

**Imagining ‘We’ in the Age of ‘I’**

**Romance and Social Bonding in Contemporary Culture**

Study Day

29th March 2019, University of Warwick



**Guide to Papers**

**9.30-10.30 – Welcome and Keynote 1 (MS04) – Tamar Jeffers McDonald (University of Kent), ‘Romantic Comedy today: teenagers, head trauma and time-loops?’**

Brian Henderson’s celebrated 1978 article on the state of the genre, ‘Romantic Comedy today: Semi-Tough or Impossible?’, pronounced the impossibility of the romcom’s existence once sexual desire could be not only acted upon, but also discussed, in mainstream movies. This could seem ironic since, at the very time of the piece’s writing, Annie Hall, An Unmarried Woman, and The Goodbye Girl were in circulation, films that are now seen as reviving the form.

However, Henderson was fully aware of this increase in realism, and in fact his gloomy prognosis for the romcom was based on the very qualities that now make such films modern classics, their credible and frank portrayals of the problems and challenges of contemporary relationships. Henderson’s article posits that the genre needs allusiveness to survive: once characters have the ability both to have sex, and to talk about having sex, the romantic comedy is doomed.

Forty subsequent years of generic product seem to have proven Henderson’s prophecy slow to come true but, in a period where the romantic comedy is undergoing resurrection after another, more total, assumption of its demise, his ideas seem worthy of reconsideration. In this presentation, then, I will be surveying films on either side of the recent hiatus in romcom production, to ask whether it was realism (or something else) that caused this most recent temporary dearth. As my presentation title suggests, the films in circulation now seem to be making much of teenagers, alternative worlds in which characters find themselves after a bump on the head, and time loops. In exploring these ideas I will suggest that contemporary romcom’s use of these tropes indicates both an attempt to return to the pre-lapsarian state Henderson celebrates, and an anxiety over the validity of the genre after its recent brush with death.

Biog.

Tamar Jeffers McDonald is Reader in Film at the University of Kent, in Canterbury, UK, where she resides. She read English at Somerville College, Oxford, before being awarded her PhD in Film by the University of Warwick. A Hollywood historian, Dr Jeffers McDonald is the author of several monographs - on romantic comedy, film costume, stardom and movie magazines. Forthcoming publications for 2019 include two co-edited collections, one on movie magazines, and the other on the Gothic in film. Her current writing project is a monograph tracing the history and impact of the Hollywood movie magazine from 1911- 1976.

10.30-10.55- Coffee/tea

**10.55-12.45 – Panel 1 - Popular Screen Narratives (MS04)**

Chair: Claire Jenkins (University of Leicester)

- Beatriz Oria (University of Zaragoza), ‘Friends with Benefits? The Trope of Friendship in the Rom-com of the 2010s’

In an industrial context that seems to have lost faith in the economic viability of the rom-com, the genre finds itself in a slump, commercially speaking. From the 2000s onwards, Hollywood romantic comedy output has been on the wane. This seems to point to a crisis in a genre that has been certified dead many times in the past. But appearances are deceiving: this paper argues that romantic comedy actually finds itself in an exciting moment of reinvention. It suggests that the genre is taking new directions partly as a response to a new socio-sexual context defined by millennials’ cynical attitude towards romance and a growing individualism fueled by the neo-liberal ethos. This particular context threatens to throw the shared project of the couple off-center, and compels the “post-romantic” era rom-com to offer possible solutions through new generic inflections.

This paper outlines some of the most recent tendencies in contemporary romantic comedy, focusing on the newfound relevance of the trope of friendship during the 2010s. It uses Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theory of individualisation (2004) to analyse the increasing emphasis of the genre on both cross-sex and same-sex friendship rather than on heterosexual romance as a preferable alternative to the traditional happily ever after. Some recent rom-coms seem to suggest that in today’s “hook up culture,” friendship constitutes the only kind of reliable long-term relationship available to the individual, to the extent of modifying the meanings attached to what may be the genre’s most solid convention: the happy ending. This paper connects this generic twist with a waning cultural belief in the possibility of everlasting love and the increasing perception of friendship as the last bastion of personal security for the individual in the age of neo-liberalism.

Biog.

