



Three-D

Issue 7 (April 2006)

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Good media merger shock

Finally a media merger we can welcome. Unless you've been hiding in the Gobi desert for the last year, or perhaps preparing for the RAE, you'll probably be aware from our email communications, our website, or just via good old-fashioned word of mouth, that soon MeCCSA will quite probably be no more in its present form. For as Christine Geraghty reports below, the AGMs of MeCCSA and of AMPE (the Association of Media Practice Educators) voted in January to merge the two organisations.

Amongst various other items, there's also news of a project on postgraduate networking. As its researcher Salvatore Scifo writes, this seeks to provide case studies of completed research degrees in the MeCCSA fields, in order to facilitate networking and the sharing of good practice. Please remember that this newsletter goes only to those people named by departments; postgraduates are often not named, and so it may be that your postgraduates don't receive this newsletter, or even know of its existence. Indeed, your postgraduates may not even know that MeCCSA exists. What can be done about this tricky situation? Well, you can tell them. And if you could pass on your copy of this newsletter to a postgrad or three once you've finished with it, and/or let postgraduates at your

institution know that a copy of the newsletter is available on the MeCCSA website for free downloading, then we'd be very grateful. Also up there are details of our lively Postgraduate Network (PGN) – and there are details there and in this newsletter of the next MeCCSA PGN conference. We're working hard to serve postgraduates in the subject areas.

Also on the website is a mine of other stuff, including numerous reports about MeCCSA activities, including summaries of the work of the Executive Committee and its sub-committees in 2005 and – inevitably – items on the RAE.

Also included in this issue is a piece I've written about the process of putting together a new media studies course at the Open University. We welcome contributions which reflect on teaching experiences and practice in media and cultural studies. Copy for the next issue is due the other side of a summer which I, for one, am awaiting with something close to desperation. If you'd like to run ideas past me at the email address in the closing credits, on this or any other topic, that would be delicious.

Dave Hesmondhalgh
The Open University

The Business

Merger Report

MeCCSA Chair Christine Geraghty reports on developments in the proposed merger of MeCCSA with the Association of Media Practice Educators (AMPE)

The MeCCSA AGM in January 2005 instructed the Executive Committee in the following terms:

This AGM believes in principle that the interests of the subject area would be best served by a single organisation with appropriate sections/networks for specialist interests. It therefore instructs the Executive Committee to pursue this aim with AMPE and any other interested organisation and report back to the next AGM.

As a result of the discussions held during the year, the AGM 2006 considered two motions which recommended moving further down the road to a single organisation. These motions were passed. This report provides some background to the recommendations.

Following agreement at the two AGMs, representatives of the two executive committees met four times during

the year and after each meeting there were reports back to our respective executive committees. The first two meetings discussed the nature of the two organisations, the work we do in representing members to a variety of bodies, the structures we work within and the HE environment generally. It was clear that the problems we faced were the same, that both organisations relied almost entirely on the voluntary work of their committee members, and that joint activity was already being undertaken, for example in relation to Skillset and the annual conference. This meant that there was a positive approach at the meetings and those involved in the talks certainly believed that a single organisation was desirable in terms of enabling us to work more effectively and removing complications in decision-making and duplication in workloads.

Over the summer a new constitution was drafted which was the subject of detailed discussion at two meetings in the autumn. The proposed constitution put before the AGM (currently available on the website under the heading 'conference', then 'AGM papers' – ed.) was the result of that work. Much of it is based on existing arrangements in our current constitutions but we all recognised the crucial importance of ensuring proper representation for practice-based staff. The new constitution provides for sections to be established and the transitional arrangements commit the Executive Committee to setting up a section for practice staff immediately following the 2006 AGMs with a Section Chair to be elected alongside the new Executive Committee in the Autumn of 2006.

Just as MeCCSA's Women's Network, with the support of the Executive Committee, has developed through the activity of members, so there is a great opportunity to develop a strong, effective Practice Section which will have the force of a single organisation behind it. In addition, the constitution provides a framework which should allow other appropriate organisations to join or act with us without requiring further amendment. More generally, the new organisation would allow us all to work more effectively and to direct our energies into addressing outside challenges rather than internal structures.

Both AMPE and MeCCSA put these proposals to their AGMs with a view to the new organisation coming into being on 1st September 2006. This is designed to give

time to sort out some issues which still remain but at the same time will ensure that there is a new, functioning Executive Committee elected by the membership to take over at the next AGM in January 2007. The timetable would be as follows:

Feb 2006:

Transitional executive begins to meet but separate organisations still exist. Discussions of future arrangements — particularly regarding finance and name — take place;

31st August

Previous organisations dissolve as agreed;

1st September

MeCCSA with AMPE comes into being, subscriptions are paid to the new organisation and the transitional executive continues;

November/December

Nominations are sought and elections take place for the Executive Committee and Chair of the Practice Section in accordance with the new constitution;

January 2007

First AGM, at which name is discussed and agreed.

This timetable does two things. First, there are some details which need to be worked out including the name which at the moment remains unresolved. The timetable allows time for all Executive Committee members to participate in discussions of the final details and to get to know each other before the new organisation comes into being. Secondly, it provides for a new Executive Committee to be up and running with the backing of the membership within the year. Postponing the final decision to the AGMs in 2007 would mean that the transitional period would be prolonged probably for another year and cause further uncertainty.

The Executive Committee endorsed the constitution and recommended it to members at the AGM, who voted unanimously for it. We recognise that there is still work to be done in sorting out some of the detail but believe that this can be achieved with commitment and good will. A single organisation will help us be a more effective voice on behalf of all our members particularly as the duplication of effort and the liaison work which now takes up a lot of time will be cut back. It is an important stage in the development of a subject association for the whole field.

Christine Geraghty teaches at the University of Glasgow and is Chair of MeCCSA.

MeCCSA/AMPE Joint Annual Conference

Wednesday 10th — Friday 12th January 2007

Karen Ross reports on plans for next year's conference.

