

"A rhapsodically panoramic view of life in New York.
... Nothing short of a masterwork." —*The New Yorker*

MARGARET

A Screenplay

Kenneth Lonergan

With an Introduction by Tony Kushner

Thursday 11 October

1pm Milgate Room, AD Hope Bldg, SLLL

Monique Rooney

Only Mediate: The Mere Interest of Interbrow in Kenneth Lonergan's *Margaret* (2011) and *Howards End* (2017)

'Only connect' functions both as the epigraph to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) and as the central character Margaret Schlegel's exhortation to her husband, capitalist entrepreneur Henry Wilcox. With her exasperated 'only connect', Margaret means for Henry to recognise that his refusal of hospitality and condemnation of the actions of others involve blindness to his own culpability in the tragic events that have unfolded. Signalling potential hospitality in any given situation, 'only connect' is here a means to an altruistic end. This paper repurposes 'only connect' as 'only mediate' in order to think about bourgeois conduct underpinning middlebrow narrative, interpersonal mediation and the role of intermedia in Kenneth Lonergan's film and television work. The television miniseries *Howards End* (2017, screenwriter Lonergan, director Hettie McDonald) and the film *Margaret* (2011, director and screenwriter Lonergan) are coming-of-age narratives in which tragic storylines pivot on the actions of young, middle-class women who insert themselves into the lives of other people. This female, bourgeois mediation can, moreover, be understood in terms of the capitalist-media environment in which both *Howards End* and *Margaret* were produced.

My coinage 'interbrow'—crossing 'middlebrow' with 'intermedia'—points to my interest in the role and significance of contemporary media in the context of bourgeois concern, with further reference to what Sianne Ngai calls 'mere interest'. 'Mere interest' is a weaker or cooler version of the curious that, for Ngai, corresponds to the circulation of the artwork within a bourgeois public sphere and among late capitalist networks of production, distribution, commodification and consumption. In this context, 'mere interest' gestures to our aesthetic proclivities, judgements and actions as they hyperconnect, enmeshed within distributive networks. This paper considers the transformative possibilities and limits of 'mere interest' as a will to 'only mediate', investigating the interbrow of Lonergan's productions and their portrayal of a feminine drive toward resolution for selves and others.

Monique Rooney is a senior lecturer in the English Program, School of Literature, Languages and Literature ANU. Her book Living Screens: Melodrama and Plasticity in Contemporary Film and Television (2015) explores the far-reaching legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ur-melodrama Pygmalion as a form that is essentially about mediation and metamorphosis. She has published on the role and significance of intermedia in Angelaki and New Review of Film and Television Studies and her essay on melodrama is forthcoming in the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia.



enquiries: russell.smith@anu.edu.au

Literary
Studies
Seminar
Series
2018