

GLOBAL HOLLYWOOD: RETHINKING THE NATIONAL, TRANSNATIONALITY, AND GLOBALIZATION

Conference at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, November 29–December 1, 2001. Conveners: Heide Fehrenbach (Northern Illinois University), Christof Mauch (GHI), Thomas Saunders (University of Victoria). Co-sponsored by the History Department, the Dean of Humanities, and the Vice-President of the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Participants: Nora Alter (University of Florida), Charles Ambler (University of Texas, El Paso), Matthew Bernstein (Emory University), Barton Byg (University of Massachusetts), Sumita Chakravarty (New School University, New York), Anne Ciecko (University of Massachusetts), Seth Fein (Yale University), Victoria de Grazia (Columbia University), Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu (University of Pittsburgh), Richard Maltby (Flinders University, Australia), Michael Raine (Yale University), Martin Roberts (New York University), Philip Rosen (Brown University), Vanessa Ruth Schwartz (University of Southern California, Los Angeles), Ruth Vasey (Flinders University, Australia) and Denise Youngblood (University of Vermont).

In our more and more globalized world, films have taken on an increasingly transnational character. Films are often produced in multinational cooperation, and the same movie may be played to audiences all around the globe. The Western, for example, was invented by Americans, but the Europeans tried to imitate the genre and its commercial success with their own (Euro)Westerns. Kung-Fu movies are popular in every continent of the world, and Dakar has joined Cannes, Berlin, and New York on the film festival circuit.

Throughout the twentieth century, Hollywood occupied a very strong position that extended well beyond the Western world. Hollywood films, aesthetics, genres, stars, and production models set trends in the United States as well as abroad. Despite Hollywood's wide-reaching hegemony, however, culturally and nationally defined film industries have always played and continue to play an important role.

At the end of November 2001, a group of scholars from the fields of film studies, cultural studies, history, and literature came together in Victoria, British Columbia, to explore the various ways that "Hollywood"—as industry, institution, and icon—has figured in the articulation of local, regional, national, and transnational cinemas. In taking a global perspective and broad temporal sweep, the conference sought to foster

dialogue on the comparative study of Hollywood's influence and to encourage sensitivity to the evolution of that influence and the world's engagement with it. One goal of the conference was to extend and refine our understanding of the relationship between cinema and identity in a global setting by exploring Hollywood film production as well as the range and evolution of meanings attributed to American cinematic culture. Another goal was to discuss the strategies employed by various groups to locate their "own" cinemas in localized form.

The conference, hosted by film historian Thomas Saunders, was opened on Thursday evening by Andrew Rippin, Dean of Humanities at the University of Victoria, and Christof Mauch. Rippin and Mauch both emphasized the relevance of the conference topic—not least in light of the terrorist attacks of September 11, which had caused a postponement of the conference, which, in turn, prevented several participants from attending. Through TV and media reporting, the terrible acts of violence had become a constitutive part of the global imagination while at the same time reflecting resistance to American cultural engagement.

The first paper delivered the following morning—Phil Rosen's "Reformulating Hollywood as Global Cinema"—focused on globalization in historical perspective and the film-theoretical concept of cinematic classicism. Rosen argued that it was precisely the long-term aspect of Hollywood's international success that allowed so many to align it with the general designation of classical cinema. He suggested that the 1910s and 1920s were formative both industrially and textually for Hollywood's global ambitions. The commercial and military consequences of World War I were of decisive importance for Hollywood, opening the way for it to take advantage of the communications and transportation infrastructure of the British Empire. It was between the 1870s and 1920s—during the third or "take-off" phase in Roland Robertson's model of globalization—that cinema was invented and films began to be distributed worldwide. The organization of Hollywood's global distribution network and the establishment of "classical cinematic codes" should therefore not be seen as something radically new but as developments that date back to beginnings of capitalist modernity.

In his paper on Chinese and American cinema, Sheldon H. Lu discussed the transnational character and unprecedented Western success of the Chinese-language feature film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (directed by the Chinese-Taiwanese-American director Ang Lee). Lu argued that the longstanding fragmentation of the Chinese nation state shaped the history of transnational cinema in China. While mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong had separate cinematic traditions for many years, the 1980s saw a trend toward co-production and collaboration

across national and regional borders—both among the three Chinese cinemas and between those cinemas and other film industries. It was only after the end of the Cold War, however, that joint productions increased on an unprecedented scale. Transnationalism, “flexible production,” “flexible citizenship,” the cross-border movement of people and ideas, and the mixing of genres culminated, as Lu argued, in *Crouching Tiger*, thereby creating new commercial possibilities for global entertainment. Lu pointed out that flexible filmmaking in transnational cinema must not be confused with other categories of border-crossing filmmaking. Cinemas such as “exilic cinema,” “diasporic cinema,” and “postcolonial ethnic cinema” imply a sense of displacement or alienation, Lu argued, whereas transnational movies such as *Crouching Tiger* provide “enormous thrills and pleasures to worldwide audiences.” At the same time, “reception gaps” between East and West continue to exist. While *Crouching Tiger* achieved unprecedented box-office successes in the United States and Great Britain, audiences in mainland China and Hong Kong found it unspectacular, familiar, and, at times, quite implausible.