MeCCSA/AMPE's 2007 conference will be held over three days, including a half-day for registration and first plenary on Wednesday 10th, one full day of papers and plenary 2 on Thursday 11th, and a half-day of sessions and plenary 3 on Friday 12th. The conference will take place at Coventry University's Technology Centre (Technocentre), which is a 15-minute walk from Coventry train station, 15 minutes from the M40 by car, or 5 minutes by taxi from the station. There is unlimited free parking on site.

We will be providing an ICT room where delegates will be able to use the internet, check email and so on: but the entire conference venue is wi-fi, so feel free to bring your laptops and surf away.

We are still discussing the shape of the academic programme, but the plenary themes we are developing include:

- a) cultural studies for the 21st century;
- b) media and politics: strategic interventions;
- c) popular culture and serious society;
- d) media regulation and HE.

We are also considering inviting papers on specific themes including:

- a) being European;
 - b) comedy;
- and the plenary themes identified above.

We will also be organizing a series of (parallel) postgraduate workshops during the programme as well as screenings and other practice-based events and activities. All plenary sessions will be filmed and a DVD of the plenary events plus received abstracts and papers will be sent out to delegates within a month of the conference.

We have already negotiated an extremely attractive conference rate with the newly-built Ramada hotel and will be securing preferential delegate rates at other Coventry hotels ranging from the Formula One for delegates on a very limited budget, up to the higher end

outlets including Brandon Hall.

We are currently considering several possible venues for the conference dinner (on Thursday 9th January) including the Ricoh Arena, Coombe Abbey and St Mary's Guildhall, all of which focus on delivering food that people actually want to eat, as well as providing very different but equally wonderful atmospheres. We have begun to test out interest amongst local entertainment and food outlets in providing discount vouchers for delegates and so far the response has been extremely positive, so we expect to be putting lots of goodies in the delegate packs on arrival.

The registration process for the 2007 conference will be fully automated so that delegates will be able to register and make payments online, although as before we will be asking delegates to make their own arrangements with the hotels associated with the conference.

We are currently running a European script-writing competition where the ten finalists will be given the opportunity to bring their scripts to production and exhibition. The first outing of the finished films will be at the Coventry Film Festival which will begin on the evening of Friday 10th January and continue over the weekend, so we would hope to see a number of delegates segueing from the conference to the film festival: conference delegates will be able to take advantage of discounted screening rates and discounts on other film festival activities such as workshops and directors' round-tables.

Currently, there is an open call for paper (abstracts). If you are ready to submit an abstract please send by email attachment (no paper copies please!) to Jane Wynn — j.wynn@coventry.ac.uk. Hope to see you there.

Karen Ross teaches at Coventry University, is on the MeCCSA Executive Committee and is the Local Conference Coordinator. Contact: k.ross@coventry.ac.uk

MeCCSA Postgraduate Networking Project

The Postgraduate Networking Project seeks to provide case studies of completed research degrees in Communication, Media, Film, and Cultural studies, to facilitate networking and the sharing of good practice within these fields.

The key findings of the research, published on www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn, highlight that the majority of doctoral students who completed their degrees, as represented in this project, have found work in higher education institutions in the UK and abroad. This shows that the training and support provided to doctoral students is directly connected to the development of junior scholars in media, communication and cultural studies.

The majority of respondents (both ex-students and members of staff), agreed that this project (and its website) could be a very useful resource for sharing good practice and a sense of community among students in the areas covered.

There is little evidence of existing databases in higher education institutions concerning completed doctoral students and their exit routes in media, communication and cultural studies. This lack of information on the experiences of doctoral students, and their subsequent career paths, indicates that institutions have placed little value on profiling existing experiences of doctoral students, and following this through to post-PhD life.

The lack of existing databases on completed PhD students has meant that it has been difficult to collect information regarding the sample, even with continuous

reminders to some students who expressed great interest, but failed to give feedback before the deadline, and, most importantly, among members of staff.

In many cases, the workload of academics and researchers in their early careers, has resulted in continuous 'reminders', even furthering the deadlines, to some of the respondents, which showed that their extremely busy schedules gave little time to respond with the data requested for submission of the case study.

A project with a wider time-frame would probably allow more interested contributors to send their information. The website for completed PhD students and the selection of case studies will encourage new participants in the project and further case studies.

Further projects could build on this heritage and it would be desirable to continue the database and raise awareness of its existence among students and members of staff in Media, Communication, Film and Cultural Departments across the UK, especially the Higher Education Institutions that are under-represented in this research project.

The project, founded by the Higher Education Academy, has been managed by Professor Annette Hill and researched by Mr Salvatore Scifo, at the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), University of Westminster.

For further info please write to Project Researcher, Salvatore Scifo, at scifos@wmin.ac.uk and visit the Project Website at <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn>

3rd Annual MeCCSA Postgrad Conference

The MeCCSA Postgraduate Network, working in conjunction with MECCSA and ADC-LTSN, is pleased to announce that the next annual conference will be held at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland on the 22nd and 23rd June 2006.

Travel in Northern Ireland will be arranged. We will pick students up at 10.30–11am on Thursday morning from Belfast International and City airports and return them to the airports for 6pm on the Friday for flights back.

This is an excellent opportunity for postgraduate students working in the areas of Film, Media, New Media, Culture and Communications Studies to present their work to like-minded individuals in a supportive and productive environment. The conference will also include workshops from expert academics on contemporary topics such as publishing, teaching, the RAE, and other issues pertinent to postgraduate students working in the highly political and controversial arena that is the University today.

The Postgraduate Network was set up in May 2004 specifically to offer support to postgraduate students working within the broad disciplines of media, culture and communications studies. It is the only network of its kind, and has members from all over the UK working within diverse academic areas. The aims of this conference are to offer an arena in which postgraduates can present their work, and an opportunity for networking.

The Postgraduate Network's goals are to:

- Situate postgraduate researchers in the national landscape of media, communication and cultural studies
- Provide a national forum where postgraduates can participate in workshops/seminars related to teaching, learning and research
- Bring together members of the postgraduate community in order to debate contemporary issues in media, communication and cultural studies
- Provide a supportive environment where valuable contacts for the future can be established

The last two conferences held in Birmingham (2004) and Cardiff (2005) were a great success, with keynote speakers such as Peter Golding, Sue Thornham, Terry

Threadgold, Maire Messenger-Davis, Ernest Mathijis, Justin Lewis and Greg Philo. The issues discussed centred on the political and academic concerns of postgraduate students, and included issues such as publishing, teaching and researching. This conference promises to be equally successful with speakers such as Martin McLoone, Sarah Edge, Sue Thornham and Mark Jancovich (to be confirmed).

