

## 14. Cinema and the Mythical

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Since the beginning of cinema the mythical has been a central trope situated in themes as well as in cognitive forms of filmic expression. Equally well established is the use of cinema for diverse political purposes. In recent years especially postcolonial countries have witnessed a significant change in the relationship between cinema, politics and popular culture. As a result of global processes of media deregulation and the growing accessibility of diverse visual technologies, it has become increasingly difficult to control cinema industries, which had often played a central role in state and other hegemonic politics of representation, only small numbers of independent film-makers had succeeded in using cinema as voice of critique.

The current situation is characterized by new possibilities in the field of production, technological shifts, and the emergence of new circuits of circulation and new publics on national as well as international scale. One result is a growing emphasis on hitherto neglected themes in general, and the mythological or spiritual in particular. These changes have also strongly affected dominant Euro-American cinema and its political-cultural strategies. The existence of new privatised film industries and the creative appropriation of the new communication technologies signal a different politics of representation – no longer hegemonically controlled and feeding into, as well as reflecting, alternative imaginations of community and agency.

The workshop seeks to explore these developments based on detailed ethnographic and theoretical research. The central focus is on cinema's role and place in current politics of representation and on the significance of the mythical in these processes as central venue of cinematic articulation between documentation and fiction.

Syncretic Secularism in Bangladeshi Cinema

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In this paper I want to explore some recent Bangladeshi films that portray Sufi and Baul traditions in the Bangladeshi countryside. I will argue that discourses of fundamentalist Islam as well as perceived Saudi attempts to export Wahabist notions are generating a new urgency in representations of popular Islam and mysticism in Bangladeshi film. A secularist agenda is forwarded here in the form of a mystical humanism.

The films I will discuss are funded either by the French government or by Channel I, one of the new private satellite television channels in Bangladesh. While technologically changes are very slow, new possibilities for circulation as well as new audiences and money are supporting films that seek to reinterpret Islamic traditions in Bangladesh. The 'independent' filmmakers that work largely outside the state film

industry are taking this opportunity to create films that use a syncretic mysticism to counter the representation of Islam coming from the sharia-inclined coalition partners of the present government, the wider South Asian movement towards wahabism, as well as to counter the global discourse on Islam.

Mythologicals and modernity: contesting cinema in south India, 1920-1950

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This paper looks at a set of critical debates surrounding Hindu mythological cinema in south India between 1920 and 1950. In particular I look at how critics understood the contemporary social and political significance of mythological films against the changing background of the Indian nationalist movement and Independence from British colonial rule. Over this period I argue that there was a general shift in the conception of mythological cinema from being something potentially modern and relevant to contemporary social and political issues to being a cultural form associated with a historical and traditional past and restricted to a more delimited religious significance.

In the course of 30 years mythological cinema in south India gradually loses its contemporary associations with modernity to be rearticulated as a traditional form of religious expression within the secularized politics of Independent India.

Aotearoa – New Zealand – Middle Earth. The impact of recent movie productions on identity and nation-building processes in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Since the release of the movie trilogy *Lord of the Rings* “Middle Earth” is used as a synonym for Aotearoa/New Zealand. Especially the tourism industry is making extensive use of this new label for promotion. Only very recently New Zealand became acknowledged as Aotearoa. Movies like “*Once were warriors*”, “*The Piano*” and “*Whale Rider*” highlighted Maori culture world- and nationwide. Biculturalism was and is the new formula for this very young nation. Nevertheless this concept is in conflict with the fact that New Zealand/Aotearoa is housing many more immigrant groups from the Pacific islands as well as from Asia and elsewhere. With the *Lord of the Rings*-production New Zealand/Aotearoa has a new identity – this explicitly virtual one seems to connect the people more easily than all the others. This paper presents the theoretical framework for the analysis and is work in progress.

