



## Lectures on Memory and Visuality

The intersection between visuality, memory and politics is a crucial field of inquiry for the BABE research project, calling attention to the historical processes through which practices of mobility and border regulation have reconfigured the European space after 1989.

The two invited lecturers aim to enlarge our methodological perspective by discussing research fields and approaches based on colonial and postcolonial India. They will explore how visual meanings were generated and transformed in relation to the geopolitics of empire and to the national self-making of post-colonial India, and will shed light on the cultural and institutional relations shaping political spaces. Furthermore, their contributions will discuss how protocols of personal identification as well as the visualization of material/imagined borders reflect multiple temporalities.

Thursday, 19 May

16:00-18:00 Seminar room 2, Badia Fiesolana

### ***Film in the Archive of Mediatized Politics***

Professor Ravi Vasudevan (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi)

Chair: Professor Luisa Passerini (BABE Principal Investigator)

### **Abstract:**

The presentation will look back, focusing on film in the spectrum of media forms, specifically using documentary material to consider how film stores and reanimates the time of the political, the particular way politics, political constituencies and the mediatized forms of their articulation are configured historically. I will refer to forms such as the newsreel, the separately shot and relayed political speech and the reflexive documentary. For the latter, I will focus on Sukhdev's *Thoughts in a Museum* (1968), to examine how the film positions the Nehru Memorial Museum in Delhi, its presentation of spaces and objects for the plebeian viewer, in relation to Films Division, the Indian government's documentary film unit, as a repository of the Nehruvian imaginary.

Friday, 20 May

10:30-12:30 Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana

***The 'Look' of the Document: The Colonial Subject in Transit, British India, 1882-1921***

Professor Radhika Singha (Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi)

Chair: Liliana Ellena (BABE Associate Researcher)

**Abstract:**

This talk compares the 'look' of the international form of the British Indian passport with that of the pilgrim passport issued to Muslims when they set off to perform the Hajj in Arabia. It reviews debates about the indexical value of the photograph, as against the thumbprint. It concludes with a discussion about spatial jurisdictions as a consideration in the 'look' of a travel document. The British Indian passport, recast over 1914-21 marked the potential entry of India as a distinct actor in an international state system. Yet a 'local and regressive' practice left its mark on the document, in the exemption from the photograph given to women who observed norms of veiling. 'Lesser standards' were even more marked in the 'look' of the pilgrim passport. Yet this document gave substance to assertions, such as those made by Viceroy Hardinge in 1916, that the British Empire ought to be visualized as the 'biggest Mohammedan power in the world.'

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## ***Film in the archive of mediatized politics***

Ravi Vasudevan

The thematic focus of this presentation is on the political uses of the film archive in India. For this exercise, I refer to the political in terms of a leader's iconicity, how his or her image is produced and projected through technological means. Such political uses need to be explored, I argue, not only through empirical accounts of production, circulation and reception, but can also draw upon film and related archives to develop a speculative register about how such cinematic images function.

A key background question to the project is how to think of film as archival object and resource for historiography. The archive itself is potentially vast, if intermittent. In the longer history, the newsreel, the short film and the radio were obviously key media forms for the presentation of the political. The Delhi durbars, elaborate ritual events orchestrating colonial India on the basis of rank and regalia around the figure of the emperor, are the best covered events from the early twentieth century. The 1905 swadeshi agitation was another important instance covered by cameramen; and so too was Bal Gangadhar Tilak's funeral procession in 1920, though in these cases, no footage appears to remain. There is also some amount of so-called 'topical' film material and newsreel, including unedited archival footage, available in various deposits, including the recent Pathe online archive. After India's independence, another important resource for the non-fiction film archive emerges from Films Division, a film-making unit set up by the government to make official documentaries and newsreels that would be compulsorily screened as part of commercial theatrical exhibition.

I employ two analytical strategies to explore this material. The first is to look at how films or post-cinema media objects are composed, to look for areas of uncertainty and excess, in filmic images and in discourses about their making, circulation and reception. I do this by looking at 'stock' films that were used as archive footage for newsreels, shorts, and so on. This latter category includes material which could not be used at the time of their capture because of the prevailing political situation. Secondly, I will be analysing a film made by a well-known director, S. Sukhdev, who made films commissioned by the Indian government, but was also considered part of an experimental documentary tendency of the time. Sukhdev's *Thoughts in a Museum* (1968), a compilation film he made for Films Division, is overtly on Teen Murti Bhawan, where India's first Prime Minister Nehru lived and which was subsequently made into the Nehru Memorial Museum; but it is also about Films Division as an archival deposit. I find Sukhdev's film interesting as method, a way of disaggregating unities and coherences, to create effects that separate publics from the discourses of leadership which seek to mobilize them. It asks us to think about the space of the museum, and how and under what dispositions publics congregate; and, in turn, as cinema audiences, it asks us to look at Films Division archivally, as being a deposit which, while deriving from statist impulses, may offer information which exceeds bureaucratic objectives. Finally, I consider the relay of the political image into a proliferation of localities in the new, digital environment. Here I take up the case of the hologram, a three dimensional projection used to

present major candidates in public meetings across the country. I analyse the discourses of how such images are produced and presented, along with media forms through which an account of the hologram's effects can be diagnosed. This includes the exploration of new types of streaming space such as YouTube, which is emerging as a critical archive of the past and the present, of old and new media technologies.