There will be a conference fee this year, plus accommodation and evening meal charges. Prices will be confirmed nearer the date.

We welcome abstracts of 250 words from postgraduate students wishing to attend the conference no later than 1st April 2006. Abstracts should include a title, topic of research, methodology/ies employed and contact details. They should be forwarded to Helen Thornham at thornham-h@ulster.ac.uk or Ciara Chambers at cn.chambers@ulster.ac.uk along with any queries about the event.

Other information about the network and the conference can be found at www.meccsa.org.uk/pgn or www.ulster.ac.uk (follow the links)

Women's network report 2005

by Heather Nunn

The Women's Media Studies Network (WMSN) was very busy in 2005, with a steady expression of interest from colleagues keen to host a WMSN event. Academics, practitioners and students in Media Studies and related areas have used the space that WMSN provides to exchange ideas, debate pedagogy, theory, representation and practice and to network with colleagues. We aim in 2006 to build on these successes and to encourage others to contribute to seminars and email dialogue. We also welcome offers to host WMSN events and suggestions for expanding the network.

Events held in 2005

- 'The Born Gender Supremacy: Challenges in Feminist Pedagogy & Research', held at University of Leeds on Friday 11th March 2005 and organised by Katharine Sarikakis, Institute of Communications Studies, attracted approximately 35 scholars from across the country.

- On Tuesday 19th April, Natalie Fenton, Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths College, organised a very well attended event supported by 45–50 colleagues. Speakers covered a diversity of gender-related theoretical, representational and practice-based issues.
- The Tessa Perkins Memorial Event at Sheffield Hallam University on Wednesday 14th September was organised by Rosalind Brunt and Margaret Montgomerie to commemorate Tessa's work. A range of speakers covered Tessa's interests in gay/lesbian theory and representation; gendered media representations, educational policy, politics and gender. It was an excellent tribute to Tessa and her work and a quick headcount revealed 55 people had attended.

Women's network at MeCCSA conference

Karen Ross organised a panel for the conference entitled

'women and news'.

Karen Ross, Coventry University, spoke on 'Geese and Ganders: Reading the Voices of Women and Men in the Local Press'. She analysed the gendering of news sources in local press coverage during the 2005 British General Election. She argued that despite the greater attention to citizen voices in the media during election periods, women are less visible than men as cited authoritative sources and tend to be allocated the role of source in human interest stories.

Rosalind Brunt, Sheffield Hallam University, presented 'Abu Ghraib and the Trailer Park Girl'. She focused on provocative April 2004 tabloid media coverage of the involvement of American women in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib jail. Her paper discussed the iconography of (originally 'trophy' and 'psy-ops') photographic images of sadistic punishment of prisoners. Comparing this coverage to the media myth-making surrounding the perceived heroism of Private Jessica Lynch in Iraq during 2003, Brunt considered how the media negotiated the shock of women as perpetrators of torture and pornographic imagery as a valuable starting point to think through media effects and 'decisive moments'.

Deborah Wilson, University of Lincoln, spoke on 'The Female Broadcast Journalist' and the 'Journalism of Association: Framing the News Agenda for BBC Local Radio's "Dave and Sue"'. This paper interrogated the construction of Dave and Sue – a fictitious 55-year-old married couple whom BBC Local Radio had personified as their composite listeners. Drawing on the perceptions of women journalists working in BBC Radio Lincolnshire's newsroom, Wilson analysed whether women journalists exercise the greater level of empathy associated with the now common newsroom practice of the 'journalism of association'. She asked whether female broadcast journalists can actually empathise better with the target audience and questioned whether this necessarily made for better journalism or simply a more marketable news product.

Vicky Ball of the Postgraduate Network has collaborated with the WMSN to organise the debate 'Understanding New Femininities in Contemporary Popular Media'.

Julia Dane, University of East London spoke on

'Survival and Solidarity: Girls and Music Video'.

Drawing on both recent feminist and post-feminist debates about gendered power, she interrogated the representation of contemporary hypersexual autonomous femininity in music videos featuring popular female 'divas'. She then outlined her recent research with young girls in groups discussing these media femininities and their use of narratives of friendship, suffering, survival and financial independence to identify or disengage with different female media icons.

Dee Amy-Chinn, Oxford Brookes University, engaged with gendered representations on popular TV programming such as 'Sex in the City', 'CSI' and 'Dr Who' to open up recent debates about new femininities and cross-generational identification with feminist and post-feminist scholarship. She debated Angela McRobbie's recent argument that 'Sex and the City' has given rise to "complicitous critique" – a mode of scholarship that engages in a feminist perspective but suspends critical engagement with wider political and economic conditions. In conclusion, she drew on the popular character of Rose Tyler in the 2005 revival of 'Dr Who', to suggest that she embodies an ethics of care that has strong roots in feminism and feminist philosophy, and that crosses age, class, gender, race, and even species, barriers. This may offer an alternative model for young women and could appeal to both feminist and post-feminist generations.

'Just joking? Positioning humour in contemporary life' organised by Margaret Montgomerie, De Montfort University was held on March 10th to celebrate International Women's Day.

Publicity

A postcard flyer has been designed and produced this year by the organising committee to promote the WMSN and encourage new members of the mailing list and potential seminar organisers.

Mailing List

The WMSN mailing list continues to be successfully used by members. Thanks to Ann Butler at Sheffield Hallam for her support mailing messages.

Heather Nunn teaches at Roehampton University and is Chair of the Women's Media Studies Network.

The OU, Media Studies and New Times

By David Hesmondhalgh

I've spent much of the last few years putting together with colleagues a new undergraduate media course for the Open University. During this time, many people have asked me questions about the OU system and about the new course, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to answer them and to reflect on what we've done. I should make it clear that this is a personal view, and others who've worked on the course may well see things differently. This is not the official university version either.

