Day Two, Session Two
Roundtable 1

New Pedagogical Tools

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Ashish Rajadhyaksha

I remember that I told Moinak [Biswas], and I continue to reiterate, that the agenda for this [Colloquium] should be set by the people who spoke this morning [Session One]. In other words, you're the people who are seriously getting their hands dirty in the classroom, in the firing line. You are the ones who strive to decide, particularly with the new structure of coursework which is not the old curriculum, what courses to teach. I can understand that given my personal stakes in wanting to know, say what sort of course on Bengali cinema is worth teaching and what not, my suggestions may or may not be useful to you. So I would very much like to set this up as a conversation.

A certain sense of ageing and experience comes up repeatedly during deliberating such disciplinary issues and a while ago Madhava [Prasad] and I were commenting on how old each of us looks and I had to correct someone by saying Madhuja [Mukherjee] and Subhajit [Chatterjee] too are not so young anymore. In fact you people may be at the stage we were when we set up the Department, kind of mid-career academics. And at this crucial moment when the discipline is undergoing rapid and radical changes we need to figure out a

number of things. For example, what would you do to replace earlier canonical texts, say *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, with new canonical texts? Or what is the role that canonical texts at all play in a Masters programme: I mean, what is the purpose that such texts are expected to play? Or should you, as I would tend to do in a Masters degree programme – not having had that much experience of teaching at the Masters level – decide to not work with canonical texts but work instead with source materials of the kind that Madhuja suggested this morning, but which are difficult to bring into the classroom? I would be interested to then know what kind of problems arise. And I'm also interested to know what constitutes those invisible steps of mediation that take place when materials that scholars like us across the table produce in the public domain are translated into the class room? What makes for the usefulness of that material and what makes for the act of translating that into a class room? I was very impressed with Subhajit's point in this morning regarding bringing in those choices, and the debates over methodology that apparently took place when setting up a course, taking place before the students and inviting them to reflect on the pedagogical devices and problems. I think that is a distinct possibility.

I just want to reiterate couple of things regarding issues which are different from the time when we, and I do say 'we' as it was mostly taught by visiting faculty at that point, began the department of Film Studies many years ago. At that time a specific set of problems emerged and I personally located one of those problems as the transition of film theory into film studies, the developing of an academic discipline, and the need to capitalize on what seemed to be a body of good work by what we might now call first-generation 'trained academics' – friends who actually had this training as against the previous generation of film-literate intellectuals. As far as that goes I would consider myself in some sense part of that previous generation, and academically I would be on the same side of the fence as someone like say Chidananda Dasgupta than someone who has the credentials for formal teaching now.

That particular shift which took place in that time was of great importance. But since then, I imagine a lot of things have happened, but I want to continue with the sharp exchange between Sibaji [Bandopadhyay] and Manas [Ghosh] about this whole business about 'using cinema for class room purpose' as against 'teaching cinema'. We do have now two extreme positions, where on the one side- and Madhava [Prasad] might be the exemplary representative of that position – film studies is conceived as a properly humanist discipline. The second position would be the one of asking why films or film studies

should actually not be a part of a number of disciplines. In Jadavpur University, back in the beginning of the department when it was almost entirely run by visiting faculty, the question that arose was why in fact the role of the others inside the J.U. Arts faculty who were teaching in the Film Studies programme, scholars like Sibaji [Bandopadhyay] or Kavita [Panjabi], why in fact the particular role that Film Studies envisaged within the Arts faculty should not then become the defining factor of the discipline itself. In other words, could Film Studies actually be a means, a staging ground for multidisciplinary orientation across the Arts faculty? This was a debate that took place around that time.

So the question of why cinema should not be in fact be present in history courses for example, is not a question on which the jury has given the last word. And there is of course a long and complicated history of what some film studies scholars might consider the 'misuse' or instrumentalization of cinema for uses of other kind. There is also a third kind of position which involves the question of practice. I believe that the transition, the dramatic transition of cinema making and the proliferation of locations where moving image making happens across disciplines, and now across professions as well, is actually a crisis that film studies is facing. In a manner of speaking, the difficulties we are talking about seem like a hall of mirrors, where everyone seems to recognize the difficulties arising with the introduction of the digital divide, torrents and YouTube: and everyone even uses these new technologies. But what now to do about theorizing is not a question to which we have an answer because I suspect there are too many straws in the wind, and we have not as yet developed any coherence even in terms of terminologies, or the basic assumptions that Film Studies had at the time when the department began but which now need to be revisited.

I want to suggest three possible locations for exploring this change. First, the humanities, second one is the multi- disciplinary or a multi institutional department, and third the arrival of professional, and practice oriented, teaching that apparently seems to have something to say to and learn from the teaching of moving image studies.

