

# Popular Culture and Social Transformation

International Conference in Oslo, 4-5 October 2012

Book of Abstracts



## “Let art be your weapon”

*A part of the campaign against this summer's election of Enrique Peña Nieto as the President in Mexico. The poster reads: “Let art be your weapon. Art in War invites all artists to demonstrate against the imposition of Peña Nieto in the ‘Expo-Fraude’ (fraud expo)” in front of the US embassy in Mexico City.*

## **Call for papers: Why and how to study popular culture?**

Globalization has been described as a new constellation in the worldwide configuration of power, production and experience. As a result, the contemporary distribution of power and wealth to people and countries are largely determined by the extent to which they are inside or outside global networks of capital, information, technology, and images. To analyze these structural changes on a world scale, a pertinent question is how people living under them experience these changes, and how narratives in people's everyday lives make sense out of them. This raises the question: what can we learn about social transformations from popular culture? If our object of inquiry is, say, globalization or the state and its power, why should we turn to popular culture?

Studies of globalization typically concern “the outside of things”; actual movements of capital and people, increase in social inequality, poverty, and polarization; all hard facts, easily observable and recorded. In this conference, however, the focus is on the “inside” of social processes. Investigating an event’s “inside” implies mapping the road from ideas to practice, to understand an event as an action informed by ideology and values. This is not to reject the relevance of say the growth of inequality within and between countries to understand global power constellations. However, limiting social inquiry to such objectively recordable facets of change ignores the importance of ideas and ideology to understand how transformations happen and who they benefit. Such social inquiry risks creating for instance a male bias, where female voices and experiences are defined as irrelevant.

A perspective from popular culture to supplement the hard facts of globalization could correct such biases, in that it places peoples’ understanding of the events and the narratives they consume and produce about them at the centre of inquiry. It enables us to analyze the order of things from a different perspective. Popular culture provides not only data to perceptions about the inside of events; it also offers insight to a venue where social change plays itself out. Stuart Hall sees the “codes of intelligibility” that make up popular culture as “the ground on which transformations are worked”. In this sense, it provides an arena where social groups battle for the supremacy of their worldview and version of social change.

For that reason we should also consider the methodological aspects of investigating the relationship between the cultural product and the social structure it springs from. As such, it makes seemingly little difference whether the subject is political strategies, commercial ventures, social movements or identity construction – popular culture is part and parcel of the unfolding of the events. The aim of this conference is to investigate how popular culture not only is a mirror of society, but also how it is a crucial element of power.

Two keynote speakers will present papers on the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study of popular culture. Kultrans invites PhD candidates and researchers from the humanities and social sciences to present ongoing research projects.

**Possible topics for sessions and papers include:**

- Why study popular culture?
- Popular culture Inc. – the commercialization of culture
- Popular culture, identity and social movements
- Popular culture and politics
- Popular culture and religion
- Popular culture and popular resistance
- Popular culture and subaltern studies
- Popular culture and interdisciplinary studies
- Popular culture and methodology

**Organisers:**

Kultrans – Cultural Transformations in the Age of Globalization – an interfaculty research area at the University of Oslo

Academic director **Helge Jordheim**.

PhD research fellows **Audun Solli** and **Hans Erik Næss**.

# Keynotes

## Jason Dittmer

### **Playing Geopolitics: Utopian simulations of international relations**

Games and simulations have new prominence in the social sciences. This paper traces their use in geopolitics and international relations, utilizing a complexity theory/ assemblage approach to view them as systems with emergent properties produced through players' engagement. These games are enrolled in larger assemblages of pedagogy, foreign policy creation, and the inter-state system. These games function as utopias in which reductionist theories of neoclassical geopolitics and realist international relations can be seen to function. Model United Nations and Statecraft are examples of the way in which this occurs in practice, with realist assumptions coded into the games' spaces. However, observation of, and interviews regarding, actual gameplay indicate that other forms of space are emergent, and offer alternative visions of geopolitics that may be more just. The article concludes with an argument for the inclusion of complexity theory and play within political geography, arguing that they embed an ethic of experimentation and hope.

