

## Report on *Theorising Practice, Practising Theory*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2013, the Media, Culture and Language Forum and the Centre for Research in Film and Audiovisual Cultures (CRFAC) at the University of Roehampton hosted the postgraduate training workshop entitled *Theorising Practice, Practising Theory*. Around forty delegates from institutions across the UK and Ireland attended and participated in a full day of presentations, screenings and discussion around practice-as-research in film and screen media studies. University of Roehampton practice-based PhD student Holly Giesman led the workshop, supported by fellow postgraduate MCL Forum organiser Theodora Thomadakis.

Eight research students—at various stages from first year through to completed Viva—presented papers on their practice research. All of the presenters showed clips of screen media practice associated with their PhD projects during their presentations and four of them screened their practice work in full after their presentations. The first panel of the day, “Theory into Practice”, included Eirini Konstantinidou (Brunel University) and Catalin Brylla (Goldsmiths, University of London). Eirini discussed her completed practice-as-research doctoral project, which began as a purely theoretical enquiry into the relationship between film and memory and the notion of ‘artificial’ memories. She subsequently decided to explore these themes further through her film *Mnemophrenia* with the aim that the theoretical might “become alive” through her film. *Mnemophrenia* was screened in full after the panel. Following Eirini’s presentation, first-year PhD student Catalin Brylla gave a presentation about the theoretical framework and methodology for his documentary practice PhD project and shared some of the results of his in-

progress literature review. Catalin's research explores the cinematic representation of blindness and subjectivity, and he is aiming to "transpose the way [blind artists] perceive themselves and their environment into an equivalent (not identical) audience experience." His chosen methods are informed by audience reception theory, specifically cognitive theory and phenomenology. Catalin also showed clips from some early filming he has done with blind artists.

The second panel, "Exploring participation and representation" included Allister Gall (Plymouth University), Shireen Shortt (Dublin Institute of Technology), and Shannon Magness (University of Sussex). Allister's PhD looks at the notion of 'imperfect' or 'punk' filmmaking practice and ways of exploring alternative and emerging arts culture. His work is based on his experience of running a no budget, DIY film collective, and he is particularly interested in the process involved in this kind of filmmaking. He discussed the importance of participation, collaboration, shared experience, interaction and conviviality and showed clips from in-progress films being made by his film collective. Shireen Shortt's presentation also explored participatory media practice as she talked about her work with stigmatised youth in inner-city Dublin and about facilitating their use of various digital media to share aspects of their identities. Her work explores her research participants' self-representation as well as their collaboration with her as co-producers of knowledge. Shannon Magness then discussed her nearly completed practice-led PhD project in which she made a documentary film with her distant cousin in the United States—someone she considers to be 'politically opposite' to her and an 'extreme other'. Her work explored Michael Renov's concept of 'domestic ethnography' as well as her attempts to represent her cousin in an 'unfinalizable' way. Shannon's film *U Know Them By Their Fruit* was screened in full after the panel.

The third panel of the day explored affective and integrated approaches in screen media practice-as-research and included Matthew Hawkins (Coventry University), Vicky Smith (University of Creative Arts), and Heidi Hasbrouck (Goldsmiths). Inspired by 1920s Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov's writing and methods, Matthew argued for a return to considering theory and practice as symbiotic and for a method of "*thinking and doing* cinema simultaneously". His film *Bullseye*, which screened in full after the panel, experiments with narrative by foregrounding affective elements over the traditional structures of cause and effect. Vicky Smith also discussed an integrated approach to theory and practice as she presented on her PhD research into making film without cameras. She talked about how her performance and presentation of 'physical films' leads to discussion, reading, writing and theorising about the relationship between the body and film and links to the feminist reappraisal of expanded cinema. In her project *Making Film Like Me*, Vicky uses the body to animate imagery directly onto film. Three of these physical films—1) *bicycle tyre track*, 2) *100 feet* and 3) *documentation of these as performances*—were screened in full after the panel. Heidi Hasbrouck then embodied the integration of theory and practice in her performance/presentation. Adopting and enacting the persona of an American Diner waitress (she even served coffee to some of the workshop delegates as she presented), Heidi explored the political economy, iconography and affective labour of the waitress. Her work is informed by a feminist Marxist perspective, and she hopes that her research may help reveal ways of re-appropriating power. Sections from her documentary filmmaking with waitresses in a New Jersey diner played on the screen behind her as she presented ideas from her nearly completed PhD project.

Panel chairs Tony Dowmunt (Goldsmiths), Enrica Colusso (University of Roehampton), and Michael Chanan (University of Roehampton)—all active practitioner-scholars and audiovisual PhD (AVPhD) supervisors—provided insightful feedback on the presentations. The audience—comprised largely of AVPhD students, prospective students, and AVPhD supervisors—then participated enthusiastically in question and answer sessions following the presentations. After the workshop, many of the student presenters reported that they were very pleased with the useful feedback they received on their work both in the question and answer sessions and throughout the course of the day.

The workshop ended with a lively and interactive plenary roundtable. Michael Chanan (Professor of Film & Video Studies, University of Roehampton) began by talking about the history of theory/practice debates in film and screen studies in the UK. Tony Dowmunt (Senior Lecturer in Communications, Goldsmiths) then spoke about the AHRC-funded AVPhD initiative (2005-2008) and subsequent AVPhD activity and development. Alisa Lebow (Senior Lecturer in Film & TV, Brunel University) talked about her experience supervising AVPhD students, having herself come from a U.S. film studies background in which practice and theoretical work were not integrated. Enrica Colusso (Senior Lecturer in Film, University of Roehampton) talked about participatory and interactive approaches in practice research, specifically applied to the documentary form. Finally, Jeremy Bubb (Senior Lecturer in Film & Television Studies, University of Roehampton) spoke briefly about other initiatives and networks like AMPE (Association of Media Practice Educators), PaRIP (Practice as Research in Performance) and the MeCCSA (Media, Communication & Cultural Studies Association) Practice Network and about his experience working with dramatic, multi-screen, new media and other kinds of screen stories. Audience members raised questions and initiated discussion on topics like: the relationship

between practising and theorising in screen media research, proposing an audiovisual PhD project, timeframes for and managing practice-as-research work, supervisor/student working relationships, and audiovisual practice research outside of the UK and Ireland.

In summary, the organisers believe that *Theorising Practice, Practising Theory* provided an important space for presentation and discussion of practice-as-research in film and screen media studies. It served as a follow-up to previous practice-as-research initiatives like the AHRC-funded AVPhD event series of 2005-2008, as delegates revisited and updated earlier debates and discussions. For prospective or less experienced AVPhD students, supervisors and examiners who attended, *Theorising Practice, Practising Theory* served as a learning and training opportunity. Finally, the workshop served to build and strengthen a network of scholar-practitioners and postgraduate students. Organisers and delegates have already begun utilising social media to facilitate and maintain this network. AVPhD Facebook group membership has more than doubled in the week after the event took place. Finally, the University of Roehampton's Centre for Research in Film and Audiovisuals Cultures will be posting documentation of the event on its website. Additionally, editor Charlotte Crofts of the *Journal of Media Practice Screenworks* has offered to link to this event documentation from the JMP Screenworks website.