

Book of Abstracts

Academia on Screen: The World of
Higher Education in Film and TV
Series Across Cultures



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Breaux, Richard M.

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, USA

Don't Sleep on Us: Dap, Freddie, Shazza, and Fudge: 'Woke' Black Collegians on TV & Film before *Dear White People*

The movie and Netflix television series *Dear White People* (2014, 2017-2020) presented audiences with several conscious black collegians who speak about confronting anti-black racism and white supremacy, with a frankness heretofore rarely seen in television and film history. Samantha White (Logan Browning) and Reggie Green (Marque Richardson) possess a reverence for black people that embodies socially aware black collegians in the age of Black Lives Matter. Although black socially conscious characters may seem new to some audiences, they have antecedents in earlier black television and film characters who attended fictional colleges and universities.

This paper explores intertextuality in films and television programs featuring “woke” black collegians in the United States. Vaughn “Dap” Dunlap (Laurence Fishburne), Fudge White (O’Shea “Ice Cube” Jackson), and others represent antecedents to Winchester’s comedically-woke black collegians on *Dear White People*. In 1988, Vaughn “Dap” Dunlap reminded jheri-curl dawning black townie’s, “You’re Not Niggers,” after local blacks questioned Dap and other Mission students’ blackness with simultaneous accusations that black collegians steal jobs from poorer black people. Dap’s anti-Apartheid activities jeopardizes his enrollment status.

Fudge is a protagonist in John Singleton’s *Higher Learning* (1995). This film, about the politics of race, gender, and sexuality at fictitious Columbus University, attempts to capture college life from the perspective of several students – a black man, white woman, and a white man. Fudge is not the film’s main characters, yet he centers the plot and provides the cautionary advice to other black collegians about credit card abuse and the exploitive history of the World Bank. In an ironic twist, we learn from Professor Maurice Phipps (Laurence Fishburne, also Dap in *School Daze*) that Fudge’s surname is White. In this light, these fictional black collegians represent a complex, interweaving of television and cinematic narratives about black collegians.

Keywords

Black Collegians, Campus Racism, Black Film, Racial Identity

Biography

Richard M. Breaux is an Associate Professor of Ethnic & Racial Studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. His published research explores the history of black students and Historically White Colleges and Universities, blackness in the media, and Queer Black Cinema and has appeared in the *Journal of African American History*, *Journal of African American Studies*, *the Journal of Pan-African Studies*, and *The Apollonian*.

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Calderon, Marietta

University of Salzburg, Austria

Intersectional stereotypes of academics and their fields of work in *Vienna Blood*

The British-Austrian crime series “Vienna Blood” (2019–present), set in early 20th-century Vienna and filmed in English, presents a somewhat unrealistic depiction of the era and milieu it aims to portray, largely due to linguistic inconsistencies in its script and German dubbing. For instance, the characters’ names do not accurately reflect Viennese society at that time, and forms of address (e.g., *Doktor* rather than *Herr Doktor*) and code choices lack authenticity. Notably, the main characters do not exhibit features of standard Austrian German, and sociolects are oversimplified, diminishing realism.

This linguistic superficiality mirrors a similarly stylized portrayal of scientific and academic milieus, as well as religious institutions, especially evident in Season 2, Episode 3 (“Darkness Rising”). The series does make attempts at historical plausibility, referencing intellectual trends and social diversification (e.g., racialization, gender-based educational restrictions). However, recurring characters tend to be depicted with greater nuance than those appearing in isolated episodes.

Among more stereotyped (MALE) figures are a disillusioned ROMAN CATHOLIC HISTORIAN – characterized as a MAD PROFESSOR skeptical of the establishment’s “coldness” – and a racialized INFIRMARER with AMBIGUOUS ACADEMIC and FRENCH COLONIAL origins and an UNCLEAR MONASTIC AFFILIATION. In contrast, recurring characters portrayed in greater depth include a FEMALE former ELECTROSHOCK PATIENT, portrayed as a stereotypical NATURAL SCIENTIST (identifiable by LAB PROPS and a British educational background) and the main academic protagonist, a NEUROLOGIST, establishing himself as a PSYCHOANALYST. Likely MODELED AFTER FREUD, this character is a COMMITTED ACADEMIC and SECULAR JEW grappling with themes like institutionalization, medical ethics, and a perceived superiority of science over religion.

This study examines how omissions, stereotypes, and the mobilization of various topoi create a coherent but modernized framing of Vienna’s social and temporal context, highlighting how these elements structure discursive (re-)framings for a contemporary audience.

Keywords

multimodal stereotype constructions, intersectionality (gender, religion, race, class, power), representation of academic fields, parallel depictions of academia and religion, historical accuracy in settings

Biography

Marietta Calderón works as a linguist, primarily focusing on Romance languages and multilingual situations. Based on her research on discursive identity constructions among French-Israeli binationals, she has developed interests in socio-onomastics, multilingualism, and discourse analysis (specifically identity constructions). Her interest in multimodality stems from her semiotic thesis on TV commercials, while her interest in media translation and dubbing arises from her translation studies and experience as a translator. In her teaching, she emphasizes both Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies (including Jewish Studies and Post-Colonial Studies), combining the relevant disciplines, with Linguistics providing the core approaches.

Conacher, Jean E.

