

CRESC News

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A successful conference on media change and social theory

David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee

If we can talk about tradition in such a young field, then media studies has not traditionally been informed by social theory to any great extent. The 2006 CRESC conference aimed to make a start in changing this situation. Organised by Theme 2, whose focus is 'Transformations in Media, Culture and Economy', the major goal was to cross-fertilise and reinvigorate media studies by opening up perspectives on the media in relation to larger questions of the social.

By all accounts the conference did this pretty successfully. There was a strong sense over the three sunny September days at St Hugh's College in Oxford that that this was just the right time for such an event, and perhaps history had a role to play here; the 'digital revolution' coinciding with cultural-political upheaval on an international scale. But the success of the conference was surely also the product of a new attentiveness on the part of researchers to the issue of framing the media, of how to pose worthwhile theoretical questions.

Certainly, the conference agenda struck an international chord - over 250 participants attended from twenty eight countries. The emergence of a set of common approaches across the international range of the contributions was in this context particularly interesting. The plenary addresses gave a good impression of this. In his opening contribution, Philip Schlesinger (University of Glasgow) proposed that the 'European Union provides an excellent case for analysing the fragility of the cosmopolitan vision' summoned up by certain social theorists. Against that vision, Schlesinger argued that public spheres remain national, and cosmopolitan identities elusive. Annabelle Sreberny (SOAS), who followed, focused on the letter of President Ahmadinejad of Iran to US President Bush in Spring 2006 which received no response from its addressee, yet was 'purloined' by the media. Sreberny argued the letter and events surrounding it repudiated any straightforward notion of communicative mutuality.

Toby Miller (Riverside) made the case that critical work on media production which focused on organisations was all well and good, but it needed a radical reorientation towards media workers themselves. Closing the conference, Daniel Hallin (UCSD) offered a *longue durée* view of the media system of the late twentieth century, and critically analysed the sometimes glib use of the term neoliberalism in understanding mediated communication during this period. Des Freedman (Goldsmiths) and Charles Briggs (UCSD) also spoke compellingly at the conference on that same topic of neoliberalism. Liesbet Van Zoonen (Amsterdam) analysed the online responses to the U.S. 'agony uncle', Doctor Phil, and detected not the hoped for stirrings of deliberative democracy but instead an affirmation of existing positions which simply bypassed debate.

Another plenary session paired Faye Ginsburg (NYU) with Nick Couldry (Goldsmiths College), followed by a response from Tony Bennett (The Open University). Ginsburg's focus was media activism by indigenous communities in Australia. She showed how small scale media making problematised notions of the digital era. In a nuanced overview of potential meta-theories of the media Couldry set up actor network theory, Foucault's 'order of discourse' and an anthropological conception of ritual as competing approaches to conceptualising media power. Tony Bennett's response provocatively and stimulatingly contrasted Couldry and Ginsburg's addresses as representing sociological and anthropological approaches respectively.



Beyond the plenaries, the diversity of theoretical perspectives and topics was just as evident in the panels. As organisers, we found it hugely frustrating not to be able to be in six or seven parallel sessions at the same time. Inevitably, given such a large conference, our sense of what happened in the panels is highly selective. One key dimension of the conference was a continuum between 'ground-up' theory and what might be described as a priori theory. The ground-up theory was to be found in new ways of conceiving media which emerged directly from empirical studies. Tanja Dreher (UTS) for example, developed the notion of the 'media community intervention'. Such interventions, as she showed in a compelling survey of her own case studies in Sydney, Australia, effectively challenged those naturalised symbolic hierarchies which do so much to reproduce media power. In a parallel vein, John Postill (Sheffield Hallam) examined the limits of Bourdieusian field theory through his ethnographic work on local government and internet activism in Malaysia. Postill brought the early work of another field theorist, anthropologist Victor Turner, to bear in order to make sense of the crisis-ridden nature of net activism. Coming

from the other, a priori, end of the spectrum was John Downey's paper on the renewal of ideology critique. Downey used Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as his theoretical springboard, so bringing a new set of theoretical tools into media analysis.

One of the highlights of the conference for many of those who attended was a superb panel exploring various aspects of lifestyle and makeover media, with four very different and yet mutually complementary papers from Ruth Holliday (Leeds), Tania Lewis (Monash), Katherine Lewis (Annenberg, PA) and Alison Hearn (UWO), the latter exploring questions of 'the branded self'. All the papers were submitted separately and yet seemed to work together beautifully. Another notable panel featured a fine trio of papers on 'Rethinking subjectivity and historical experience in the moving image' from Jodi Brooks (NSW), Therese Davis (Newcastle, Australia) and Susannah Radstone (UEL). Sometimes different approaches were combined in the same panel – for example in a really stimulating session on 'Subjectivity and the representation of self at work', where Heidi Solbrig (Bentley College)'s fascinating analysis of AT&T training films meshed very well both with Vicki Mayer (Tulane)'s reflections on creativity theory based on her fieldwork in a television factory in a free trade in Brazil and with Matt Stahl (Muhlenberg College)'s impressive theorisation of creative labour.



