

# Control Conference, 25th and 26th June 2009 - Report

The Researcher and Graduate School in the Humanities and Vitae sponsored The Control Conference at Cardiff University on 25/26th June 2009. The two-day conference was the 5th annual conference to be organized by Cardiff University PhD students for PhD students across the globe. In attendance were students from the UK, USA, Asia and Europe.

Presenters from a variety of disciplines across the humanities and in various stages of their research presented papers on a wide variety of topics all concerning the many ideas of control. Subjects included: media control, religious control, border control, control of the arts, political control and social control. This interdisciplinary approach allowed for engaging debate amongst a number of differing topics and viewpoints.

A highlight of the event was the keynote address by Richard Reeves, director of the think-tank Demos. At the core of his talk was the idea of becoming a public intellectual, something of which every student should strive for; and, his non-academic approach supported the idea that students think beyond their own discipline in order to be liberated from the specialization of academics.

The Control Conference provided not only an important framework for interdisciplinary discussion but also a space to allow research students an opportunity to foster skills and confidence in presentation and communication. A sixth-annual conference has been discussed and plans will soon be announced.

## Panel 1

### Controlling Narratives Part 1

**Chair: Peter Phillips, Cardiff School of Religious & Theological Studies**

- Carmel Murphy 'Beyond the Waverley Narrative: Romantic Historical Fiction/s'
- Soad M Nigm 'So in the Land / Madoc was left Sole Lord': Superiority and Control in Southey's 'Madoc'

The two papers in this panel dealt with Romantic narrative as an active ingredient in nationalism and colonialism. Carmel Murphy's paper, "Beyond the Waverley narrative: Romantic Historical fiction/s" discussed the extent to which Scott had begun to determine the nature of Scottish historical self image. In proposing alternative narratives of historical understanding she raised the larger question of mythic national image being institutionalised and nurtured at the expense of other, dissenting narratives. Her paper argued for a reassessment and destabilisation of the fictions which both form and legitimate excluding national images.

Soad Nigm examined the idea that Southey's 'Madoc' is a legitimization of British colonial power, its implied moral vision and the perception of its altruism by its proponents. She proposed Southey's poetic narrative both as celebration and justification of colonialism in general and British colonialism in particular.

Both papers and the responses to them implied a necessary subversion of formative narratives which both legitimate national self image (and self interest!) and are legitimated by it. Possibly some such discourse would have emerged if panel members had been guided towards looking at cross-paper themes.

## **Panel 2**

### **Border Control Part 1**

**Chair: Ronen Shayovitz, Cardiff School of English, Communication & Philosophy**

- Robin Kim 'Control and Urban Planning: A Case Study of Bankside, London'
- Abigail Lockey 'The Unspoken City: Capoeira and the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro'

Robin Kim introduced the role of town planning in the urban regeneration of Bankside in South London. He highlighted the historical inability of the two approaches to urban regeneration—'the Masterplan' and one-off architectural projects—to overcome the economic, social and spatial division created by the River Thames. The recent cultural redevelopment of the Bankside Power Station into the Tate Modern in 2000 and the building of the iconic Millennium Bridge in the same year may conspire to overcome this barrier and lead to the successful regeneration of Southwark but this has yet to be seen. Robin concluded that Town Planning had shown an inability to control urban and spatial divisions and disparities.

Another physical but also metaphorical barrier has been deliberately created in the form of concrete walls by the state to contain and separate the favelas (and their inhabitants, criminal economy, and illegal status) of Rio de Janeiro. Abigail Lockey argued that the barrier are a concrete manifestation of the already existing multitude of barriers between the inside and outside of the favelas, including the dualities of legal and illegal, rich and poor, formal and informal economies, order and chaos. They also represent the limits of town planning resisting even the possibility of the dwellings being recorded, measured or standardised. Although to an outsider the favelas are the embodiment of anarchy and chaos they are in fact internally controlled and disciplined through informal systems of authority based around the drug trafficking hierarchy. Abigail utilized the metaphor of the stylised movements of the 'fight-dance-game' Capoeira to describe the paradox of external chaos but internal control.