University of Limerick, Ireland

Cinematic representations of university professors: exclusionary and inclusionary practices within a community of practice

Cinematic portrayals of university life, of lecture halls and students gathered to debate topics of the day or to party long into the night can be both culturally specific and universally recognised. The world portrayed constitutes an example of what, in 1991, sociologists Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger termed a “community of practice” in which the newcomer, the fresher student, gradually comes to adopt the practices, language and codes of the academic community, moving from its periphery to centre stage, as they become more experienced and in turn are placed in a position to help initiate the next generation of novices.

This paper considers the ways in which Lave & Wenger’s sociological model compares and contrasts with the more traditional *Bildungsroman* model often adopted in studies of literary and cinematic portrayals of education processes. In so doing, it focuses in particular on the portrayal of established university professors in films made, and set, in different cultural contexts (including *Unser kurzes Leben* [Our short life: GDR, 1981] & *Hannah Arendt* [post-unification Germany, 2012] *Educating Rita* [UK, 1983] and *Mona Lisa Smile* [USA, 2003]). The paper explores how and why these senior figures adopt differing exclusionary and inclusionary roles as gatekeeper, rival, mentor or friend in relation to less experienced members of the broader academic community, before asking to what extent a greater appreciation of such dynamics can help the audience develop a deeper understanding of the cultural values and practices of the individual education systems portrayed.

Keywords

professors in film, communities of practice, *Bildungsroman*, comparative film studies

Biography

Jean E. Conacher lectured in German Studies at the University of Limerick for over 30 years and has researched extensively in the areas of education and literary/film studies, particularly focusing on the literature and film of the German Democratic Republic/Eastern Germany. Her monograph entitled *Transformation and Education in the Literature of the GDR* was published

by Camden House in 2020 and she has presented and published on aspects of film adaptation, cinematic representations of women at work and gender and ageing, particularly focusing on the work of the (East) German director Andreas Dresen.

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Fitz, Karsten

University of Passau, Germany

The World of Higher Education as Successful Class and Race Struggle? Stabilizing the Status Quo in *Good Will Hunting* and *The Blind Side*

When Spike Lee's film *BlacKkKlansman*, after being nominated for six categories at the 2019 Academy Awards, 'only' received one Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay, while with *Green Book* another racial reconciliation film won the Best Picture Award, proponents of the #OscarsSoWhite movement criticized, once again, the systemic racism within Hollywood's film industry. Ever since the implementation of the so-called G. I. Bill of Rights after World War II, higher education in the U.S. has been conceptualized as a pathway to achieving the American Dream – at least for white people. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and in the spirit of embracing a more multicultural American society, this opportunity towards social mobility was gradually made more available to People of Color. This is also reflected in Hollywood movies, which have always been a major producer of American cultural myths and the main medium for the reproduction of social ideas and beliefs about core categories like race, class, and gender. And this phenomenon is particularly graspable in Hollywood films set in the world of higher education. No prominent Hollywood movie of the 21st century has been more 'guilty of' perpetuating the myth of the American Dream as available to African Americans – and thus stabilizing, at least indirectly, the status quo, including systemic and institutional racism – than John Lee Hancock's *The Blind Side* (2009). Gus Van Sant's *Good Will Hunting* (1997), focusing on the issue of class in academia rather than race, at first glance seems to follow a different trajectory. However, comparing these two extremely successful contemporary films of this genre, this contribution argues that the way higher education is depicted as a pathway to achieving social mobility once again stabilizes the myth of the American Dream – thus confirming that American society as such is fair and egalitarian as it is.

Keywords

higher education in U.S. film; American Dream in Hollywood; racial reconciliation movies; institutional racism

Biography

Karsten Fitz is Professor of American Studies / Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Passau. His research interests include Native American Studies, Visual Culture Studies, American cultural memory, and political and media culture in transatlantic comparison. He is the author of *The American Revolution Remembered, 1830s to 1850s: Competing Images and Conflicting Narratives* (2011), editor of the anthology *Visual Representations of Native Americans: Transnational Contexts and Perspectives* (2012), co-editor (with Jürgen Kamm) of the conference volume *Transatlantic Cinema: Productions - Genres - Encounters - Negotiations* (2020), and co-editor (with Birgit Däwes and Sabine N. Meyer) of the book series Routledge Research in Transnational Indigenous Perspectives.

Joyce, Stephen

Aarhus University, Denmark

The Campus Novel and the Campus Film

On screen, the different aspects of academic life are often divided into different genres. Scientists and researchers, whether good or evil, are rarely shown as part of a campus environment where they also have teaching and administrative responsibilities (Kirby and Ockert 2021); narratives about inspiring teachers or education more generally usually focus on high school rather than university lecturers (Dalton 2010); films about campus life are usually coming-of-age stories focused on undergraduates (Conklin 2008). Hollywood, it seems, struggles to find a generic formula that adequately captures the different facets of academic life.

This is why it is curious that mainstream cinema has developed no equivalent tradition to the campus novel. From Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* to David Lodge's *Campus Trilogy* to Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, the satirical campus novel typically portrays the university as a place of petty squabbles and philandering, devoid of meaningful intellectual debate (Dalton-Brown 2023). It often revolves around a male mid-life crisis, in which frustrated academics question their sense of purpose in a bureaucratic, pseudo-intellectual environment defined by their lack of agency and feelings of inadequacy and social irrelevance (Robertson 2022). Scholarly analyses of the campus novel are plentiful, but scholarship of an equivalent cinematic genre is relatively scarce, because Hollywood has struggled to adapt this literary genre.

