

## European Network for Cinema and Media Studies Conference. Budapest, 19–22 June 2008

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This was the second annual conference for the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS). NECS is one of the most significant international groupings of screen and media studies scholars to have emerged in recent years. Since its foundation in February 2006, the non-profit organization has grown considerably, with a total of 174 members from twenty-two countries in June 2007 rising to 395 from thirty-seven countries a year later. While at present Germany (19%) and Britain (15%) make up the majority, the rest of the membership cover a wide geographical range, including Brazil, China, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Korea, while delegates from Scandinavian and Central/Eastern European countries form two significant clusters. This broad constituency reflects the network's aim of encouraging exchange between scholars, archivists and programmers from many different nationalities in order to 'stimulate new developments and create a public for new concepts and ideas which will secure our discipline a place as an innovative engine of the humanities'.<sup>1</sup>

While many researchers within the group work on European cinema, the network does not confine itself solely to this subject area, declaring on its website: 'Our aim is the integration and prosperity of Europe and its cinema(s) without limiting the scope of our activities to European cinema and media'. Assisted by the benefits of an active website, NECS provides members with regular updates on forthcoming conferences,

<sup>1</sup> URL: <http://www.necs-initiative.org>

journal calls for papers and other general information in the broad discipline of screen studies, as well as a forum for posting publications.

An interesting feature is the formation of workgroups which gather together scholars interested in particular themes, including affects and audiovisual cultures; avant garde(s) and new wave(s); characters and persons in audiovisual media; digital cinema; film festival research; film industries; industrial, science and utility film research group; screenwriting; sexual representation; teaching materials; television industries and audiences. At the annual conference, those who have joined the various workgroups online meet to discuss the sharing of resources, scholarly materials and plans for research funding applications. Indeed, the broad geographical constituency of NECS seems to thrive on the opportunities it presents for the formation of specific sub-networks, bringing together people with similar interests who might otherwise find it difficult to make contact and sustain collaboration. Again, quoting from the website, NECS aims 'to foster exchange across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries' and 'to deepen and intensify cooperation in order to make truly comparative work possible'. Indeed, the dominant rhetoric informing NECS is resonant with the themes of crosscultural exchange, collaboration and cooperation which, on a broader intellectual level, represent 'the turn' towards the postnational.

The two conferences, each with somewhat broad titles, 'Perspectives and Challenges for Cinema and Media Studies' (Vienna, 2007) and 'New and Old Frames' (Budapest, 2008) have attracted an extremely wide range of delegates and subjects, ranging from transnationalism in Indian cinema, film aesthetics, the future of television studies, and the many and varied impacts of digital media. In Budapest, the chosen keynote speakers reflected the conference's broad reach and its aim to encompass academia as well as archival institutions. Silent cinema scholar William Uricchio opened the conference with his 'Reflections on a medium in transition', covering questions of archival priorities and new communication technologies in the new millennium. The second keynote speaker, Ivan Klimes of the Czech National Film Archive in Prague, represented both the sizeable Central European contingent and the interests and concerns of the archivist community. Pierre Sorlin's plenary address drew on early sociological (Emilie Altenloh and Georg Simmel) and psychological (Hugo Münsterberg) studies of the impact of cinema in order to consider whether cinema produced a change in our perception of the world. It is perhaps hardly surprising that an affirmative conclusion was drawn, through examples that emphasized the historicity of perception.

Given the range of different nationalities present, the research methodologies, theoretical paradigms and wider intellectual concerns presented across the four days were remarkably consistent and compatible, suggesting a supranational approach to cinema and media studies. Equally, there were often demonstrable links between

workgroups and panels, for example a panel on concepts and contexts of film production was clearly relevant to the primary concerns of the film industries workgroup. One paper on this panel detailed the problems facing the contemporary Turkish film industry, in particular the Antalya Studios which have failed to expand or become a site for international film production; another paper concentrated on trends towards regionalism in Swedish film production. A new feature at Budapest was the inclusion of three workshops: the first reported on a two-year project geared towards training doctoral students in using film archives; the second concentrated on online archives; the third on methodological challenges informed by a group of academics who have researched film exhibition and culture in cities, involving methods applied by local historians. As became clear in the closing annual general meeting, NECS is not standing still and the group's enthusiasm and ambitions were palpable – there are plans for an online and print peer-reviewed journal and to establish a graduate student committee.

As well as offering a lively platform for academic exchange via the provision of the website and annual conference, on a more pragmatic level the growth of NECS in a relatively short time is partly explained by its low-cost membership fee of twenty euros (ten for students). Thanks to the sponsorship of the University of Bochum (at which the majority of the steering committee is located) and additional local backers for each conference, other costs are kept down: for example there is no registration fee for members attending the annual conference. As previously in Vienna, local organization, resources and hospitality in Budapest were impeccable, amply showcased in the lavish evening receptions which set standards future conferences may find difficult to live up to.

Next year's conference venue, meanwhile, is already confirmed – the host will be the University of Lund in Sweden. In discussions about future venues, however, national differences became evident. For example, whereas Higher Education institutions in the UK regularly charge for the use of conference facilities, resulting in substantial registration fees for delegates, this practice seems less common in the rest of Europe. Conversely, delegates from the UK and the USA find it easier than their European colleagues to have their travel costs refunded by their employing institution. One can assume that the bridging of these different institutional practices across borders (which extend to other areas, including collaborative research projects) will constitute one of the main challenges for NECS in the coming years.