Whatever approach was adopted – in other words ground-up, theory-led or something in between – all the contributions seemed to have a genuine sparkle. Media Change and Social Theory was a typically flat, epithetic conference title. But it elicited much illuminating and engaged reflection on theoretical paradigms, reflection which will surely make a significant contribution to media studies over the next few years. For that we are indebted to the conference committee of Marie Gillespie, Farida Vis and Helen Wood and to our organisers Josine Opmeer, Catherine Lillie and Karen Ho. A selection of conference papers will form the basis for a collection entitled *The Media and Social Theory*, edited by David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee, which, it is hoped, will be published by Routledge in its new CRESC book series.

Contact: D.J.Hesmondhalgh@open.ac.uk and j.a.toynbee@open.ac.uk

Shifting locations, borders and money in Eastern Europe

Sarah Green

Several Theme 1 Cultural Economy projects explore how economic relations are implicated in shifting spatial relations and how geographical, environmental, social, political and even imagined spaces of the economic are undergoing a series of reconfigurations. From a range of different angles and disciplinary approaches, the underlying concern is shifts in the located contexts in which economic practices occur, including shifts in relations across sectors (e.g. public and private), across social and cultural differences (e.g. 'west' and 'east'), across diverse understandings of what counts as, or is amenable to, the 'economic' (e.g. weather futures). Here Sarah Green reports on how she is developing a cluster of activities and research focused around the intersecting themes of location, borders and money, particularly in relation to the eastern peripheries of Europe.

The aim is to bring together a range of researchers, both within and beyond CRESC, working on similar themes from different disciplines and in different parts of the world; and to carry out new research at the same time. And the first step was the founding of a transnational research network dubbed *EastBordNet*, which brings together scholars working across the entirety of the eastern peripheries of Europe.

This began with a workshop held in Manchester in May 2006, called "Eastern boundaries, money and gender: a workshop exploring shifting locations of identity and difference on the European peripheries." The main purpose of the network is to draw together expertise that explores transformations of 'Eastern' European borders, including shifts in the meaning and location of Europe. In the approach of the network, borders are not taken for granted; rather, researchers focus on comparing findings about the constant process through which borders appear, disappear, reappear and are reconfigured. The themes of money and gender - which always mark differences between people and places, but also involve exchanges and relations across differences - were used during the workshop to examine the expression of diverse values across and within borders. The network has brought together specialists working on the borderlands running from the north-east (Baltics and environs) to the south-east (Balkans and environs). Currently, a website and email forum are being developed for the network (available via the CRESC homepage), and funding is being sought to hold a series of joint meetings, mutual visits to research sites and, equally importantly, to develop a photographic portfolio (and perhaps also a sound archive) of the entirety of the eastern periphery border regions of Europe.

Several other events have been planned this year on related themes, and are going to be carried out in 2007. One is a workshop entitled "Money, Location and Visibility" to be held on March 23rd. The speakers will include geographers, sociologists, economists and anthropologists: Andrew Leyshon (Nottingham), Geoffrey Ingham (Cambridge), James Korovilas (UWE), Michael Pryke (CRESC, Open University), Karel Williams (CRESC, Manchester), and Andrew Irving (Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology). The workshop will focus on monetary relations, transactions and representations in order to explore how money contributes towards generating both a sense of location and affects the visibility and invisibility of peoples, places and activities. A panel in next September's CRESC annual conference, entitled "Difference, Money and Borders" will extend this theme so as to pay closer attention to other issues of identification and differentiation involving money and borders, in addition to the issue of visibility.

Finally, I will myself be starting new ethnographic research in January 2007 that will make use of all this collaborative work and sharing of expertise across regions and disciplines on the issue of money and borders. In a CRESC research inquiry titled, "**Of borders and money: an ethnographic study of shifting locations, relations and accounts in the Aegean**," I will explore the shifting meanings of relative location in a particular eastern periphery of Europe through carrying out an ethnographic study of a recent (and as yet still fairly tentative) re-establishment of easy travel and exchange between two small Aegean coastal towns, Mytilene in Greece and Ayvalik in Turkey. The two towns, which are market and trading centres, are both linked and separated by a

long history of mutual relations and hostilities. The small stretch of Aegean sea between them has been the subject of repeated political, military and economic interventions. This has regularly transformed both the meanings associated with the two places (as well as the sea in between them), and in practical terms, it has considerably affected the practical links between them. In recent years, the Greek side has taken on the mantle of being located at the edge of the European Union; and the Turkish side has been cast as existing at the edge of the ambivalent relationship between the idea of 'Europe' and the idea of an elsewhere that is increasingly being (re)cast as the difference between east and west (in both orientalist and post-socialist senses). Their relative locations, both in relation to one another, and in a wider sense, are currently shifting.