This presentation looks at two adaptations of major campus novels, *Wonder Boys* (Curtis Hanson, 2000) and *White Noise* (Noah Baumbach, 2022), and explores why these literary conventions have struggled to make an impact on mainstream cinema. I argue that the campus genre, despite criticisms of it, is a narrative in which ideas are important and the attempt to portray these ideas and academic life more generally as marginalised and socially irrelevant is actually at odds with the growing educational divide visible in American national politics.

Keywords

campus film, genre, satire, *Wonder Boys*, *White Noise*

Biography

Stephen Joyce is an associate professor in media, literature, and cultural studies at the Dep. of English, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research interests include transmedia storytelling and adaptation, tragedy and tragic theory, postapocalyptic fictions across media, fantasy worldbuilding, and creative industries. He is the author of two books: *A River of Han: Eastern Tragedy in a Western Land* (Winter Verlag 2015) and *Transmedia Storytelling and the Apocalypse* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), as well as numerous articles on contemporary media, participatory culture, and cultural industries. He is also an editor of the scholarly peer-reviewed journal *Imagining the Impossible*.

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Kotian, Utkarsha

Whistling Woods International, Mumbai, India

From Aggression to Empathy: A Study Of the Evolution of Indian Campus Culture through Aamir Khan's Hindi Cinema Portrayals of College Characters

Since the early 1970s, India's statutory body for higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC), has continuously penalised the act of ragging (hazing rituals) on Indian campuses (Rao et al., 2018) (Raghavan et al., 2007). Yet, this practice has a persistent legacy in Indian cinema with movies as recent as 2024 using it as a narrative device for initiation rituals in higher education.

In an acting career spanning over three decades, Aamir Khan is Hindi cinema's favourite "college student" (Ahmad, 2019), whose movies often invoke this trope of initiation in college through bullying of the new student. From his breakthrough role in 1988's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* as a college student in a star-crossed lovers' tragedy, to a career-defining *3 Idiots* in 2009, Khan's filmography offers a unique vantage point into the evolution of performative masculinity on Indian campuses.

Moving from the aggressor and bully in *Dil* (1990), *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) to the victim of hazing on campuses in *3 Idiots* (2009), Khan's movies align with India's educational reforms (Kharbanda, 2022) and growing public condemnation of ragging. This paper will study this shift in his movie characters in three of his movies - *Dil* (1990), *Rang De Basanti* (2006), and *3 Idiots* (2009) through a qualitative analyses of character arcs, key scenes, and audience reactions through media reporting around the time of release. Khan's characters not only reflect the evolving UGC legislation in India but also influence the shifts in Indian educational policies (Tripathi, 2021) and societal perspectives towards inclusivity and compassion on campuses.

Keywords

Ragging, Indian Cinema, Aamir Khan, Performative Masculinity, Higher Education, Indian Educational Policy.

Biography

Utkarsha Kotian is a senior manager of academics and a senior faculty member at Whistling Woods International where she has been the primary faculty for literature and journalism. She has mentored student research and international collaborations in these areas, fostering an environment of critical inquiry. Before Whistling Woods International, Utkarsha worked as a reporter and consulting editor for Indian national dailies, and served as an interpreter and translator on research projects. Her academic background spans education management, journalism, literature, and comparative mythology. Her research interests and publications focus on gender, and narratives surrounding welfare and education policy.

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Manjrekar, Nandini

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Hum dekhenge/ We shall see: Student activism and Dreams of Tomorrow in Cinema

The image of the student as activist has left an indelible imprint on nationalist narratives of the freedom movement in India. The university student-activist has been idealised in official as well as public history as part of the vanguard for social change and progress, bringing intellectual energy to movements for freedom from exploitation and oppression and struggles for a new society and nation. In popular imagination, animated by biographies, literature, the visual arts and cinema, the young student has always been capable of seemingly infinite self-sacrifice and abnegation of desire and material needs towards these ends. These cultural productions of history often refer to nationalist appeal to youth, especially in the 1920s Non-Cooperation Movement's call for boycott of college and universities, as well as the brutal deployment of the colonial regime's repressive machinery, aimed especially at those who espoused socialism and armed insurrection against the state.

The anxieties of the post-colonial Indian state around student mobilisation on university campuses as a threat to its hegemony were most acute in the late 1960s and the mid- 1970s, the period of the national Emergency marked by the total suspension of democratic rights. The more recent clampdown on student protests commenced in 2016 with the suicide of a Dalit doctoral student in a leading public university that led to large-scale student mobilisation across the country against caste discrimination, caste patriarchy and anti-minority violence by the current Hindu right-wing government. This was the same time as the government was discussing changes in the Indian Citizenship Act, virtually keeping Muslims, who constitute 14.6% of the population, out of its purview. Agitations in 2019 across the country against this largely led by university students and women, were immensely creative. Student activists increasingly got labelled 'urban Naxal' and 'anti-national' and many, almost all Muslims, continue to be in prisons without trial, charged under colonial sedition laws.

This presentation will discuss two films and two documentaries that keep memories of these critical moments alive. The films, *Hajar Churashir Ma* (Mother of 1084), *Hazaron Khwaishen Aisi* (A Thousand Dreams Like This) relate to contexts and subjective experiences of student activism in the 1970s. I will also be discussing two contemporary documentaries, *Prisoner No.*

626710 is Present and *Land of My Dreams* on student protests and state violence. Through discussion of these films, I hope to make the argument for films on student activism as testimonios of history and as public pedagogy for resistance.

