THE SEMINAR

Situated astride Malaysian and global film culture, the late director Yasmin Ahmad’s fresh model of postcolonial poetics is both a departure from traditional hybridity tropes and an indicator of the nation’s postcolonial-global duality. Set in globalized social and cultural milieus, Ahmad stages interethnic squabbles between speakers of different languages. First, using imperfect or absent subtitles, Ahmad steers attention away from dialogue’s linguistic meaning, toward the purely acoustic pleasures of duelling cultural phonemes or prosody – what language simply sounds like.

The resultant national soundscape harbors an aesthetic that transcends the hybridity paradigm associated with postcolonial culture. Ahmad’s second predilection, for highlighting characters who speak ethnically incongruent languages, does not require audience comprehension either. It offers a cinematic experience that is thoroughly aural, spatially marginalized, and yet seductively immersive. Through French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s Listening, and his eponymous writing vis-à-vis globalization in The Sense of the World and The Creation of the World or Globalization, we find that the films evoke a phenomenology that speaks to Malaysia’s geopolitical “sense of the world.”

THE SPEAKER

Gerald Sim is Associate Professor of Film Studies in the School of Communication and Multimedia Studies at Florida Atlantic University. His recent book, The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), historicizes critical race film theory from the perspective of the Frankfurt School.

His Neo-Marxian writing on diverse topics that include national cinema, film music, financial television, and digital cinematography appear in journals such as Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Film Quarterly, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, Rethinking Marxism, Projections, and Discourse. This talk is part of his current book project on postcolonial film aesthetics.

For more information on the KCL Film Studies Research Seminar series visit: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/filmstudies/research/Research-Seminars-15-16.aspx