**Jason Dittmer** earned his PhD in Geography at Florida State University in 1999. He is currently Reader in Human Geography, University College London, and has published extensively on popular culture including the critically acclaimed book *Popular Culture, Geopolitics and Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

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## Simon Lindgren

### **Fan F(r)iction: Exploring the semiotic social spaces of digitally networked pop culture audiences**

The emergence and continued development of digital and social media platforms has lead to a renegotiation of the relationship between "producers" and "consumers" of popular culture. In today's media landscape, not only big media corporations have the tools and means to channel content, and to refine and transform it to generate new interpretations and new knowledge. This transformation is largely taking place through affinity spaces that relate to popular culture: Digital pirates are writing network protocols and software, movie enthusiasts are translating subtitle files, fan fiction is written, digital art is created and commercial content is remixed and subverted. These settings constitute new avenues for enjoyment, informal learning and knowledge exchange.

This presentation will use case studies to discuss the potential of this type of “collective intelligence” (Lévy, 1999). While its potential is huge, there are indeed also pitfalls and obstacles to realizing it. I will look at the cultural and social protocols that shape these new audiences. This is done with a focus on the linguistic as well as the social exchange that characterizes networked publics. The general argument will be that these so called "participatory audiences", allegedly driven by "co-creation", simultaneously bear characteristics of "socialized" and “alienated cyberculture” (Fuchs, 2008). This is not to be seen as a contradiction. The development of internet cultures is always happening within the full complexity of society as a whole, and the interplay between unity and discord must be seen as the basis for the social integration of any group.

**Simon Lindgren** is Professor of Sociology at Umeå University, Sweden. He researches digital culture with a focus on how new media audiences navigate the border landscape between the new potentials for participation and activism on the one hand, and the risks for exclusion and exploitation on the other. Simon is actively taking part in developing theoretical as well as methodological tools for analyzing discursive and social network aspects of the emerging new media landscape. He has published internationally on themes like hacktivism, digital piracy, citizen journalism, subcultural creativity, popular culture and visual politics.

# Abstracts

Abstracts in alphabetical order, by (first) authors last name.

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## Emma Arnold

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### **Politics and popular (sub)culture: Street art and student protest in Montréal, Canada**

The streets of Montréal are overflowing with red squares. These *carrés rouges* have become an iconic symbol of the recent student protests against the Québec government's proposed tuition hikes. Small squares of red tape adorn traffic signs, statues and monuments, lamp posts, mail boxes, and all manner of urban infrastructure. More intricate graffiti and street art has also emerged. Handprinted political posters reminiscent of those from the Paris 1968 student movement are pasted up around the city. Bright red yarn-bombs – a form of textile graffiti which introduces knitted pieces into the urban landscape – can be seen close to universities and along protest routes. Whether artistic interventions are simple or complex, playful or radical, Québec students have made use of the popular (sub)cultures of graffiti and street art to further their social and political cause.

Street art is considered by many to be one of the most important art movements of the twentieth century. With roots in the graffiti subculture of 1970s and 1980s New York City, street art has quickly entered the realm of popular culture. This is particularly evidenced by the success of street artists like Shepard Fairey and Banksy but also in the popularisation of the graffiti aesthetic itself. Regardless of its popularity, street art remains largely unsanctioned, informal, and illegal. It is generally introduced into urban landscapes without permission and though very often ephemeral, it is virtually ubiquitous in the modern urban landscape. It is a form of creative expression found in cities around the world. It is also a significant form of dissent and of social and political expression.

This paper explores how street art may be used to express political views and uses the example of the Montréal student protests of Spring 2012; a social movement which some students have dubbed *Le printemps érable* or *The Maple Spring*. This research looks at the diverse ways students have utilised street art and graffiti to express their opinions and suggests that when venues for self-expression are limited and citizens become disenfranchised, the streets become a canvas for political thought.

This research forms part of the *Geographies of Street Art* project by the Canadian think-tank The Institute for Art & Environment. The project makes use of visual and psychogeographic methodologies to explore street art in the city of Montréal.

