

EuroSEAS Conference 2010

Panel: Shifting Cultures of Intimacy in Southeast Asian Visual Representation Coordinators: Brett FARMER and Arnika FUHRMANN

#	Name	Paper Title
1	ANDES, Sheryl Rose M.	A Peek at the Winners of the Most Gender Sensitive Film Award of the Metro Manila Film Festival
2	Atit PONGPANIT	Visualising Kathoey Bodies in Thai Sexual Minority Cinema
3	DIRGANTORO, Wulan	Bodyscape: Renegotiating Feminist Desire in the Works of Indonesian Women Artists
4	FARMER, Brett	Magical Love in the Moviehouse: (Re)Negotiations of Thai Heterosexuality in the Films of Mitr Chaibancha and Petchara Chaowarat
5	FUHRMANN, Arnika	Under Permanent Exception: Queer Buddhist-Muslim Intimacies in Independent Thai Film
6	HARRISON, Rachel	What kind of yearning? Nostalgia and Crisis in Thai Cinema, post 1997.

Abstracts

Panel:

“Shifting Cultures of Intimacy in Southeast Asian Visual Representation”

This panel investigates shifting understandings of sexual subjectivity and cultures of intimacy in Southeast Asian film and other visual representation. The centrality of cinema to formations of sexual modernities in the region cannot be overstated. In Southeast Asia, cinema from its beginnings represented a site in which cultures of intimacy were disseminated and tried out and from which they were learned, rejected, or adapted.

With regard to the present, cinema represents a particularly fraught space for sexuality in several Southeast Asian locations. Thus in Thailand, where film is currently the most censored medium, cinema represents a site in which intimacy consistently rubs up against the juridical authority of the state. At a time when Thai national cultural identity and citizenship continue to be closely articulated with normative prescriptions for sexuality, mainstream films have, for one, focused on the question of how the social suffering of sexual minorities can be made to count politically. In comparison, the forte of independent filmmakers and artists has been to conceive of sexual histories beyond those organized solely by national recognition or rights discourses.

While their parameters differ significantly, other contemporary Southeast Asian cinemas and visual cultures—including the diasporic—likewise register innovation in representing cultures of intimacy as well as struggles over definitions of sexual citizenship.

1.

ANDES, Sheryl Rose M. (University of the Philippines) tbc**

email: <she.andes@gmail.com>

A Peek at the Winners of the Most Gender Sensitive Film Award of the Metro Manila Film Festival

The power of cinema resides in its ability to portray relations of power in society. This makes film an effective vehicle in symbolizing the oppression, suffering, victimization, and sexual oppression of women, gays, lesbians and other individuals who possess liminal sexual preference. Launched in 1975, the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) holds an annual competition for local cinema every December, organized by mayors in the metropolis. Its goal is to upgrade the quality of Filipino cinema and convince viewers to patronize local products made by major production houses. In 2003, led by Quezon City Gender and Development Resource Coordinating Office, the MMFF introduced the Most Gender-Sensitive Film Award, in order to encourage and introduce to the mainstream useful discourse on gender, particularly in terms of advocating equal rights of women and queer subjects.

This study reconsiders the texts, elements, and messages of the MMFF's Most Gender-Sensitive Film Award winners, specifically *Homecoming* (2003), *Aishite Imasu (Mahal Kita) 1941* (2004), *Bluemoon* (2005), *Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo* (2006) and *Desperadas* (2007).

2.

Atit PONGPANIT (SOAS, University of London)

email: <ex_123456@hotmail.com>

Visualising Kathoey Bodies in Thai Sexual Minority Cinema

This essay explores the cinematic representations of the kathoey (transvestite/transsexual) characters in mainstream Thai cinema with a focus on sexual minorities. It organizes the discussions according to three different genres: tragedy (with reference to *Pleng Sud Tai/The Last Song*, 1985 and 2006); drama (with reference to *Phrang Chompoo/Saving Private Tootsie*, 2002, and *Beautiful Boxer*, 2003); and comedy (with reference to *Plon naya/ Spicy Beauty Queen in Bangkok*, 2004).

Selecting *The Last Song* to analyse within this paper provides a clear opportunity to compare and contrast how transgendered women's bodies are portrayed between the past two decades and the present time. Medical technology has become the most important factor in transforming a male to female body more authentically. The films show that having a female body, or being able to "pass as a woman", helps gain positive reactions and a greater tolerance from the heterosexual/majority characters. The kathoey characters who are merely effeminate or camp but who do not possess female bodies and are ugly or old, are the recipients of negative attitudes and greater intolerance. The tension which derives from the kathoey characters' existence or from the absence of the penis becomes an issue and plays a significant role in the films in determining the nature of relations between the kathoey and heterosexual characters in the narrative.