OU students can draw on the support of local tutors, but most of their study is done alone, at home or at work. The majority of students have been away from formal education for many years. So it's vital that OU materials are clear, cogent and academically rigorous. OU courses (which usually form one-sixth of an honours degree programme) are produced by teams of OU and external academics, tutors, professional editors, media producers, technicians, designers and others.* This course team system of production is astoundingly intensive. That it's survived decades of managerialist drives for greater efficiency in the public sector is a minor miracle of academic autonomy.

Members of OU course teams read each other's work in a number of different drafts – at least three – and make comments at a series of meetings. To sit listening while a number of very bright people make detailed criticisms of your work is a character-building business. I've never heard of such meetings ending with a group hug. The process is wonderfully stimulating but unless you have a vast and impermeable ego, at times it's pretty terrifying. But it does produce a degree of rigour and clarity.

Courses are nearly always centred on a series of books, consisting of a small number of longish chapters that include readings from other authors and student activities. Some of these are co-published and are used in other universities. But courses also involve a range of other materials which rarely make their way beyond the OU: study guides, audio CDs, videos and DVDs, websites and, increasingly, interactive material on disk.

And of course there was television. It's an inexorable

law of nature that any middle class person over the age of 30, when introduced to someone who works for the Open University, will make a remark that includes reference to beards and/or bad jumpers and/or jackets with elbow patches. Once the OU employee has wiped away the tears of helpless mirth that inevitably follow such remarks, she or he will usually explain that OU programmes stopped looking like that many years ago and – with some regret – that course programmes will no longer be shown on the BBC from 2006 onwards. The Open University still makes a substantial amount of television for the BBC, but these are general educational programmes – the best-known are probably *Rough Science*, *Coast* and *The Mark Steel Lectures* – and are not linked directly to courses. Instead, the emphasis – and quite a bit of the cash – has shifted to the production of web-based and DVD-rom teaching material.

Media and cultural studies at the OU

Why's all this relevant to Three-D? Well, the OU has had quite a role to play in the development of media studies. Even in the USA, it often gets a mention alongside the usual and now-tedious invocations of Birmingham cultural studies. The OU's 'Mass Communication and Society' (1977-1982) and 'Popular Culture' (1981-7) courses were hugely important in Britain. Many well-known media-studies names authored teaching materials: Tony Bennett, James Curran, Stuart Hall, and John Hartley, to name some contrasting examples. Dozens more cut their media studies teeth teaching courses at OU summer schools and local centres in the 1970s and 1980s. Literally thousands of students took the courses as part of social science, humanities and other programmes. And of course hundreds of thousands watched the OU's TV stuff. Communication, film and television studies barely existed in Britain before the early 1980s so these courses filled a huge hole for many who wanted to engage with the media and popular culture.

The most recent OU contribution to undergraduate media and cultural studies was 'Culture, Media and Identities', launched in 1997 and chaired by Stuart Hall. By the 1990s, the Open University was producing some of its teaching materials with publishers such as Sage,

Routledge and Blackwell. The 'Walkman book' which introduces Culture, Media and Identities, and Hall's own edited collection on Representation, have become well-known beyond the OU, along with other books in the associated series. The course also introduced the much-cited 'Circuit of Culture', really a development of Hall's earlier encoding/decoding model.

The new course

For those of us charged with the responsibility of developing the new OU media course, its earlier achievements were hard acts to follow. One of the most interesting aspects of working on the course (which, typically for OU courses, has a thrilling title: 'Understanding Media') has been to observe the ways in which it ended up reflecting shifts in the field of media analysis and shifts in the big wide world beyond it.

The mandate of the 'Understanding Media' course team was to provide a secure foundation in media analysis for a new generation of OU students – and for others reading our published textbooks. At the beginning we faced a major dilemma. Should we, in an introductory course, stick with the production–texts–audiences trio which is at the heart of most ways in which the field is pedagogically carved up (including Hall et al.'s circuit of culture)? Or should we try to innovate beyond it? With some anxiety that the trio was becoming stale through familiarity, we decided to use it as the basis of the structure of the course.

But in other respects, we have departed significantly from what a media studies course in the 1990s would have looked like. For many years, well-rehearsed tensions between political economy and cultural studies have divided the field (and, for better or for worse, saying they are 'boring' has not made them go away). The troubled legacy of post-structuralism is surely relevant here too: some cultural studies have thoroughly engaged with this legacy, others are more akin to a kind of mainstream sociology. Some of these differences have turned – and continue to turn – on epistemological arguments about constructionism versus realism versus positivism. All this has, I think, led to real difficulties on some undergraduate media courses in bringing these various approaches and positions into dialogue with each other. In many universities, the compromise has been that particular modules are taught by critical realists/political economists; others by post-structuralists

and constructionists; and others by what academics focused more on popular culture itself. Or, worse, entire courses in effect pursue one line.

For many amongst a new generation, whatever their own preferences, an adequate grounding in media critique needs to take serious account both of post-structuralism and of the Marxian approaches that were sometimes portrayed as a thing of the past in the 1990s. Rather than advocating a particular approach, the 'Understanding Media' team encouraged its authors to put different perspectives on particular topics into dialogue – including more mainstream and 'centrist' positions. Across the course, our goal was to avoid caricature and un-necessary simplification so that students gain a real understanding of the different approaches on offer. The challenge was not to let this tip over into a bland relativism. I'd like to think that the preferences of individual authors shine through in their presentation of alternative approaches, in spite of this balancing act. Strong views emerge throughout the books.

Changing politics, changing media teaching

The course reflects changed political priorities too. For all kinds of understandable historical reasons, the political orientation of many cultural and media studies teachers in the 1990s, like many on the left in general, was towards questions of difference and identity. The politics of culture became central. Some accounts seemed to come close to presenting culture as coterminous with politics, or even with the social. This was the aftermath of 1989, the period where political debate was dominated by conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and by the continuing struggle for gender and ethnic recognition. To put it another way, this was the world before the WTO protests, before 9-11 and Afghanistan, before the second Gulf War.

