

Decentred / dissenting connections: Envisioning Caribbean film and visual cultures



Co-organized by Dunja Fehimović (Newcastle University) and Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián (Durham University), *Decentred / dissenting connections: Envisioning Caribbean film and visual cultures* took place at Newcastle University on 29-30 May 2018. The two-day conference received generous funding from the Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR), the AHRC Open World Research Initiative (OWRI), and Newcastle University School of Modern Languages.

The conference's primary aim was to foster an ongoing regional network that connects disciplines, academics, and practitioners around a new vision of Caribbean film studies and visual culture production. A second aim was to facilitate public exposure to and engagement with this dynamic, transnational, and multilingual body of work.

The conference was structured as a series of workshops that attracted scholars and postgraduate students interested in re-imagining the Caribbean through a visual lens (see programme [here](#)). Discussions centred around three main questions:

1. How can the visual help us approach the Caribbean anew?
2. What does it mean to re-envision the Caribbean in times of global fragmentation and expanding inequalities?
3. How can we approach the Caribbean's multiple peripheries rigorously and creatively from the relative remoteness of the North-East of England?

The conference included presentations by a total of 16 scholars, including three postgraduate students, from ten different institutions: Newcastle University, Durham University, Universität Bremen, Queens University Belfast, University of Essex, University of Cambridge, Open University, University of Edinburgh, UCL, and University of Liverpool. Overall, there were 45 attendees across the two days.

The keynote speaker was Professor Charles Forsdick (University of Liverpool), who presented on 'Unthinkability, Unfilmability? The Haitian Revolution on Screen'. The programme included the screening of *A Winter Tale* (2007), a feature film by an influential protagonist in Caribbean diasporic cinema: Canadian director, writer and producer Frances-Anne Solomon. The film was shown at the historic Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle and the screening was followed by a conversation between the audience and the director via Skype.

Over the course of the two days of discussions, a number of common threads were identified. The participants noted a series of visual echoes and tropes connecting different places and traditions, many of which were related to stereotypes, fantasies, and the tourist imaginary. These demonstrated how the visual can work to fix a subject, imposing stasis. However, the way in which some of these tropes repeated themselves also spoke to the power of the non-verbal and the visual to make archipelagic connections, from which strength and resistance might be constructed. Highlighted, in particular, was the potential of film and visual arts to make visible marginalised subjects and hidden processes.

At the same time, as Solomon's film and post-screening discussion evidenced, it was not easy to envision and make visible the connections between micro experiences and individual practices and macro historical, geopolitical, and economic patterns. Several of the contributions made use of visual metaphors in order to articulate these connections, and to demonstrate the concrete impacts of the imaginary. These encounters with and through the visual helped us to envisage the Caribbean as a space of flows, connections, and repeating patterns, but also of blockages, counterflows and resistances. Many of the papers returned to ideas of resistance, indicating the power of the (Caribbean) margins not only to survive but also to initiate radical change. It became clear that the visual was not just a perspective on the Caribbean, but also that a Caribbean perspective can shed invaluable light on wider cultural and social, aesthetic and political questions, dynamics and processes.

Plans for the future include the organisation of two further one-day workshops on the topic of Caribbean cinema in Easter 2019 (Durham University) and 2020 (Newcastle University). The aim is to expand on the experiences and results of the 2018 conference and to work on developing a select number of research papers for potential publication as articles in an edited special issue in autumn or winter 2020, approaching journals such as *Small Axe*, *Social Text*, *Third Text*, or *Transnational Cinemas*.

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