakers included sombre accounts by students and parents of their treatment by Birmingham, and Dr Lynne Jones M.P. (Birmingham Selly Oak) recounted her attempts to question university management and to seek answers from HEFCE, QAA and most recently the National Audit Office.

It emerged from a thoughtful but sobering day that universities are in no clear way accountable for their actions (despite the plethora of 'quality' and 'audit' trails), and that the new managerialism is now prepared to act in ways which offer severe challenges both to trades unions and associations and to professional bodies such as MeCCSA itself.

In terms of the events surrounding cultural studies at Birmingham, subsequently the new external examiner for the Media, Culture and Society course (Dennis Cosgrove, Geography, UCLA) has said he will withdraw after this summer after being briefed by his own professional bodies; the Birmingham AUT has called for an independent inquiry into events.

In a surreal twist, the staff team dismembered and dispersed by Birmingham last summer achieved Birmingham's only 1st place (Sociology) and only 2nd place (Media) in *Education Guardian* league tables of the kind so cherished by managers. This development was taken up in letters to the *Education Guardian* and on its website.

***Michael Green teaches in the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology at the University of Birmingham***

## Dazed and Confused in Leicester

*A letter from students at the Centre for Mass Communications Research published in The Guardian, Friday 30 May 2003*

Whilst reading the recently published ranking of university departments, I was not surprised to see Leicester's centre for mass communications research, the CMCR, in the top 10. In fact I expected it if the literature published by the university to advertise the CMCR is to be believed.

As a first year undergraduate on the course I have to ask why the administrative powers that be at the university feel then that it is necessary to undertake nothing short of destroying the shape of the CMCR, which has proven to be so successful?

Is it because of the HEFCE capability fund made available to the field nationally, specifically in this instance being offered for the implementation of an "effective research strategy"? Does this translate to 'OK, dismantle the department and fling it to the four corners of the Leicester universe'? Are these 86,000 pieces of silver really worth that much?

Reading my course literature, as some students do, I see the promise of a dedicated staff and building providing a unique focus. I am told "no, don't worry you will be closer to the library" and there'll be a mix of "richness and diversity of which exposure to the multiple disciplines can provide" – the very distraction I sought to avoid when applying.

My course boasts about a 100% success rate of employment post graduation, a fact that my father, in particular, has found most comforting, as did I when parting with my hard earned tuition fees.

There is hope, however. Like King Arthur, a new professor is coming to us in our time of need. Our champion will come to

oversee our restructure and maintain the "unique focus". There is one draw back. They will not be here until January (at the earliest), a full five months after the changes.

Well, what of our existing equipment? Assurances are zero. We will basically have to take a ticket and stand in line with the other 20,000 students if we even want to use a VCR. This is not to mention our other digital projectors and audio-visual facilities, archive room, video library and lecture theatre.

I saw no mention in the *Guardian's* listings of politics, sociology or even the revered genetics at Leicester in the tables. But the builders are not knocking at their door to get lucrative residential refurbishment. What more can I say? I am simply confused and bemused, as to why (you might think me mad) all of this was to happen without prior consultation with the staff, or the students for that matter. This is absolute madness. I just don't know how to break the news to my dad.

**For more details see the following student-run websites:**

**Leicester:** <http://www.savethecentre.co.uk>

**Birmingham:** <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/culturalstudies>

**And of course** [www.meccsa.org.uk](http://www.meccsa.org.uk)

**As we went to press, interviews were being held for a new Professor to head the new centres of cultural, media and communication studies at Leicester.**

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## The Birth of SCoMSA

*MeCCSA chair Christine Geraghty reports on the formation of a new umbrella body of the various associations representing the media, communication and cultural studies groupings in higher education in the UK.*

**T**he field of media, communications and cultural studies sometimes resembles a rather dense jungle which hides a rich variety of research, teaching and professional interests. It is perhaps not surprising then that there are a large number of

professional organisations, some of them quite small, representing different groups to different bodies and in different situations.

