ABSTRACT

THE INTIMACY OF MACHINERY

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This presentation is based upon anthropological fieldwork among male motor mechanics in the Chinese diaspora of Penang, Malaysia. Among these men, machinery and definitions of masculinity are often working in parallel and the metaphorical inventory concerning gender configurations of masculinity draws heavily upon qualities connected to mechanical machinery and technology. A man of good standards is typically hard as steel, enduring as a mechanic machine and fast as a racing car. The intimate relation and equation between masculinity and technology are then co-constructed in language and metaphorical use as well as the embodied practices of physical labour. As I will show the embodiment of tools, machines and technology is also constitutive of patriarchal privileges and masculine homo-social bonds. Privileges and bonds that are being mediated and communicated through the interaction of men and machines. What I argue for is that men embody “others” in form of tools and machines and such an embodiment of machines is a constitutive part of a masculine script among the mechanics in Penang. In this it also connects to the enforcement of patriarchy through the long-lived metaphorical use and resource of the root metaphor of the mechanic machine as the ultimate point of reference for masculine scripts based on rigidity, strength, endurance and hardness.