## **Panel 3**

### **Censorship & Propaganda in the Arts**

**Chair: Peter Phillips, Cardiff School of Religious & Theological Studies**

- Anke Caton 'Schubert's 'Die Forelle' – an Innocent Song about a Fish?'
- Alexis Paterson 'Maestro? Socialist ideals in Louis Andriessen's De Volharding'

The relatively sparse attendance at this panel and the restrained response raised questions about whether art music ("classical" music to put it in populist terms) is perceived to have a valid or relevant perspective on issues of culture and nationalism. Alexis Paterson's paper, "Maestro? Socialist ideals in Louis Andriessen's De Volharding" looked at these issues at the macro level, using Andriessen as her focus. In particular her paper questioned whether

democratic intention is undercut by the control element implicit in the authorial/composing function. She implied that an element of accommodation with more commercial agencies was inevitable as well as some recognition of “mainstream” arts organisations. This did not necessarily mean submission or conquest.

Anke Caton’s paper, “Schubert’s ‘Die Forelle’ – an innocent song about a fish?” examined the possibility that the composer’s authorial role could subvert by suggestion and by musical image allied with text. Her paper pointed up the need for a serious review of Schubert’s use of text by different hands and for his lieder to be released from the exclusive preserve of technicians and performers. This paper, more than most that I heard, crossed a number of discipline boundaries and showed the strength and depth of argument that can be achieved by doing so.

Both papers should have provoked thought about the role of the composer and, hence, of music across society and in relation to regimes which are culturally and/or politically repressive.

#### **Panel 4**

##### **Controlling Narratives Part 2**

**Chair: Ronen Shayovitz, Cardiff School of English, Communication & Philosophy**

- Rachel Tsang ‘The Cuckoo in the Historian’s Nest: Reconceptualising Cultural Heritage as a Political Resource’
- Helen York ‘Sins of Omission: How to make History Go Away’

Rachel Tsang initially discussed the idea of Cultural Heritage as the collection of physical artefacts and intangible aspects (such as idiom, rituals, clothing etc) of a people that are passed on and replicated from one generation to the next. Together they form part of the framing of a collective historical narrative and the identity of that society and its individuals. The question of both how and who controls this collection was addressed by Rachel. Although it is clear that the state can commit acts of collective forgetting by destroying statues and banning traditional practices the recording and preservation of Cultural Heritage is more problematic: can the state be trusted to act as the gatekeepers to a collective memory or will they inevitably manipulate symbols for political advantage? Rachel argued that the successful cultivation of Cultural Heritage can be used to bolster liberal and multicultural values as long as a single identity is not promoted to the exclusion of others.

Helen York’s paper offered a very different perspective on the politics of remembering and forgetting. The proliferation of radio signals in the 20th century democratized and liberalized the dissemination of information and provided a platform for public discourse. However to cope with the technical, social and political problem of ‘interference’ and ‘noise’, regulations needed to be introduced to regulate the frequency of broadcasts and inevitably their content. The economics of radio broadcast whereby costs can be reduced by syndicating material across networks has also conspired to reduce the diversity of content and the voices able to participate in the medium. Furthermore the recording of this important cultural history has been compromised due to the lack of archival discipline and

the fragility of the magnetic medium. Thus a paradoxical excess and lack of control has negated the history of radio in two ways—through heavy-handed regulation and neglect.

## **Panel 5**

### **Control Freak**

**Chair: Corbett Miteff, Cardiff School Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies**

- Sophia Deboick 'Sœur 'Je veux': Céline Martin's Iconographical Mission and the Cult of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux'
- Sally Higgs 'I have no Longer any Sense but that of Sorrow': The Portrayal of Madness in Sophia Lee's 'The Recess'
- Theresa Wray 'Puppet Mistresses: We have taken to our beds! Matriarchal control from the safety of the bedroom: an Examination of the Forbidden side of Motherhood in the Writings of Elizabeth Bowen and Kate O'Brien'

The second day of the conference began with three papers all with strong female voices trying to find a certain position within the world. Sophia Deboick began the session with describing the cult status of Saint Therese of Lisieux. From the paper we were told how Saint Therese's sister Celine Martin had ultimate control over the images of her sister, which became iconographic across the world. Secondly, Sally Higgs presented a paper dealing with Sophia Lee's novel 'The Recess.' In the paper the idea of framing fictions was used to integrate various perspectives into the novel. By using an insane narrator the novelist was able to control certain situations from a position normally not taken. Lastly, Theresa Wray examined how authors Elizabeth Bowen and Kate O'Brien countered the control of the orthodoxy of Catholic Ireland. In *The House of Paris* and *The Ante-Room* both authors controlled their female characters to extremities beyond typical situations of the current day.