The politics of identity and difference remain key in the new course, but I suspect there is much greater attention to issues of social inequality, class and imperialism than there would have been if we had been producing the course ten years earlier. And the issue of market liberalism crops up a good deal – especially in the book on Media Production I've edited, but not just there. For many years, consumption was where the action was felt to be in cultural and media studies, and was often understood as the privileged site of cultural creativity. Understanding Media's book on audiences, edited by

Marie Gillespie, has a different inflection, and is centrally concerned with the experience of living in nations increasingly penetrated by transnational media flows. Here too, neo-liberalism, in its many guises, is a spectre haunting the teaching material.

In trying to create a new distance-learning media studies course for the first decade of the twenty first century, we've tried to draw upon as wide a range as possible of critical media scholarship. Readings from over 70 authors are integrated into the textbooks, hundreds more are cited. And this takes me to the final point I want to make here. Confronted by the pressures of audit, grant-getting, and packed classrooms, it's sometimes easy to feel despondent sometimes about the state of media and cultural studies. On bad days I certainly do. But as we put the course together, a different feeling predominated: that there is actually an inspiring body of critical media work to draw upon in meeting the challenge of teaching

the media to new audiences. As for whether the Understanding Media course team has drawn upon this work successfully – that's for others to judge.

* The Understanding Media series is published by Open University Press, in association with the Open University (<http://mcgraw-hill.co.uk/openup/ou>). OU courses are collective enterprises and the Understanding Media team included the following people who may be known to MeCCSA members: as members of the core academic team, Richard Collins, Jessica Evans, Marie Gillespie, Hugh Mackay and Jason Toynbee; as OU chapter authors, Tony Bennett and David Herbert; as external consultant authors, Frances Bonner, Gill Branston, Nick Couldry, John Downey, Jostein Gripsrud, Sonia Livingstone and Gillian Ursell; as external assessors, Ann Gray and Peter Golding. But many others were involved too and further details can be found on <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/courses/da204/>

Just Gaming?

Seth Giddings and Helen Kennedy on studying games

The academic study of computer and video games is a rapidly growing multinational and multidisciplinary field. The first UK international conference on computer games in 2001, a UWE event organised by Helen Kennedy and Jon Dovey at the Watershed Media Centre, marked a key point in the development of 'game studies' from a loose network of researchers into a field with its own research association: DiGRA – the Digital Games Research Association.

Keynote speakers at that conference, such as Espen Aarseth and Henry Jenkins, have been instrumental in helping to establish game studies as an accepted discipline, which now has two peer-reviewed journals, regular international conferences and symposia and a growing presence in academic publishers' lists. Over 500 people attended the last two DiGRA events in Holland and Canada, with a third planned to take place in Tokyo in 2007. Smaller symposia in the UK have also helped to drive the research agenda. 'Power Up' in 2003, addressed questions of ideology in computer games and play, looking for example at the ideological content of

simulation games, and whether game rules can be thought of in the same way as social rules. 'Playful Subjects' in 2005, concentrated on technology and players, tackling questions of human and non-human agency in videogame culture and play. Each symposium included contributions from international artists as well as academics.

The field that DiGRA seeks to represent now has a global reach, with researchers from across Europe, the Americas, Australasia and increasingly from Asia. It is characterised by a remarkable interdisciplinarity, with scholars from the social sciences, humanities, computer sciences, education, art and new media production industries. Most of these researchers study games within their own established disciplines, but some have argued that 'computer game studies' should be a discipline in its own right. The US and Scandinavia have to date led the way in the development and consolidation of the academic study of games. Internationally, there is a wide array of university courses which study games in relation to new media, digital culture, interactive narrative and cybercultures at places such as the

Comparative Media department at MIT in the USA, the ITU in Denmark, Bergen University in Norway, the University of Maastricht in Holland, and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia.

There is also a growing number of undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in the UK that specialise in computer game design and programming. This area has recently attracted the attention of Skillset, who have produced a set of accreditation standards for the vocational teaching of interactive media and computer games. Given the technical orientation of these initiatives it is important to highlight the parallel growth in attention given to computer games in cultural and media studies courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, often as part of a broader study of digital media. A significant number of these courses combine cultural theory with practical elements of production (at Newport and more recently Brunel, for example). Students, as consumers of games across a wide range of platforms and formats, are increasingly interested in having the chance to study these as an important aspect of their own cultural experience. Initially, the study of games culture was dominated by concerns around violence and behavioural 'effects', this being indicative of the kind of moral panic that has accompanied all popular media when they are new. The Columbine massacre and associated condemnation of games in the US was a galvanizing event in the generation of a more rigorous academic response to games. The pattern of the development of media forms suggests that moral panic is eventually followed by cultural acceptance. The Barbican's 'Game On' exhibition in 2002 perhaps exemplifies this process – it is symptomatic of the way that games have 'come of age' culturally (www.gameonweb.co.uk). Their appearance in the gallery signifies the way that they have now moved from subculture to mainstream. This process includes, of course, the attention they are receiving in the academy.

The study of these previously marginalised or overlooked forms and practices also promises to challenge the theoretical and methodological assumptions of cultural and media studies. For instance, whilst the methods of textual analysis developed in media studies are very useful in the study of video and computer games (drawn as they often are from the images, scenarios and dynamics of television and

cinema), these interactive media offer their own analytical puzzles. Established narrative theories, for example, cannot easily be applied to a multilinear and interactive media 'text'. The notion of representation is fundamental to cultural and media studies, yet computer games can also be productively thought of as simulations, dynamic spatio-temporal models of existing or fictional worlds and processes. Play itself proves an elusive object of study, both conceptually and practically, challenging dichotomous accounts of 'passive' consumption and 'active' production. Videogame play – so often characterised by rapt and near immobile attention on the part of the player when at their most productive – is particularly difficult to study ethnographically. An international seminar will take place in Sweden this Spring with invited speakers from UWE and the Institute of Education with a particular interest in the use of video for participant observation and micro-ethnographic studies of gameplaying, to share their insights and to develop new conceptual frameworks. These developments in theory and research methods may offer new ways to study 'old' media as they become increasingly integrated into interactive digital platforms.

