### 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)**
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   **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.


2. **Atit PONGPANIT (SOAS, University of London)**
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   **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 Chompoon/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 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.

CATALAN, Cristobel (SOAS, University of London)
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Re-Constructing the Filipino Homosexual: Representations of Resistance, Pride and Protest in Filipino Cinema

The cinema of the Philippines is notable for its output of award winning, internationally distinguished films that have unambiguously addressed issues surrounding same-sex sexuality, simultaneously declining to salute gender/sexual categorizations that prevail in the West. Recently, Filipino films have begun to deal more explicitly with Western sexual identities, particularly the gay identity, offering valuable insights into how male homosexuality is changing within the Philippines. In this article I attempt to chronicle the recent cinematic exposure the gay identity has been accorded; and to explore the ways in which cinematically historical forms of indigenous sexuality are being affected.

Looking closely at several films, from the Macho Dancer Saga (Macho Dancer, dir. Lino Brocka, 1988; Midnight Dancers, dir. Mel Chionglo, 1994; Burlesk King, dir. Chionglo, 1999; Twilight Dancers, dir. Chionglo, 2006) to more recent productions, such films as Ang Lalake Sa Parola (Man in the Lighthouse, dir. Joselito Altarejo, 2007) and Bathhouse (dir. Crisaldo Pablo, 2005), this paper examines how Filipino men engage with (or disengage from) the global gay construct. Drawing on ethnographic research, queer theory and post-colonial
discourse this article analyses how these filmic texts reflect the changing diversities of incumbent homosexuality as they engage with global gay subjectivities.

Using notions of cultural imperialism, reappropriation and protest as conceptual backdrops the paper considers the relevance of dichotomies, global/local or metropolitan/rural, in understanding experiences with the gay identity by characters tied to globalized spaces. Its contention is that these texts illustrate how same-sex screen identities are recontextualized, visually and diegetically, through self-peripheralization of the body and of the self. Specifically I analyse the potential for national resistance as the indigenous bakla and global gay meet in recent Filipino cinema, looking at examples of people's 'ability rather than their inability to make sense of their lives' (Natrajan, 2003: 229). I argue that the reshaping and redistribution of homosexual identities is synonymous with a reconstituted (national) resistance to non-Filipino global gay identities.


4.

COPPENS, Laura (URPP Asia and Europe, University of Zurich) 
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Films of Desire: The representation of queer characters in Indonesian films and its impact on the formation of lesbi subjectivities

It is the aim of the paper to examine selected films and to trace the queer content and portrayal of queer characters in Indonesian movies over the past years. Depictions of queer characters in Indonesian cinema have a longer history than most people realize. But especially since 1998, the revival of Indonesian film after Suharto, more and more directors included queer characters in their films, even though they mostly play a minor part within the overall plot. It will become clear that many movies differ a lot from their Western counterparts. Instead of celebrating everyday gay life and promoting political rights, many are operating within the sphere of the nation and the family. How is homosexuality portrayed in both Indonesian mainstream and independent films? This question will be considered in the first part of the paper. The second part deals more with the impact of queer portrayal in Indonesian films for the formation of especially lesbi subjectivities in Indonesia. Most Indonesians only learn that someone can be gay or lesbian from the mass media: through magazines, TV or films. When they read or watch stories about ‘queer others’, there is a moment of realisation and the own same-sex desires are recognised. Thus, in many cases, the own subject position as lesbi or gay only comes into being through contact with the mass media. To conservative Muslims the sexualized imagery of television, film and video appears both morally threatening and culturally foreign. The behavioral freedoms promoted by these media are seen to be infused with Western values, undermining local Indonesian identity, defined in strongly Islamic terms. What does the ban of the circulation of material deemed pornographic means for artistic expression and cultural freedom? What are the concrete problems filmmakers and festival organizers have to alike and what are their coping strategies the new anti-pornography law and censorship causes?
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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.

FARMER, Brett (Chulalongkorn University)  
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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.

7. **FUHRMANN, Arnika (ICI Berlin)**  
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   **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, Thunska 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.

8. **HARRISON, Rachel (SOAS, University of London)**  
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   **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).

9. **MURTAGH, Ben (SOAS, University of London)**  
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   **Waria and transexuals in New Order cinema.**  
   It has become almost standard to dismiss portrayals of *waria* (transvestites) in Indonesian New Order cinema (1966-98) as stereotypical and comedic. However, a small number of Indonesian movies have taken a far more nuanced approach to the representation of *waria*, investing these characters with a considerable degree of agency. Focussing on two films, *Betty bencong selebor (Betty the extraordinary transvestite)*, dir. Benyamin S. 1978) and *Akulah Vivian (I am Vivian)*, dir. M Endraatmadja 1977) this paper will investigate how Indonesian cinema has engaged with the *waria* subject position, focusing particularly on an apparent fluidity between the *waria* identity and the far less common transsexual identity.

   ‘Betty’, played by the renowned comedy actor Benyamin S., tells the story of a man who became a transvestite in order to get work, but then feels comfortable
with her new gender identity. In working as a maid she yearns for tolerance and acceptance, and distances herself from those waria who work outside of the law as sex-workers. *I am Vivian* tells the true story of Vivian Rubianti, who succeeded in bringing about a change in the law such that her sex change was recognised by the state. On the one hand these films represent the desires of their central characters for legitimacy and recognition from agencies of the state, on the other hand they reflect a concern to distinguish between these morally upright and sympathetic characters and other queer characters who are cast as being morally dubious.

As with many subsequent Indonesian films which endeavour to depict non-normative genders and sexualities sympathetically and positively, *Akulah Vivian* makes specific use of scenes with medical professionals in which modern scientific knowledge is used to legitimise Vivian’s subject position. However, what is unique in this movie is the recreation of the court scene in which sex changes were first recognised in Indonesia, thus allowing her to enter into a state sanctioned marriage. Referring principally to Boellstorff’s work on Indonesian New Order discourse and concepts of national belonging, this paper will examine how these two films not only challenge dominant cinematic representations of waria/transsexuals but actually make strong arguments for social and legal inclusion, though this is an inclusion which is conditional upon according to the gendered and ideological norms of the New Order state.