CINEMATIC IDENTITIES: GENDER, RACE, NATION, SELF
Session Moderator: Jennifer Bean, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media
026 JHN
3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Turning On and Off the "Post Racial Gaze"
Anaiis Cisco, Senior, Film Studies, Queens College of New York
Mentor: Roopali Mukherjee, Queens College of New York

Barack Obama’s historic election to the United States presidency in 2008 focused national attention on the first Black president and his family as living and unequivocal proof of the triumph of equal opportunity and the end of centuries of racial strife. The visible role of elite women like Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey has often been explored, while less well understood is the role of everyday portrayals of Black women as they normalize colorblind paradigms of post-racialism and “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Goldberg 2009, 23). This paper analyzes three media texts, all released in 2008 - Neil LaBute’s Lakeview Terrace, Tyler Perry’s The Family That Preys, and Beyoncé’s “If I Were A Boy” music video - focusing on representations of Black women as sexualized objects involved in interracial relationships with white men. The paper reveals that these ways of seeing serve the privileged white male gaze while falsifying racist and sexist realities. Offering key insights into the “post racial gaze,” the paper exposes how Black women are being positioned to normalize pleasurable post-racial fantasies and to facilitate discursive shifts toward neoliberal multiculturalism.

The Perpetuation of Sexism through Cinematic Female Absence in American Children’s Films
Christina (Chrissy) Kemling, Senior, Art History, Western Washington University
Mentor: Julia Sapin, Art and Art History, Western Washington University

In modern society, film has become an incredibly influential form of media and cultural currency. From childhood, we have a constant interaction with film and with the narratives and messages that it communicates. In this project, I propose that there is an absence of female representation in children’s films, and that the resulting lack of exposure through film to strong female characters during childhood has a direct effect on societal outlook in adulthood, and by extension, on American culture, and on the subconscious sexism inherent within. In order to make this argument I will be utilizing the Bechdel test, which is an informal set of criteria with which to analyze the level of female representation in film. For a film to pass the “test” and achieve an adequate level of equal gender representation, it must have at least two named female characters, the two characters must speak to each other, and they must speak to each other about something besides a man. With these criteria in mind, I will analyze a number of popular children’s films, and attempt to highlight the potentially negative effects that gender misrepresentation has on American society.

Joyful Dissolution: Analysis of the Film Experience
Valerio Varani, Senior, Comparative Literature (Cinema Studies), Comparative Literature
UW Honors Program
Mentor: Jennifer Bean, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media

This project explores the cinematic experience both in its formal aspects and in the effects produced on the audience. For many now canonical theorists, such as André Bazin, cinema has a privileged access to the real world as well as a direct influence on our minds. The distinctive peculiarity of cinema as a unique art form that utilizes elements from theater, literature, music, and photography creates a point of inquiry for many theorists in respects to film’s ability to represent reality to us. By contrast, this project employs a structuralist approach to an understanding of cinema as a system of symbols that is multisensory in nature and assess cinema’s capacity to simulate an experience of reality while almost reversing the relation between subject and object. The starting point of this essay is Christian Metz’s notion of the transcendental subject as the spectator of film and Hegel’s model of self and self-identity. My primary investment is to analyze the effects that the film form implicates for the subject within the peculiar
dynamics of film as a sensorial experience. Ultimately, I argue that individual identity is “joyfully dissolved” through the film experience, a process that directly contradicts the human subject’s relationship to reality.

Exploring New Grounds: Transvergent Filmmaking
Nandini Rathi, Senior, Film and Media Studies, Politics, Whitman College
Mentor: Anne Helen Petersen, Film and Media Studies, Whitman College

The aim of my presentation is to explore a unique approach to cinema called ‘a cinema of transvergence,’ as theorized by Will Higbee, as a means to glean the effectiveness of the work of three women directors from the Middle East/North Africa region, in suggesting possibilities for challenging the fixed positionings typically offered by the hegemonic structures of knowledge and power. When applied to the films of directors Raja Amari, Annemarie Jacir and Samira Makhmalbaf, a transvergent approach provides an open ended framework for understanding of interconnections which bind the filmmaker to a given film culture/national identity, the intentions, approaches and material conditions behind the production of their films, and the international reception of these films. The understanding of these factors, in turn, reveals the difference and imbalances of power exist between various film cultures and film industries.

Crisscross: From Script to Screen
Allison Renee Greer (Allison) Ross, Senior, Classical Studies, Comparative Literature (Cinema Studies)
Mary Gates Scholar, UW Honors Program
Mentor: Jennifer Bean, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media

Crisscross, a feature-length screenplay I wrote as one element of my Cinema Studies Capstone Project, uses a multi-referential, dialogic narrative structure to interrogate the psychological and philosophical ambiguities of retributive violence. A speeding Honda skids out of control. After learning the love of her life has drowned, aspiring filmmaker Samantha Cross, the driver, crashes into a sedan, killing her philandering father and his seductive mistress, Sam’s mother’s sister. In what appears to be a justifiable context, the film offers multiple interpretations of Sam’s actions. Combining film noir stylistics, mockumentary and metafilmic traditions, and a surrealistic stance, the screenplay draws upon Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic storytelling to challenge viewers and their traditionally held ethical beliefs. In Sam’s world, Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a tapestry of meanings, modes and representations: its language constantly reinterpreted; its symbolism eternally in flux. Adaptations become their own language, hyper-text which enables Sam to explore the motivation of her behavior: her personal experiences infuse Hamlet’s soliloquies. This past six months, on a limited budget,