ABSTRACT

The research is an exposition and inquiry into the ontology of obstructions, epistemological obstacles, and occlusions covering up the field of knowledge about the structures of cinematic-spectatorial experience in Asia and the ‘Idea’ of Asia as cultural difference. The research question starts at a point where it asks ‘What is Asian about Asian Cinema?’ ‘Why can we not access the structures of spectatorial experience at the level of ‘our’ experience?’

The research opens up the inquiry at various levels for an understanding of the cinematic and problematization of the idea of Asia and cultural difference in a way that they illuminate each other as objects of inquiry.

At the level of the a priori, the research identifies the a priori as both an object of study in so far as it sees its performativities in the form of meta-discourses that have acted as epistemological obstacles hindering us from recognising or accessing certain structures of experience that either already were or could also be ours; and at another level, the a priori is approached as a resource to discursively open up those problem areas where experience was locked out of disciplinary gaze, either because of error, wrong concepts, or too great an emphasis on concepts, ideas and stability. It was seen as the site to locate the workings of the transcendental, phenomenological and the historical archives and how they change the framework within which cinema experience occurs, to see whether the a priori aids in stripping the ‘cinematic’ of the ‘theory laden’, thereby furthering aesthetic experience, or whether the ‘necessity’ principle defining the a priori becomes yet another obstruction to experience. The idea of limit and finitude of our experience discovered through the a priori and discourses on it, has been significant to answer the research question for both cinema and the idea of Asia and cultural difference.

The a priori is also the resource that helped the research to transcend the disciplinary boundaries of cinema studies and the research draws upon aesthetics, philosophy of science to understand the nature of aesthetic judgment and various representation rules by which cinematic experience could be approached other than that of Film Theory bound to the tropes of nation, semiotics and psychoanalysis. It provided the research to explore the connection that cinema holds with the world at an ontological rather than political, industrial or reception theory level. The a priori helped to foreground the significance of the experiencing being even as it technically stood outside of experience.
At the level of opening up the ‘disciplines’, the research is also an analysis of the workings of meta-discourses of the archives of psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, and modernism in film history and cinematic experience in the region, that complicate the place of language, linguistics, form, essence, identity and cultural difference in the project of understanding cinema structure and the structure of ‘Asian’ experience. Here it drew upon the extra-cinematic fields of aesthetics and philosophy of science to explain the structure of aesthetic judgment and the cinematic beyond the Kantian and Aristotelian frameworks. Various representation rules have been discussed alongside the questioning of rules themselves through philosophy of science, cultural philosophy and cinema practice. Here the research looked critically at the works of Bachelard and Bergson, filmmaking practice of Lars von Trier and Jorgan Leth; it also builds discussion around the 1960s linguistic debate in cinema that privileged chaos over the order of concepts and semiotics, drawing upon the views and works of Pasolini, Wollen, Eco, Heidegger and Hou Hsiao Hsien.

The research also opens up an inquiry into what could constitute a ‘first order theorisation’ that can speak more directly of and to our experience in the region, and in the process, further revises the terms of such definition so as to significantly influence and invigorate the re-aestheticisation of cinema studies. Here, the research looks specifically at discourses on the idea of Asia and aesthetics as a site of sameness and difference vis-à-vis the West. One of the attempts made by the research is to ‘bring near’ or bring close the discourses on Asia and Asian aesthetics not easily accessible to us within Asian cinema history or discourses on Asian aesthetics. Here the research probed into the early 20th century debates on space and spatiality as structures of Asian experience developed on Fudosei or climate-spatiality aesthetics, by Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro to see how it addresses our distinctiveness as well as our sameness vis-a-vis the West. This comparative work on space as possible a priori of Asian aesthetic experience that actually takes us beyond culture and necessity to chance and chaos aided with the robust philosophy of Nietzsche’s conception of ‘will to power’ brings to the field of cinema and film-philosophy research the requirement to understand aesthetics and the cinematic through the force field of chaos and becoming.

Just as historical a priori provide the condition of experience through discourse, similarly, or differently, transcendental a priori of time and space were seen to be divided up culturally within discourse to define our pre-disposition and representation regimes along lines of difference. The research looks into these cultural distinctions to evaluate their tenability and implications for the aesthetic and cinematic. It does so in a discursive manner, choosing
films/film practicing styles and film practice driven theories that fall on various sides of culture, unrestricted to Asia, to locate the points at which cinema could be seen and shown in its ontological relations with being’s tenuous relation with Aristotle’s Law of Contradiction. Here the works of Lars von Trier, Pasolini, Mani Haghghi and Kim ki Duk and Hou Hsiao Hsien provide the field to demonstrate chaos and chance as structure of aesthetic/cinematic experience, anywhere.

With this the research is able to provide a critical response to the points of inquiry initiated and the urging of certain film historians in the region to abandon the question of Self-Other in the pursuit of making cinema studies radical. The research maybe seen as having carved a path to outline what the ‘difficulties’ of being ‘radical’ in the overdetermined site of cinema studies could mean as well how the radicalisation could be undertaken by a modification of objects and questions.