If we have, let's say at the lateral level, a horizontal *topos* of these three locations, then we also have the vertical split that now takes place in between these, and the J.N.U example is very crucial here: a very different PhD and M.Phil programme than what happens at the Masters level. I suspect this disciplinary segregation is something that Film Studies has not taken on board seriously as it ought to have. So the time has come to debate not what a film

studies curriculum should be like but rather what Masters curriculum itself should comprise of. And I know that Colin's [MacCabe] experience here would be invaluable for that. My internal joke that I used to share at CSCS, Bangalore particularly, when you are teaching the undergraduate college level you teach 'two plus two is equal to four' and in Masters level you teach them that 'two plus two may or may not be equal to four' and in PhD level you say 'which two and which other two?'. That is to actually start to look at foundational questions. And just the fact that two plus two may not be equal to four can be a mind-bending experience for the Masters level students. So that is asking them 'question your facts'. We are actually embarking on a journey for which I'm not going to spoon feed; you have to figure this out.

I have one last point about the disciplinary structure, and here I would like to mention an interesting Chinese example. I know that in FTII, Pune, huge debates that took place between a group of film makers, some of whom are friends, and the so-called 'bad boys' of the cinema: communication studies people and those from advertising backgrounds. This debate took place about whether gaming, the whole production of video games ought to be brought into the Film Institute or not. And of course how could you possibly imagine such an inconceivable question? But nevertheless I'm very interested in the way the Chinese Academy of Arts (Hangzhou) that set up something like School of Intermedia art, is doing interesting set of dialogues with the Beijing Film Academy despite their disparate locations. And I'm also extremely interested in the role of the Media Lab here in this department as you [the Director and the faculty] have envisaged it for future practice of the programme. I think those are the issues that are tremendously important.

My very last point, we have been battling the demons – and both Sibaji and Moinak are all aware of these demons – the funding organizations for this particular workshop. One of the ideas behind that particular initiative, now under fire, was this: if you are looking at a department – let us say, the School of Arts & Aesthetics – which teaches its own theory, along with whatever assumptions its faculty is presently making. Now is it possible to carve out from that Department a research location through independent funding, whose primary purpose or mandate would be to ask this single question – how will the discipline look like after a decade? And then to start doing research projects, which will have two mandates: one, to have an interface with the industry, and second, to ensure that research projects being done there percolate into the curriculum. So it would be a double-edged mechanism. I can refer here instances like School of Interior Design, at CEPT, Ahmedabad, which were

some of more successful instances of this particular experiment. We did try, though without that much success, to set up something like the Media Resource Cell at MCRC in Jamia Millia. I think those are the kinds of efforts that we may need to think of in terms of how we may envisage a future. I don't know if the problems of one particular location will suffice for another location, but we will certainly encounter strategies that are being actually used by specific locations: where we may find not only the lateral movements of multidisciplinary spaces opening up, but also the vertical movements, within the Masters and Doctoral levels, that permit academic percolation within the discipline.

S. V. Srinivas

Continuing from some of the points Ashish [Rajadhyaksha] raised and a I think remark that Manas [Ghosh] made in passing I would insist that if we are talking about new pedagogical tool the first thing we need to take on board is the fact that the new pedagogic tool, as far as the academy in general is concerned (humanities and social sciences), is the cinema as a new 'thing' to be mobilized in pedagogy. And then we have a disciplinary location in which one is supposed to be training people to study the object 'cinema' and we need to think what tools we have here.

To my mind, in the Indian context, the classic establishment position on the cinema is traceable to two books Chidananda Dasgupta's *The Painted Face* (1991) and M. S. S. Pandian's *The Image Trap* (1992) They are very different books but they are strikingly similar in terms of the anxiety and the energy that went into producing them, the kind of resources and materials that were used and the sense of immediacy they conveyed. Especially for someone like Chidananda Dasgupta who could not care a damn for popular cinema, the depth of references to local newspapers, films and pamphlets and other such non-conventional materials used is indeed striking. Pandian used similar materials and between the two books we can cull out an argument about a set of film stars and that has become more or less the model now, the established model for carrying out research in film studies. You go and identify a new archive which is not simply films but other kinds of materials as well. The crucial issue that remains is how people may be trained to read those materials, be it print film criticism or details about a distribution circuit etc.

So obviously we just don't talk about film texts but also other kinds of texts and research now is centrifugal. If somebody comes with a research object and says 'I'm going to basically do textual analysis with three hundred or two

hundred films in a genre' you would say 'this is not enough, you go and find a new archive and a new setting'. That has become the standard thing you ask of a research student. Increasingly, research students take up that challenge and finding new and newer materials to include in their understanding of films.