Keywords

India, Student activism, Public pedagogy

Biography

Nandini Manjrekar has recently retired as Professor and Dean, School of Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Her research interests are located at the intersections of education and gender studies. She teaches postgraduate courses in sociology and history of schooling/education in the Indian context, and childhood in social and historical perspective, areas within which she has also published research papers. She has also edited a reader, *Gender and Education in India* (Aakar, 2021). Nandini has been involved in the Comparative Education Society of India (CESI) (of which she was President between 2020-22) and the Indian Association of Women's Studies (Treasurer and EC member, 2012-2014). She has served for several years on the Editorial Board of Comparative Education Dialogue (Sage) and is currently on the Editorial Advisory Board of the Journal of Education Policy (Taylor and Francis). She has been a visiting fellow at the German Historical Institute London (2016 and 2019), and the Georg Eckert Institute of International Textbook Research, Germany (2018).

Pittel, Harald

Leipzig University, Germany

Transformative Spaces, Challenges from the Margins: Academia Through a (Post)British Lens

My paper will suggest reading three popular films in dialogue with each other, films from different decades that are culturally diverse and at first sight have little in common apart from a vague level of Britishness they can all be said to reflect. What these film do share in a more qualified sense is that they echo and anticipate crucial challenges to, and historical shifts of, academic power relations, and they all represent them in a spatial mode, looking at architecture, object arrangements, locale and location as well as the material practices that characterize transforming academic structures.

In Alfred Hitchcock's James Bond-inspired spy thriller *Torn Curtain* (1966), academia features prominently as a traditional setting in which power is shared by the professorial Head of Department and the (authoritarian) state. Challenges to these hierarchies (set in Leipzig University during the Cold War) come from a young American double agent and his female assistant, aiming to appropriate the professor's knowledge and give it a new direction. This constellation, while projected on the cultural and political Other, subtly foreshadows more generally the generational and political resistance of the burgeoning student movement.

The gendered dimensions of such academic power struggles come out more distinctly in Lewis Gilbert's / Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1983). The female hairdresser entering an Open University literature night class, much against the will of 'her professor' whom she promises a haircut in his office, captures the opening of traditional academia to working-class women and feminism. Still, a level of pessimism raises its head here, as deeper reforms might be necessary to bridge the gap between the ivory tower and the extramural reality.

Such 'transformative pessimism' manifests itself even more profoundly in the Bollywood blockbuster *Rang De Basanti* (2006), in which a female British freelance journalist invites Delhi University students to participate in an on-campus film project to deepen their awareness of anti-colonial history. This unconventionally performative approach to

teaching history eventually reiterates the past as a tragic farce, literally turning the students into terrorists. *Rang De Basanti* thus brings to the fore a level of scepticism that clings to all three films' representations of academic structures and practices 'in solution'.

Keywords

Hitchcock, Bollywood, Torn Curtain, Educating Rita, Rang De Basanti

Biography

Dr. Harald Pittel teaches British Cultural Studies at Leipzig University. He has published articles on post-Brexit fiction, working-class literature and decadent theory. From 2018 to 2019, he was a visiting scholar at Delhi University. He wrote his PhD thesis on *Romance and Irony: Oscar Wilde and the Political*. His second book (in progress) explores to what extent the crises of the present might shape a new understanding of world literature. His other research interests include political affect studies, comparative film studies, genre theories, and materialist theories of culture.

Ramos, Tiago

University Lisbon, Portugal

Nightmare Scenario:

The Portrait of Academia in Kristoffer Borgli's *Dream Scenario* (2023)

Paul Matthews, a quiet university professor with a degree in evolutionary biology, becomes a meme, a concept that comes from that scientific field, when, overnight, a large part of the population starts dreaming about him. Paul appears in other people's dreams. But that's it: he appears. He plays no part in the dreams. He simply appears in people's dreams, observing the action without actually intervening in what happens. Emasculated by his wife, ignored by his daughters, crushed by his mother, used by his ex-girlfriend for a newspaper publication, and wronged by a former university colleague who steals his idea for a scientific article, Paul is as passive in real life as he is in other people's dreams. However, for the first time in his life, his unnoticed and inert character brings him to the fore. Things take a turn when those who saw Paul walking peacefully in their dreams begin to be stalked, assaulted and killed by the professor in their sleep. Fame turns into scandal, momentary glory into permanent disgrace. *Dream Scenario* (Kristoffer Borgli, 2023) constructs a parable about the growing presence of scholars in the media, from the internet to television; the precariousness of the profession; and the difficulties that professors can face when negotiating with students' sensibilities during lessons. This paper aims to discuss these themes, which give us an idea of how professors deal with the current media landscape and how this media coverage can condition the classroom environment and the relationship that is established between them and the students.

Keywords

Academia in Cinema; Classroom Environment; Media Landscape; Political Satire; Representation of Scholars in Cinema.

Biography

Tiago Ramos is a PhD student in Communication Sciences, specializing in Cinema and Television, at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of NOVA University Lisbon. He was awarded a PhD Scholarship by the Foundation for Science and Technology. He holds a master's degree in Comparative Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon. During his master's degree, he carried out a research project entitled

“Aquém e Além de Si: Os Diários de Jonas Mekas”. Tiago Ramos has also published several scientific articles in national and international academic journals, as well as given several presentations at both national and international conferences.