Beatriz Oria is Lecturer at the English Department of Zaragoza University, where she teaches Film Analysis. Her current areas of interest include romantic comedy and independent cinema. She is the author of Talking Dirty on ‘Sex and the City’ (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and co-editor of Global Genres, Local Films: The Transnational Dimension of Spanish Cinema (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). Recent publications on romantic comedy include: -

-"We Found Love in a Hopeless Place: Romantic Comedy in the Post-Romantic Era." In “Happily Ever After”: Romantic Comedy in the Post-Romantic Age, Maria San Filippo (ed). Wayne State UP: forthcoming.

-“Love on the Margins: the American Indie Rom-com of the 2010s.” *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies*. 40.2 (2018): 145-167.

-“Love is a Man’s Thing: Hollywood and the Spanish ‘Homme-com’.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television.* 43.1 (2015): 28-38.

-“Isn’t it Bromantic?: New Directions in Contemporary Spanish Comedy.” In Global Genres, Local Films: The Transnational Dimension of Spanish Cinema, Elena Oliete-Aldea, Beatriz Oria, Juan Tarancón (eds). London: Bloomsbury, 2015: 173-186.

- Anousch Khorikian (University of Hull), ‘Everybody Needs Some Bodies: Familial Teams and Individual-Communal Tensions in British Crime Series at the Intersection of Post-Feminism and Post-Television’

The workplace family in crime drama – consisting of parent-child roles, romance (‘will-they-won’t-they’s), and humour (banter) – has been relatively unexplored. My PhD research has suggested, however, that exploring the early twenty-first century trend of familial team in British crime drama provides insights into popular neo-liberalism on screen, gender dynamics and representation, and backlash co-optation of feminist ideals through neo-liberalism. Furthermore, familial team narration relates interestingly to developments in television at the turn of the century that demand a broad audience appeal – in particular to the usage of centripetally complex narration, which zooms in on the (inter)personal (see Mittell 2013).

At the intersection of these two frameworks – ‘post-feminism’ (here used in the broad and inclusive manner of, for example, Genz and Brabon 2009) and ‘post-television’ – the crime genre contributes its formulaic structure. My research therefore proposes to coalesce these three frameworks in practical analysis through two narrational patterns: ‘freedom-responsibility-freedom regained’ (for the individual) and ‘cohesion-incohesiveness-cohesion re-established’ (for the team). These are used to analyse the usage of centripetal narration and gender discourse in the portrayal of the neo-liberal individual-communal tensions of the teams.

My presentation would like to present the approach and findings of my PhD research, with examples from my close analyses of Silent Witness (1996- ), Ashes to Ashes (2008-2010), and Spooks (2002-2011), in the hope that these relate interestingly to other close analysis of television, other eras, and other formulaic genres.

Biog.

Anousch Khorikian is a Screen Studies PhD candidate at the University of Hull, researching early twenty-first century British television crime drama. Previously, her MA thesis “‘You Gonna Kiss Me or Punch Me?’: Misogynist Nostalgia in Life on Mars and Ashes to Ashes” was awarded the biennial Herman Servotte Prize. In 2016, she published an article on Silent Witness called “Prunes and Posses: Individuation and Team Cohesion in Silent Witness”.

- Betty Kaklamanidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), ‘The limitations of postfeminism in contemporary Greek television comedy. The case of *Don’t Start Nagging*’

On October 7, 2013, in the midst of an economic crisis that almost destroyed Greek television fiction, an inexpensive comedy series broadcast its pilot and soon after won the hearts and minds of both critics and viewers. Don’t Start Nagging, the Greek adaptation of the Spanish Scenes of a Marriage, is basically a series of vignettes of the lives of three couples: The 20-something Vaso and Haris, the 40-something Ilias and Marina and the 60-something Voula and Minas. Based on a close reading of the first two seasons (156 episodes), I first present how the writers depict the three different relationships and how romance, love and sex are negotiated in the show. I then offer a summary of the complications that arise not only in contemporary gender representations and especially representations of romance and marriage but also in the use of tools that originate from the arsenal of postfeminist theory. My main questions are:

\* What can feminist media scholars do when a given gender representation can be evaluated as both progressive and regressive at the same time?

\* Are there any other new questions we should be posing to overcome this theoretical impasse?

\* Is a new theoretical language needed?

