Day Two, Session One
Presentation 3

Teaching European and Asian Cinemas

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Yesterday, I was discussing with Ira Bhaskar and Ranjani Mazumdar about where exactly does the crisis that we are talking about lie? Most probably the crises lie in the fact that there are new materials teasing us to devise newer methods. How can we – in our classroom situation – accommodate these? And when we are accommodating these newer methods and newer materials will we treat it as a kind of continuity or as a discontinuity or as a kind of break from the earlier paradigm? Where do we posit ourselves when we explain the conditions of these continuities and breaks? Do we really present it as a kind of a break or as a kind of continuity? In other words how do we arrive at contemporary models of reading?

I am talking about teaching European Cinema in our classrooms. We have one course dedicated to European Cinema and I am talking about how to make this course effective and meaningful at present but again the methods become irrelevant or redundant in another perspective. To describe this course very briefly one can say that it begins with the silent modernist movements of the 1920s, which is necessary for us to introduce the basic tenets of modernism, primarily in the visual arts. Then it moves to at least a couple of post –War

new cinema movements, of course they are very predictably Italian Neorealism and French New Wave until 1968 and our course stops right there as far as historical overviews are concerned. And therefore it presents our students with two useable paradigms of new cinema, i.e. Neorealism and the New Wave, through a template using which they can understand other new cinema movements. Then we shift to post-war *auteurs* like Bergman, Antonioni or Tarkovsky so on and so forth.

I think one of the problems of this course is that it presents the students with a singular idea of Europe and also a singular idea of European cinema which is more or less geared to understand modernity in its Western modular form and modernism as critique of Western European modernity. Somehow our course is modelled over this singular conception of Europe, i.e. the notion of Europe as a cradle of post-Renaissance, post-Enlightenment modernity, something which is conveyed well to our students. It logically ends around the World Wars and it doesn't present the World Wars or the situations after the Second World War as the crisis of modernity. It presents modernism as a kind of a crowning achievement, a rebuttal or response to the crisis of modernity.

And all cinematic movements discussed in this course are examples of art cinema or alternative cinema movements opposed to Hollywood. So somehow in the entire European cinema course Hollywood or rather the ghost of Hollywood is looming large. It is always there like a specter on the horizon that conditions meaning. I think that this entire model is unable to engage with European films after 1968 or even East European new cinemas. The course is working only as a broad exposition to a certain models of cinematic modernism and they are not presented as a historical model. For example, in a way that the East European modernisms might be different model of modernism or that Spanish cinematic modernisms might also be a different model. Only one model of modernism is presented here. Therefore after arriving at the moment of 1968, it appears as a logical dead end as we are unable to address modernism from other cultures as I said.

So I think there is a fallacy here. The post-War critique of modernity must present modernity in a state of a crisis. Rather we have a kind of narrative where modernism comes as a crowning achievement and presents a tale of twentieth century Europe's cultural becoming. One can say that in this course modernism turns out to be a veil of fantasy because it hides and never points out to the crisis of modernity itself. When – apart from this course when we are teaching other kind of cinemas, other kind of issues in other courses – then these issues, I think, are foregrounded more clearly, for example like in

the course 'Non-Western Cinema' where a certain model or models of Europe are seen from a critical distance. But in this course, i.e. in 'European Cinema', there is identification with a certain discourse about Europe. For example when we study non-fiction films, when we read Jean Rouch or *Night and Fog* (1955) or *cinema verite*, then the idea of Europe and idea of European cinema is actually addressed in a more clearer and critical way. This happens even when we read certain genres, for example when we discuss spaghetti Westerns or *film noir* where there is a very interesting to and fro movement from Europe and away from it.

So the Europe in German Expressionism, the migration before and during the wars, European filmmakers immigrating to America, the way *film noir* is being born, rediscovered by French critics later and how the French writings, this entire discourse comes back to America in the 1970s – this presents a more vivid picture of Europe and its cinema. Even when we discuss the Western it happens. Because when we discuss Westerns we discuss how the entire spaghetti Western defines the changing face of the Western forever. And from a distance we understand what Europe is doing, what a kind of European sensibility is doing with American films. I think here we deal with different notions of the idea of Europe, different sensibilities of Europe. In this way we address it in a more complicated manner which turns out to be more interesting. Therefore in the European Cinema course the modernisms around 1968 turns out to be a logical extension of earlier models. Thus in this course we can't actually differentiate how the modernism centering on 1968 is different from the modernisms of the silent era. Obviously there is some kind of a block here because we cannot address Godard's post-'68 phase as a break. We address it cursorily as a kind of continuity and we fail to read Godard after 1974. Thus thirty or forty years of Godard remain unaddressed.