Reid, Danny

Allan Hancock College, USA

College and Carnality: Campus Sex on Celluloid

Ivy-covered walls, dusty professors, and large, looming buildings are of the staid air of college and university campuses across the United States. For many students, however, the experience of college has shockingly little to do with formal educational, but rather the extracurricular pursuit of marriage and sex.

Away from home and on their own, college is an opportune time for most students to experiment with sexual intimacy. Films, looking to exploit this, have been made about campus love life since the silent era. From male undergrads visiting 'college widows' and women looking for their 'M.R.S.' degree to the free love of the mid-Century and now towards a more conservative focus on intimacy and connection, the sexual desires and mores of student bodies have been obsessively portrayed by filmmakers who desire to either titillate or reproach their morality.

This paper will reflect on films primarily set on college campuses. Films covered include *The Freshman* (1920), *Monkey Business* (1931), *Age of Consent* (1934), *Yes, My Darling Daughter* (1939), *Sex Kittens Go to College* (1960), *College Confidential* (1960), *Get Yourself a College Girl* (1964), *Animal House* (1978), *H.O.T.S.* (1978), *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), *PCU* (1994), *Loser* (2000), *Old School* (2003), *Accepted* (2006), *21 & Over* (2013), *Neighbors* (2014), and *Life of the Party* (2018).

Through these films, the American college experience is shown as less of a staid institution than one governed by the passions and yearnings of its student bodies. By taking a progressive look at how these films have treated sex life on campus, we can see how filmmakers have had to evolve their portrayals of both men and women in the over the last century and reflect on how that has shaped both the institution of college and American perceptions thereof.

Keywords

college, campus, marriage, maturity, sex

Biography

Danny Reid is a librarian who has been writing about pre-Code Hollywood, 1930-34, for over a decade at pre-Code.com. His published writing includes the forthcoming *Pre-Code Essentials* from Running Press, as well as *Murder on Celluloid: A Companion to the Hildegard Withers Film Series* and editing the essay collection *Thoughts on the Thin Man*. Danny has introduced film screenings around the world and talked extensively on podcasts to discuss the era. He currently lives in Germany with his wife, two kids, and three very silly dogs.

Riedler, Nina / Krockner, August

University of Passau, Germany

Linguistics saves the day. And the world, eventually.

Dennis Villeneuve's 2016 film *Arrival* centres on two academics – linguistics professor Dr Louise Banks and theoretical physicist Dr Ian Donnelly. Narrated from the point of view of Louise Banks the film initially follows her personal and professional life until she becomes involved in an ongoing effort to understand and communicate with newly arrived aliens on Earth – during which she meets Ian Donnelly.

The film makes reference to the real-world scientific domain by portraying the inner workings of the American academic system, such as the relationship between the humanities and the natural sciences, as well as the competitive dynamics between scientists and their schools. The research depicted in the film is situated within a particular sociocultural context – Banks and Donnelly are recruited by the American military after all. The film offers the opportunity to examine the interconnections between different societal subsystems, including those of science and politics. Furthermore, the manner in which both scientists work is informed by their respective academic cultures. In order to make progress in communicating with the alien visitors under the double strain of proving themselves and increasing tensions among the factions involved, Banks and Donnelly join forces. When due to a panic reaction events come to a head, Banks takes the lead and saves the day. And Earth.

In our talk we take aim to analyse the portrayal of the following three aspects of academia:

- a) academics, their lifestyle and character traits
- b) the concept and conception of academic work
- c) the role of academia in the interplay with other societal subsystems

Keywords

academic culture, science and success, two cultures (C.P. Snow), communication, dualities

Biography

Nina Riedler (M.A.) teaches Cultural Studies with special emphasis on literature and the arts, including film. Her research interests include 19th century culture and literature, the notion of self and other, monsters and the monstrous. Her PhD project is concerned with the rediscovery of the Renaissance in fin de siècle Europe centring on the concept of universal man.

August Krockner (M.A.) is a research assistant and PhD student. His dissertation focuses on the discursive construction of democracy in popular non-fiction books. His main area of interest is the intersection of media, politics and culture.

Sathsarani, Ruvindra

University of Tübingen, Germany

Female Chairs only for Precarious Times: The Conflict of Gender in Senior Academic Positions

The persistence of conflicts relating to gender and power in senior academic positions is a much debated topic. Underpaid female faculty staff, the difficulty of female academics to obtain tenure professorships and mostly the difficulty of reaching professional success due to pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood have been crucial topics over the years. As academic employment is often socially viewed in terms of confidence, success, contribution to outstanding research and expertise, it favors male employment over the female as the former is believed to fit better to these criteria. This power struggle has been analyzed in different fields especially in terms with psycho-sociological aspects. However, visual media as a narrative mode assists in the identification of complexities within this conflict between gender and power as it allows us internal perspectives through characters, interactions and events. This study explores how female academics challenge the male centered hegemony of senior academic positions at universities through a close analysis of the 2021 Netflix series *The Chair* in which a female professor of Asian origins is appointed as the Chair of the English department amidst many racial and sexist backlashes. A crucial aspect of the narrative is that Dr. Ji-Yoon Kim is given the position at a time of dire crisis when student enrollments at the department are quickly decreasing and she remarks in episode 4 that she feels as if “someone handed [her] a ticking time bomb because they wanted to make sure a woman was holding it, when it explodes”. The study focuses on to what extent Ji-Yoon navigates the conflicts successfully while paying close attention to underlying gender and racial dynamics of the institution while also incorporating Pat O’Connor’s ideas in her socio-political theoretical study “Where do Women Fit in University Senior Management?” in *Gender, Power and Management*.