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**Siyu Chen.**

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**Dilemmas of Chinese Modernity: A Case Study of a Localized Television Dating Show in China**

In the age of media globalization, television is subjected to both the influence of global modernity and the pull of local context. The Chinese dating show *If You Are the One* at Jiangsu Provincial TV Station is a case in point. Inspired by the British show *Take Me Out*, it appeared on Chinese screen last year and quickly became the most watched entertainment program nationwide by the end of 2010. However, despite its phenomenal popularity among Chinese youth, it has been criticized by the government, educationists and scholars for “promoting negative, non-traditional values.”<sup>1</sup>

By treating the show as a kaleidoscope of contemporary Chinese views on marriage and family, and as an arena in which the traditional and modern ideologies collide, my research will aim to:

1. Identify the contemporary China marital ethics reflected by the show
2. Investigate the audience reception of the show by observations and interviews.
3. Examine the cultural and social factors influencing the audience reception of the show.
4. Exploring the media policy in a changing China by examining the modification of the show.

This project is planned to tie the ideological inquiry to the fundamental changes taking place in contemporary China. Meanwhile, the project is expected to demonstrate that with the advent of modernity, the Chinese traditional values are facing challenges from home and abroad. Meanwhile, Chinese media is entangled in the dilemma between the traditional ideological system advocating for solidarity and the modern system characterized by individualism.

Different research approaches will be adopted in this study. Among them, Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding theory<sup>2</sup> will be employed as the general research framework. In the encoding phase, this research will analyze the transcripts and tapes of the show by way of content analysis. In the decoding phase, based on the Grounded Theory, audience reception of the show will be examined by focus group research. Finally, through combining the findings of the encoding and decoding phases, the research will shed light on the public perceptions of marriage and family at a time of great political and social change in China.

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<sup>1</sup> People’s Republic of China, The State Administration of Radio Film and Television. *Notification on enhancing administration of television dating shows*, Beijing, GPO, 2010. Print.

<sup>2</sup> S.Hall, ' Encoding/Decoding', In S.Hall et al.(eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*, New York, Routledge, 1980, pp.128-138.

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**Benjamin de Carvalho and Fabian Mosenson.**

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**Heroes, War Movies and the Aesthetics of US Interventionism**

US foreign policy moves in cycles, punctuated by changing regimes of interventions in places far and near. But while these interventions are by and large collective endeavours, the immediate experience of them is one reserved to the few. The most immediate experience of these wars is thus for most a mediated one, grounded in individual experience and heroism. The experience most have of US intervention is thus one largely aestheticized on the screen. This experience is one which turns domestic constituencies into domestic bystanding public. Being the most important way in which the interventions are mediated to the population, the clash between Self/Other on the screen (be it big or small) is a crucial component in collective identity formation. Through a selection of the most important post WWII movies, our paper will address how US interventions are aestheticized, focusing on collective and individual heroism, identity and memory.

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**Giacomo Di Foggia**

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**Traces of cinephilia online. Facebookisation and Twitterisation of the cinephiliac experience.**

I propose an intervention that aims at analyzing the relations that occur between the cinephile member of the audience – and therefore his gaze – and the multitude of cinema fragments that populate the web. In addition, I'll investigate the way in which relationships, behaviors, processes of negotiation, and habits of cinephiles have been modified by the encounter with online cinema traces: the definition of the various typologies of classic/traditional cinephile behaviors; the mapping of the contemporary online behaviors of cinephilia: status updates, video uploads, creation of fan pages and of bottom up groups, etc.; creation of fan groups and of groups with the purpose of advertising Festivals and studios; diffusion of reviews and usage of one's own "wall" to publicize personal reviews, etc. The massive development of the systems of online social networking highlight the emergence of new and ambiguous figures of cinephiles. Whilst on the one hand these contemporary figures maintain some characteristics deriving from the evolution (and remediation, relocation, etc.) of classic cinephilia, on the other hand they show completely original typologies of experience, socialization and taste. The web, and in particular the programs of video sharing and the social networks, feed and trigger the characteristics of classic cinephilia, amplifying its consequences: the unity of the filmtext has been definitively compromised, for cinephilia can now overcome the boundaries of the dark élite oriented cinema halls. A one and a half hours long movie can now be watched in pieces, it can be arbitrarily reconstructed, its scenes can be shared on YouTube according to one's taste and preferences, it can be preliminarily evaluated by having watched nothing but a fragment of it being shared by a friend on Facebook, whereas the varieties of video shared by a friend on Facebook can help one understanding that friend.