Useful Resources

Books:

- Atkins, Barry (2003) *More than a Game: the computer game as fictional form*, Manchester: Manchester University Press
Dovey and Kennedy (forthcoming May 2006) *Game Cultures*, Open University Press
King and Krzywinska (eds) (2002) *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, London: Wallflower
Lister et al (2003) *New Media: a critical introduction*, London: Routledge
Rutter and Bryce (eds.) (in press) *Understanding Digital Games*, London: Sage
Wolf, J.P. and Perron, B (eds.) (2003) *The Video Game Theory Reader*, London: Routledge

Journals:

- Games and Culture* (Sage: first issue – 2006)
Game Studies <http://www.gamestudies.org>

Web sites:

- <http://powerup.motime.com>
<http://www.playfulsubjects.org>
<http://www.digra.org>

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Conference Reports

Vana Goblot reports on 'Media Policy — Making and Power' held at Goldsmiths College, 23rd September 2005

Media policy processes in Britain today are said to be rapidly growing in size, changing direction, and shifting in their balance of power. These were some of the central problematics addressed at a symposium held in September 2005, organized by Goldsmiths College's Unit for Journalism Research and by Des Freedman. The symposium offered four thematically distinct panels and invited a broad mix of government, industry and academic positions, comparing the past and present of regulation, national and supranational dimensions, general and specific perspectives, some of which were reflections on 2003 Communications Bill and challenges facing the upcoming Charter Review.

The opening paper by Professor of Government Michael Moran set the tone of the symposium by defining distinctive national features of the British regulatory system. Articulating key shifts that have occurred in the past 40 years, Moran claimed that the club government approach, with its non-democratic and metropolitan foundations, was the key feature. The major changes today involve incredible growth in the size of regulatory communities, with the very nature of procedures shifting from the tacit, informal and collegial to an explicit, formal, and instrumental mode. Cultural historian Jean Seaton problematised Moran's implications as rather inadequately fitting British broadcasting policy, in which example "the club government produced a world class organisation". According to Seaton, fierce competition in creative content lies at the heart of good regulation of electronic media.

Des Freedman, author of 'Television Policy and the Labour Party', was more interested in structural changes and the conduct of policy processes. In his latest research based on interviews with 40 media policy makers, Freedman arrived at the pessimistic conclusion that the transparency and growing pool of consultations do not necessarily democratise policy making processes as decision making power still resides in a tightly controlled group. Freedman's findings resonated through differing responses in the second panel. Lord David Puttnam, Joint Scrutiny Committee Chair, spoke of his crucial role in the 2003 Communications Bill, detailing the complexities involved in the consultation process, and in defining the role of the electronic content regulator, Ofcom.

We learnt how the rather narrow focus in media reports on the lifting of restrictions on foreign ownership had a damaging effect on public awareness of more crucial issues surrounding the Bill. Perhaps most significantly, Lord Puttnam felt that Ofcom wasn't sufficiently distinguishing citizen from consumer.

Bill Bush, former special adviser to Tessa Jowell, DCMS, saw the Communications Bill as facing an 'explosion of plurality', impossible to do from the very narrow core of those in position of power. He saw it as the sum of a great many contributions and all sides of society, including the campaigning group Public Voice, whose input Bush considered highly influential. However, Public Voice's Don Redding, who fought to secure citizens' rights in the final 2003 Act, largely agreed with Freedman, suggesting that the public views are elicited but almost always ignored, defining Ofcom as an 'impenetrable organization'. He saw the 2003 Bill as being already an historical document, given the rapid application of convergence technologies to create new challenges which need more attention.

The opening panel in the afternoon session addressed issues of press regulation. David Seymour, Daily Mirror political editor, focused on technological changes and their impact, amongst others, on declining press circulation, and the eventual end of print. For Seymour, technology changed the nature of journalistic practices, introduced more effective self-regulation at the workplace — and increased risks of hasty mistakes, some of which he demonstrated through some of the more controversial Mirror headlines.

Eric Barendt, professor of Law at UCL, explored the problematic of the lack of regulation of press. Barendt explored the implications of the demise of the Royal Commission, and questions of ownership, privacy laws and freedom of speech that are dealt with by neither the government nor the law.

Professor James Curran carefully examined why different strategies of reform successful elsewhere, such as social market policy, failed to have any impact in Britain. The complex dynamic between politicians' fear of the concentration of power in ownership, and a strong libertarian

legacy, are, according to Curran, key reasons why press regulation is a failed project in Britain.

The closing panel focused on an evaluation of Ofcom and BBC's Charter Renewal. Jamie Cowling, currently at the DCMS, acknowledged the changes in media policy and focused on the role of public participation, assuring us that the Government is working harder than ever to secure a very wide spectrum of public input. Robin Foster, former head of strategy and currently special adviser for Ofcom, explained the consultation process in Ofcom's public service broadcasting strategy. The large majority of the interviewed public still wish to preserve public service broadcasting and the more informed and knowledgeable types of programmes. The most controversial part of Ofcom's proposals, Foster noted, concerned the expansion of the use of the licence fee to cover PSB providers other than BBC, notably Channel 4, or a new model of PSB for the future, such as a public service publisher. David Levy, BBC controller of public policy, addressed the issue that the Charter Review is no longer a one-off event. According to Levy, Ofcom's and Barwise's reviews, amongst others, are very influential in redefining the role of public service broadcasting and the shape of Charter Review. He agreed that the greatest change

is in the number of policy inputs, but was cautious about technocratic debates following 'flavours of the month' rather than focusing on important issues.

Underpinning many themes explored by the speakers was the underestimation of the pace of changes in broadcasting sector, but also the emerging important role of the EU in the policy process, about which we learnt more in the closing address of the conference by Granville Williams from the Television without Frontiers directive.

The symposium's success, however, rested not solely in the speakers' contributions, but in harnessing a valuable dialogue between media academics and a broad section of policy makers and journalists. The highly intelligible, insightful and important questions that greeted all the panels from the mixed audience, transformed the symposium into a democratic forum, and will hopefully set an example for more future events of this kind.

