

EDITORIAL
NOTE

The 2010 annual seminar in the Department, on which the present collection is based, sought to launch a retrospection on the legacy of alternative cinemas in a spirit of untimely meditations. Interestingly, the avant-garde continues to have some purchase among Indian film scholars, but the rest of the New Wave hardly commands their attention. This is not surprising, given the fact that the rise of Indian film studies took place at the precise moment of the demise of the (often) state-sponsored serious cinema, and the assimilation of its conventions in the all powerful market forms. Film studies in India, almost from the beginning, lost its hold on certain distinctions and categories, on the tools that used to force the critic to take a position regarding the value of cinematic choices exercised, owing to its very context of emergence. It remains possible to arouse critical interest in the far end of the spectrum, the cinema of Mani Kaul for example, but the majority of anti-commercial practices have more or less disappeared from the horizon of critical investigation. We felt it is the right moment to re-consider the New Wave and its legacies as a whole as a) the cultural studies turn looks exhausted and certainly unable to address the global resurgence of alternative film styles, and b) the new cinephilia (what Thomas Elsaesser calls 'cinephilia take two' in his essay 'Cinephilia, or the Uses of Disenchantment') has begun to make considerations of artistically purposeful cinema viable in a new way.

The annual seminar on 'Alternative Cinemas in India: Forms and Institutions' did not manage to produce a comprehensive account of the stakes of re-considering the New Wave, but it did indicate enough interest in the history of the alternative project, an interest that ranges from the complex account of affinities and differences between mainstream and alternative cinema when a commonality of location is read into them (eg., Kaushik Bhaumik's essay on Rajasthan as representational content) to the function of technology (eg., Madhuja Mukherjee's essay on the Arriflex camera). This issue brings together revised versions of most of the papers, leaving out a few for technical reasons. We have added an essay on Tapan Sinha, who had passed away a year before the seminar, and decided to club it with a brief essay on Mani Kaul under 'Remembrance'. The essay on Kaul was also not part of the seminar (the author Amrit Gangar presented an argument on a general theory which can address the cinema that Kaul and his colleagues practiced). But these two essays, beyond paying tribute, should convey an argument for the continuing necessity of thinking with the individual author's work.

'Special Features' has a contribution from Anustup Basu on the archival project on the National Instrument Limited factory. It is not meant to be directly related to the general theme, but it does present a meditation on the question of the image and its relationship with documentation, which we feel to be an important site of re-launching the task of thinking about both alternative image practices and a criticism with commitment to practice.

Moinak Biswas