Keywords

Academia in Crisis, Female Academics, Literary Studies, Gender and Race in Academia.

Biography

Ruvindra Sathsarani is the research and teaching assistant to the Chair of English Literature and Gender studies at University of Tübingen. Her doctoral thesis focuses on issues of third world female labourers and how literary studies assist in accessing the consciousness of these marginalized workers. Her other recent studies are on settler colonial literature, post-colonial capitalism and the role of literature in memory studies.

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Sol, Hermínia

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Beyond Oxbridge: New universities and the quest for cultural heritage in *The Lost King*

Most British productions with university settings -- such as *Cambridge Spies* (2003), *The Riot Club* (2014) or *Saltburn* (2023), to mention but a few -- tend to privilege an Oxbridge imaginary as the quintessential paragon of British higher education heritage, both in a tangible and intangible sense. Given Cambridge and Oxford universities' scientific prestige, their medieval origins, and their imposing architecture, they belong to a very exclusive list of original academic institutions whose reputation as major contributors to the cultural, material and intellectual heritage of Europe remains unshakable. Despite Oxbridge's on-screen prevalence, Britain's university landscape is of a more diverse nature. Based on Stephen Frears' *The Lost King* (2023), this paper explores the strategies adopted by new universities, represented in the film by Leicester University, to create their own heritage so as to emulate that of the old, with the aim of asserting their cultural significance (Boylan 2002) and attracting students.

Borrowing, mostly, from heritage and film studies, it will be revealed how the concept of cultural heritage, as a social practice, is a useful ally in the process of combining the Humboldtian model of university (more European) with a more recent neoliberal model, imported from the USA, that promotes the commodification of the past (Sanz & Bergan, 2002). By following a storyline that focuses on a civilian's quest to discover Richard III's remains, one witnesses an academic environment where scholars must demonstrate their worth by attracting funding, where historical discoveries are incorporated into marketing campaigns, and where 'new' universities struggle to stress their relevance in a never-ending higher education reform process. Overall, Britain stands as an epitome of the many changes that European intellectual life faces due to consistent state cuts to higher education, which threaten to endanger the same heritage values that Europe seeks to promote.

Keywords

cultural heritage, commodification, Higher-education reform, British college films, Europe

Biography

Hermínia Sol is a Coordinator Professor at the Polytechnic University of Tomar (Portugal) where she teaches English and Screenwriting. She holds a BA in English and Portuguese Studies, an MA Hons in Women's Studies and a PhD in American Literature. She is the Director of the R&D Unit Technology, Restoration and Arts Enhancement Center (TECHN&ART) and a researcher at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES). Her research interests focus on the dialogue between cinema and literature, travel writing and storytelling in general. She also conducts research in the fields of cultural heritage preservation narratives and memory studies.

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Subbarao, Nikhila

The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

Caste in the Scene of Education: Structures of Romantic Love in Indian College Films

Offering a historical sociology of higher education, Gerard Delanty (2003) delineates four revolutions in the modern university, following major ruptures in modernity – the Humboldtian University marked by the ideals of Enlightenment, the elite American civic university marked by disciplinization and professional accreditation, the mass university, which was linked to the transformative project of democratic politics, and now the virtual university marked by the institutionalization of market values. Rudolph and Rudolph (1972) noted that with Independence, Indian higher educational institutions lost their elite character, and became popular and a part of the project of political democracy (Delanty's mass university). Andrea Kolbel et al (2022) study the university as a transformative social space in the south Asian context, marked by mobility and mobilizations. This is more so in the post-Mandal political scenario where a new generation of youth from marginalized communities are shaping the Indian university as a social space, as Satendra Kumar's study in the Kolbel edited volume indicates. Given this social diversification and democratization of the sphere of higher education (in universities, colleges), in a society otherwise largely segmented by caste, and where sociality is still structured by caste hierarchy, everyday life in this space - interaction, communication, commensality, love and conflict are all worth investigating.

Particularly, this study is interested in the question - how does caste work as an affect, a 'structure of feeling' punctuating everyday life in this space? A couple of studies look at the way in which caste structures gendered interactions in college spaces – "Subjectivities of Suitability: 'Intimate Aspirations' in an Engineering College by Nandini Hebbar (2018) and Marty Roger's essay titled "Modernity, 'authenticity', and ambivalence: subaltern masculinities on a South Indian college campus (2008). Since Indian films are surfeit with all kinds of romantic relations among young men and women, and many of them are set in colleges, universities or involve college-going youth, I want to draw up a corpus of Indian films where caste works to structure a particular kind of affect – romantic love. By paying attention to these narratives of (often) inter-caste romantic love, the attempt is to understand caste as an affective phenomenon, shaping and being shaped by the space of higher education in India today.

Keywords

Higher education, democratization, caste, youth, romantic love, Indian films

Biography

Nikhila H. is Professor in the Department of Film Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, where she teaches and researches in the areas of Film Studies and Gender Studies. She is co-founder of an online film discussion forum called Talking Films Online. Her recent publications include a commissioned essay for a volume on Shyam Benegal, and a collaborative essay on cinephilia and film archiving for a volume on the politics of curatorship.