In the study of contemporary culture, cinephilia helps understanding some of the internet related phenomena, such as video sharing websites and social networks. Moreover, it contributes to the in-depth evaluation of the cases and examples of transformation processes of the media, and of contemporary spectatorship practices. Cinephilia is both something which can be experienced and something through which having experiences: it is a peculiar form of gaze, and therefore it is both a peculiar experience of cinema and the and an experience of the world via the cinema. It is a specific necessity within the process of negotiation that is activated by the act of vision. Cinephilia has been a deeply sentimental and existential experience. For classic cinephiles, today, reflecting upon cinephilia means to elaborate on a memory of one's own youth, and at the same time it means to elaborate on a memory of one's own life in order to think of "love for cinema". Cinephilia should therefore be understood as experience, or model of experience towards the story and the self-portrait of one's own cinephile pleasure, towards the narration of one's own gaze, one's own pleasure, obsession and urge of desire. After all, desire and pleasure, once that they are made narratively explicit, become self-sufficient in feeding each other with one another. The reproduction of the mechanism movie/obsession, movie/pleasure, movie/reflex is obtained by means of autobiographic (self)narration. Systems of online social networking allow a depersonification of the user, who gains the possibility of constructing her artificial personality, until her complete reshaping into an ubiquitous avatar in a constant (and potentially endless) movement between the real and virtual worlds.

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**Rana Issa**

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**The Bible and Popular Culture. A Case Study of the Levantine Christians and the Modern Arrival of the Bible**

In recent years, leading newspapers and magazines around the world have published top ten lists of the world's most read texts. The bible routinely shows up on those lists as one of the world's most bought (and by association most read books). The rise of the bible as one of the world's most popular books is, as I contend, a largely modern phenomenon. During the age of modern Imperialism, thousands of missionaries from the four corners of the Western world actively sought the dissemination, translation and publication of bible books in the languages of the native populations that Western governments showed a vested interest in controlling. By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the bible became the most widely translated and disseminated book, enjoying an unprecedented global reach and became available in tongues that only some decades before enjoyed no written forms of language. By interrogating the dissemination of the bible from the viewpoint of popular culture, this paper hopes to argue that the life history of the bible underwent a radical transformation in modernity impacting the relationship faithful communities had towards the bible as a holy book. By focusing my analysis to the geography of biblical lands, where Levantine Christians enjoyed an uninterrupted presence since even before the time of Christ, I hope to examine how the translation of the bible to Arabic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century inaugurated the bible as a Deleuzian simulacrum, popular by virtue of sheer number and forcefully transformative of the political and religious identities of indigenous Eastern Churches and their populace.

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**Yee-man Lam**

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**Environmental popular culture: the representations of the environmental ethics in Hong Kong's popular culture**

No one is going to question the importance of environment concern as it has become one of the most pressing problems in the 21st century. In response to the problems, sustainable development and ecological modernization prevail in the developed countries, so is Hong Kong. However, while these theories are being discussed and implemented in the theoretical, global and governmental level, what is the role of popular culture in the environmental discussions? This paper will be situated in the context of Hong Kong. How is the issue of environment represented and discussed in Hong Kong's popular culture? Is the environmental discourse(s) in Hong Kong's popular culture coherent or confronted with the two theories? To what extent is the environmental discourse(s) generated in popular culture shaping our understanding of the environmental problems we are facing today? All in all, what is the specific environmental popular culture in Hong Kong?

In the paper, I will explore how nature is represented in a Hong Kong's popular culture, how the concept of environmental conservation has been incorporated into popular culture, and how a representation of environmental disasters has been absent in popular culture. At the end of the paper, I will urge for the importance of a diversified popular environmental culture in Hong Kong.

The specificity of Hong Kong popular culture lies in her own history and strategic location — that besides local culture which has been influenced by Chinese traditional thought in some sense, Hong Kong is importing popular cultures from Japan and the United States. While this blending of Chinese traditional thought and the imported popular culture provides a unique and sophisticated account for my investigation here, the case of Hong Kong as a highly modernized and economy-driven city should also be a good reference for other developed states/ cities.

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**Behzad Khosravi Noori**

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**The Black Eyes of Bruce Lee. A Practice of public art beyond the notion of Multiculturalism in the Hyper politicized society**

My dissertation is motivated by three general problems within the notion of European contemporary Multicultural racial politics: First: The very criticality of the discourse called prescriptive Multiculturalism and transformation to Balkanization. Second: The anti racist philosophy that has rarely explored the political possibilities of parody, pastiche, irony as a critical response to multicultural ideologies. Third: The logic of art in the Hyper politicized society and the artist position in this specific situation

Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is a policy, ideal, or reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world, especially as they relate to one another in

immigrant receiving nations. A few countries, have adopted multiculturalism, as a systematic and comprehensive response to cultural and ethnic diversity, with educational, linguistic, economic and social components and specific institutional mechanisms, notably Australia, Canada and Sweden.