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In an attempt to bring together the diverse scales involved in this, the ethnographic fieldwork will focus on just one element of the story: the entanglement between money and borders. Money is the one element that almost always appears in both relations and separations between Mytilene and Ayvalik, and across a range of wider spatial, social and political scales; it is the one element that tends to change, either in form or denomination or both, whenever major political, territorial and/or economic shifts occur; it is used to both generate links across places, peoples and ideals as well as separations; it regularly forms the focus of (numerical) narratives, on both sides, about all manner of things – value, politics, worth, changes in relations, hierarchy, and so on. In short, money both contributes a great deal to the making and meaning of borders, as well as to the extensions and relations across them. This research aims to understand a bit more about how that process works in practice.

Contact: sarah.green@manchester.ac.uk

Talking with television

Helen Wood

The television set is the centre-piece of most living room geographies and is at the heart of domestic social action, therefore it seems rather obvious that television should be bound up with our everyday interactions. Yet, despite this common sense understanding that television is part of our interactive worlds, there has been hardly any attempt to account for how that is relevant to the broader aim within media sociology of understanding the role of television in everyday life.

Talking With Television is a forthcoming CRESC book about television and talk. It is concerned with talk about television which involves drawing upon a number of popular and academic discussions dealing with issues to do with contemporary television forms, talk shows and daytime magazine programs, and their associated cultural values. More specifically the book addresses questions to do with talk on television not least those concerned with the gender politics of 'talking personally' on daytime talk programs which have been associated with feminine modes of talk. More unusually, this book sheds light on the phenomenon of talk with television, making visible the commonly rehearsed, if often unacknowledged practice of talking back to the television set.

In this sense this book contributes to the broad aims of Theme 2 of CRESC by adding colour and empirical description to how media forms are ethnographically embedded in daily life and therefore bound up within the quotidian forms of social change which we take for granted. It is about how the television world and the social world of audience members collide in the living room. It is concerned with how mediated relationships produce a 'doubling' of place (Scannell, 1996), asking questions about how the two realms are stitched together and how those links are sustained across the ubiquitous reach and kaleidoscopic forms of broadcasting. The book aims to take seriously the possibility of the formation of mediated social relationships in the case of a medium like television which has traditionally been analysed as the one-way mode of communication par excellence.

Talking With Television therefore takes a multi-disciplinary perspective, drawing on resources from sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, pragmatics and ethnomethodology, at the same time as taking its lead from the cultural studies tradition of audience research influenced by feminist researchers interested in women's consumption practices of popular culture. Here, a particular combination of cultural studies and linguistics attempts to give fresh inflection to understanding the prism of relations between television and audiences. In part this might be done by

returning to simple observations about television as a cultural form. The uniqueness of the medium itself is characterised by its relationship to immediacy and intimacy, created through its special claim to liveness; the ability to represent the world 'out there' as though it is 'here and now'. (Williams, 1974; Ellis, 1982) Television is therefore a dynamic medium which enters into the space of the home, whilst the home itself of course has its own 'here and now'. This is a simple set of orientations, obvious to television studies more broadly, but which rarely comes into play in audience research. Therefore, this book considers the dynamic entry of television talk into the socio-communicative sphere of everyday life, but in doing so it demands that we return to some of the boundaries of communications research and to fundamental concerns in media studies over the establishment of meaning.

Media and audience studies have been centrally concerned with deconstructing meaning in media texts and then understanding how that meaning is unravelled by audiences in their own social locations. That premise seems fairly straight-forward, but it serves to reify meaning as established at each end of the exchange – first in content and then in context. Such an approach brackets out the texture of the experiences that audiences might have as they engage with television as a medium. This book investigates how broadcast discourse *dynamically* enters the socio-communicative sphere of the home establishing particular spatio-temporal conditions and mediating our senses of 'here and now' through the union of televised and lived environments. This approach to television discourse combines talk on, talk through and talk with television to suggest that it is possible to gauge how meaning is established in the communicative *achievements* of broadcast discourse in the life of the home. It does so by outlining an alternative methodology for audience research, 'texts-in-action', re-centring meaning as a dynamic process fought over in the interplay between mediated and non-mediated realities.

This methodology suggests that other routes to understanding how media become meaningful might be registered in

the *mechanics* and *temporality* of the process. This is not to jettison ideas about power, since throughout the book it is clear that all forms of communication are always implicated in, and constitutive of, contexts of power. Instead a focus upon *mechanics* might help reveal, the 'drive belts' of the media's relationship with social change. In the case of this study and the relationship between women and talk television, these are constituted through a mediated speech genre of gossip which has implications for understanding gender identity in the modern age. If it is the case that the telling of a life is the more significant struggle than dealing directly with the material constraints which surround and condition it, as in the individualisation thesis by Giddens and Beck, then women should here be ahead of the game. But such daily ritualised acts of self-reflexivity call them to explore and enact their feminised roles, which in effect re-embeds within the quotidian baseline that experience - along with its many oppressions and constraints. Rather than this public space transporting the women from the private domestic sphere, it can serve only to 'double' their only too well-trodden experiences.