The logical dead end of a certain idea of Europe also prevents us from addressing European films after 1968. It cannot deal with the European films during the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, fall of the Eastern Bloc and aftermath and a kind of multi-ethnic and multicultural and popular European cinematic imagination.

I think that the 'Great Masters' mode in the latter part of the course is also getting redundant not only because certain *auteurs* can be read autonomously in other courses but also because of two more reasons. Firstly this method doesn't actually teach the students a method of reading art cinema as such. Neither does it use '*auteur* criticism' as a conscious method when we are reading Tarkovsky or Antonioni or similar masters. We are not teaching students how

to address art cinema so that, for example, a module on Antonioni will enable them to approach Fellini or any other *auteur*. In my opinion reading *auteurs* can only be treated as definite case studies, as examples of certain paradigms of filming or reading texts in the context of European cinema.

This impasse, the situation like this at present in our course on European cinema, is – according to my opinion – largely because of a certain kind of film society discourse which was erstwhile prevalent in West Bengal. Now here I have a point to make. When we came into this department a decade ago the European cinema course was most probably the course which excited us most. I think that before we entered our classrooms we were actually exposed to a certain sort of film society discourse regarding European cinema which actually made the entire course familiar. Therefore now we have problem addressing the new students who are most probably not exposed to that kind of literature. And since we don't know about – since they don't articulate – the resistance they have to the language through which this course is taught, therefore this way of teaching, is most probably not communicating anything and is not generating excitement to the students as such.

So in my opinion the crisis in teaching European cinema in the classroom is a crisis of register, a crisis of language, because we as teachers are situated within the discourse, we identify with the discourse. Instead I think the entire course might be turned into something like how European cinema was received and read in the context of Bengal. Then we have a kind of reception to study and we will be able to turn the discourse into an object of study.

I am also interested with an idea of distant reading. When we read a certain kind of cinema we always think that we will gather a lot of background information, about the cultural context and so forth. Something which we are very equipped to do in cases of Indian cinema or Bengali cinema or Hollywood. But which we are unable to do satisfactorily, within a short period of time, regarding other cinemas. So I think we might devise a method of distant reading, reading not closely but distantly. Just a couple of batches ago I taught Westerns to my students, especially to few students who have seen more Westerns than me. And thus in the classroom we experienced a looking at the Westerns from a distance when we could actually identify some broad patterns, like how Western ceases to be a myth and turns into a historical period piece by the 1970s and '80s, the way no Westerns are made now in Hollywood. It was myth then, before these decades, myth with full of significance. And now they are becoming historical period-pieces full of details. So a kind of realism is packing it into these broader pattern and tendencies. I think it's possible to

look at certain cinemas from a kind of distance and discern patterns likewise.

I will end my presentation telling about one particular case. One of our ex-students who was a Romanian presented a writing which was an overview of the New Romanian Cinema. Throughout this essay the student was very uneasy about the template of the 'New Wave' to be applied. Thus a question arises in her essay: if we can at all discuss New Romanian Cinema in terms of New Wave? She was writing sentences like "though they didn't have *Cahiers du Cinema*" or "though these film makers weren't very competent over film language" and so on and so forth, a kind of apologetic. Now this kind of reading most probably throws into sharp relief certain errors on our part, that when we teach New Wave we teach New Wave as a kind of radical alternative cinema which it might not be. If we read between the lines in her essay, if we stretch, put pressure on her argument then something becomes very evident, like how certain new cinemas actually tackle historical issues in a kind of visceral way, they actually confront directly the issues of history, the issues of memory. How most probably the French New Wave – and I am not talking about *400 Blows* and I am not talking about Godard, because I think some films are always greater than the movements – the movement in general how it was most probably unable to address the recent periods of French history. Like the Occupation or the Algerian wars, issues like which were so thoroughly commented upon in *Rules of the Game* (1939).

And therefore this new inability to deal with history proper will lead to a kind of overinvestment in the history of cinema, a kind of cinephiliac investment in history of cinema, knowledge of cinema, archival knowledge so on and so forth. This might be read as a kind of displacement whereas in the case of Romanian cinema, in a situation where there were no standard discourses or journals, cine clubs etc. or a history of intellectual engagement with cinema through which one can actually discuss the history of cinema in a very engaged way, a new cinema actually necessitates a more visceral engagement with history proper. When certain competence over language is impossible or when in the history of the local cinema there is no competence regarding the language of cinema as such, one can hardly present a reflexive cinema. Then actually one resorts to realism and a sort of confrontation, collision occur where the issue of history crops up.