“The multicultural” has been being oscillating between these two understandings: description and prescription. The latter definition implies a timeless sanctity and impenetrableness of so-called unique, distinct and unchanging cultures; not the fact that societies can and should be inhabited by people from a variety of places and cultures around the world and that these people can and should find a way of living together and learning from each other.

Vijay Prashad has written extensively on kung fu as an anti- racist philosophy. In his 2003, “Bruce Lee and the Anti-imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure,” in “East Asia Cultures Critique,” Prashad says he is interested in “how an investigation of kung fu can help us move from a limited multicultural framework into an antiracist, polycultural one.”

In 2005 “The urban movement group” in Mostar, one of the divided city in the world, (seems practicing the notion of prescriptive Multiculturalism when it comes to the idea of state) tried to change the situation between two groups of people from east (Moslem, Bosniak) and west (catholic- Croat). They erected a statue of the Hong Kong martial arts legend, Bruce Lee, at the dividing line between the Croat and Bosnian sections of the city on Nov. 26, the day before what would have been Lee’s 65th birthday. City leaders said that Lee symbolized their resistance against ethnic strife.

The aim of this article is to understand the logic of art in Hyper politicized society and develop the relational aspect between the ways of reading a culture in the limited multicultural framework to the notion of balkanization within the Hyper politicized society. Hyper-politicized space” (hyper-politicized social climate) is where any action or motion immediately associated with one or the other side of the previous conflict. This article is part of my current artistic research about the logic of art and the role of artist in the hyperpoliticized societies in the format of storyteller video- essay.

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## **Torgeir Nærland**

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### **Music and deliberation – the Norwegian hip hop-scene as an arena for the formation of (political) public opinion**

In this paper I argue that Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere offers a promising yet incomplete theoretical framework from where the democratic role of expressive culture in general, and music in particular, can be understood. It is promising because it clarifies how public communication amongst citizens forms the very core of legitimate political decision-making and furthermore connects the communicative processes in the public sphere with political-administrative action. The theory is incomplete because it cuts political processes too cleanly away from cultural forms of communication. Firstly, by over-emphasizing verbal deliberation as the only means of democratic communication it excludes other forms of communication that are evidently at work in processes of opinion-formation, such as TV-drama, theatre and music. Secondly, the theory is underdeveloped as to where in the anatomy of the public sphere musical practice and reception should be located, how music forms part of

public sphere-processes and how this relates to his wider theory of deliberative democracy. Habermas' insistence on the primacy of verbal communication can be seen as part of what Craig Calhoun has coined "Habermas' tendency to impoverish his own theory".

Music, a form of expressive culture that primarily communicates on the affective, emotional or aesthetical level and by means of connotation, is left outside Habermas' conceptual framework. Considering the roles of for instance the musical genres of funk and soul in the African-American civil-rights movement in the sixties, punk's central role in the UK anti-Thatcher movement in the early eighties, or the fact that the Taliban abolished all music when they first came to power in Afghanistan, suggest that music under certain social and historical conditions do enter into public sphere processes. In present day Norway hip hop stands out as a potentially fertile case where the interplay between music and politics can be seen to unfold. This is both due to the politicized traditions of the genre, its (contested) status as a vehicle for expression of the interests of the socially marginalized, and due to its potential to verbally address societal issues through rapping.

Based on interviews of key actors from the Norwegian hip hop-scene and drawing on theories from musicology and the sociology of music this paper shows and discusses how the scene in its own right might function as an arena for formations of political public opinion. Moreover it discusses how themes, songs, performances or artists from the scene in certain instances enter into important discussions in the wider public sphere, and as such must be considered part of the democratic framework offered by public sphere theory.