It is also evident from the films in question that to earn a positive reaction from, or be recognised as beautiful by, the heteronormative world both within and outside the filmic text, the beautiful female figure must not be used to gain sexual satisfaction. These films thus provide firm evidence for the obsession with beauty

and aesthetics, and the rigid binary notion of heteronormativity, where only male and female bodies and masculinity and femininity can be accommodated. The films further reveal the presence of a strong patriarchy at play, under which even those who are not women but try to adopt some of the female codes must not express their sexual desire as it is only “real” men who are free to express this. At stake here is the wider issue of what limitations are enforced for kathoey characters in their attempt to carve out a space for themselves in what is predominantly a the heterosexual world. This applies particularly in the field of the workplace. Kathoey characters are repeatedly portrayed as “show girls” (an entertaining object for the heterosexual/majority), as beauticians or as having menial jobs. The positive/tolerant reactions of the heteronormative world in these contexts may not therefore provide an accurate indication of a wider acceptance and understanding towards sexual minorities portrayed in Thai mainstream cinema. On the contrary, the films show how heteronormativity manipulates and locates sexual minorities within a “comfort zone” where heteronormative hegemony can still be used as a means of control over them.

3.

DIRGANTORO, Wulan (University of Tasmania)

email: <Wulan.Dirgantoro@utas.edu.au>

Bodyscape: Renegotiating Feminist Desire in the Works of Indonesian Women Artists

Indonesian contemporary art is a dynamic arena of modernity, tradition, socio-political contestations and multiple issues of identity, including gender identities. Since the inception of modern Indonesian art, artists have continuously explored and represented these issues through their art practices, in both celebratory as well as critical ways. More recently, the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998 provided the impetus for a momentous shift in the ways of Indonesian women artists working with issues around the female body.

The collapse of the authoritarian regime opened the gate for a new kind of freedom of self-expression in various media in Indonesia. In visual arts and literature there is now a strong representation of subject matters which were previously taboo, including female sexuality and the deconstruction of feminine identity. In order to analyse how these new developments are influenced by the works of Indonesian women artists, this paper will examine the representation of the female body by Indonesian women artists in the post-Soeharto era. It will discuss works by well-known artists such as IGAK Murniasih, Arahmaiani and Titarubi as well as other significant works/exhibitions which are strongly influenced by gender issues, sexual politics, memory and intimacy.

Each individual artist covered in this paper interweaves the past, present and future in their works. They also present complex sexual, political, religious, ethnic and cultural layers of local and global identity through their diverse artistic practices.

Given that sexuality and the construction of feminine identity were tightly regimented by the previous regime, this paper will look at how contemporary Indonesian women artists are representing the newly found, albeit still fragile freedom, through their works. This paper will also examine the strategies and negotiations that they have to apply in addressing these issues.

4.

FARMER, Brett (Chulalongkorn University)

email: <brettf1@mac.com>

Magical Love in the Moviehouse: (Re)Negotiations of Thai Heterosexuality in the Films of Mitr Chaibancha and Petchara Chaowarat

This paper focuses on the transformative impact of post-war modernization on discourses of Thai heterosexuality through a critical analysis of the films and combined star image of Mitr Chaibancha and Petchara Chaowarat. Appearing in over 150 films together from 1961-1970, Mitr and Petchara were unquestionably the most popular star couple of Thai Cinema's so-called Golden Age and were an omnipresent aspect of the popular cultural landscape of the time. Part of their appeal, and arguably part of their ideological function, was their embodiment of a new style of heterosexual relationality or 'coupledom' that, this paper contends, was reflective of the era's changing social economies of erotic intimacy rooted in, among other things, gender egalitarianism, urban capitalism, and consumerist identities. Through their films and generalized personae, Mitr and Petchara offered Thai audiences of the time a popular and deeply affective celebrity-mediated public sphere within which to negotiate and make sense of the rapidly changing sociosexual cultures of Thai modernity.

5.

FUHRMANN, Arnika (ICI Berlin)

email: <fuhrmann.arnika@googlemail.com>

Under Permanent Exception: Queer Buddhist-Muslim Intimacies in Independent Thai Film

Against the background of the Southern Thai conflict in which a perpetual state of emergency has become the norm, the paper inquires into how cinematic discourses reconceptualize arenas of Buddhist-Muslim coexistence beyond the state. Investigating how the independent films *Hasan* (2008, Attapon Pamakho) and *Boriwen Ni Yu Phai Tai Kan Kak Kan (This Area Is Under Quarantine)*, (2008, Thunskha Pansittivorakul) present Buddhist-Muslim same-sex intimacies, the paper proposes a reframing of understandings of the Southern Thai crisis and Buddhist-Muslim antagonisms through the analysis of their quotidian, affective dimensions and through concentration on the ways in which non-state actors, as sexual subjects, approach both conflict and coexistence.

6.

HARRISON, Rachel (SOAS, University of London)

email: <rh6@soas.ac.uk>

What kind of yearning? Nostalgia and Crisis in Thai Cinema, post 1997.

This paper investigates one form of cinematic response to Thailand's Economic Crisis of 1997 with reference to the cultural impact and expression of economic demise. It looks at nostalgia as an aspect of cultural anxiety, viewing it as a symptom of yearning for an "authentic Thai identity" perceived in "The Past" and expressed through cinematic narrative. The paper refers specifically to films such as the Thai domestic box office hit *Faen Chan* ('My Girl', 2003).