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The conclusions from such an approach to reception research have implications for understanding the role of media in social change. In particular these ideas intervene in competing debates whereby the media is described *either* as a catalyst to forms of individualisation or as the unifying tool in creating new modes of community. This work suggests that distinction as over-simplified, and opens out a space for fruitful lines of inquiry which mine the complex relationships between mass and interpersonal communication along a broader axis of communication per se.

Helen Wood's new book, *Talking With Television*, will be published by the University of Illinois Press. Contact: Helen.wood@manchester.ac.uk

Curating diversity?

Helen Rees Leahy

Museums figure in several projects in theme 3 Culture Governance and Citizenship because current forms of governmentality increasingly enlist museums in their projects of constructing cohesion and community. Here Helen Rees Leahy discusses how museums are marking the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade in 2007 and explains how slavery and its legacies challenge museum policy and practice.

For many commentators, Tony Blair's article in the *New Nation* newspaper (published on 26th November 2006) marked the opening salvo in a battle of words over the legacy of the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade in 2007. Blair used the article to convey his 'deep sorrow' for this country's 'profoundly shameful' involvement in the trade, but predictably, it was his decision to express regret, rather than to apologise, for British participation in the commerce of enslaved people that fuelled the ensuing media debate. Other aspects of the politically nuanced article were largely overlooked, including Blair's hope that the anniversary would provide an opportunity to explore our 'shared heritage' as well as to celebrate 'the richness of our diversity.'

The rhetorical coupling of a collective past with a diverse present is, of course, a familiar trope within the contemporary production of 'heritage' as an instrument both of social cohesion and communal self-expression. And certainly, this is the ostensible objective of a substantial (in heritage terms) programme of public expenditure to mark the bicentenary. The Heritage Lottery Fund has committed over £20 million to local projects under a programme called 'Remembering Slavery in 2007', numerous museums are planning special exhibitions, Wilberforce House in Hull has been entirely renovated, and a new Transatlantic Slavery Museum will open next August in Liverpool's Albert Dock. However, the bicentenary presents an unprecedented and as yet, only partly acknowledged challenge to the authority of museums and organisations such as English Heritage to mediate and manage the interpretation of the slave trade. In effect, 2007 crystallises a set of issues and challenges in museum policy and practice that have emerged over the past decade.

Since the election of New Labour in 1997, museums have become increasingly adept at harnessing their historic collections to simultaneous strategies of widening access while also calibrating audience on the basis of racial difference in response to ambitious targets for attracting greater numbers of 'Black and Ethnic Minority' (or 'BEM') visitors. To this extent, the business of measuring audience in terms of crude demographic markers is necessitated by

government funding, and in common with other public sector bodies, museums have readily acquiesced in quantifying the quantifiable – arguably, as a bulwark against a perceived threat to their institutional privilege.

Increasingly, museums have adopted processes of 'community consultation' as a means of soliciting the opinions and knowledge of previously under-represented groups, and of accommodating them within the existing structures of the institution. The model is often a diluted version of well-established (but, at times, still contentious) practice in countries such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada where the authority of indigenous people to interpret and curate their own cultures is evident via their institutional presence. With a few exceptions, there is no comparable sustained presence of diasporic and immigrant communities within the majority of British museums, despite their past and present connections with the material culture held in those museums. Ironically, the potential move from consultation to dialogic collaboration is inhibited by the extrinsic policy frameworks within which museums currently operate, whereby cultural diversity objectives are essentialised in terms of audience differentiation and delivered via mechanisms of short-term project funding, themed initiatives and target setting.

In many ways, funded programming for the 2007 bicentenary falls neatly into this policy/practice mix. But there are also signs that issues raised by the project of interpreting slavery and its legacies are unsettling museum practice at a more profound level by questioning the basis of curatorial expertise and by exposing the lacunae and fissures within historic collections. In Greater Manchester, a consortium of organisations has formed an umbrella project called 'Revealing Histories, Remembering Slavery': each museum has conducted research into its collections in order to find objects and stories linked to the history of slavery and its economic, social and cultural impact on the North West of England. The idea is to recover hidden or fugitive histories from institutional amnesia, neglect and

ignorance, and to reinsert objects, texts and images into alternative, thematic categories – crucially, in conjunction with individuals and communities outside the museum.

Again, the methodology is borrowed from an established practice of uncovering ‘hidden histories’ of, say, race, sexual orientation or disability within collections that had become invisible to the normative gaze of the museum. Such projects always run the risk of tokenism, but they also carry the possibility of greater institutional reflexivity and an escape from the myth of historical (and contemporary) detachment. ‘Revealing Histories’ is a process that has the potential to acknowledge the museum’s complicity in the representation of many histories including, but not only, the legacy of the slave trade.