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## **Liliana Ozolina**

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### **The manifestations of national identity in popular culture: construction of Latvian national identity in the communication discourse of pop-music band Brainstorm**

The forms of national culture have significantly changed over the time, but the power of their heritage still is running also in contemporary cultural forms. The strength of traditional ceremonies and other cultural components is based and continuously developed in popular culture, where it mixes with other iconic cultural elements, which in a competitive manner express the message of the nation. Therefore, it is important to view and analyze the expression of national identity in popular culture, particularly in popular music. The products of popular music – concerts, songs and festivals – are an important social force that helps to secure a sense of identity, combine and divide a person. As well popular music serves as a vivid example of trans-national cultural forms in the formation of national identity and an example of how modern national cultures appear on the international and trans-national level: British - *The Beatles*, Icelandic - *Bjork*, Finnish – *Him*, Latvian – *Brainstorm*. Thus, popular music is important in formation and maintenance of common awareness, symbols, practice and values, as well as it contributes to the state cultural economy.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods have been applied in the research design present study. The research was carried out in two linked stages: (1) The reflection of desires of national identity in *Brainstorm* songs was viewed by using the metaphor analysis, and it was also clarified how the audience perceives and interprets *Brainstorm* constructs of national identity through public questionnaires and semi-structured expert interviews, as well as the

quantitative analysis of press publications. (2) The process of construction of national identity was analyzed in the communication discourse of *Brainstorm* and its audience.

The research result on the construction of national identity in the communication discourse of *Brainstorm* and its audience shows that popular culture is a strong resource of promotion and maintenance of national identity in Latvia. Popular music is a significant communication channel of popular culture, which promotes the national consciousness and pride in the reflection of national culture in the international environment, creates and maintains national identity communities, the feeling of belonging with the experience of participation and suffering.

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### **Aneeta Rajendran**

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#### **The Popular as (Alter)Normative**

What can popular cultural production tell us about discourses of sexuality in modern-day sub-continental India? This paper will study how the “trashy” forum of the mainstream film, graphic novel or pulp-novel produces and eroticises “alternative” sexual subjectivities, and whether any emancipatory potentials might be uncovered herein.

Films made in India's mainstream Hindi-speaking “Bollywood,” like *Kalyug* (Hindi, 2005), *Girlfriend* (Hindi, 2004) and “pulp” bestseller English-language novels like Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* (1994) and *Snapshots* supply a reverse discourse of lesbian abjection and vilification even as the modern-day reinvention of the “buddy” film, in *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Hindi, 2003) and *Dostana* (Hindi, 2008) for instance, offer startlingly “wholesome” representations of gay men. A Malayalam film made for a mainstream audience, *Deshtanakkili Karayarilla* (The Migratory Bird Does Not Cry, 1987) throws up interesting suggestions when viewed in the light of later “art-house” productions like *Sancharam* (The Journey, Malayalam, 2004) and *Fire* (English, 1998).

Where the latter two films, like several others made by diasporic Indian directors about “Indian” women, but with the main eye on GLQBT circuits rather than on the “mass” market, feel constrained to choose between identities, films like *Deshtanakkili Karayarilla* and graphic novels like Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008), I argue, permit audiences and auteurs to go beyond this dichotomous logic (an alter-normativity, as it were, of alternative desire that replaces heteronormativity), forcing, even, a consideration of the sexual and erotic beyond the rubric of identity politics. Mass-market “products,” be they novels like *Kari* or films like *Kal Ho Na Ho*, or *Deshtanakkili Karayarilla*, where pleasure can be derived from the successful combination of plot, music and visual spectacle, can, I argue, serve in the hands of critical viewers, as better tools for destabilizing sexual binaries than do films like *Sancharam*.

This paper will thus examine if and how popular forms permit escapes from some of the normativities of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. Besides, this paper argues that popular forms are involved in a complex process of both making tastes as well as reifying and endorsing normative tastes at the same time, making for a very interesting crucible in which to examine the “creation” of globalised, “modern” sexual identities in South Asia today.

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## **Birgitte Sandve**

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### **Popular culture and interdisciplinary studies: Popular musicology and questions of Identity politics in contemporary Norwegian Rap group Karpe Diem**

Through the global spread of rap music, mediations of marginalized identities has been transformed from a distinct African-American urban experience into a wide range of contexts, in which black cultural expressions have been appropriated by a variety of local cultures (Mitchell 2001). The development of Norwegian rap music, illustrates how negotiations of ‘difference’ are informed both by the identification with transnational musical styles and in the rearticulation of local identity through musical performance (Vestel 2004). Norwegian rap group Karpe Diem’s display of multi-ethnic experiences through lyrics, music videos, interviews, TV shows and statements on various virtual communities, underlines how identities are constructed and mediated on several layers in popular music, through the audiovisual display of the performers (Hawkins 2009).