Biog.

Betty Kaklamanidou is a Fulbright scholar and Assistant Professor in Film and Television History and Theory at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece. She is the author of Easy A: The End of the High-School Teen Comedy? (2018), The ‘Disguised’ Political Film in Contemporary Hollywood (2016), Genre, Gender and the Effects of Neoliberalism (2013) and two books in Greek on adaptation theory and the history of the Hollywood romcom. Betty is also the co-editor of Contemporary European Cinema: Crisis Narratives and Narratives in Crisis (2018), Politics and Politicians in Contemporary U.S. Television (2016), The Millennials on Film and Television (2014), HBO’s “Girls” (2014), and The 21st Century Superhero (2010). Betty’s articles have appeared in Television & New Media, Literature/Film Quarterly, Celebrity Studies and The Journal of Popular Romance Studies.

- Eileen Velthuis (independent researcher), ‘From Digisexual Closet-Crush to Robot Rape: Inter-AI Intimacies in *Äkta Människor* (Sweden, SVT, 2012-2013)’

In a present that seems to resemble science fiction imagery like never before, human beings traverse their data-driven worlds mediated by technology, processing images that come in unprecedented numbers. When science fiction imaginaries and reality influence each other in equal measures, studying visual culture can lead us to uncover how both our fantastical and our physical worlds are shaped.

Feminist-queer theory on visual culture has proven to be a vital framework to distinguish, for instance, the well-established trope of the robotically engineered woman that provides male protagonists with companionship, sexual satisfaction and character development in varying degrees from Donna Haraway's role model cyborg. Are we, and are we depicted as the cyborg Donna Haraway had in mind yet? That is not my main question today, however, but it points the way for much of the themes that we will be dealing with.

Locating my research at the intersection of resurgent popular interest in television series and science fiction, I focus on one case study of contemporary TV which features intimate relationships between humans and what I call artificial intelligent others. Looking at the Swedish television show Äkte Människor (also known by its English title Real Humans) through a feminist-queer and posthuman lens, I pose the question how visual culture shapes contemporary concepts of intimacy and what meanings we might dissect from this case to develop modes of thinking about closeness today. It might help us in imagining ourselves as and becoming the future-proof cyborgs of tomorrow.

Biog.

Eileen Velthuis is originally from Amsterdam, where she studied Cultural Studies at the University of Amsterdam and is now finishing her MA in Art & Visual Culture at the University of Westminster in London. To pursue her interest in researching the intersections of popular visual culture, feminism, queer studies and technology, she is looking to continue her studies on a PhD-level.

12.45-1.30 – Lunch

1.30-3 – Parallel panels

**Panel 2 – Mediating Marginalised Identities in Love (Ms04)**

Chair: Mary Harrod (University of Warwick)

- Alison Wilde (Leeds Beckett University) – ‘Unlovable? Constructions of the non-disabled “gaze” in contemporary romantic comedy’

This paper will argue that the imagining of the ‘we’ in the age of I, continues to position romantic protagonists in the ‘we world’ of non-disabled bodies and subjectivities of contemporary film. Using key characteristics of the romantic comedy genre, such as those theorized by Jeffers McDonald (2007), Shumway (2003), Abbot and Jermyn (2009) Deleyto (2009), this paper will argue that the metagenre of disability, as a genre of genres (Carter, 2007), prevails within recent depictions of romantic narratives featuring disabled people, despite the growing recognition of the need for representational change emanating from the #MeToo movement, and calls for greater inclusion. Exploring the ramifications of this for the portrayals disabled men and women in recent films, and broader cultural outlooks on disability, the presentation will examine the way that cinematic devices create distinct meanings of disability, focusing in particular on Me Before You (2016) and The Lobster (2015).

Biog.

Alison Wilde is a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University. Alison has written mainly on topics of screen media, disability, gender and audiences, in addition to researching and publishing on disability and educational inclusion, parenting, gender, social and health care. She teaches mainly on sociology, disability-related topics and research methods, supervising doctoral work on several topics. She co-founded the MeCCSA Disability Studies Network, and the BSA's Disability Studies Group. Her first book on comedy, film and disability was published in 2018.