Thus if we just read French New Wave or Romanian New Cinema side by side and if we provincialize the erstwhile New Wave rather than universalize it as a model a new method might appear. If one always judges all kinds of new cinemas in terms of Neorealist or New Wave models sudden errors might

crop up which the case of Romanian New Wave illustrates. So I am thinking of certain questions in light of which the entire model of teaching European cinema should be changed. There are certain fallacies we need to rectify or instance question, if we should keep a course named European cinema at all or should it be renamed 'Cinematic Modernism' or something like that instead of the continental epithet. Or should we read Neorealism and the effects of Neorealism in other cinemas like the Latin American cinemas in the same course rather than dealing with it in a course on European cinema as such. Thank You.

Manas Ghosh
   I would like to start where Anindya [Sengupta] has finished his discussion. Recently one of our young colleagues asked me how to teach French New Wave cinema in three/four classes in an under graduate course. I suggested to him a suitable entry point which is Ming-liang Tsai's *What Time Is It There?* (2001) where in a scene Jean-Pierre Léaud appears in person. From that point we can enter into French New Wave. It's very difficult to introduce the New Wave with Godard. Firstly, New Wave should not be equated with Godard. Secondly, Godard is difficult stuff to begin with. So we can choose to approach French New Wave primarily with *400 Blows* (1959) and then we can enter actually into the history with the help of a contemporary Asian film like *What Time Is It There?*

   But accommodating Asian cinemas in film studies and devising a proper method of teaching pose a challenge in contemporary film studies. It's challenging not really because we are running short of resources. On the contrary, access to resources on Asian cinemas has been largely facilitated with internet, YouTube, torrents, e-journals and pirated DVDs. It is challenging mainly since the discipline called film studies stands on a crossroad, as cinema itself exists in a state of danger. Global media and the advent of the digital devices put a threat on cinematic form and its conventional format.

   In the introduction to their edited volume *Reinventing Film Studies* (2001), Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams have noted that the impending dissolution of cinema into global multimedia endangers the future of cinema and cinema studies. The area of Asian cinemas emerged and attracted the film studies scholars at a historical juncture when the discipline was facing an uncertain future. New Asian cinemas not only exhibit new forms of national cinema and gives rise to *auteurs* but develop several industries also. It dramatically entered in the stage when the curtain was about to fall announcing the tragic

death of 'Cinema'. And as a result of the dramatic entry of New Asian Cinemas the death of celluloid and cinema-as-institution was postponed.

No doubt those Asian cinemas get huge global exposure not only by their merit but also the interest of globalized culture industry, the flow of transnational finance capital and the global circuit of dissemination of cultural capital play significant role in their phenomenal rise. The rise of new Asian cinemas was so meteoric within last one and half decades that before film studies could address it with proper disciplinary discourses, it banged on film studies. The discipline looks slightly bewildered as Asian cinemas arrive with their huge complexity, power, new forms and new modes of circulation. But at the same time the advent of Asian cinemas have saved the form and formats of cinema and revitalizes film studies. So, Asian cinemas as a part of film studies teaching and research is a kind of compulsion and an object of celebration at the same time.

New Asian cinemas emerge in altogether a new global academic perspective too. Yesterday Colin MacCabe was saying that in the 1960s it was difficult to introduce films in institutional discourses because film was not at all considered as a serious object of study even in the humanities. It was film studies in the 1970s that broke the ice.

However in today's academia, apart from film studies, films are being widely used as an important teaching support in the social sciences. To them films become just audio-visual records of identity, class, race, postcolonial history, food culture, ethnicity, historical events, and behavioral patterns. They take cinema as a showcase of meager replica of reality. I must admit that films are not the sole property of film studies. But the problem appears if film studies runs after social science. Because the journey of film studies as a discipline starts with theoretical ventures to expose the gap between image and reality. The discipline reads images as socio-semiotic codes and not as mere replica of reality.

Asian Cinemas recently and most helplessly fall prey to positivist social science. In the context of increasing saleability of East-Asian and South-East Asian studies, contemporary Asian cinemas are read as images of ethnic-identity. Rey Chow, for instance, fears that Asian Cinemas may dissolve in an array of multimedia discourses (cuisine, fashion, herbal medicine, sex trade, child adoption, model-minority politics, illegal immigration, etc.). As early as in 2001 she had proposed that film studies as a discipline has to encounter the question: how do we begin to theorize this state of affairs in East-Asian cinema which is stripping its images of their fabulous surface?