## **Panel 6**

### **Remote Control**

**Chair: Alexis Paterson, Cardiff School of Music**

- David McQueen 'Information Dominance' in Current Affairs War Reporting: a Case Study in Media Control in the Iraq Conflict'
- Andrew Power 'Control of Identity'
- Edward Willatt 'The Abstract and the Concrete in the Control of Social Space'

Last minute cancellations from speakers led to a reassignment of some papers to different panels, and to the addition of Edward Willatt's 'The Abstract and the Concrete in the Control of Social Space' to this panel. This resulted in an interesting contrast between the papers, and while 'Remote Control' may no longer have been the most appropriate panel title, the juxtaposition of papers that focussed on the way our thoughts and responses are controlled by media; internet and literature respectively worked well, with the final paper giving a more theoretical lens through which to return to the previous discussions. Each paper was informative and engaging, generating lively discussion about the way in which our modern selves engage with various media.

## **Panel 7**

### **Social Policy & Control**

**Chair: Corbett Miteff, Cardiff School Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies**

- Peter Phillips 'What kind of Ministry is this? Anglican Prison Chaplains as Ministers of Church and/or State'
- Mike Thomas 'Emancipatory Control of Same-sex Couples: an Exploratory Study of Civil Partnership'

The two papers within the panel entitled Social Policy and Control were on two completely different topics, yet both used Foucauldian methodology to examine how certain institutions in society imply various notions of control over its citizens. Firstly, Peter Phillips explored the use of ministry in British prisons from a first-person perspective since he's an active chaplain working in prisons. Looking at the hierarchy of prisons, Phillips used his own methods with those of others to discover the role of chaplaincy in prisons. For perhaps it could be argued that prisons give a space of control to its inmates so that they may find their own ways to ministry. Secondly, Mike Thomas spoke on the roles and responsibilities of same-sex couples in relation to civil partnerships pertaining to state intervention and social scrutiny. Drawing upon his own research and using specific examples from interviews, Thomas explained that with lesser control comes more responsibility because as government lifts bans on same-sex marriage couples are obliged to participate in obeying laws that other married couples face such as taxes, family law and next of kin rights.

## **Panel 8**

### **Religious Control Part 1**

**Chair: Gerardina Antelmi, Cardiff School of English, Communication & Philosophy**

- Ronen Shayovitz 'Controlled and Controlling: The Islamist Discourse'
- Bulbul Siddiqi 'Discipline and the Islamic Movement: Case of Tablighi Jamaat in the UK and Bangladesh'

Ronen Shayovitz introduced Islamism from two perspectives: firstly as a religious movement which is seen as a 21st century challenge to the Western secular mind, and secondly in its relationship with the Islamist movements within it. As to the latter issue he continued by analysing Islamism from its origin as a controlling ideology and how it exercises control on the beliefs and behaviour of its believers, without overlooking the influence that its members may have at their turn. In particular Ronen explored the development of the Islamist discourse before and after the 1960s, by identifying the importance that Sayyid Qutb played within Islamism. He focussed on Sayyid Qutb's contribution to the idea of transnational Islamism which includes the concept of umma.

The second paper was mainly centred on reporting the preliminary findings of Bulbul Siddiqi's research concerning Tablighi Jamaat. Bulbul's field work was carried out both in the UK and in Bangladesh in the period October 2008 to April 2009. First Bulbul explained how analysis of the Tablighi Jamaat movement in the two countries could help achieve a better understanding of Islam today. He then explored the nature of this movement, which commenced in the 1920s in India and which arrived in the UK in 1940s. The speaker also

focussed on the idea of 'true' Muslim, in particular how to make a Muslim a 'true' Muslim, and on the close relation established between the individual and the larger community by means of the idea of 'invitation'. While explaining how both concepts are key to achieve the level of discipline required. Bulbul also pointed out how individuals interact within the community.