- Qi Li (King’s College London), ‘Symbolic Fruits in Western and Chinese Gay Romance Films’

Queer cinema in the past several years seems to be at odds with romance, as tragic stories and harrowing loneliness have dominated certain traditional narratives of gay existence. However, until recently, queer filmmakers have unabashedly put so much effort in reinventing queer cinema’s relation to love. One of their strategies is to code homosexuality on screen in fruit scenes. The shapes, colours, and associated scents of those dripping fruits have borne such an uncanny resemblance to the lusciousness of sex that it is nearly impossible for audience to ignore all the symbolism they carry. The latest example is Call Me by Your Name (Luca Guadagnino, 2017), a slow-burning queer romantic drama which has elaborately used ripening peach as a repeated motif and a symbol of eroticised sensuality to approach queer love. Comparing Guadagnino’s masterpiece with a Chinese gay romance micro-film Orange (Yuan Xu, 2008), this paper finds out that while western gay romance films have fetishised fruit as a sex object embodying a part of male body, Chinese queer filmmakers also deploy fruit as a cinematic device to unfold homosexuality, but in a non-sexual way. To understand this difference in filmic representation, this paper then tracks the genealogy of fruits and its relation to narratives of gay romance in both Western and Chinese culture, by resorting to elements outside films in Italian painting, Chinese historical archive, and certain reaches of the gay subculture. This paper concludes that this cross-cultural comparison could help us reconsider what is gay romance.

Biog.

Qi Li is a KCL/CSC-funded PhD candidate in Film Studies at King’s College London. Supervised by Professor Chris Berry, he is researching queer tropes in queer cinema online, and how they entangle with online affect and Chinese digital culture. Qi undertook his MPhil in Gender Politics at the University of Cambridge and once served as a journalist at China’s liberal newspaper Southern Weekly.

- Natthanai Prasannam (Kasetsart University, Bangkok), ‘*Who Else Is Hotter than Mum’s Exes?*: Queering Family and Cold War Legacy in Thai Yaoi Fiction’

Yaoi or Boys’ Love products in Thailand emerged in the early 2000s. From its early form of fan fiction under the J-Wave and K-Wave, Thai yaoi fiction has developed through fan culture, youth culure and the rise of its television adaptations in the 2010s. In the light of this, Thai yaoi fiction is growing industrialised; it owns a vast market in literary festivals and publishing business. This paper hopes to explore a specific case study of Thai yaoi fiction—Ro Ruea Nai Mahasamut’s Who Else Is Hotter than Mum’s Exes?. As a romance, it significantly challenges the conventions of both Thai yaoi fiction, as a genre within commercial category, and the literary fiction which the writer is also a figure in such arena. Queer reading is, thus, adopted to analyse the text and its connected issues. Who Else Is Hotter than Mum’s Exes? articulates the intimacy among male protagonists despite their age difference. The setting is the North East of Thailand where the conflict between American army and the communists erupted during the 1960s-1970s. In the novel, the Cold War or Vietnam War legacy usually militarised or militant, is queered through homosexual desire, silence, the decline of father figures and revisionary interpretations of the legacy. The novel also subverts the literature-for-life genre attached to collective memory of the Cold War in Thailand. In all, the novel is pioneering ‘serious’ writings and readings of Thai yaoi fiction, as a romance, widely consumed in the reading public.

Biog.

Natthanai Prasannam teaches Thai literary and cultural studies at the Department of Literature, Kasetsart University in Bangkok, Thailand. His publications touch upon various fields: contemporary Thai literature, film studies, memory studies and adaptation studies. He is now growing his research interests in Thai and transcultural intermediality after his long stay in St Andrews, Scotland for his doctoral research.

**Panel 3 – French Literature (MS05)**

Chair: Helmut Schmitz (University of Warwick)

- Nic Miller (University of Warwick), ‘Delorme vs. the traditional family: Queerness, family values and language’

