Breakout Session 1: 
Contemporary Cinema

1) Aida FORUTAN  
Censorship and imagination

Abstract

Biography

2) Golbarg REKABTALAEI  
Cinematic Revolution: The Politicisation of the Pre-revolutionary Iranian Cinema

Abstract

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was a revolution of communication media. The vociferation of Iranian society for change was transmitted through different modes of communication and the sites of sociability that such media created. While focusing on mosques, hosseiniyyas and hey’ats as pre-existing organisational resources contributing to the making of the Revolution, accounts of the Revolution often ignore the significance of cinema as a pivotal site of political sociability. In the two decades prior to the Revolution, movie theatres became preferred sites of sociability in Iran. Before the advent of cinema, entertainment was a luxury that could be afforded only by the well-to-do echelons of society and was largely designed to protect the monarchy. However, cinema soon turned into a mass entertainment medium that was affordable and accessible to the population.¹ However, in addition to entertainment, movie theatres served as political public spheres where individuals gathered to exchange (and vocalise) opinions, participate in political activities and influence policies or actuate socio-political change. By virtue of its accessibility and the politicality of the screenings, cinema bore itself out as a potently political domain — this was especially due to the potential for these sites of sociability to germinate critical conversations on the socio-political issues of Iran. The politicised cinema, in turn, contributed to the formulation of the revolutionary Geist.

By exploring a wide range of political films that were screened in the decades prior to the Revolution, I seek to assay the significance of cinema as a revolutionary counterpublic sphere. In a careful reading of film reviews published in daily newspapers and film journals such as Sitarah-yi Sinama, Dunya-yi Sinama, Kitab-i Sinama, I seek to show how international movies and documentary films contributed to the emergence of a critical political discourse in Iran.

Revolutionary movements and mass uprisings have been examined through many theories, but these theories have mostly focused on concepts such as political economy, modernisation theory, revolutionary ideologies, and belief systems. The same holds true in the case of revolutionary Iran. However, a study of revolution and mass mobilisation from a communications perspective would appear to be more revealing and adequate as it pursues a unique social aspect of the movement. This paper examines the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 through the perspective of communications

technologies, especially cinema, in order to explicate the contextual historical catalysts of the Revolution.

Biography

3) Elhum SHAKERIFAR
Ali Santouri – Censorship and Film mobility

Abstract
In this paper, I will explore the new defiance of censorship that emerged with the controversial Iranian film Ali Santouri, directed by Darioush Mehrjoui, and which created a new form of urban mobility of film and mobilization of audiences in the process.

Ali Santouri (Ali, the santour player) is a film about the detriment of censorship on art, depicting the downfall of a young musician, who gradually succumbs to drugs and destitution, after he is banned from performing his art by the government. It was, unsurprisingly, yet another film to fail the censorship test.

Though censorship has its role in contributing to hype around such films, a new form of audience collaboration emerged as the DVD was unleashed on the black market – Mehrjoui’s account number was printed in the newspapers, and audiences were asked to donate what they would have paid had they seen the film at the cinema.

The inclusion of the audience in suffering the damages of censorship highlighted the position of the filmmaker unable to screen his film and invited the audience to not only circulate the message, but also ensured that future films of this type can bypass the censorship test altogether and distribute themselves.

Biography
Elhum Shakerifar is a British/Iranian filmmaker and visual anthropologist, and a visiting researcher of the Department of Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research interests include gender in Islamic cultures, the status and rights of social marginalities, the responsibility of representation in film, and participatory mediums in film and photography. Her films have been screened internationally and are supported by the British Council and the Royal Anthropological Institute. Earlier this year, Elhum co-founded Postcode Films, a project investigating visual identity, by teaching film and representation in schools and colleges. Postcode most recently worked with the British Film Institute as part of The London Film Festival 2008 and at Art Dubai in March 2009. Elhum is currently the Development Coordinator of Dost, Trinity Centre, a community based charity for vulnerable children. She is also the project manager of Picture People’s Bam Project Book, a photographic account commemorating 5 years since the Bam earthquake in Iran and the reconstruction and rehabilitation process as documented by the people of Bam.

www.postcodefilms.com
http://www.gold.ac.uk/anthropology/