MeCCSA seeks to build up contacts with such bodies. The Radio Studies Network for instance continues to hold its AGM at the MeCCSA conference, and we worked closely with a number of organisations over benchmarking.

In May 2003, it was suggested by the Association of Media Practitioners that it might be helpful to formalise some contacts between organisations so as to present a more united front in some of our representations. The main impetus was in dealing with Skillset but the principles apply to any situation in which we want to avoid unhelpful divisions.

A meeting was held which was attended by representatives of MeCCSA, AMPE, SCMA (the Scottish equivalent) and NAHEMI (which represents film and video work in higher education). These bodies represented major parts but not all of the Media/Communication/Cultural Studies subject area, and recognised the need to carry forward the existing co-ordination of their efforts.

We had a wide discussion of the pressures on us in higher education in terms of government policy, resources and the skills agenda. In particular, we identified four common areas of engagement:

- UK Government Education Policy (White Paper, DFES and DTI initiatives etc)
- UK Funding Body policies (HEFCE, Research Councils etc)
- Industry bodies (Skillset, Film Councils etc)
- Academic Employers (eg. Birmingham University Cultural Studies dispute).

It was agreed that we recommend setting up a new body, THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF MEDIA SUBJECT ASSOCIATIONS (SCoMSA) to co-ordinate responses on behalf of the sector and its organisations. SCoMSA does not replace existing organisations but will be virtual, with no direct membership. It will deal with items on an issue by issue basis, by consultation between the respective chairs or their nominees.

Individual organisations may opt out, either because the issue is not relevant or because they wish to organise separately on the particular issue. Other organisations will be approached to participate. I should stress that this development is both experimental

and temporary. However, the meeting felt that SCoMSA should be formed with the explicit long-term aim of bringing the participating organisations into one representative grouping. It is hoped that the form of such a grouping will develop as a result of this co-operation. It was also agreed that MeCCSA and AMPE should hold a joint conference in January 2005 at the University of Lincoln, when the arrangements will be reviewed.

The MeCCSA Executive Committee agreed to being part of this umbrella body. While there are some reservations and the name does not do justice to the full scope of our membership, it was nevertheless thought that this was a constructive step and could be of considerable benefit to members.

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## Proposed Changes to the Funding of Teaching

MeCCSA Honorary Secretary **Peter Golding** writes about proposed changes to the funding of undergraduate students which could affect every single media and cultural studies department in the UK.

Colleagues will probably be aware that HEFCE are proposing changes to the funding of undergraduate students. The proposals are set out in a consultation paper (HEFCE 2003/42) which you can read on-line at

[http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03\\_42/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03_42/)

The consequences for institutions of these proposals have now been published also, at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/fundcons/>

We are especially concerned about these proposals as they may affect our field. As you know HEFCE allocate students to 'price groups'. There are currently four price groups:

- price group A (with a weighting of 4.5) for the clinical elements of medicine, dentistry and veterinary science
- price group B (weighted 2) for the high cost science, engineering and technology subjects

- price group C (weighted 1.5) for intermediate cost subjects
- price group D (weighted 1) for all other subjects

Four or five years ago SCCCMS (predecessor to MeCCSA) persuaded the Funding Council to set up a Media Studies Advisory Committee to assess, on a detailed case by case basis, the funding level for students in media and cultural studies. As a consequence most were allocated to price group C, some to B. The net gain to the field was very substantial, as even the least technical and vocationally oriented departments were, rightly, funded in recognition of the many additional costs involved in teaching media and cultural studies. The consultation paper argues that "Media Studies expenditure is typical of price group D, with no greater variation between institutions than other cost centres".