Both papers were enriching and generated a lively discussion and participation from the listeners. In particular the concept of 'invitation' was developed and explained to those participants who are not familiar with this as a technical term.

## **Panel 9**

### **Border Control Part 2**

**Chair: Alexis Paterson, Cardiff School of Music**

- Andras Szalai 'Evil Scientists and their Volcano Lair? Skilled Intellectuals and Control in Today's Globalized World'
- Kryss MacLeod 'Assuming Control, Abdicating Responsibility; Effective State Control in Non-Arrival Measures'
- Thomas Underwood 'Policing Movement beyond the Norman Border: Land Control in Thirteenth-Century Normandy'

Again, this panel contained one paper that had been transferred from another panel, following Nicola Mann's cancellation. This space was filled by Andras Szalai's 'Evil Scientists and their Volcano Lair? Skilled Intellectuals and Control in Today's Globalized World'. The first two papers were resolutely contemporary, looking at the most recent developments in refugee law and the control of knowledge, and these drew discussion on their similar concerns. However, it was very interesting to see how the discussion developed after the final paper from Thomas Underwood, who was looking at the control of borders outlined in the 13th century 'Complaints of the Normans'. This paper generated much discussion about the parallels between the hierarchies and controlling forces at work now and in the medieval period, ending in a general discussion about the ongoing importance of Magna Carta for current discussions about civil liberties. Again, all papers were interesting and well presented.

## **Panel 10**

### **Religious Control Part 2**

**Chair: Peter Phillips, Cardiff School of Religious & Theological Studies**

- Gerardina Antelmi 'Not of this World: Medieval Mystical Visions'
- Eleni Marantou 'Sanctuaries as Places of Control in Ancient Greece'
- Lisa Schaffnit 'Control and the Female Body in Ælfric of Eynsham's 'Lives of Saints'

Two of the papers in this group interrogated the processes by which religious myth-making produces control by superstition, reinforced by cultic and priestly figures. Eleni Marantou's paper, "Sanctuaries as places of control in ancient Greece" posited a reflexive scheme in which men created gods whose worship became institutionalised with a move from agrarian to urban communities and whose agents became restricting and repressive forces.

The potential of religious myth to modify and shape the cultus was brought out in Lisa Schaffnit's paper, "Control and the female body in Ælfric of Eynsham's 'Lives of Saints'". Her linguistic analysis played in an original way into wider scholarship about the erasing of women both from sacred texts and from church tradition. The controlling authorship of Ælfric had enabled a controlling hagiography to marginalise and exclude female figures.

Gerardina Antelmi's paper "Not of this world: medieval mystical visions" showed that women of later generations still have a visible and influential place in the monastic and contemplative strands of church history. She showed how the immanence of the divine command as revealed in visions set both female and male mystics apart from the structures of ecclesiastical authority and even elevated them above that authority.

All three papers provoked questions and discussion; it would have been interesting to link the papers by Eleni and Lisa and then to look at the nature of religious control in Gerardina's paper. This panel in particular showed the possible advantages of allowing time for a linked consideration of all the papers in a panel.

Peter Phillips' overall comments

- The rearrangement of the panels worked well.
- Not surprisingly, some papers could have fitted appropriately into more than one panel.
- Most papers that I heard used Control as a stance to interrogate their own concerns rather than vice versa. This meant that the outcome was divergent and diverse. I think people liked this and it contributed to people's obvious enjoyment of the conference. The comment (from Sophia Deboick) that it was "properly interdisciplinary" seemed absolutely right.
- Socially it seemed to work well. It felt easy and informal, although I was aware that there were two or three who appeared to remain somewhat on the margins.
- The plenary was appreciative and constructive. Two contributors rightly observed that in planning next year's event we need to have our objectives clear before developing the format.
- My first real conference and I really enjoyed it and the preparation for it. Thank you.