

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 20, 2011 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

SESSION 1D

ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF UNDERSTANDING

Session Moderator: Crispin Thurlow, Communication

Mary Gates Hall 231

1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Visual Violence: Deconstructing the Romani Myth in Three Films of Tony Gatlif

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English*

Mentor: Vera Sokolova, History

It is estimated that up to 1.5 million Roma (commonly referred to as gypsies), were massacred in the Holocaust and yet, this fact or any other fact concerning the Roma is rarely mentioned in any account of the Holocaust. The Roma (commonly referred to as gypsies) have one of the most overdetermined identities in the world and one of the most underrepresented. Largely considered a degenerate, illiterate race, governments across Europe have persecuted the Roma for nearly a millennium. But. They are neither degenerate nor illiterate. My research looks at the cultural image of the gypsy in relation to the historical (and contemporary) violence committed against the Roma. The way people speak and write about the Roma as a minority has concrete effects on the ways in which the majority act towards them. As culturally motivated violence, if one is to find a way to subvert these prejudices, it becomes important to examine cultural products of the Roma themselves (or those sympathetic to the Roma). For this reason, I analyze the films of Tony Gatlif, an Algerian born French Romani. His films subvert the mythic expectations about the Roma by critiquing the notion of a stable identity in favor of a dynamic and shifting one. I argue that Gatlif's films adapt Deleuze and Guattari's arguments in their book on Kafka concerning minorities writing in major languages to the visual realm. I turn then to Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to consider the importance of the visual in post-colonial identity. Gatlif's films consistently cross national and linguistic borders, imagining a different way for people to interact across these boundaries. They not only

present a sympathetic picture of the Romani contrary popular rendering, but they promote inclusive engagement with those who may be 'other.'