Call for Papers

Exoticism in Contemporary Transnational Cinema: Music and Spectacle

Humanities and Arts Research Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London

16 June 2017
Senate House and 11 Bedford Square, London

From the travelogues of early cinema over ethnographic documentaries to contemporary transnational and world cinema, film has always played a pivotal role in mediating visions of cultural Otherness. By projecting alluring images of far-away exotic landscapes, peoples and their local traditions, contemporary exotic cinema seems to invite a sympathetic identification with the Other and has the capacity to promote a sense of cosmopolitan connectivity. However, this is not how exoticism is generally perceived. Due to its colonial legacy and Eurocentric origins, it is a highly contested discourse on cultural difference that continues to spark heated public debates, as testified by the controversies surrounding films like *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2009) and *Water* (Deepa Mehta, 2005). On the other hand, Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s visually opulent *The Assassin* (2015) and Ciro Guerra’s Amazonian adventure drama *Embrace of the Serpent* (2015) have won critical acclaim despite their overt exoticism.

This interdisciplinary conference, organised by Royal Holloway’s Humanities and Arts Research Institute, aims to reassess the exotic in contemporary transnational cinema. It asks how the collapsed distances of globalisation and the transnational flows of media and people have affected exoticism, which is no longer exclusively the projection of Orientalist fantasies of the Other from one centre, the West, but which emanates from multiple localities and is multi-directional in perspective. Bollywood’s song and dance sequences, performed against the backdrop of the Swiss Alps and other spectacular foreign settings, the cocktail of exotic locations from around the world that add local colour to James Bond movies and the transnational revival of the Chinese wuxia genre all capitalise on the spectacle of the exotic in a bid for box office success. Music, as a multi-layered semiotic device, has been used abundantly to evoke the Other in background scores as well as in song sequences in musical films. Unfamiliar sounds may also be used for the purposes of aural spectacle, feeding demand for newness in rapidly changing capitalist entertainment industries. In addition, its flexibility allows for Other sounds to be interwoven with familiar idioms.

Bringing together researchers with special interest and expertise in contemporary transnational and world cinema, film music and ethnomusicologists, this conference will explore how contemporary transnational cinemas imagine the exotic, paying particular attention to the role of sound, music and spectacle. Topics for papers may include but are not limited to:
The visual - or aural - spectacle of the exotic
The sound of the exotic
Exoticism and film genre
Exotic stardom
Self-exoticisation and auto-ethnography
Indigeneity and exoticism
Consuming the exotic
Exoticism and (visual) pleasure
Poverty porn and other contested forms of exoticism
Exoticising nature and wildlife
Exoticism, (imperial) nostalgia films and heritage cinema
Exotic musical sources, copyright and ownership
Performers of and resources for exotic music in transnational film industries
The reception of transnational exotic film and film music
The political economy of the exotic in transnational film and film music

Confirmed Keynotes speakers:

Professor Rachel Dwyer, Professor of Indian Cultures and Cinema, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Dr Song Hwee Lim, Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Dr Laudan Nooshin, Reader in Ethnomusicology, City, University of London

Submission of abstracts:

Please submit the title of your proposed paper, a 350-word abstract together with a short biographical note, contact details and institutional affiliation (where appropriate) to: ExoticismConference@rhul.ac.uk

Submission deadline: 15 March 2017

You will be notified by 15 April 2017 whether or not your proposal has been accepted.

The conference registration fee will be around £30 and include lunch, teas and coffees.

Conference committee:

Professor Daniela Berghahn, Department of Media Arts and Director of the Humanities and Arts Research Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London

Professor Anna Morcom, Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London

Katie Young, PhD student, Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London