We regard the evidence for this as unconvincing. If all media studies is reallocated to D the reduction in funding across the field will be very substantial. How it will affect your institution depends on many factors, including the present arrangements for allocation of your university's block grant. However, we regard the proposals as generally a major threat to the field. We have written to the funding council to express this view, and to point out that the proposals overturn their own decisions made relatively recently on the basis of painstaking consideration of programme level evidence.

We need to pursue this argument vigorously. The consultation deadline is November 14th. We need members' help in compiling evidence for submission of our own response. This means we need from you, if at all possible:

1. Evidence of how your teaching income has been spent in the last three years, especially if this has involved economies which constrain teaching as your income falls short of formula allocation
2. Evidence of additional costs borne in order to deliver your teaching, which justified classification of your teaching into bands C or B.

It is vital that we make as comprehensive and detailed a case as possible. We hope very much that you will be able to contribute to the submission. We would also be grateful for any information about your own university's response to the consultation, as it may have a bearing on our field.

Please send any information and comments to me, by no later than 31st October, at [P.Golding@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:P.Golding@lboro.ac.uk).

## ... reflecting on reflexivity

### **Oi, Karl, what's 'reflexivity' when it's out and about?**

Not now ... I'm trying to download my exam results on this fifth generation mobile .... and all I'm getting is channel 5.

### **Oh go on ... you owe me for the fifteen vanilla cokes you've downed this afternoon.**

But that's my new diet: ice-cream caffeine. Okay ... 'reflexivity' is one of those things that you have to say you do these days or be cast into a dark pit and flayed for your sins. It's a commandment: thou shalt be reflexive. We're all for it, it's a GOOD thing, a necessary thing ... even if we're not sure what it means.

### **But I've heard it used loads of times in lectures, books and that.**

Too true. Let's see .... you've got your various species of reflexivity, like endogenous, referential, indexical, constitutive, etc. Then you've got your theorists of reflexivity, like Schutz, Garfinkel, Mannheim, Giddens, Beck, etc etc. But that's not all.

Don't forget the things you can apply 'reflexivity' to as an adjective: like claiming we now live in 'reflexive modernity' or saying the process of modernization is different. So, like David Beckham's latest barnet, reflexivity is everywhere ... and those were just for starters.

### **Great, thanks ... now my head's gonna explode.**

Okay, let's simplify. First, we can say that talk of reflexivity tends to be about either intellectual practices or features of social life. Next, if we stick to the first of these – reflexivity as intellectual practice – and stand back then it's clear they share the argument that authors should position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that we can assess their knowledge claims. The

reason is that your social position, identity, experiences, basically the point from which you view things helps shape your point of view in all kinds of ways, often without you realising.

So being reflexive is supposed to provide a firmer epistemological base for knowledge. That's the theory anyway. How it works out in research practice is another thing altogether.

### **My lecturer began her conference paper on history teaching by reflexively describing how she had been a history teacher.**

That's one form it can take. I've also heard acute self-awareness of your social identity or providing a travelogue of the fieldwork or a diary of your relation to the object of study ... among many others.

Often it's more 'reflectivity' than reflexivity. Before you know it you're reading more about the author than what they were supposed to be looking at.

The thing is, you might aim to struggle clear of the distorting effects of your social position by discussing it but you're discussing it from a position, so if anything you're adding another distorted view.

It's like trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps: it's physically impossible and you're likely to disappear up your backside if you're not careful.

Thing is, the forms taken by reflexivity in research often represent good practice and open up the researcher and research process for questioning ... they're good methods or they give a sociological account of knowledge, but they're not epistemological tools, whatever the intention.

### **Okay, right .... so what's epistemology then?**

## This regular feature highlights writers and books in the MeCCSA subject areas who haven't received the recognition they deserve. This issue, **John Street** looks back at Bernice Martin's *A Sociology of Contemporary Change*.