**Ravi Vasudevan** is currently on a fellowship at the Institut d'Etudes Avancées de Nantes. He works at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and co-directs Sarai, the Centre's urban and media research programme, co-founded with his colleague Ravi Sundaram and the RAQS Media Collective in 2000. His work on cinema explores issues in film, social history, politics, and contemporary media transformation. He is visiting faculty at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He is on the advisory board of the Film Studies journals *Screen, Cinema & Cie*, and *Reframe*, and co-founder and editor of *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*. Vasudevan has curated film exhibitions, lecture series and conferences, including *Selves Made Strange: Violent and Performative Bodies in the Cities of Indian Cinema* (House of World Cultures, Berlin, 2003) and *The Many Lives of Indian Cinema, 1913-2013 and Beyond: Disciplines, Histories, Technologies, Futures* (CSDS, Delhi, January 2014). His publications include the co-edited volumes *Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life* and *Sarai Reader 03: Crisis Media, Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (edited, 2000) and *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (2010, 2015). Currently at Sarai, along with Ravi Sundaram he is running research initiatives on Media Information and Infrastructures, and Social Media.

## ***The 'look' of the document: the colonial subject in transit, British India, 1882-1921***

Radhika Singha

I begin by outlining the long history of interventions to shape and monitor travel across the borders of colonial India. The 'look' of a travel document emerged from the imperatives bound up with a particular stream of population mobility. Descriptive protocols and procedures which inscribed status and identity in one social space or official jurisdiction were drawn upon and recomposed in the travel document. It bore the mark of contests over the choice of protocols and demands for exemption. However elements of co-constitution can also be discerned in its morphology. There were continuous discussions about the merits of insignia, information columns, the descriptive roll, photograph, signature and thumbprint. Not all travel documents could incorporate the most complete or 'scientific' methods of the time for recording, or authenticating identity. Nor was it always found necessary to do so.

Along with identity proofs and their negotiation, space is another key consideration in the design, and use of travel documents. When colonial officials generated a new travel document they reviewed the effect it would have in spaces outside the reach of their authority. Colonial officials felt that among illiterate populations an official- looking piece of paper operated as insignia of state, in much the same way as a seal, or a belt of office. One of the most trusted spaces for the recording of identity was the district. The introductions, signatures, seals and accompanying remarks which recalled that space allowed the document to move upwards to other levels of decision making, or to be carried into other spaces. In certain contexts an ordinary residence, with family members, had to be documented so that the traveler could conceptually be returned to this site.

This talk examines the 'international' form of the British Indian passport as it took shape over the period of the First World War (1914-21) and compares it with the pilgrim passport. This was the document issued to Muslims, usually at the port of embarkation, when they set off to perform the Hajj in Arabia.

In the 'international' passport the Government of India was forefronted as a distinct political constituent in empire, pushing down but not eliminating the spatial frame of the district, and the province or the princely state. An international frame of travel also seemed to require the most complete, and most 'scientific' form of recording identity. However Hindu and Muslim merchants who had dealings with South East Asia on the one side and with East Africa and Zanzibar on the other demanded that women who observed norms of female seclusion, *pardah*, be exempted from the photograph. The Government began by casting *pardah* as a regressive 'local' practice but eventually had to accept it could not by-pass inter-regional norms of border-crossing. *Pardah* women were permitted to submit a thumbprint instead of a photograph.

What changed about the pilgrim passport was the sudden removal of all references to the Ottoman empire. The pilgrim passport also began to be tied more tightly to the ship ticket, to encourage poor pilgrims to pay for their return journey in advance. But the constant complaint of officials in India was that the pilgrim passport did not incorporate either the photograph or the thumbprint. Yet this 'lesser' standard served a key purpose. It allowed the British Empire to participate in unacknowledged spaces of trans-national Muslim opinion formation. It was this perspective which allowed colonial satraps, for instance the Viceroy Lord Hardinge in 1916 to visualize the British Empire from Delhi as the 'biggest Mohammedan power in the world.'

**Radhika Singha** teaches history at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is currently on a fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Nantes, France. Her research interests focus on the social history of crime and criminal law, on borders and border-crossing and on identification practices in relation to colonial governmentality, the mobilization of human resources from India for World War one has become a second, often intersecting research track.