In her paper on “Hollywood in Bollywood,” Sumita S. Chakravarty examined the nature of Hollywood’s influence on Bombay cinema—the world’s largest film industry. Chakravarty’s paper, summarized in her absence by Heide Fehrenbach, pointed out that Indian cinema was distinguished from the outset by its difference from its American counterpart and that this difference was the key to survival and success. Through repetition and redundancy, through song, dance and elements of melodrama, Bollywood cinema carved out a niche in the non-Western world. At the same time, it made use of star glamour and formulas for success similar to those employed in Hollywood. The national and the global were not mutually exclusive in Bollywood. To explain the (world)wide appeal of Indian movies outside of India, Chakravarty invoked Veit Erlmann’s concept of the market-driven “global imagination.” She insisted that a truly global analysis should not position the Third World as a mere hunting-ground for Western capital in search of profits, but see it rather as “a site of negotiations of the local and the global.” The reason for the global success of Bollywood’s aesthetics can only be described as a combination of film as market driven product and the film star’s body as a site of mobile identifications. The Raj character in the old Raj Kapoor film *Shri 420* is an example of such mobility—a hero suspended between the industrial and the pre-industrial, between cynic and clown.

In his paper on the Mexican and U.S. film industries in the “Golden Age,” Seth Fein demonstrated how cinema crossed the U.S.-Mexican border and transformed cultural frontist representations between the 1930s and 1950s. He pointed out that one of the major factors of Mexican cin-

ema's wartime development was the direct intervention of the United States government in Mexican film production through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). The "Golden Age" of Mexican cinema, despite the national myths that underlie so much of Mexico's official history, must be understood as a metonym for the Hollywood style—a "derivative and repetitive commercial genre, marketed internationally through a story system, produced in privately owned studios." Furthermore, Fein argued, an understanding of the transnational, hybrid history of cinematic practices may help in understanding the history of transnationalism and hybridity that lies beyond the screen.

In her paper "Popular Cinema and the Invention of the Asian Blockbuster," Anne Ciecko explored the box-office success of three fin-de-siecle Asian films: *Jose Rizal* (Philippines, 1998), *Nang Nak* (Thailand, 1999), and *Shiri* (South Korea, 1999). Each of these films broke local box-office records previously held by Hollywood's *Titanic*. Ciecko argued that the success of each of these films was based on a combination of the manipulation of familiar stories or characters (such as folk-narratives or local stars), the development of spectacle-driven and expanded-scale entertainment, and a marketing strategy that employed Hollywood for favorable contrast. While the future of local feature film-making and film-going in the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea is obviously subject to many economic and political factors, Ciecko argued that the landmark significance of local productions in South East Asia and its capabilities of "blowing the Hollywood ship out of the water" should not be underestimated.

In a paper titled "Shadows and Unreal Things," Charles Ambler analyzed the persistent appeal of American movies among African audiences. He discussed the ways in which white Africans had often cut films beyond recognition according to race categorization and in order to remove any seemingly offensive scenes or images. He also examined the longstanding myths about early audiences' encounters with films and the supposed perplexity of the "natives" when confronted with modern technology.

Vanessa Schwartz' presentation on "Hollywood on the Riviera" shifted the focus of the conference to the culture of European film festivals as an alternative to Hollywood's domination. Schwartz argued that the Cannes festival, which emerged as a major European cultural event in 1946, was not only grounded in specifically French or European traditions but also implied a cosmopolitan outlook. The key to the success of Cannes was, according to Schwartz, "precisely that it promoted itself as chic, hip and cosmopolitan as opposed to national." Although the Americans never believed they were adequately represented in Cannes, the festival organizers allowed additional films to be shown outside the competition. This move guaranteed Hollywood box-office success and high

visibility in a European setting. At the same time, by promoting cosmopolitan stars such as Omar Sharif (who lacked national specificity), Cannes became a vital institution for international film beyond the reach of American hegemony.

Like Vanessa Schwartz, Barton Byg focused on alternatives to Hollywood. In his paper "We All Live in Inceville," Byg discussed East German *Indianerfilme*. (Because Byg could not attend, his paper was presented by Heide Fehrenbach.) Byg pointed out that although they imitated Hollywood conventions, the German Democratic Republic's Westerns were unique in a number of ways. They were genre hits in a country where that could not be expected; they replicated an American convention without awaking the cultural watchdogs; and they conveyed "official" Marxist ideology by way of expressing solidarity with Native Americans, the victims of U.S. imperialism. GDR Westerns were the only European movies that presented the genre from the point of view of the Indians. Byg saw the success of the *Indianerfilme* as a result of their providing sanctioned access to pleasures that were otherwise taboo. He emphasized, however, that it is best to interpret these films "less as an anomaly than as a uniquely popular expression of international cultural practices using fantasies of Indian culture and history which have some connection—albeit indirect—to reality on various levels."

