

## MECCSA Women's Media Studies Network Newsletter April 2004

### Events

There have been two network events since our last newsletter. The first was organised by Karin Wahl-Jorgenson and Rebecca Farley and hosted by the School of Journalism Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2003. This 'Women's Mentoring Day' consisted of two round table panels addressing the vital issues of 'Succeeding in the Academy' and 'Getting Grants'. Speakers included Terry Threadgold, Jenny Kitzinger and Cindy Carter (all from Cardiff) and Katharine Sarikakis (Coventry). This was a successful day that enabled both postgraduates and academics to share their experiences and expertise.

The second event, organised by Jane Arthurs at University of West of England, was held on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004 at the excellent Watershed Media Centre. Provocatively entitled "The 'New Sexism'" the day consisted of illustrated presentations followed by an open debate focusing on the new formations of sexism in popular culture and feminist strategies of intervention.

This successful day addressed the resurgence of sexist forms of discourse and imagery in the popular media including advertising, romantic comedy and men's lifestyle magazines. A convincing case was made that we have now moved beyond the ironic sexism of the 1990s into a new period of post-ironic 'retrosexism' in which factors such as nostalgia, postfeminism, permissive populism and so on have validated a reinvigoration of sexist language and imagery.

In her paper 'Down with Love: The feminine mistake' Kathrina Glitre (UWE) explored some of the continuities between the sex comedy, postfeminism and the 'new' sexism, and particularly the nostalgic return to the American iconography of the fifties and sixties through the resurrection of the sex comedy. In doing so she charted the retrogressive move from irony to 'insincerity' and surface and the transformation of a self-conscious gender performativity to a more overt emphasis on gender consumption and a de-politicised feminine space.

In 'Retrosexism in Popular Culture' Judith Williamson (freelance) challenged our unwillingness to name sexism in the present moment. She argued that this timidity has encouraged sexism to develop either as a form of nostalgia or as cutting edge radicalism. By locating sexism as a sign of the past, popular cultural images are emptied of political content. Using advertising as an example, Williamson suggested that at a time when sexist imagery not only persists but also flourishes we have deprived ourselves of the language to analyse it as such.

Kate Brooks' (UWE) presentation 'Loaded with Meaning: working with men researching men's lifestyle magazines' moved the debate into the domain of consumption by outlining her research on the dynamics of male consumer discourse. The talk usefully provided a broader context for understanding the new sexism by highlighting issues of class, tabloidisation and masculinity in post new-lad culture. Her account of the research ethics and strategies necessarily employed by a feminist academic in interviewing male readers and exploring gender politics also foregrounded the challenge of intervening in the production and consumption of sexist representation; a challenge which was the subject of much animated debate in the open forum that followed.

A number of people involved in the organisation of this day event are also members of the Gender and Culture Research Group in the School of Cultural Studies at UWE. The group aims to foster shared discussion groups, projects and public events. For more information please contact Jane Arthurs at [jane.arthurs@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:jane.arthurs@uwe.ac.uk). Jane is also interested in continuing the debates raised at the WMSN event via the WMSN website.

### **Future Events**

Karen Ross (Coventry) is organising the next event on the Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2004, to be hosted by Manchester University, on the theme of gender and reality television. To register please email Karen on [k.ross@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:k.ross@coventry.ac.uk)

If you would like to propose an event to be hosted by your institution please email Heather Nunn at [h.nunn@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:h.nunn@roehampton.ac.uk) to discuss your ideas.

### **WMSN Organising Committee**

The committee for 2004 is chaired by Heather Nunn and consists of Anita Biressi, Ros Brunt, Cindy Carter, Margaret Montgomerie, Karen Ross and Milly Williamson.

Once again we would like to thank Ann Butler for managing the WMSN email list.

The Committee met on Monday April 5<sup>th</sup> 2004.

Present : Heather Nunn, Anita Biressi, Margaret Montgomerie, Karen Ross.

Apologies from: Ros Brunt, Cindy Carter, Milly Williamson, Ann Butler

Agenda items included:

- Strategies to prolong the life of events via email discussion and the posting of papers on line.
- The promotion of forthcoming WMSN events.
- Budgeting and charges for events.
- Call for papers for panels under the WMSN umbrella for the next MeCCSA conference to be held at Lincoln in January 2005.
- The scheduling of the Network meeting at Lincoln to optimise attendance.
- The return of Showcasing Women as a space to promote women's practice and scholarship for the Lincoln Conference.
- New initiatives to maintain and improve the WMSN webpage.

See the next email newsletter for progress reports on actions arising from these discussions.