Pirates, Tricksters and the State. The Magic of Captain Jack Sparrow

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Tricksters are essential to the art of storytelling in a great variety of settings and cultural contexts. They impersonate particular ways of interacting with the world as well as shaping social and political relations. These border-liners of mythical times do not only play a constitutive role in many narrations about the origins of nature, culture and sociality, but also represent a link between cinema and the mythical.

This paper will look at several aspects of the figure of Captain Jack Sparrow in “*Pirates of the Caribbean. The Curse of the Black Pearl*” (USA 2003) and its trickster qualities. Departing from an assessment of the relationship between pirates and the state in the genre it will concentrate on Captain Jack Sparrow’s performance on the

fringe of the mythical and the political. Central to the analysis will be the topics of otherness, power, and violence as fields of action for the trickster and the state respectively. Finally, the contribution will attempt a discussion of the figure of Captain Jack Sparrow in the context of current politics of representation.

Feature, Fiction and Refraction

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My main interest is cinema as cultural operator and as a particularly significant arena for the anthropological study of social refraction in representation. In the last years I have been examining how kinship,

procreative and gender stereotypes and models are refracted (not mirrored, as I will discuss) in popular cinema, and how the medium has become a major point of interest for social, politic and economic agencies.

In my presentation I would like to discuss: a) how refraction operates in non-disciplinary film production (fiction-/feature films, motion pictures), b) the central role of such films in changing and culturally specific politics of representation, and c) the potential identification (or misidentification) of certain segments of the audience with the represented 'models', which are largely the result of social, economical and political interest. For this purpose family and gender will serve as operationalization-axis in Spanish- and Hollywood production in the 20th century. I plan to critically examine this empirical repertoire connecting anthropological, filmic and historical theoretical backgrounds.

Mediatized Wars and Dystopia

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The new wars of public safety target an iconography of demonized border-crossing figures and forces including drug dealers, terrorists, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, and even microbes. Accompanying these new war imaginaries are strategically positioned structures of displacement, projection, and arbitrary object-choice and object substitution. We are now subjected to a new super-structure of war fantasy in which the targets of warfare, and the enemies of public safety are as malleable and as arbitrary as a dream image. Unlike the classic global and guerrilla wars of the twentieth century, these public safety wars are not wars of utopia, but wars of dystopia.

Film and Revelation. On the Convergence of Technology and Religious Practices of Looking

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The fierce debates about Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* pinpoint that a strict separation between religion as an object of representation, on the one hand, and a system of beliefs, on the other, is problematic. Representations of divinity seem to easily feed into, as well as reflect, religious practices of mediating the invisible.

Taking as a point of departure an understanding of religion as mediation, this paper aims to discuss the entanglement of practices of mediating the invisible and visual media technologies, and the blurring of media technology and practices of revelation. These issues will be explored by a brief investigation of the Ghanaian video-film industry, which started to thrive in the wake of media deregulation and the decreasing

capacity of the state to control the means and mode of visual representation. This industry parasitically feeds upon the phenomenal popularity of Pentecostal-charismatic churches, and mimetically seeks to represent Pentecostal views through the medium of video.

Beyond 'Event Horizon': Terror and other Thrills

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This contribution examines contemporary notions of terror, fear and horror in selected genres within euro-american cinema. The relationship between body, pain and modes of transformation is taken as basic blue print applied to diverse forms of narration of postmodern and postcolonial tropes and mythologems. Basically I regard fiction film as the paradigmatic 'myth-machine' of the present, but especially under the given globalising conditions I will also argue that documentary films and the daily news coverages of the visual media are modelled to a large extent on particular fictional modes of signification. Soldiers, terrorist, serial killers, vampires, cyborgs, warlocks, the undead, angels and demons, 'natural' and 'supernatural' beings occupy a collective space. Originally derived from specific cultural codes of perception and cognition, cross-gendered and loaded with different moral implication, they can be linked and explored as questions of re-appropriating and representing socially and politically colliding interpretations in the contemporary politics of experience between the occult, the supernatural and the real.