In one corner, we have Wendy Delorme; writer, queer activist and performer and pro-sex feminist. In the other, the persistent social construct of the heteronormative, monoganormative family unit. This paper will discuss the way Wendy Delorme’s literary work; Quatrième Génération, Insurrections! en territoire sexuel! and La Mère, la Sainte et la Putain stages insurrections against the heteronormative and monoganormative visions of family units. These visions are often fought against in Delorme’s texts with an importation of language from the more tolerant state of California into the French world; ‘Queer’, ‘Fisting’, ‘Pomosexuelle’, ‘Fem’, ‘Polyamorie’- Delorme’s choice of words to translate (or import directly) both linguistically and conceptually are important considerations in this fight. It is important to consider Delorme’s work in its social context of the French Republic and its own conceptions of the family unit to provide us with a litmus test of the extent to which we can see Delorme’s work as subversive in its context, which we will do by exploring a number of sociological texts on the republic such as the work of Eric Fassin and Shirley-Ann Jordan. The paper will also explore Delorme’s work outside of its French context, considering how Delorme uses her writing to subvert internationally held conceptions of family and human interrelating such as homosexual marriage, monogonormative relationships and conventional ideas of motherhood.

Biog.

Nic Miller is a final year undergraduate student in French and History at the University of Warwick. He presented a paper at the International Conference of Undergraduate Research 2016 titled Remember this? The issues and advantages of social media as a historical source for memory studies. His current research interests centre on psychiatric history, and in September he will be starting graduate entry medicine hoping to specialize in psychiatry. This interest stems from the way in which human interactions work and can be understood and have been understood historically, seeing the medical science in equivalence with the humanities aspects of studying psychiatry.

- Louise Kari-Méreau (Trinity College, Dublin), ‘Despentes and “feminine cynicism”: A Pre-#MeToo?’

In this paper I will present my findings regarding cynicism in French literature, from the 1990s to 2010s. The definition I use highlights two kinds of cynicism:

There is the altruistic one, coming from Ancient Greece: cynics wanted to denounce the flaws of their society to improve it. They were rejecting the societal body, praising the natural one. There is the individualist one, coming from the 19th century, as Sharon Stanley notes. People no longer welcome travellers into their homes for the night, now they open hotels and charge them for their stay. This shows the disappearance, slowly but surely, of virtues that modern societies replace by a calculating self-interested spirit. This individualist cynicism is more common since the 20th century, and especially after globalisation.

Each cynicism can be unproductive (criticising without proposing an alternative) or productive (criticizing and proposing an alternative). While I was studying the works of two major contemporary French authors, Virginie Despentes and Beigbeder, I understood that cynicism seems to come from two things: a young-ish age, and a feeling of discomfort.

In my paper I would like to question the possibility of a gendered cynicism, and especially the possibility of a feminine one, opposed to a masculine one. Indeed, it is possible to see similarities in Despentes and Beigbeder’s cynicism, however Despentes’ one appears harsher, more violent and seems to last longer. Would that mean that the feeling of discomfort stays longer in a woman’s life?

Parallel to this thought, Despentes’ books Baise Moi (1994) and King Kong Theory (2006) seem to be more relevant than ever, as they both deal with the issues raised in the #metoo movement. This link between her works and societal issues and changes has led me to consider her cynicism not only as a feminine one, but as a feminist one (during the #metoo movement many references were made to her essay on womanhood in contemporary France, King Kong Theory).

Biog.

Louise Kari Méreau is a third year PhD in the French department of the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies at Trinity College, Dublin. She is supervised by Dr. Sarah Alyn Stacey. Louise has a double license of philosophy and literature (Panthéon Sorbonne, 2014), a master of French Renaissance Literature (Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016), and a master of English Literature (National University of Ireland Galway, 2016). Her current research focuses on Cynicism in French contemporary novels, with the examples of Frederic Beigbeder and Virginie Despentes. She published her first article for Les Cahiers Linguatek n° 3-4 : "L'Ambiguïté": “L’Ambiguïté du cynisme de Marc Marronnier, une étude des romans de Frédéric Beigbeder, 1990-1997” on the 30th November 2018.

- Elizabeth Purdy (University of Leeds), ‘Desperately Seeking a Connection: Modes of Communication in Christophe Ono-dit-Biot’s *Plonger*’

“To be on the same wavelength” is a metaphor for the connection between two people, originating from the idea of a signal finding resonance with another point. This paper will discuss the way in which communication, or a lack thereof, shapes Christophe Ono-dit-Biot’s award-winning 2013 novel Plonger, and will attempt to map points of connection where the deteriorating couple are operating on the same communicative wavelength. It will explore how technology shapes and complicates relationships in what has been describes as ‘l’histoire d’un couple de notre temps’. In line with the conference theme, the ultimate aim of this paper is to address the way in which Plonger represents how the multiple technological avenues for communication that exist today can complicate relationships, and how the use of more complex signalling can diminish the intimacy of face-to-face communication.