Vana Goblot is researching a PhD at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Originally from Yugoslavia and now settled in the UK, she previously worked in television production and as a freelance journalist.

Leeds MeCCSA conference

Collectively written by six delegates from University of Central England Birmingham

We came from UCE Birmingham to Leeds by road and rail ready to immerse ourselves in some intellectual stimulation and team bonding and to bring together our collective thoughts for those who couldn't make it this year. We stake our claim to being the largest university cohort, although it was pleasing to see that the delegate list contained sizable groups from other universities. MeCCSA conferences always create just the right atmosphere for forging new contacts and renewing long-running acquaintances, and for balancing the intellectual endeavour and sociability that characterises the field.

Those driving explored Leeds' loop inner ring road a few times before arriving at the conference hotel. The conference venue and hotels were within a few minutes walk of each other, and of the restaurants and bars of central Leeds which buzzed with discussions of media communication and cultural studies for the long weekend.

The conference was hosted by Leeds Metropolitan University's School of Cultural Studies at the Carriageworks

Theatre and the Electric Press Building both in Millennium Square. This was generally an excellent venue, with good rooms for the individual sessions, and very nice theatre for the plenaries and screenings, and some good common spaces for inter-sessions discussions.

The public transport users managed to make the first set of sessions. The title of one set up the conflict between education and vocationalism before anyone had even got to Leeds, and clear battle lines were drawn in the room between notions of 'education' and 'training'. Or rather, between MeCCSA and Skillset. Heady stuff for day one. This is a long running debate, of course, one in which each organisation claims their own high ground. Skillset see themselves as the definitive voice of the employer, making clear they are simply interested in the future development of the media industry by ensuring skills supply meets current and future demand. MeCCSA on the other hand gleefully point out the narrowness of the Skillset position whilst getting increasingly anxious about Skillset's creeping influence in the HE sector. The debate will run and run, but

there was little here to suggest that we can all agree that the study of the media is a worthy end in itself, that critical skills are employability skills, and that as many students take media courses because they want media jobs we should help them get them. At UCE we sometimes don't see the problem.

The keynote plenary was made by Professor Michele Hilmes from the University of Madison-Wisconsin. Looking beyond simplistic notions of Americanisation in the cultural relationships between British and US broadcasters, Michele drew examples from some key points in the development of radio and television to open up the way that for each nation's broadcasters the other became a reference point for explaining and justifying domestic broadcast practice and policy. In essence Michele claimed that the influence was much more inter-active and discursive than is usually portrayed. This was an excellent choice for the first plenary, as Michele mixed an accessible style with some interesting examples of radio and television output, and an insightful commentary.

The early evening offered up the Vice-Chancellor's reception and welcome by Lord Mayor at Leeds' very grand Civic Hall. The wine flowed and the speeches were witty and not too long. Then everyone we talked to got down to discussing the extract of *Cop Rock* screened at the plenary. This allowed MeCCSA members with encyclopaedic knowledge of British television schedules to demonstrate that this 'cop show with stage singing in a contemporary style' that Michele had used to demonstrate a UK-US cultural interaction was actually screened on BBC1 primetime without ever capturing the collective imagination.

Bright and early on Saturday morning three of our UCE party were presenting the results of a research and training project into developments in online music enterprise, while parallel sessions grouped together papers around the themes of women and news, newspapers and radio, regionalism and globalism, social history, science, nature, and hegemony. It was a pleasure to see a strong thread of media history and concern with media as history (if the two are divisible) running through this year's conference. Saturday morning began with a panel on 'Mediating Social History'. Papers explored the radio archives of BBC Northern Ireland (Stephen Douds), the excellent BBC TV series 'Nation on Film' (producer Tony Parker) and RTE's use of streaming technologies to upload elements of its own archives (Liam Wylie). These papers explored the nature and unevenness of media archives, the kinds of historical work that can be done with them, what they tell us about the changing nature of

representation (Douds) and, in the case of Parker and Wylie, how such material is reworked into a form of public history – via TV or the web. This prompts us to wonder at the ways in which such work meets with that of the traditional historian and to what degree media history presents its own particular interpretative problems and opportunities – certainly in communicating with a wider audience.

All the reports praised the quality of the papers, but everyone agreed that with so many papers running at the same time they missed out on other papers they wanted to hear.

Professor Hong Fan from Tsinghua University, Beijing gave the second plenary on 'Chinese Journalism and Communication Education in the Global Context'.

One of the undoubted pleasures of this year's MeCCSA was the variety of modes of presentation and events available alongside the more formal delivery of papers. (This extended to an open-air ice-rink outside of the venue for which the organisers are to be congratulated). Tending to reinforce the dominance of the audio-visual media within our field there were several screenings – all entertaining nonetheless. On Saturday, Lizzie Thynne of Sussex University presented her film 'Playing a Part'. Concerning the extraordinary life of Claude Cahun (Nee Lucy Schwob), this experimental biopic told of a trail-blazing personal life, contribution to surrealist photography and resistance to the German occupation of Jersey in WWII. This was an intriguing act of biographical retrieval that at times made one of us wonder whether we were viewing an elaborate fiction – which is meant as a compliment. Moving and innovative, Thynne's work deserves a wider audience, if only to demonstrate how AHRC money can be spent in original and instructive ways.

Saturday afternoon had another set of interesting panels. The discussion of ways of disseminating media practice was far more positive than earlier discussions of this issue elsewhere. It was a shame that an interesting report on sharing postgraduate networking wasn't considered after an initial presentation by Salvatore Scifo [see page 5 for a report by Salvatore on networking – ed.].

There was also some AHRC money behind the presentation of the films of Mitchell and Kenyon which were discussed and presented in a panel on 'Films as History'. Vanessa Toulmin (National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield) and Karen Alexander (BFI) spoke on the discovery, management, availability and use of the archive – well known through a related TV series. Those that came to the panel

wondering what such archival material says were comprehensively answered in this panel. Simon Gunn's deft paper on urban space and social history in particular demonstrated what a close reading of the films could do. This was one of the highlights of the conference.

