

Title

Silent Babel: Cinematic Multilingualism Beyond the Soundtrack

Abstract

This talk takes its cue from the reflection that multilingualism is one of the impellent cultural forces of the last two centuries, and that, as such, it has had an extensive and profound impact on cinema. Whether understood as an individual characteristic, such as may derive from a diasporic upbringing or from migration into a non-native linguistic environment, or as a pervasive societal condition – brought about by various mass displacements and colonization projects and recently intensified by media globalization – multilingualism encompasses both the generative experience of linguistic confrontation and exchange and the adversity of linguistic destabilization, repression or loss. It therefore bears a series of social, political, psychological and even ethical implications whose relevance to contemporary culture and society has indeed been widely examined, but whose relation to cinema has been left largely unexplored. Our talk advocates the opening of film studies to a broader appreciation of the ways in which linguistic difference has shaped, and continues to shape, the medium's history. In particular, we try to discern and emphasize the areas of study that appear, to us, most crucial to forging a renewed understanding of cinema's relation to language diversity and, through that, to language as such. In the first instance, and quite simply, this entails an effort to broaden the field of research by looking to the least studied geographic contexts and the least circulated films, as well as by opening the discourse of the transnational to films and contexts that may not, on the surface, appear to be informed by transnational (and thus multilingual) forces, or that have not typically been viewed in that light. On the other hand, and perhaps most importantly, there is a need to redraw the conceptual parameters of this field of research: namely, by further reflecting on and theorizing the numerous ways in which multilingualism has impacted on cinema without actually appearing *as such*, in the form of either original or translated dialogue. To reassess the methodologies and frameworks that have influenced the study of filmic multilingualism means necessarily to propose that its force is also, and perhaps counterintuitively, a silent one. While most studies of the subject have explored linguistic difference as a largely audible phenomenon – manifested through polyglot dialogues, or through the translation of monolingual dialogues for international audiences – this talk explores some of its unheard histories, thus contributing to a new field of enquiry based on an attentiveness to multilingualism's work *beyond* the soundtrack.

Bios

Tijana Mamula teaches film studies at John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. Her writing on exilic cinema and language, experimental film, and the work of Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras has appeared in *Screen*, *Studies in French Cinema*, *Avanguardia*, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, and *NERO* magazine (Italy), where she is also a contributing editor. She is the author of *Cinema and Language Loss: Displacement, Visuality and the Filmic Image* (Routledge, 2013), and co-editor of *The Multilingual Screen: New Reflections on Cinema and Linguistic Difference* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016). She holds a PhD in Film Studies from King's College London.

Lisa Patti is an Assistant Professor in the Media and Society Program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Her research focuses on global media, multilingualism, and translation; contemporary media distribution; and media studies pedagogy. She is the co-author (with Glyn Davis, Kay Dickinson, and Amy Villarejo) of *Film Studies: A Global Introduction* (Routledge, 2015) and co-editor of *The Multilingual Screen: New Reflections on Cinema and Linguistic Difference* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016). She holds a PhD in comparative literature from Cornell University.

Book description

The Multilingual Screen: New Reflections on Cinema and Linguistic Difference

Edited by Tijana Mamula and Lisa Patti

Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016

The Multilingual Screen is the first edited volume to offer a wide-ranging exploration of the place of multilingualism in cinema, investigating the ways in which linguistic difference and exchange have informed the medium's history. Moving across a vast array of geographic, historical, and theoretical contexts – from Japanese colonial filmmaking, to the French New Wave, to contemporary artists' moving image – the essays in this collection address the aesthetic, political, and industrial significance of multilingualism in film production and reception. In grouping these works together, *The Multilingual Screen* reassesses the methodologies and frameworks that have shaped the study of filmic multilingualism to propose that its influence does not only extend to the soundtrack but resides also in the silent and tacit traces of multilingual practices that mark cinematic images and other artifacts of film production and circulation. Bringing into critical dialogue original essays, translations and interviews that reexamine canonical film theories and film-producing regions and others that excavate rarely discussed film histories, the collection provokes a re-evaluation and re-invigoration of the question of cinema's relation to language.