Under these circumstances, how to train people in that research? For instance if you are a student of history you have to know how to read government records, what sense you make of it, that's part of a historian's basic training. Every discipline has its own version of textual analysis; every discipline trains students how to read texts/documents. The difference is that each does it with different set of texts and does it differently.

Now for films we do have wealth of materials which one could not dream of earlier but some critical knowhow is lost even as we discover these new resources. For instance, I don't know if pirated copies of print materials is such a major issue for the students working on areas of literature. In case of films if anything is available on DVD it's available on torrents. So the problem of availability of films appears to have been solved for the time being. There are plenty of primary sources available out there. What do we do with all these films? To put it very anecdotally, all of us here have come across presentations and arguments about films made with the help of film clips. In a way reading clips is part of our job description. And yet, we have all come across any number of instances when the clip does not convey what it is meant to convey. In short, arguments run aground due to straightforward reading incompetence.

One of the things that perhaps we have not paid enough attention as we move out of literature or comparative literature backgrounds into other humanities discipline like film studies is the ability of students to interpret texts. We perhaps take this ability for granted. It's not only entry level PhD students or M.A. students but experienced academics who use film in questionable ways.

How well prepared is the emerging discipline of film studies to deal with textual analysis? How equipped are we to deal with the question of textuality, of films and other materials that we now routinely use? Speaking for myself it took me a while to figure out how to read a newspaper as a text with its specific materiality. As a student of literature I sat in a class where the problem had been cracked: I was taught practical criticism. My task was to identify forms, identify metaphor, simile, rhyme scheme and explain what the text was all about. Now of course you don't exactly go back there but it is useful to think through the question of textuality—acknowledging that the things we

examine have some kind of materiality that is specific to each form—and teach students to analyze texts, film and non-film.

Ranjani Mazumdar

I don't know where to begin, but I would like to start by saying that I was first trained as a film maker, and remained one for many years. I was also a member of a collective and a documentary movement. And I do still have a dream of doing some of that again. But somehow for the last ten years or so that has not happened. I find it amusing now and interesting and intriguing that we want to give so much attention to practice since that was not the case when I joined film studies. I went to NYU and I still remember that we talked about cinema and time with sometimes very little knowledge about the difference between a dissolve and a cut. I am talking about the classroom situation where students did not know the difference between a cut and a dissolve and yet theorizing the relationship between space and time and how it operates in cinema was constantly discussed. This is the reason I have always felt that some basic training regarding practice is important, but over the years I have realized that many scholars have acquired that knowledge in other ways. There is something behind the image that is important for us to understand.

Today I would like to see cinema not just as the frame on screen and not just as an image, but more as an event. While all the tools for interpreting films as narrative constructions or as a series of frames continue to remain important, I would like to also open the study of film in different directions. This means a backward movement into an exploration of practice, production techniques, and the many different ways in which the frame actually comes into being. Such an approach opens out different kinds of questions.

For instance I want to go back to something that [Tom] Gunning and others have done through the 'early cinema' debate which is to explore the links between cinema, travel and the railways. In my current work I'm looking at film as infrastructure and its relationship to aviation and railways and how all these technological transformations impinge on the way cinema functions. These questions have come to me in the context of the contemporary because somehow these issues have been raised during the digital explosion and are concerns that we may have ignored earlier. But now when we look back we can see the same kind of transactions and links even in the early period.

I was talking to Ira [Bhaskar] this morning and we thought there is such a lot of interest in the history of sound today and people want to go back to the early period of sound to track the technological transformations that ushered

in the transition to sound cinema. Yet there is still very little archival material available to trace the past and I hope that does not happen again since one of the problems today is the speed at which the contemporary is just passing us by and this is also a period that has exploded traditional notions of the archive. What will be the archive for the future? If we don't address the new kinds of archives that have emerged in the contemporary, we will miss out on the significant issues the present has opened up, especially the question of technology.

In terms of classroom teaching there are many things, and I can give you a couple of examples to substantiate the ways in which new archives have started to emerge as a result of the digital explosion. When Shammi Kapoor died or when Tiger Pataudi died we witnessed the production of a huge archive of reminiscences and memories on the internet within 24 hours after their death. I had planned to go to Bombay to speak to Shammi Kapoor for my work on the 1960s. But now I can't as he has passed away. But what I can access now is an internet archive that emerged after his death. This is a new kind of material memory.

When SV [Srinivas] made his presentation in the morning I was thinking of the number of students at J.N.U who are actually doing that kind of work. They are opening film out for wider discussion without dissolving the film object. It's not that the film object is over but only a recognition that the object is more than just the frame. And once we move with that we need to raise new research questions.