In practice, it is still rare to find a museum that is committed to questioning the taxonomic foundations of its collections beyond the span of a single project. Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow has recently attempted to do that by reworking its collections into a series of new displays that demonstrate the intellectual and visual impact of interdisciplinarity, while simultaneously alluding to previous modes of exhibition and categorisation. Like many Victorian museums, Kelvingrove’s collections were amassed and organised according to 19th century classifications of material culture: ethnography, art, decorative art, natural history, armour and so on. These structures of knowing and looking are still discernible in Kelvingrove today, but they represent just one approach within an expanded repertoire of narrative-based interpretation that foregrounds the entangled biographies of objects and people.

To return to the role of museums in marking the bicentenary of the Abolition Act: given the pervasive effects of the slave trade on British economic and social structures, there are few historic collections where its traces are indiscernible, albeit indirectly via the material cultures of industrialisation and colonisation. The momentum to mark the anniversary is likely to produce a spectrum of representational practices, including, potentially, a shift towards increased reflexivity and dialogue with voices beyond the museum. There is also the danger that programming will be formulaic: ‘a black subject for a black audience’, which in turn, begs the question as to why the black community would choose to learn about slavery in a museum of all places. 2007 poses some hard questions for museums – about themselves, as well as about the slave trade.

Contact: helen.rees@manchester.ac.uk

Corruption and social change

Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox

Corruption has been high on the international political agenda recently, with the World Bank and the IMF pointing to corrupt practices as a major barrier to social change. But according to CRESO research, attempts to combat corruption may be just as much a part of the problem of inequality and underdevelopment as ‘corruption’ itself. Here, Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox explain how, as CRESO Theme 4 researchers, they have been working in Peru over the last year, looking at processes of road building as sites of social, economic and political change.

People in Peru hold out a lot of hope for the developmental benefits that roads can bring to rural communities, but at the same time they look upon large-scale internationally funded road construction projects with a sense of suspicion. Any project or organisation which is perceived to have money is a potential site of corruption. People berate the state of their country and its transport network, where some roads have taken decades to materialise and millions to build because of corruption. We found that wherever we went we heard people talking about the problem of corruption – from software piracy to nepotism, from fraud to outright theft. However, there was a seeming contradiction at the heart of these local accusations of corruption – nobody thought they themselves were corrupt but everyone thought almost everybody else was.

One form that corruption accusations often take is ‘nepotism’ where contracts for work are seen to be given to friends and family rather than being put out for open tender and decided upon on the basis of cost-benefit measures. In one highway construction project in the north of Peru where many people have been jailed over the theft of funds, members of the regional governor’s family who lived outside the Department were shown to have been given contracts to carry out work that should have been available to local companies. This favouritism can clearly be seen as a barrier to local development. However, later on, whilst studying another construction project in the south of Peru this ‘data’ was put into a different light.

We were in a car with an engineer who was on his mobile phone to a series of friends and colleagues. He was engaged in an urgent task to get together a new team of people to rapidly study the implications of a possible route change. The change had come at the last minute and the company were to begin the sub-contracting process the next day, so there was little time for any potential contractors to put forward a good presentation. The topographer was keen to get a team together and he

stressed on the phone in a friendly tone that this would be a good way of making good money fast. Though on paper this might have looked like a clear case of nepotism, for the topographer this was not corruption, just the way in which things got done. Engineers are often employed on these projects as much for the network of contacts that they bring with them as for their individual technical skill.

This need to draw on friends and family in engineering projects was an ambiguous and difficult position to justify against possible accusations of corruption, but forms of organisation in Andean towns and villages have an even more awkward relationship to the idea that nepotism might be morally abject or corrupt. Building a road or a house in a community in the Peruvian Andes usually involves bringing together a communal work party to do the job. This form of organisation is also mirrored in the preparation for annual festivals where it is the responsibility of one member of the community to draw everyone together in the preparations for the festival. One man told us about his grandfather’s experiences as organizer of the festival who planned to pay for the festival by selling some of his own animals rather than asking for help from other members of the community. But a series of misfortunes beset him – he had bad dreams about a policeman who was hounding him, then the roof of his house fell in. He realised that the dreams were instructing him to go from house to house and collect contributions from the community, rather than funding the festival on his own. An attempt to act individualistically without recourse to social networks and favours was, for the saint, morally problematic and drew its own reprisals.

In all of the practices which the label ‘corrupt’ denotes, we can find similarly complex fields of contradictory accusations and counter-arguments that make corruption a slippery and difficult concept to deal with. Anti-corruption measures are meant to resolve inequalities between rich and poor by making sure that money circulates through some channels and not

others. However, the effect of anti-corruption measures is not just the rechanneling of money to bring about equality but the reproduction of a particular kind of neo-liberal morality that might be just as destructive to social relations and the possibilities for social change as lack of money.