In the ongoing research project *Popular Music and Gender in a Transcultural Context*, at the Department of Musicology (UiO), questions of how popular music informs and is informed by changes in society play a significant role in understanding how aspects of gender, ethnicity, and cultural belonging are negotiated through musical texts. Through the interdisciplinary field of popular musicology musical texts are read as part of a broader socio-cultural context, based both on a musical analytic approach, and on social, cultural, and aesthetic studies of popular music in relation to popular culture and society at large. As part of this research group, these questions occupy a significant role in the further development of my PhD project.

Through analysis and close readings of selected texts I consider the audiovisual display of Karpe Diem as a way of opening up discussions on the multi-ethnic realms of contemporary Norwegian society. Following Laird Eriksen (2008), Vestel (2004) and others one of my main interests is to develop the concept of a ‘community of difference’ from a popular musicological point of view, bridging this concept with questions of how musical performance highlights ambiguous and unstable identity constructions in multi-ethnic, transcultural contexts. The multilayered mediations of popular culture through popular music represent a useful starting point into discussions of the ‘inside of social processes’, considering how musical performance offers various sites for negotiating aspects of identity, power and social change in the alternation between performers and audiences and in the transition from one texts to another.

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## **Gita Silina**

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### **Popular literature in everyday life: from the past to the present. The case of post-Soviet Latvia**

The widely renowned (and also often criticized) genre of literature – popular novels play a significant role in many people’s lives. Writings of popular culture, published in large editions and widely read in the past, have a particular importance as they have formed the values, taste, understanding of the good and evil, the meaning of life and other important social issues for a large part of the society.

My research is based on the approach by anthropologist James Wertsch. He describes social memory as an active, explicitly dynamic process, mediated by textual resources. An important role is given to “association” of readers or specific community to describe what Wertsch refers to as the concept of “textual community” that makes itself / is formed on the basis of joint use of texts. “Understanding of mass or popular literature”, as semiotician Yuri Lotman (Лотман) has stated, “is understanding of sociology”.

The paper discusses the question of the taste according to the choice of popular novels in Latvia today and 20 years ago – in Soviet Latvia. The results of the questionnaire survey and focus group interviews show that the most favourite novels of this genre have been following the reader since the Soviet times and sometimes are even passed on to the next generation as an example of the popular taste. Why this practice of communication is still so popular? What does it say about Latvians?

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### **“A Croatian champion with a Croatian name” National identity and uses of history in Croatian football culture – the case of Dinamo Zagreb**

From 1990 to 2000 Zagreb’s main football club, Dinamo, changed its name three times, which in itself testifies to a certain crisis of identity. This was the turbulent decade when Croatia abandoned communism, seceded from the Yugoslav federation, lived through a four year war of independence, and rebuilt and redefined as an independent republic. New state-bearing ideologies were introduced in the form of nationalism and (at least formal) multiparty democracy, and history needed to adapt to these changes. From 1990, history and historical identities were fundamentally revised in the independent Croatian republic.

The different names carried by Dinamo in these years illustrate these revisions: its first new name, ‘Hašk-Grđanski’, adopted in June 1991, signalled a return to a pre-communist Croatian football culture. Its second name, ‘Croatia’, the Latin name for the country, was in use from February 1993. This name made the club, in the words of Croatia’s president Franjo Tuđman, “a Croatian champion with a Croatian name” and tied it to a new nation-building project. And

the return in February 2000 to ‘Dinamo’, the club’s name during the communist period 1945 - 1990, signified a reconnection to the club as most supporters knew and revered it.

The changes of Dinamo’s name were deeply disputed, reflecting diverging opinions about which parts of history – and consequently which version of Croatian national identity – the team was to be associated with. In essence, what unfolded around Dinamo and the name dispute was a struggle over history and identities, national identity especially. Croatia’s political elite, Dinamo’s club management, Dinamo’s fan groups and audiences and other public actors contributed to the struggle.