I also want to respond to Manas [Ghosh]. I think empirical research is absolutely essential and important. I don't think we can in any forum or discipline suggest that we don't need to do empirical work. There are people who don't want to do empirical work which is fine.

One of the important issues for cinema studies is to make links with the ongoing debates in media theory. Unlike cinema studies, the frame was never the most important issue in media theory. Perhaps there can be some interface and discussion over here in terms of what we can draw from there without pulling in all the functionalist arguments that may also be present in disciplines like media studies. Therefore media theory is a very important direction. We have to recognize that there is something significant in the philosophical debates that are going on over there. I've found Deleuze's work extremely useful, not for the kind of way it has been used in media art and internet art, there's a lot of bad work going on there, but the way his ideas have been deployed to understand new formations, new kinds of collisions, and new kinds of

transactions. There is always a space for surprises in Deleuze's approach. We have to allow ourselves to be surprised and not constantly use fundamental and foundational frameworks available to us. So in that sense, opening the film frame to these different networks both prior to its making and in the course of its afterlife becomes very important. What happens to film as it emerges, how does it emerge in the first place and where does it go eventually? These are questions that I think we will have to address. I am therefore interested in issues of materiality, the status of the object and space. I was trained as a geography student first before I went into filmmaking. All these questions have become important as a result. And of course, 'the archive', to take Ashish's [Rajadhyaksha] question for instance, ten years from now what is the cinematic archive going to be? This is a question we must collectively think about.

Thank you.

Discussion:

Colin MacCabe

I would just like to take a little issue with the points about theoretical research. What we want is 'questions' and these questions are what involves research but actually just doing empirical research is often a way of not asking questions. Certainly that's where roughly I think film studies in the Anglo-Saxon world has got to. And if you think about 'questions' then I'd like to suggest that you also need to think about canons. It seems to me that there is a very strong argument for canons which is an argument about information and that faced with the ever growing archive. With the excessive amount of materials that is being produced you need to start with certain kind of search engines, and a canon in that sense can work as a necessary search engine. I think I would affirm, and this relates to questions that came up yesterday which I don't know were resolved or not, that we are engaged in questions of evaluation and as a part of the humanities it is clearly the case that our approach to cinema must be evaluative. I'm remind you of Bazin and of the fact that as the Cold War actually prevents him from addressing the popular audience (I can go to details here if you want me to), he makes a conscious decision to move back, as he says, to the café floor and from there he will simply try and affect the critics on the ground that critics could play a significant role in improving the films. He really wanted the audience to demand for better films and a better society and believed that critics have a role there. Now of course

when Bazin makes that move the critic still had a small but significant economic role in the release of cinema. That finished in the summer of 1975 with the first blockbuster release which was *Jaws*. Effectively since that point the critics ceased to have anything to do with changing values etc. Actually this ever expanding archive is now producing another effect of value grounding which is the 'curator' because actually now all the time there is a demand for the databank of images to be organized in certain ways for a certain audience. I think that in some ways we should be enabling, maybe not all students, but some of our students to do that work because that works is really growing essential.

Manas Ghosh

Firstly, I never claimed that empirical research should not be done in film studies. What I wanted to mean is that certain social science disciplines are oriented to empirical researches and they still bear a legacy of a kind of positivist practice of knowledge. Empirical research must be done in film studies but in its own terms, otherwise how can you understand things like film cultures, cinephilia, fandom, circulation of specific films and so on. But I'm only talking about some social science disciplines that are still using empirical researches with a positivist kind of attitude.

Now I just want to mention two of my experiences. In Jadavpur University I was talking to the head of the History department and she was saying that the Department was trying to launch a course on film and history. So I proposed her to employ a teacher who has done some research in film historiography. She said there is no provision to employ a film studies teacher in a history department. The second experience is a response to Ashish. Presidency College runs a course on 'Film and Literature'. And one day a teacher from there called me and asked me to give him a copy of Colin's article on the 'classic realist text'. I pointed out that the article actually traversed an intermediary phase of literature and cinema and therefore could be very productive to a film and literature course. So I proposed to her again to plead to the authority to take a teacher who primarily has a literature background but is secondarily a film scholar. Then again the response is of the order, 'I would propose to them but really don't know…' And in response to SV's point between teaching film with a proper disciplinary attitude and the response of students. So in the Jadavpur Film Studies department, and definitely in EFLU and J.N.U also, students come from social science and other humanities backgrounds. They often try to understand film images in terms of our discipline but their mother

discipline hardly allow them to be acquainted with the film studies discourses. Perhaps there is a fear that those students with film studies orientation might deviate from their core disciplinary background. This is my experience that I wanted to communicate.

Thank you.