Publicly funded infrastructure projects like highway construction programmes are precisely the kinds of projects that international development organisations are worried about as sites of corruption where money intended for development is siphoned off illegitimately. Paul Wolfowitz, the head of the IMF, has stressed how measures must be put in place in developing countries to prevent corruption at all levels, using anti-corruption teams on the ground to counter illegal activities to prevent international development funds from being illegitimately distributed. Anti-corruption measures are made to appear external from the problem in hand, a knight in shining armour battling against the abject forces of corrupt practices. But our research has suggested that as anti-corruption measures make social relations explicit in the interests of greater transparency, and accountability, these social relations inevitably come to appear 'corrupt' – and practices which might otherwise be quite unremarkable forms of sociality get revealed as abuses of power, continuous with the more dramatic corporate and political scandals that occasionally disrupt the established smooth running of established and legalised corporate interest. If we are to understand social change, our research has suggested that concepts such as 'corruption' should not be assumed as neutral terms, nor can they be defined and circumscribed a priori. We would suggest that rather more robust sociological concepts like power and control are more useful for thinking about possibilities for equality and social change. Such an approach allows us begin to unpack how people who are struggling to survive in an unequal world might quite legitimately exchange favours, food, goods and possibly even cash, in circumstances that are not commensurate with the theft and misuse of public funds that characterise 'public works', and which are often undetectable or not technically 'illegal'. The distinction is crucial also in allowing us to see the role that organisations like the IMF and the World Bank themselves play in reproducing a system where mundane social relations are made to seem corrupt while corporate privilege can go unchecked.

Contact: Penny.harvey@manchester.ac.uk
and Hannah.knox@manchester.ac.uk

World class culture? Andrew Miles

The phrase 'World Class' is often used in the promotion and marketing of cultural events and resources and is presently being heard more frequently in connection with the development of the North West and its cultural offer. It is less certain whether the notion of 'World-Class' quality in the cultural sector has any clear meaning or utility, however, and if it does, how one goes about capturing and validating it.

As part of its work on user engagement and the development of closer links with the wider cultural sector emanating from the HEIF2 project, CRESC recently joined forces with The Northwest Culture Observatory to produce a Research Forum on the theme of 'World Class Culture'. This event, which took place on 27 November 2006 at The Lowry in Salford Quays, attracted an audience of 70 policymakers, practitioners and researchers from across the region to a daylong programme of presentations, workshops and discussion.

The Forum heard presentations from leading cultural producers who identified diverse regional and sector approaches to the 'World Class Culture' theme. Howard Raynor, Managing Director of World Class Service Ltd, examined the key components of a service-driven concept of quality based on the hotel and leisure industries. Alex Poots, Director of Manchester International Festival, argued for the need to do things that nobody else was doing, involving world premieres, unique productions and major artists. John Porter and Julie Tait, directors of Kendal Mountain Festivals, highlighted the importance of product evolution and diversification and the need to balance quality of service with respect for tradition, while identifying an international visitor base and recognition through imitation as key indicators of world-class status. David Chell, Head of Sales at Manchester City Football Club, suggested that a world-class entertainment venue needed to build on past successes like the Commonwealth Games, maintain a diverse appeal, and engage local people. Finally, Chris Farrow, Chief Executive of Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company, presented a vision of the UK's first media city as an integrated, international resource centre founded on digital culture and rooted in the local community.

The difficulties of definition and application associated with the term 'World Class Culture' were highlighted in the responses to pre-Forum survey of delegates and continued to provoke much debate at the meeting. Some felt it was 'provincial and pleading', 'fluid and too wide in scope', and that the use of questionable and unsubstantiated labels could be damaging. Others thought it defined an ambition and was useful as an

outward facing marketing concept if backed up by cultural products, experiences and services that enhanced the credibility and reputation of the Northwest.

The Forum explored the 'World Class' theme in depth through working groups. Delegates were tasked with developing vision statements for the cultural sector in the region and identifying evidence and indicators through which to measure and evaluate success. Although the problem of establishing coherent aims outside of a unitary organisational context was stressed, it was agreed that a collective shift in perception was required, and that the priorities stemming from this should be to encourage and support risk-taking, innovation, vibrancy and participation. Several common objectives were identified in support of these aims, in particular the development of a shared and consistently communicated agenda which recognises new ways of working; a continuous investment cycle and the identification of clear economic and social benefits; perseverance, the raising of aspirations, and engagement with local communities.

The difficulties of pinning down the concept of world-class culture resulted in fewer solutions for evidence and indicators or world-class quality. However, the importance of qualitative evidence and 'unmeasurables' alongside quantitative data was highlighted, as was the need to broaden the notion of 'value' beyond the economic to encompass the distillation of tangible social and cultural benefits. A number of indicators of world-class quality were generally agreed, including sustained and diverse recognition, comparative quality, authenticity and distinctiveness, organisational ambition, inspirational impacts on individuals, and the engagement of local populations.