We must keep in mind two unique aspects which problemetize teaching of Asian cinemas in film studies. First, it is impossible to formulate a single disciplinary focus with which Asian cinemas are understood in the film studies discipline. We already have a framed canon to read European cinema, or Hollywood cinema. Though Latin American cinema and African cinema are constituted along with national cinemas of wide number of nations, there are connecting threads like 'third cinema' and 'resistant cinema'.

Asian cinemas are primarily national cinemas but with diverse features, characteristics and issues. There barely exists any connecting thread. The wideness and diversity of Asian cinemas pose the primary challenge. Second, though Asian cinemas emerged in the early 1990s as *auteur* cinema from Japan, China and Korea, in last 15 years multiple aspects of Asian cinemas came into our purview. Researches on melodramatic imagination of Chinese and South Korean national cinema, culture industry and generic excellence in Hong Kong action films and S. Korean blockbuster, *auteur* cinema of the PRC, Taiwan and Korea, transnational aspects of East Asian films, dynamics of global-local-national, independent cinemas, cinephilia activity etc indicate multiple loci of studying and teaching Asian cinemas. This renders a significant point to us that Asian cinemas are 'cinemas' not only because it is constituted with different national cinemas but there exists multiple loci of understanding them. No single aspect can be left unaddressed in order to understand Asian Cinemas comprehensively. In order to understand New Asian cinemas with its characteristic multiple dimensions of development we must deploy several disciplinary paradigms, strongest of which may be the national cinema paradigm.

Asian cinemas, therefore, as a part of the Film Studies curriculum should not be taught as a single course under a rubric called 'Asian Cinemas'. The preferable strategy would be to distribute different aspects of Asian cinemas into different sections/modules (e.g, melodrama and popular culture, globalization and culture, *auteur* study, history of film movements, new media practices, gender and cinema etc) of the syllabus. This kind of dispersed structure helps to accommodate and effectively address the heterogeneity of new Asian cinemas within a curriculum.

A more theoretical debate for which the dispersed structure is preferable is the location of Asian cinemas in world cinema. The rise and phenomenal prosperity of Asian cinemas both in industrial circuit and art-house circuit effectively destabilize the once unchallenged place of Hollywood cinema as the heart of transnational cinema and European cinema as the home of art house cinema.

Significant scholars such as Stephen Teo or Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto have argued that Asian cinemas are not only alternative cinemas but also opens up an alternative paradigm to read cinema as a whole. Now in order to register this claim of alternative paradigm, issues and aspects related to Asian Cinemas are required to be distributed in different major sections in the body of a syllabus. Because revision of syllabus in wide range usually takes a long time in institutional structures, it is better to incorporate study of Asian cinemas as discrete modules distributed in different parts of existing curriculum.

Now the problem lies in the question how to incorporate a proper historical understanding of Asian cinemas in the current syllabi. In most of the curricula Asian cinemas are considered as mere contemporary phenomenon. But a proper historical understanding must be there in order to locate the new object of study in the context of already acquired knowledge of the discipline, vis-à-vis film history, film theory and film aesthetics. In Film Studies, this historical understanding is best studied in the framework of national cinema. National cinemas from other than European nations are critically studied in the 'Non-Western Cinemas' course. This course is designed in order to address colonialism, nationality questions, imperialism, debates of tradition and modernity, societies of different non-Western nations. The history and culture of national cinemas of East and South-East Asia can be read as a module under the rubric of non-Western cinemas. It helps in two ways. First, Non-Western Cinema has developed an effective, if not proper, method of studying national cinemas of the non-West as alternative paradigms which may demystify the dominant paradigm, namely 'essential' Hollywood and European art-cinema.

The inclusion of history of Asian cinemas as a module in 'Non-Western Cinemas' will definitely enrich the study of non-Western cultures in Film Studies in two ways. First, the said course critically analyzes national cinemas with Spanish, French and British colonial pasts, the influence of and encounter with the Japanese colonialism in national cinemas is yet to be examined. The inclusion of Asian cinemas in the Non-Western Cinemas course will open a new area. Second, the said course trains the students to identify and analyze the independent and alternative film culture which sprout outside the milieu of capitalist production. The huge expansion of independent cinema and activist cinema can be explained aligning it with non-Western cinemas. That actually may also indicate the contemporary trends in non-Western cinemas in a new global order.

Thank you.