Note from the Organisers

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The articles in this collection first appeared as presentations at a conference entitled *Fragile Realities: Intersecting Interpretations of the Real*, held at University College London on 6 July 2012. The conference was put together as an opportunity to showcase postgraduate research conducted in UCL's School of European Languages, Culture and Society (SELCS), and to bring together postgraduate researchers working between and across disciplines at institutions around the UK.

ThoughtsForward is a postgraduate student forum based in SELCS, interested in fostering research and relationships within the school, regardless of language or disciplinary specialism. Since the inception of ThoughtsForward, the organising team have been keen to find productive ways to get SELCS postgraduates to discuss and reflect upon their research, as well as consider their position in a changing academic landscape no longer constrained by traditional disciplinary boundaries.

The theme "Fragile Realities" was chosen for a number of reasons. First, many of the postgraduates working in SELCS conduct research into areas where representation and the construction of realities are paramount. Secondly, the impact of globalisation, technology and digital interaction is causing many to question the nature of reality as applies to social interaction, cultural production and even language. As can be seen from the articles included in this special edition of Opticon1826, these questions are at the forefront of much contemporary research in the Arts and Humanities. This volume on current research at SELCS is both an answer to the "fragile reality" of research in the Arts and Humanities, and a thought experiment to help elucidate how academic research can step out of the ivory tower and contribute to a wider interrogation and engagement with a changing world and its multiple realities.

This collection of articles aims to showcase the diversity of research and approaches within SELCS. The articles approach a wide variety of geographic and thematic subjects, from a variety of perspectives, and with a variety of methodologies. We have grouped them into three thematic sections, although these sections belie the many connections and interplays between the articles across such groupings.

Section 1, "Nordic Spaces and the Changing Realities of Urban Europe" features two articles by Essi Viitanen and Pei-Sze Chow (both UCL Scandinavian Studies). Viitanen's article examines the intersections of the social, political and topographical realities of Finland's Tapiola suburbs on screen as they are depicted in Jaako Pakkasvirta's 1968 film *The Green Widow*. Chow's contribution focuses on landmarks and the parallels between urban and cinematic space in three contemporary films by Swedish film-maker Fredrik Gertten.

In Section 2, "From Surrealism to "Keeping it Real" – The Vicissitudes of Identity Formation", Camilla Sutherland's article (UCL Spanish) examines identity and exile through the

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surreal depiction of space in the work of Spanish *émigré* painter Remedios Varo, while Nichola Smalley (UCL Scandinavian Studies) interrogates assumptions about authenticity in the context of contemporary Swedish literature and rap, exploring the socio-political issues that these complementary art forms engage with.

The third section of this volume, "Media Spectacle and the Projections of Reality" focuses on the construction of reality through (or in spite of) its representation in the media. Alicia Spencer-Hall (UCL French) draws on medieval hagiography to explain modern celebrity culture and thereby interrogate the contemporary validity of the concept of "resurrection", with reference to recent holographic rap concerts by deceased American rapper Tupac. Kinga Bloch (UCL German) questions how television can impact upon its audience's self-image and its understanding of reality through her empirical research on German television series in the 1980s.

We hope you will enjoy the articles we have selected.

Acknowledgements