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## **Conference Organisers Introduction**

**William Boelhower and Chris Gair**

This last May the Universities of Birmingham and Padua, Italy, held their first international seminar on themes and perspectives in trans-Atlantic studies. Students and teachers participating in the intensive one-year MA program in Trans-Atlantic Studies sponsored by these two institutions came together with other scholars from Europe and the United States and discussed some twenty-two presentations over a three-day period.

The thematic areas touched upon ranged from international relations (Professors Scott Lucas and Antonio Varsori and graduate students James D. Boys, Michael Burns, Giulia Bentivoglio and Kaeten Mistry) and historical and cultural issues (Professors Stephen Smith, Salvatore Ciriaco, Guenter Lenz and John Leo) to topics dealing with music (Professors Neil Olmstead and Luca Cerchiari), cinema (Professors Giuliana Muscio and Joe Coroniti), literature (Professors Chris Gair, Aliko Varvogli, Donna Perry, Andrea Molesini and graduate students Corinna Baschiroto, Giuliano Bettanin and Simone Francescato), and photography (graduate student Eva Rus).

The papers selected for this special issue of *49th Parallel* were originally given during the Padua seminar and are intended to represent the quality and variety of scholarship on that occasion. While appreciating their multidisciplinary range and the broad spectrum of issues they address, the reader should also try to imagine what was perhaps the most rewarding and intellectually satisfying aspect of the seminar, namely the totally original discussions and the unique scholarly esprit that developed. It is with this selection of papers, therefore, that we would like to celebrate the new MA program cosponsored by Birmingham and Padua and its very mature first fruits.