There were a number of panels on television, cinema, advertising and new media in this section, and here the clustering of topics made it even harder for visual medium scholars to choose. It's certainly not easy to programme a conference, but too many simultaneous panels on a narrow range of topics seems most likely to increase the problem. A group with experience of conference programming should produce some 'rules of thumb' for future organisers.

Richard Berry's paper on Podcasting argued it was "radio in a converging world... the start of a personal revolution, where broadcasting, digital music and mobile communications collide". While Lizzie Jackson, editor of online communities at BBC New Media, tracked the BBC's move from broadcaster to "host", and its listeners and viewers to members.

Alison Preston's report on research at Ofcom was presented at the third plenary, and was most informative. She is a senior research associate for strategy and market research. It is encouraging to see staff from media regulatory bodies at academic conferences. After the presentation, researchers in the field raised questions about the engagement of statutory bodies and academia. Although no one in the audience was completely happy with Ofcom's position it certainly felt like there was something to build on in the future.

There were meetings for MeCCSA and AMPE in the afternoon that are reported elsewhere in this issue. The evening's conference meal combined eating, drinking and more debate, with appropriate speeches thanking all those who put in the vast amounts of hard work involved in organising and running the conference.

Mitchell and Kenyon made a further appearance in the evening as a number of delegates rushed from the Conference dinner to catch a further screening entitled 'Electric Edwardians and Leeds'. This was a gratifying way of acknowledging our host city – something conferences rarely do in such explicit fashion – as this unique archive was explored for its record of Leeds and environs. The screening was introduced and glossed in engaging manner by Vanessa Toulmin who reiterated the myriad ways in which such material 'speaks' about the form of early film, its

exhibition and social history. To underline the surprising modes of presentation and thought that had gone into this year's event this screening was accompanied by Stephen Home on keyboard and effects.

The city and hotel bars then played host to the most important part of any conference: talking long into the night.

Of course, we then needed to be up for the last half day of papers. The 9.30 papers had good audiences. It was good to see some practical papers on media pedagogy, along with a variety of sessions arching over the media, its audiences and culture. The Radio Studies Network session on regulation involved stimulating presentations and discussion, but sadly only brought in scholars from the Network. This reinforced the feeling that radio is seen by many as marginal to media, communication and cultural studies, while being one of the oldest and most prevalent media. As a counter, Mike Henfield's parallel paper explored the increase in audio plagiarism due to "cut and paste" culture liberally sprinkled with audio examples and amusing anecdotes.

Dr Nick Couldry from London School of Economics presented the final plenary on 'The Difference Media Make'. This was followed by a choice of debates and screenings. Darren Long, Head of Collections and Information, BFI and Professor John Ellis, Royal Holloway, debated the future of the BFI National Library and Archive. Dee Amy-Chinn, Oxford Brookes University and Julia Dane, University of East London, debated new femininities in the media. And Lloyd Peters presented a screening of 'Now You See Her' (Peters/Cullen, 2003). A final clutch of sessions drew together probably the most eclectic set of papers in the conference. Faye Davies presented her work on representations of lesbian culture in 'The L Word' (a US import somewhere on satellite TV) along with Chris Pullen's look at 'Queer as Folk' and Sherryl Wilson's dissection of 'Six Feet Under'. There were also panels on media practice in the classroom (or radio studio), film and TV sound and drama, video games, institutions, and audiences.

Overall we went back to Birmingham feeling we had enjoyed an excellent conference with a good range of stimulating papers on relevant research and pedagogic issues.

Compiled by Tim Wall from contributions by Sam Coley, Faye Davies, Andrew Dubber, Dave Harte and Paul Long (the UCE Birmingham delegation).

A media and cultural studies 'race' network for MeCCSA

Following a proposal by Ashwani Sharma and Roshini Kempadoo of the School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies, University of East London, the MeCCSA executive has agreed to the establishment of a 'race' network. This will provide a space to support and promote the work of young and established black (which in the context of this network means individuals of African, Asian, Arab, or Caribbean heritage) academics, lecturers, researchers and media practitioners working in Higher Education. The network will facilitate the sharing of information, develop and promote research and seek publishing and production opportunities for black individuals in the fields of media, film, music, communications and cultural studies. It will also be concerned with research into racial and cultural equality in the academy. Further details of how the network will run are still being discussed, but anyone interested in getting involved should contact Ash and Roshini at the email addresses below.

There has been an increasing recognition of issues of race, ethnicity, 'cultural diversity' and equal opportunities in Higher Education in Britain. Significantly, this is not reflected in the recruitment and promotion of black lecturers, practitioners and researchers particularly in the fields of media and cultural studies. The AUT 'Diverse Academy' report in 2005 confirmed that UK nationals from black and Asian backgrounds are significantly under-represented in HE. While there are increasing numbers of black students on undergraduate media courses with some undertaking postgraduate study, relatively few continue with a career in academia.

The network will identify and disseminate areas of good practice. Given the globalised context of academia and the diasporic nature of the network, it will promote equitable exchange of information, knowledge and research for students and staff in Europe and the international context. The network will also promote and contribute to public debate and agenda setting on 'race' in the areas of media and culture.

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MeCCSA Executive Ballot Report

Half the Executive Committee seats were up for election in the ballot preceding the AGM and the following were elected:

Helen Baehr (University of Roehampton); Anita Biressi (University of Lincoln); Barbara Cairns (University of Stirling); Gillian Doyle (University of Glasgow); Christine Geraghty (The Open University); David Hesmondhalgh (The Open University); Karen Ross (University of Coventry).

The AGM thanked Sally Munt for all her hard work in her years of the Executive Committee, remembering in particular the very successful MeCCSA conference at Sussex. At its meeting in February the Executive Committee resolved to invite Justin Lewis from Cardiff and Ash Sharma to become co-opted members of the Committee. This has been done and both have accepted.

Closing Credits

Three-D (Issue 7: April 2006)
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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
Treasurer: Gillian Doyle, University of Stirling

Full details of the Association, including how to join, along with a full list of the Executive Committee for 2006 can be found on the MeCCSA web-site at www.meccsa.org.uk