Szlezák, Klara

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Harvard or Yale?:

On the Depiction of Higher Education in *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007)

Running through seven seasons, from October 2000 through May 2007, the WB/CW¹ series *Gilmore Girls* has by now achieved cult status in the annals of American TV series. During its original airing, *Gilmore Girls* managed to draw a steady viewership throughout all of its seasons and has been cited as one of the streaming channel Netflix's most watched shows worldwide in 2023.² Crisscrossing the comedy and drama genres, *Gilmore Girls* counts among the most popular and successful TV series internationally, with both creator Amy Sherman-Palladino's writing and the cast's performance receiving wide acclaim.

The cultural influence emanating from such popular and critical success thus warrants a scholarly inquiry into the depiction of higher education in the series. In fact, academia plays a central role in *Gilmore Girls*, from the pilot, in which teenaged Rory is admitted to the prestigious private school Chilton preparing her for an Ivy-League college career, through the process of college applications, through the end of the final season, when Rory graduates from Yale. The challenge of covering horrendous tuition fees actually turns into a driving force of one of the plot lines as it starts the weekly encounters between Lorelai and her parents. And while Rory gets to choose between Harvard and Yale, other characters struggle to get into and finish community college. This paper explores the series' focus on the academic path of one of its principal characters, arguing that plot lines and visual aesthetics oscillate between reverence for the Ivy League, subtle criticism thereof, and even ridicule, thus opening up for viewers the possibility to both identify with and to distance themselves from exclusive U.S. institutions of higher education.

Keywords

popular culture, Ivy League, stereotyping, branding

1 The series switched from the WB to the CW network for the last season.

2 [h7ps://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-68138795M](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-68138795M); Oct. 20, 2024.

Biography

Klara Stephanie Szlezák received her PhD in American Studies from the University of Regensburg. She has taught at the Universities of Osnabrück and Augsburg and currently works as a lecturer at the University of Passau. Her research interests revolve around immigration history, photography and film, Jewish American Studies as well as popular culture and tourism studies. She is the author of *“Canonized in History”: Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Writers’ Houses in New England* (Winter, 2015), the co-editor of three essay collections and recipient of fellowships from the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, the Terra Foundation, and the JFK Library in Boston.

Tharakeshwar V.B.

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Changes in the Indian Higher Education System in the 1990s and their Relationship with Popular Perceptions: A Case Study of Select Kannada Films

This paper attempts to examine the relationship between popular perceptions of the higher education, specifically, college education, as evident through popular movies, and the changes that happened in the field of higher education in India, precisely in late 1980s and early 1990s when India entered the world of what we call roughly as globalization (opening up the economy to the world), privatization (allowing private sector to invest in what was till then exclusively handled by the state) and liberalization (easing of norms to facilitate the role of private players in economy including the field of higher education). The changes that are seen post 1990 is seen as the decision of the state without much demand from the society. The paper argues that especially in the field of education, the popular perceptions of the field of higher education was ripe, as evident in the representation of the college system, and that also might have played a role in the decision taken by the state. A selection of films popular in late 1980s and early 1990s in Kannada, one of the prominent film industries in India, will be taken up for analysis along with a few films from the earlier and the later period to track the representation of higher education in the popular cultural arena in order to glean out the relationship between them and the changes that were wrought on higher education in the Indian context in 1990s. The argument is that there seems to be a dialectical relationship between the changes that were wrought on higher education by the Government of India as well as federal Governments in India and the popular perceptions of higher education in late 1980s and early 1990s. Though the films analysed are from the Kannada industry, they might share common tropes/traits in representing higher education across languages in India.

Keywords

Privatization of Education, Campus films in Kannada, Changes in Indian Education system, Popular perceptions and Films

Biography

Tharakeshwar V. B. is a Professor at the Department of Translation Studies at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He has published in the areas of Translation Studies, Colonialism and Nationalism, Linguistic Nationalism/Identity, Literary Historiography etc. He is a bilingual writer who has published both in Kannada and English. He has coordinated a translation series called 'Classical Kannada Texts in English'. He has handled many research projects in the area of Translation Studies. He has nearly 26 years of teaching service in Translation Studies. He has also directed many plays.

Tu, Xiaofei

Appalachian State University, USA

The Movie 决裂 (*Breaking with Old Ideas*): An Utopian Vision of Higher Education in the Chinese “Cultural Revolution”

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chinese cinema scenes have undergone many significant changes, reflecting a fascinating history of the evolution of intellectual discourse and ideological struggles over the past 80 years. Among the many controversial films, *Breaking with Old Ideas*, stands out as particularly noteworthy. Deliberately released on the first day of 1976, the film is a drama about a Chinese college, called the Communist Labor College, based on Mao's ideas on high education, which aims to create productive citizens for an egalitarian society. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell have discussed the film in the context of the Cold War and the global ideological conflicts between the socialist and capitalist camps.

Interestingly, contemporary Chinese critics draw on the film's political visions to critique today's China's education system that prioritizes profit and careerist “academic” success. Furthermore, many people today see the eerily relevance of the film's themes: the unaffordability of education for peasants and workers, the disconnect between education and real life, and the disappearing idealism for students.

Using the movie as a case study, this paper traces the metamorphosis of Chinese higher education in the past decades and applies the Foucauldian theory of subjectification to critique the dominant neoliberal thinking in 21st century Chinese universities and colleges.