Whether Bernice Martin's *A Sociology of Contemporary Change* is a classic text may be an open question. It is certainly unusual, either as a work of sociology or of cultural studies. And it is without doubt largely lost and forgotten. It still appears on the odd course outline, but it is, I suspect, there to fill out the space rather because of its perceived centrality to the topic or discipline. When it was first published over twenty years ago, it attracted praise – if the backcover of the paperback edition (1983) is to be believed – from reviewers in the *Financial Times*, the *THES*, *Critical Quarterly* and the *Catholic Herald*. Despite these garlands, though, it failed to secure itself a place in the canon.

Re-reading it now, it is possible to see both why it was neglected and why this fate was not warranted. What is immediately striking, and what perhaps explains its neglect, is the way Martin writes as an outsider, or at least without the pretence of being an insider. She does not talk about the popular culture of the sixties as a fan. This was the presumption of so many of the books and articles that defined the emergent cultural studies of the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Even the first version of Simon Frith's *Sound Effects*, the drily titled *The Sociology of Rock* (1978), still laid claim to the perspective of the fan, albeit tempered by the insights and tools of the sociologist. The same authorial device was evident too in many of the first products of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

Although Martin clearly knows and appreciates the culture she writes about – whether Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* or Andy Warhol's *Flesh* – her own engagement with them is not part of the narrative. Martin provides no preface or acknowledgements (save for copyright purposes). She tells us nothing about herself. But neither does she write as a dispassionately scientific sociologist.

Her book, as she notes at the beginning, is a work of interpretive sociology, but one inspired by an extraordinary richness of reference and theoretical perspectives. Thomas Mann and WH Auden

rub shoulders with Mary Douglas and Victor Turner. Almost every chapter begins with an Auden poem, and many of her key points are illustrated by *Doctor Faustus* or *The Magic Mountain*. Her underlying argument is that 'the social structure of Britain which formed, as it were, the receiving culture for the symbolic messages of the Expressive Revolution, was minutely structured by group and grid. It had its framed and classified 'moments' of liminality, which were programmed into an otherwise structured system.' (pp 53-4)

Martin's book stands apart from the culture it analyses and from the form of cultural studies that was then emerging. She draws on Frith and the CCCS, but as a source of empirical detail; her argument works from within a quite different discourse. Although much of what she discusses belongs to the subcultural elites of the sixties and seventies, the avant-garde of contemporary culture, her concern is with how these ideas and values permeated and formed the wider culture of everyday life, of the social mainstream. In this sense, her book chimes with the current disillusionment with sub-cultural study and the emphasis on the everyday.

### The ties that bind

More than this, the book is also striking for the way it talks of the political impossibilities or contradictions or ambiguities (all three appear in her narrative) of the counter cultures she analyses. She constantly refers to the tension between the anomic expressivism in contemporary culture and the collectivist ambitions that root its meanings and significance. Elsewhere this contrast is represented as that between structure and anti-structure. For Martin, these competing pulls, each side dependent on the other, are not just particularities of culture, but lie at the heart of the social transformations which defined Britain in the 1960s and 70s. Culture's symbolic repertoire provides the means by which attempts are made to bring order to, in her words, the precariousness and ambiguity of human experience.

These assumptions inform her reading of culture and its place in

social change, the way she links the avant-garde to the everyday. There is an Oakeshottian conservatism to this that is less concerned with ideological prescription than with the fine details of the cultural and social ties that bind. The book's distinctive perspective is captured by her final quotation from – inevitably – Auden: 'Now as then, a proper balance between detachment and commitment seems impossible to find and hold. Both lead to evil. The introvert, intent upon improving himself, is deaf to the neighbour when he cries for help; the extrovert, intent upon improving the world, pinches his neighbour (for his own good of course) until he cries for help. We are not, any of us, very nice.' Such sentiments may resonate more today than they did twenty years ago,

and perhaps this is indication of the need to re-assess Martin's neglected contribution to our understanding of culture and cultural change.