This paper investigates the role of Croatia’s leading football club, Dinamo Zagreb, in the negotiation of national and other identities in Croatia in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. By analysing how club history and identities was being represented and used in the club magazine of Dinamo Zagreb, and in descriptions and comments in tabloids, the article points out how football club discourse interacted with grand national narratives, how history was being used and for which purposes, and how this contributed to the establishment of new identities, based on new historical interpretations, in Croatian society.

The case of Dinamo Zagreb is particularly interesting for this kind of analysis, because the club throughout the 1990s was ascribed special importance as a symbol of Croatian national identity. The Dinamo case also highlights the role of politics and the struggle between political power and popular football culture over which historical and other identities were to define Zagreb’s main football club. The article thus contributes to a closer understanding of the roles played by football culture, particularly with regard to the creation of national histories and the establishing of national and other identities.

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### **Music making as social process: Swedes and Russians negotiating sound and power in a Stockholm recording studio**

Within the study of popular music, the analytical point of departure has quite commonly been the musical product (such as a song, an artist, or a music video). The social then often remains a contextual framework for a song or an artist to be explained within or in relation to, neglecting the fact that musical products are themselves the outcome of social interaction. It is here argued that in order to analyze social structure and change through popular music, one largely benefits from placing the focus of inquiry on the social processes through which such musical products come into being.

This paper presents a case study in which the young wife of a wealthy Russian businessman employs the services of a Swedish music production company to help her develop a pop music career. Based on data material accumulated through ethnographic fieldwork, the paper investigates the following question: What can a recording session in a Swedish music studio tell us about the role of women and the distribution of wealth in post-socialist Russia?

Placing the researcher in the recording studio as songwriters, producers and artists negotiate over how a piece of music should sound provides not only a valuable insight into the conditions, preferences and practices that inform and influence creative choices, but also helps



trace the outline of the larger historical, structural and institutional landscape that the actors involved are positioned within.

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### **Culture of Anti-Semitism, Historical discourses and Popular culture**

This paper analyses Anti-Semitism in two novels: D. Steel's 'The Ring' and M. Budak's 'Grandpa Vidurina's shoes' investigating Anti-Semitism and historical discourses inside the 'culture of Anti-Semitism' in the country of origin of the authors of two novels.

When analysing D. Steel's 'The Ring', a story of ethnic German who fled to the US to receive hosting from a Jewish family a reader sees one of the Anti-Semitic prejudices hidden in the story, i. e. Jewish exclusiveness in being attached to their own people only however, the discourse is at the same time also showing a Jewish man not accepting betrayal and a lye from a woman he married.

The discourse is therefore revealing prejudices towards Jews and expresses somewhat romantic sentiments towards German girl who married a Nazi officer and fled to the US when he died after Germany got defeated, only to marry a Jewish man upon arrival without revealing who she actually is.

But, the overall discourse of the book is not violently Anti-Semitic as it is usually the case in the Anti-Semitic discourse. On the other hand, a story of M. Budak, former Minister of Education in the establishment of Croatia's WW II Nazi puppet state reveals a story of a traditional family in pre-war Croatia. The story shows a conflict of generations where the son who came back from the US tries to live a 'modern' life while his father expresses disapproving attitude of his behaviour and teaches his grandson that his father's values are influenced by Jewish values and that everything that is domestic should be preserved even if it's wrong. In his narration grandfather is expressing Anti-Semitic prejudices against Jews in several instances and the talk clearly points to several predominant Anti-Semitic prejudices, i.e. of Jews only being eager to make profit, to impose their culture and than control the world and the US in particular, etc.

This paper therefore analyzes these two novels through historical discourses of Anti-Semitism in the US and Croatia. The US participated in combating Nazism in Europe while today's Jewry in the US enjoys high level of integration. Croatia, on the other hand, presents a country that was on the defeated side in the WW II but that never accepted its guilt while the Anti-Semitism remains steadily present in the society as well as Anti-Semitic practices such as e. g. Holocaust denial. Although Jews do not face Anti-Semitic attacks, co-existence and full acceptance of each other is questionable.

By analysing historical discourses in two countries as well as prejudices in novels, both widely circulated, the paper argues that the 'culture of Anti-Semitism' and historical discourses of the author's country of origin influence the popular culture when the fictional story reads a story of Jews. In line with that, popular culture is indeed not only "a mirror of society", but "a crucial element of power".