The key issues arising from this Forum, and in particular their implications for the development of new research in the regional cultural sector, will be explored further in a new CRESC/COIN (Culture Observatory Intelligence Network) seminar series. This begins with a meeting on *Image and Identity: Perceptions of the Northwest as a Cultural Place* at Manchester Museum on 7 February 2007.

Contact: andrew.miles@manchester.ac.uk

From our PhDs

We are extending the reach and scope of CRESC research and making a contribution to the training of the next generation of social scientists by building a group of PhD students. Here are reports from two of our students who are starting out on the first year of research.

The erosion of social cohesion? Ben Garner

The big background issues for my research are globalisation and imperialism, in particular how they relate to contemporary rationalities and technologies of government in Britain and America. Previously, I have tried to overcome some of the disciplinary and theoretical boundaries that have tended to separate the study of contemporary forms of 'macro' social, economic and political change (the 'globalisation' of finance, transformations in the conduct of the state) from some of the more 'micro' level practices and technologies that have been associated with contemporary forms of liberal government (often understood in terms of a process of 'individualisation,' the promotion of 'active citizenship,' and so on).

I have also recently finished some work on Foucault's genealogies of liberalism and neoliberalism, attempting to show how our reading of them is affected by a closer attention to the contexts of imperial expansion in the U.K. and U.S. With this background I hope to bring an inter-disciplinary approach to some of the key debates regarding contemporary social and cultural change that are being addressed by

CRESC's theme's 3 and 4 on *culture, governance and citizenship* and *cultural values and politics*.

My PhD research will be focused on one particular aspect of socio-cultural change: the progressive erosion of collective bonds and bases of social and community cohesion. These issues have increasing significance in light of what have been seen as some of the 'damaging' effects of the culture of neoliberalism. In the Anglo-American debates over neoliberalism we have seen this concern reflected in the political discourses of both left and right: radicals, neoconservatives and various 'fundamentalists' as well as centrists, social democrats and Third Way politicians are all concerned with cohesion. Social scientists have also taken up cohesion as a new problem which is central to the whole project of building a market society. Their questions are about how to better 'embed' economic activity and political order in collective processes, relations of trust, communication, 'social capital' and so on. In sum, the programmes of neoliberalism and marketisation have provoked new governmental concerns regarding the state of the "social fabric", the decline of civil society

and collective moral and patriotic values, the sources of wealth, institutional order and collective life itself.

These developments beg unexplored questions regarding their relationship to the recent imperial turn in the programmes of neoliberal globalisation: in particular, to what extent have these problems been reflected in the contemporary Anglo-American rationalities of empire. These concerns are reflected internationally, in the development of a dubious form of *civilising mission* and projects of international intervention and nation-building; and also, perhaps more significantly, in governmental attempts to address some of the effects of neoliberalism on social cohesion "at home" and to constitute a new sense of social order, national identity and purpose. In what ways are current forms of empire building and imperial distinctions between populations related to these contemporary mutations of neoliberalism? In this early stage of formulating questions and drawing up a proposal, I would be interested to meet anyone with similar interests.

Contact: benjgarner@gmail.com, 1st Year PhD supervised by Mike Savage

Corporate communication Adriana Vilella Nilsson

Corporate communication is being professionalised and upgraded. Until recently, corporate communications and public relations were seen as low status sub-disciplines of marketing or linked to schools of journalism for media specialists. But now the Manchester Business School, for example, has an MSc course on Corporate Communications and Reputation Management which is designed to "meet the demand" for specialists who think of communications as an integral part of business strategy which makes a difference to outcomes.

This programme claims that MBS research shows how improving corporate reputation through better internal and external communication can create on average of 3-4% per annum sales growth. And Manchester is not alone because there are similar developments at other major business schools. Thus, the University of Pennsylvania at Wharton (USA) ranked first in the world by the Financial Times in 2006, and London School of Economics have included communications in their syllabus either as a whole MSc course or as a core discipline in their management/strategy courses.

Social science researchers have begun to discuss related issues especially in CRESC theme 1 where researchers have broad interests in giant firm business strategy and the more political issues about how business organizes and represents itself to government and in civil society. Julie Froud and Karel Williams this year published a book *Strategy after Financialization*, based on CRESC research. This highlighted the importance of managing stock market expectations through company and industry narratives especially when management is under pressure to deliver 'shareholder value'. As part of another CRESC project, Mick Moran is working on a book about the political organisation and representation of business interests. This highlights the decline of collective representation through trade associations and such like over the past 30 years and the rise of DIY representation by public relations and lobbying.