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*A Sociology of Contemporary Change*  
by Bernice Martin, was published by Blackwell, 1981

## Conference report

### Stockholm: Sofas, Stars, Cineastes

**Christine Geraghty** reports on the Popular European Cinema Conference held in Stockholm in July.

This was the fourth Popular European Cinema Conference and continued the tradition of friendly and entertaining debate combined with detailed research and scholarship. So far the conferences have oscillated between University of Warwick and more nordic venues. In 1998, we were in Punkahruju, Finland and this year the attraction (and it was a major one for many) was Stockholm. We were warmly welcomed to this beautiful city, not least by the mayor who entertained us to lunch at the fine city hall. The conference was held at the beautiful green campus of the University of Stockholm and we also had the treat of two films screened at the Skandia-Tearten cinema, a wonderful 1920s cinema which despite being very battered on the outside retained many original features inside including sofas at the back and private boxes upstairs.

The conference was entitled 'Methods and Stars' and it attracted papers on a wide range of actors and actresses, although the star status of some might have been questionable. Catherine Deneuve was probably the most popular object of study with a whole panel on her put together by a number of British academics as well as other papers. There was a good sprinkling of British stars, Greek and Italian sex symbols were also on view and it was interesting to

see stars of silent cinema being considered in the same context as contemporary stars. What was striking was the careful research which was digging out fascinating contextual material though sometimes sadly there seemed to be relatively little film material left of these fading celebrities. Given the venue, there was surprisingly little on stars from Northern Europe and it was therefore pleasing that the final plenary was given on stardom in Finnish cinema by Anu Koivunen.

The conference provided evidence that the study of stars is extending our detailed knowledge of European cinema. Most of the papers were admirably focused on detailed accounts in which more general issues were implied. The work here demonstrates perhaps that there is now a much broader base to ask more general questions about whether there were or are specific modes of European stardom.

**We hope to feature at least a couple of conference reviews in every issue of Three-D. Please contact a member of the editorial board of Three-D if you plan to attend a conference, and would like to review it on our behalf.**

# Media, Communications & Cultural Studies Association

## Fifth Annual Conference and AGM

19–21 December 2003 – University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

Residential rates £150–300. 50% of accommodation is en-suite,  
first come – first served!

Keynote speakers include Elizabeth Grosz (Rutgers, USA),  
Jostein Gripsrud (Bergen, Norway), Ian Diamond (Chief Exec. ESRC),  
Elihu Katz (Annenberg, USA).

Major plenary on the Future of Film (with the Film Council)  
and Patrick Fuery (Sussex, UK), John Hill (Ulster, UK),  
Mark Jancovich (Nottingham, UK).

Establishment of the Postgraduate Network in Media,  
Communications and Cultural studies.

### You what Guv?

**Contributions highlighting overblown, dreary or just plain bad writing from the fields of media, communication and cultural studies are always welcome (see closing credits for contact e-mail)**

**G**uess which French sociologist and his translator produced this monster of a sentence?

One must be careful not to forget, as often happens, that the real efficiency of morphological factors is only defined in relation to the specific constraints of a determinate social universe and that consequently, for fear of turning these factors (like technical or economic factors in other cases) into almost natural causes which are foreign to historical reality in their genesis and operation, one must proceed, in each case as is done here, to a preliminary analysis of the social space in which they intervene.

### Closing Credits

**Three-D** (2003: issue 2)  
was brought to you by:

David Hesmondhalgh (co-ordinator)  
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Three-D is a publication of **MeCCSA, the UK national subject association for its field in higher education. The Association exists to represent the field of Media, Communication and Cultural Studies.** Except where stated, contributions do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association, or its Executive Committee.

Chair: Christine Geraghty, University of Glasgow  
Hon. Secretary: Peter Golding, Loughborough University

Full details of the Association, including how to join, along with a full list of the Executive Committee for 2003 can be found on the MeCCSA web-site at [www.meccsa.org.uk](http://www.meccsa.org.uk)