The communication of the novel’s protagonists, Paz and César, is a complex process of reading and misreading signals: their relationship begins when César misinterprets Paz’s art work. Throughout the novel each character’s preferred mode of communication constantly alters and rarely coincides: César attempts to ring Paz after an argument, unaware that she has thrown her phone into a canal. These waves of communication become increasingly problematic, with both characters becoming less able to read the signals the other emits. I will also discuss the couple’s attitudes to the sea, César’s trepidation and Paz’s obsession, and how their differing interactions with physical waves is linked to their inability to be “on the same wave length”.

Biog.

Elizabeth Purdy is currently undertaking a Masters by Research in the use of the second person and the epistolary in contemporary French literature at the University of Leeds, where she also completed her undergraduate degree in English Literature. Her wider research interests include the interrelationship between memory, loss and love, the work of William Faulkner, and 19th century French poetry.

3-3.30 – Coffee/tea

**3.30-5 – Panel 4– New Courtships (MS04)**

Chair: Susannah Wilson (University of Warwick)

- Laura Clancy (Lancaster University), ‘“Meghan Markle is the Princess to Cheer Up Feminists”: The 2018 Royal Wedding and the Co-Option of Feminism’

In November 2017, two days after Prince Harry and Meghan Markle announced their engagement, New Statesman published an article by Rosamund Urwin entitled ‘why Meghan Markle is the princess to cheer up feminists’ (2017). The piece described in celebratory tone how Markle is different from Princess Diana and Kate Middleton because she has independent, feminist views, and her relationship with Harry is ‘symmetrical: an expression of support and equality in a family that has traditionally lacked both’. This seems to suggest a shifting understanding of gender norms in postfeminist and neoliberal culture, where marriage is considered a partnership of equals. This is despite the fact that Markle gave up her role in US television drama Suits and closed down all her social media accounts and popular blog in order to marry into the monarchy, to have all her media outputs ciphered by Kensington Palace.

This article was part of a series of representations of the 2018 Royal Wedding, which seemed to position the event as a feminist, post-racial utopia, “modernising” two ancient patriarchal institutions: marriage and monarchy. This presentation will analyse media representations of the wedding to consider how feminism is being co-opted and policed by institutions with distinctly anti-feminist principles. It argues that representations celebrating the wedding as de facto progress have suspended critiques of structural power dynamics, and ignored the rise of new misogynies and patriarchies under authoritarian neoliberalism.

The work presented here is taken from a joint research project on Meghan Markle and the 2018 Royal Wedding with Dr. Hannah Yelin, Oxford Brookes University.

Biog.

Laura Clancy is a Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Lancaster University. Her PhD research explores the ways in which the contemporary British monarchy is represented in media culture, to consider the role of the monarchy in producing consent for inequalities and class power in Britain. You can follow her on Twitter: @Laura\_\_Clancy.

- Xing Wang (Loughborough University London), ‘Professionalising Romance: Imagining Couples in Chinese Reality Dating Shows’

Dating shows have been criticised for its problematic relations with patriarchy and postfeminism illusions by scholars, yet few attentions have been paid to formats produced in nonwestern contexts and their commercial as well as political conditions. This research focuses on a Chinese dating show, We Are in Love (2015-2017), which is adapted from We Got Married (2008-2017) from South Korea. In the show, stars are paired up to become “imagined couples” and observed by relationship experts during their dates, which offers an unique perspective to understand the popular culture, CP(couple) fandoms and modern relationship pedagogies in East Asia.

The paper analysed three seasons of We Are in Love with a particular interest in episodes produced in 2017. Through lenses of the political economy of media and discourse analysis, the paper revealed how the format was adapted in a transnational context. On the one hand, “imagined couples” facilitated the spread of South Korean romantic norms and reshaped public understanding of stars in Chinese contexts. On the other hand, the Chinese version lifted the significance of relationship experts and involved more “ordinary people” in response to political demands. The “imagined couples” under guidance legitimised the neoliberal ethos including constant self-improvement, self- discipline and self-marketing. At the same time, however, it demonstrated the absurd situation where authentic expressions and organic relationships were broken, alienated and abandoned. By claiming itself to be a “relationship textbook”, the programme echoed the growing “rationalisation” of love in today’s media industry where romance served as professions and businesses.