Generally, the cultural turn has brought the constitutive role of discourse to the forefront in social sciences, but few social science researchers have analysed corporate discourses of purpose and achievement just as few have critically examined the workings

of the corporate PR business. Hence the idea of my thesis which was to focus on these two neglected issues (the stories that companies tell and the practice of story telling) by drawing on the expertise of Froud, Moran and Williams who had worked on related issues. The thesis is being planned in a way that fits with other CRESC theme 1 research. The thesis will be based on extensive and detailed empirical research into two different industries of integrated oil and ethical pharmaceuticals with case research focused on four major companies (British Petroleum and Shell, Astra Zeneca and GlaxoSmithKline). The thesis also represents an attempt to marry the relatively new cultural economy scholarship with international political economy so as to circumvent the epochal/state centrist tendencies of the latter by recognising the foundational importance of culture to the analysis of economics. The end result should be a more nuanced analysis of how giant firms make and re-make relations with stock market, government and civil society.

Contact: Adriana.Vilella-nilsson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk, 1st Year PhD supervised by Julie Froud, Mick Moran and Karel Williams

Upcoming events at CRESC

January 2007

Monday 15th, *Changing Values and Identities*, workshop hosted by School of Social Sciences, CRESC and CCSR, The University of Manchester

Tuesday 16th, *Deleuze Reading Group*, CRESC, The University of Manchester

Wednesday 31st, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

February 2007

Wednesday 7th, *Image and Identity: Perceptions of the Northwest as a Cultural Place*, seminar hosted by CRESC and the Northwest Cultural Observatory, The University of Manchester Museum

Monday 12th – Tuesday 13th, *Financialisation in Retrospect and Prospect*, workshop International Working Group on Financialisation in collaboration with CRESC, London

Wednesday 21st, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

March 2007

Friday 9th, *Public Service Broadcasting workshop*, Commonwealth Institute London

Wednesday 14th, *TBC*, Seminar hosted by CRESC and the Northwest Cultural Observatory, The University of Manchester

Wednesday 21st, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

Friday 23rd, *Money, Location and Visibility*, workshop The University of Manchester

Monday 26th – Tuesday 27th, *Governing Cultures? Neoliberalism, Democracy, and the Question of Diversity*, workshop Chancellors, The University of Manchester

April 2007

Wednesday 18th, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

Wednesday 25th, *TBC*, Seminar hosted by CRESC and the Northwest Cultural Observatory, The University of Manchester Museum

May 2007

Wednesday 9th, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

Wednesday 30th, *lunchtime Consumption seminar*, The University of Manchester

June 2007

Thursday 28th – Friday 29th, *Public Knowledge: Redistributions and reinstitutionalisations*, workshop, The University of Manchester

September 2007

Wednesday 5th – Friday 7th, **CRESC Annual Conference, The University of Manchester Re-Thinking Cultural Economy** - Plenary speakers include: Karin Knorr Cetina, Franck Cochoy, Chris Gregory, Larry Grossberg, Eric Hirsch, Angela McRobbie, Nigel Thrift, Hugh Willmott. This Conference seeks to assess where the various debates about culture and economy and cultural economy have got to, and to explore where they may be going in the future. Discussion and debate will be structured around parallel streams of themed session papers as well as plenaries that address the following themes: *Finance and Financialisation, Consumer Culture, Branding and Marketing, New Spirits of Capitalism: materiality, ethics and identities, Theorising Culture, Economy and Cultural Economy, The Cultural Economy of Management, Managerialism and New Organisational Elites, Difference, Money and Borders*. Call for papers available from <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/events/conference/index.html>. Deadline 31 March 2007

For more information on any of these events please contact CRESC, cresc@manchester.ac.uk, tel: +44 (0)161 275-8985/8990, <http://www.cresc.ac.uk/index.html>

New working papers

The following working papers have been added to the CRESC website:

<http://www.cresc.ac.uk/publications/workingpapers>

Working Paper No.19

The BBC and public value

Richard Collins, The Open University

Working Paper No.20

Taking the high ground: the struggle for ideas in UK broadcasting policy

Richard Collins, The Open University

Working Paper No.21

Liberty and order: Civil government and the common good in eighteenth-century England

Francis Dodsworth, The Open University

Working Paper No.22

Stressed by choice: a business model analysis of the BBC

Julie Froud, Sukhdev Johal, Adam Leaver, Richard Phillips, Karel Williams, The University of Manchester

Working Paper No.23

Agency, the romance of management pay and an alternative explanation

Ismail Erturk, Julie Froud, Sukhdev Johal, Adam Leaver, Karel Williams, The University of Manchester

Working Paper No.24

Speculating on geographies finance

Michael Pryke, The Open University

Working Paper No.25

Working for themselves? Capital market intermediaries and present day capitalism

Peter Folkman, Julie Froud, Sukhdev Johal, Karel Williams, The University of Manchester

Working Paper No.26

Economy and aesthetic of public knowledge

Alberto Corsín Jiménez, The University of Manchester

Working Paper No.27

The operationalization of the concept 'cultural diversity' in British television policy and governance

Ben O'Loughlin, The Open University