Keywords

China, Chinese cinema, Chinese education, the Cultural revolution

Biography

Xiaofei Tu is an associate professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Appalachian State University. He received his education at Harvard, Yale, and Syracuse Universities.

His most recent book is *Japanese Idols Go to China: Cultural Adaptation and Nationalism*. This book situates the Chinese acceptance of Japanese popular culture within the broad context of nationalist ideology and international relations in East Asia. It aims to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the reader about contemporary East Asian cultural exchanges and nationalist expressions in concrete forms. Additionally, this book attempts to discover heretofore overlooked aspects of nationalism's metamorphosis in both China and Japan and challenge the existing scholarly and popular understandings of nationalism.

Viswanath, Gita

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The Pleasure and Pain of Higher Education: A Reading of *Chhichhore (Flippant Boys)*

The Grade 12 examination, conducted by either a Central Board called Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), constituted by the Government of India or State Boards, constituted by individual states in India, is taken by 17-year-old students at the end of schooling in March each year. This exam is perceived as a definitive test of the student's learning outcomes and as being decisive for his/her career and entire life. With focus on education in science and technology being a part of the neoliberal ethos, elite institutions offering degrees in Engineering and Medicine are the most coveted destinations for students in India. For instance, in 2024, 1.42 students out of every 100 who competed for the 17, 385 seats available across the 23 prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) made it.

Enormous pressure put on students by parents, schools and coaching institutes that see the child as the means to upward social mobility, and good advertisements for more enrollments respectively, has tragically resulted in suicides of aspirants. Phenomena such as these have provided ample grist for filmmakers and Hindi cinema has several instances of films based on themes of the grueling pathways to colleges, life on the campus, and the unequal access to education exacerbating the existing social, cultural and economic divisions in Indian society, that Bourdieu calls social reproduction.³

In this paper, I will analyze the film, *Chhichhore (Flippant Boys)* (Dir: Nitesh Tiwari, 2019) that explores questions of students' mental health alongside the cherished moments of campus life and an everlasting solidarity amongst the alumni of an elite engineering institution modelled on IIT. The paper seeks to examine the systemic gaps and silences in higher education that the non-linear narrative shifts between the agony of failure and the joys of campus life may reveal.

³ Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Translated by Richard Nice, Sage Publications, 1977.

Keywords

Grade 12 examination, mental health, campus life, systemic gaps and silences

Biography

Gita Viswanath has a PhD from The Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India, in Literature and Film Studies. She is the author of *The 'Nation' in War: A Study of Military Literature and Hindi War Cinema* (2014), published by Cambridge Scholars, UK; two novels, and a children's book. She has also published essays in literature and film studies in journals and anthologies. She is the recipient of the South Asia Regional Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council, New York, 2006 and the South Asia Regional Fellowship Program Comparative Research Grant by the Social Science Research Council, New York, 2007. She is also the co-founder of an online film discussion group called 'Talking Films Online.' Currently, she works as Academic Fellow, Forum on Contemporary Theory, Baroda, India.

Vollmann, Vanessa

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Reflections on Netflix's *The Chair*: A Critical Race Theory Counter-Dialogue

Netflix's 2021 six-episode show *The Chair* speaks to a changed awareness regarding the systemic power dynamics that remain in place in academia while "masquerading as non-White non-gendered objectivity," (Crenshaw 154) when they, in fact, reflect "White male subjectivity" (154).

The lead character is Dr. Ji-Yoon Kim, a Korean American and the first woman to chair the English department at the fictive Ivy League Pembroke University while handling toxic gender expectations. She is a single mother raising an adopted child of Latinx descent, and her star faculty member is Black woman professor who is trying to secure tenure while challenging the patriarchal and dusty structures that cannot value her cutting-edge scholarship. Kim's romantic interest is a beloved White academic who acts inappropriately in every societal space he visits, most poignantly by using the Nazi salute in class. This portrayal of academic life at the intersections of culture, class, race, gender, and history feels very timely, especially against the societal backdrop of the show, #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, although it fails to expose dominant society's flawed assumption that an ethnically diverse leader will automatically lead to progressive, inclusive policies.

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) tool of "counterstorytelling" is one way of investigating this "masquerade." Aja Martinez' trailblazing expansion of CRT in 2020 highlights the importance of critical thinking becoming more accessible and the need to center people of Color's experiential knowledge. In her creative dialogues, "composite characters" reflect Plato's Phaedrus-Socrates relationship and engage in a discussion.

In the dialogue written for this conference, the composite characters are Brigitte – a woman-of-Color educator of American Studies – and Russ – a White American colleague. Sitting together at a conference dinner, they discuss the show, addressing race and gender representation in academia, cancel culture, the power dynamics of dominance as well as the concepts of privilege and fragility.

Keywords

Critical Race Theory, counterstorytelling, creative critical dialogue, privilege, fragility, intersectionality, sexism, racism

Biography

Vanessa Vollmann holds a Ph.D. in American Studies and a Master's Degree in International Relations and English Literature. She teaches literature and cultural studies, interpreting, and translation. Her research focuses on uncovering systemic power structures in US society that have led to the silencing of voices at the intersections of race, gender, and history. It focusses particularly on silenced women and people-of-Color voices in the fields of media representation, the law, and social structures that have solidified over the centuries based on the bias in historical storytelling.

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