Biog.

Xing Wang is a Postgraduate Research Student at Institute for Media and Creative Industries, Loughborough University. She obtained her bachelor and master degree from Peking University, China in the area of Journalism and Cultural Studies. Her research interests include television genre, media production, emotional labour and feminist theories with a special focus on relationship discourses in Chinese dating shows. Her doctoral research is an ethnographic and textual analysis project that takes popular dating shows — both texts and their production — as its empirical focus.

- Maureen Ramsden (University of Hull), ‘To What Extent Do New Courtship Rituals and Personal Ambitions Impact on the Couple in the Twenty-First Century’?

This century has seen important changes in how couples meet. This is mainly due to new technologies and ideas about the self in this ‘me me’ society.’ There are online dating sites where people first meet in a virtual reality, rather than face to face. In addition, there is ‘Rapid Dating’, a system where people meet for 10 minutes and then move on to someone else. Although couples do see each other face to face, is 10 minutes enough to form any sort of opinion about others? People often rely on comments on Facebook to see how popular and successful they appear, often to complete strangers. Self-esteem is all-important. However, does this lead to couples in a happy relationship, as was traditionally depicted in popular romance novels (Mills and Boon), where marriage was seen as the beginning of a different, but ‘happy ever after,’ new life? Can people, often obsessed with their own self-image and their own needs, make the compromises necessary to have a happy relationship, such as that in marriage? In addition, how long can such a relationship last in the 21c? Were ‘happy ever after’ marriages only fictional, the product of romantic dreams, as in Flaubert’s Mme Bovary? Daniel Santore in his article’ Romantic Relationships, Individualism and the Possibility of Togetherness...’(2008) argues that changes in society lead to a greater emphasis on the individual, which would seem to be prejudicial to successful couple relationships.’The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society.’

Biog.

Having completed a PhD at Harvard University and held short-term posts at the University of St. Andrew’s and King’s College London, Maureen Ramsden currently works in the Languages Department at the University of Hull, UK. A specialist of the 19th and 20th centuries, Maureen’s publications include the monograph *Crossing Borders: The Interrelation of Fact and Fiction in Historical Works, Travel Tales, Autobiography and Reportage* (based on her Harvard PhD thesis, supervisor Professor Susan Rubin Suleiman, Peter Lang, 2016); the articles ‘Le Père Goriot: A Depiction of Age and of Obsession?,’ in  *As time goes by: Portraits of* *Age*, eds. Joy Charnley and Caroline Verbier, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, January 2013: 139-152; ‘La Métamorphose d’un cercle dans *A la recherche,’*  *Orbis Litterarum,* October,2006*,* 61, 5 : 416-425 ; ‘The Play and Place of Fact and Fiction in the Travel Tale,’ *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* January, 2000, 36: 1: 16-32; *Fictional Frontiers : The Interrelation of Fact and Fiction between the World and the Text,’* published online by *Neophilologus,* 6/5/11 and in hard copy 2011,95 :341-358She is working on the monograph *The Evolution of Proust’s ‘Combray:’A Genetic Study.*

5-5.10– Comfort break

**5.10-6.10 - Keynote 2 (MS04) – Diane Negra (University College Dublin), ‘Reading *The Proposal* as Post-Epitaph Chick Flick’**

No abstract.

Biog.

Diane Negra is Professor of Film Studies and Screen Culture at University College Dublin. A member of the Royal Irish Academy and former Guest Professor at Brown University and at the Free University of Berlin, she is the author, editor or co-editor of ten books including *What a Girl Wants?: The Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*, and the co-editions *Extreme Weather and Global Media*, *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity* and *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*. Her work in media, gender and cultural studies has been widely influential and recognized with a range of research awards and fellowships, including an award from the Government of Japan that led to a lecture tour in that country. Among other editorial board service, she is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Television and New Media.* She is currently working on a book on Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*.

**6.15 Wine reception (The Street)**