Richard Maltby interpreted the Western and its success in the United States as a product of the myth of Anglo-conformity. It was ironic, he argues, that Westerns were also used to promote the idea that Hollywood belonged to the world rather than to the United States alone. The worldwide success of classic Hollywood movies (especially Westerns) can only be explained, according to Maltby, as a result of the deliberate adoption of strategies of semantic indeterminacy and ambiguity. In search of markets, Hollywood exported its consumer product, that is, its movies, to the least differentiated audience, which in turn guaranteed the largest profit. Thus, "the Western provided a neat metaphor for the process of consumerism being identified with Americanism." Maltby argued, in sum, that no artifact, even if it is highly charged with ideology, can avoid reinterpretation.

Maltby's argument was echoed by Ruth Vasey, who pointed out that the Hollywood film industry managed to design a line of products that were deliberately fashioned to be attractive in a variety of viewing situations. Nonetheless, Hollywood should be seen as the national cinema of the U.S.: even as it aims its products towards a globalized market, Hollywood has been unable to offer audiences around the world representations of their own mores and cultural landscapes on screen.

In his paper on "Hollywood, Pop and Americanization," Michael Raine discussed the reinvention of Japanese cinema in the 1950s. Raine

pointed out that the history of Japanese cinema was international before it was national. The first films shown in Japan were produced abroad, and the first Japanese efforts at film-making also depended on foreign equipment and advisors. Moreover, the spread of cinema as a vital element of Japanese mass culture depended on vernacular modifications of industrial and textual practices developed by Hollywood studios in the 1910s. In the 1950s, the Golden Age of Japanese cinema, film gave Japan a chance to explain itself to the outside world. Taking the genre of the “three girls” film, which was inspired by the Hollywood musical and U.S. pop music, as a case study, Raine discussed the struggle to create a “modernist” film culture in Japan based on personal expression, individual text, and reflective critique. The “Japaneseness” of these films, according to Raine, is to be seen as “differential rather than essential, and almost never without a Western—specifically, a Hollywood—intertext.”

While historians of the Hollywood film industry have often emphasized the cultural diversity of international audiences, Matthew Bernstein reminded the conference of the cultural and ideological diversity within the United States itself. In his study of Lamar Trotti, a Southerner in Hollywood, Bernstein discussed Trotti’s vision of the South, particularly in the interwar period. As a screenwriter, Trotti sought to demonstrate that the South was a civilized place and that North and South had more in common than they realized. His engagement came partly in response to Universal studio’s big-budget production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1927, which had the potential to insult the South. Trotti played a crucial role in providing Hollywood with insight into the South and in creating films that Southerners could applaud.

Papers submitted by two other participants who were unable to attend—Nora Alter (“Producing an Alternative: Hans Richter”), and Denise Youngblood (“The Cosmopolitan and the Patriot: The Brothers Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii and Russian Cinema”)—rounded out the material for discussion at the conference.

In a stimulating wrap-up commentary, Martin Roberts criticized the fact that historical evidence had been privileged over ethnographic evidence throughout the conference. He pointed out that anecdotes were sometimes of great importance in understanding the (deterritorialized) transnational contact zones that films constitute. Roberts also suggested that a non-metropolitan theory of the global was needed; and he described the power of Hollywood as discursive rather than ideological. Above and beyond that, Roberts triggered a discussion about the role of the media in America’s current war on terrorism, about the iconicity of the movie theatre in Afghanistan (when it becomes a target for resistance), and about how media consumption (TV, videogames etc.) is depicted in the media as a signifier of normality.

A second commentary, forwarded to the conference by Victoria de Grazia, elaborated on and challenged the idea of Hollywood's discursive power. De Grazia pointed out that Hollywood, like other global businesses such as McDonalds, was willing to appropriate and hybridize any product in the name of profit. While this argument suggests that there is indeed so much semantic malleability that one might assume the dominance of discursive power, de Grazia reminded the conference of those key moments in the twentieth century when the American state had sought to align imagery with the exercise of power—particularly in times of emergency and war, including the current war on terrorism. In those moments, the “American image machine” notoriously moves from discursive construction to ideological use and exercises exceptional power.

The final discussion lasted for two and a half hours and was at times heated, especially when it came to questions of methodology. Among the many topics discussed was the character of the Hollywood empire: should it be described as an empire of trade or an empire of state? Should one define it as imperial or global? And, finally, is global imagination at all possible?

Christof Mauch

SUICIDE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Conference at the German Historical Institute, November 30–December 1, 2001. Conveners: Vera Lind (GHI) and Jeffrey Watt (University of Mississippi). Participants: Donna Andrew (University of Guelph), Machiel Bosman (Amsterdam), Jim Boyden (Tulane University), Elizabeth Dickenson (University of Texas), Craig Koslofsky (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), David Lederer (National University of Ireland), Jeffrey Merrick (University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee), Paul Seaver (Stanford University).

The history of suicide is a fairly new topic of historical research, but has become increasingly important in the past decade as a way to understand broader cultural and social issues as well as long-term changes in mentality. Almost forty years ago, the English historian Peter Laslett wrote in his famous study *The World We Have Lost* that increased knowledge of the history of suicide would provide a sensitive index of the relationship between personal discipline and social survival, and would so illuminate the society of our ancestors. This conference brought together new research on the history of suicide from different European countries. The