

Midsummernight's Dream at Punkaharju, Finland, 1996

The first Popular European Cinema Conference was held at the University of Warwick, England, in September 1989. Like many popular films, also this successful conference was destined to have "a sequel", which this time took place near the Russian border at Punkaharju, Finland, in July 5 - 9, 1996, with Finnish Society for Cinema Studies (SETS) as the principal organizer. Like its predecessor, the 5-day event consisted of both lectures, workshops and film screenings. The leisure activities included, among other things, an opportunity to visit Retretti art centre, and an excursion to the Savonlinna Opera Festival.

The subtitle and general topic of PEC '96 (or PEC 2) was loosely "Midsummernight's Sex/Comedy", and consequently most papers addressed the issues of gender and sexuality. Since PEC 1 resulted in the publication of the voluminous book called *Popular European Cinema*, edited by Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (Routledge 1992), *Lähikuva* Journal decided to dedicate the present special issue to PEC '96 by publishing a selection of conference papers in writing.

The present issue contains seven PEC 2 contributions rewritten by the authors in an article form. In accordance with the basic idea of the conference, Tim Bergfelder's paper considers the "Europeanness" of European cinema by discussing, for example, the co-production efforts of various European national film industries. The author suggests that we should rethink the history of European cinema rather in terms of cultural cross-overs than exclusion and division.

Two papers concentrate on the star images of two prominent European female stars. Ramona Curry discusses Asta Nielsen's stardom in the mid-1910s, when the renowned actress of tragic roles appeared in three very popular "sex comedies". The author analyzes the workings of Nielsen's playful performances in relation to her star image as a dramatic actress representing complex desire. Stephen Lowry, in turn, addresses the star image of Brigitte Bardot, the central European sex symbol of the 1950s and 1960s. He regards "BB" as a meeting point and negotiation of various contemporary popular discourses on sexuality.

Monica Dofs Sundin concentrates on a single film, Jane Campion's *The Piano* as a postmodern fairytale. She argues that, by making use of classical folklore/fairytale characters (e.g. mermaid, siren) and the symbolic weight of the piano, the film as a whole becomes a strong metaphor for a woman's muted struggle against sexual subordination – and her eventual release from it.

John Higgins begins his essay by offering an analysis of the history of the idea of film pleasure. This general account provides a context for the examination of some of the problems in Euzhan Palcy's film *A Dry White Season*, focusing particularly on the question of Palcy's claims for a documentary realism.

Finally, Slavoj Žižek addresses sex in the cinema in terms of psychoanalysis. Using some well-known films as examples he maintains that in its efforts to avoid the real of the sexual act the narrative cinema bears witness to the fact that the sexual act, in fact, is irrepresentable. This is also the reason for the ultimate failure of pornography.

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It is time to thank once more all the PEC '96 participants whose presence and contributions guaranteed the success of the conference – and especially those scholars whose papers made this Lähikuva issue possible. We also want to thank Henry Bacon for proofreading certain articles. A special grant from the AVEK Centre for this publication is gratefully acknowledged.

On behalf of SETS we wish to express our warmest gratitude to Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau for their co-operation and invaluable help in the organizing efforts of PEC '96. At the same time we wish to remind that the preparations for PEC 3 to be held again at the University of Warwick in March, 2000, are well under way (see a separate 'Call for Papers' in this issue). Usually "sequels" are somewhat sneered at by critics, but rest assured, however, that the PEC sequels cater for the taste of the most demanding film scholars. See you at Warwick in the next millenium!

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