

INTRODUCTION: INAUGURAL ISSUE OF WIDE SCREEN

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Wide Screen is a scholarly outlet for a diverse range of perspectives and disciplinary approaches to screen studies, including film and video. But when the University of California, Berkeley, library lists 118 English Language academic journals in the area of film studies¹, it leads to the inevitable question: why another one? Of course, there is the most logical answer: the closed-access academic journal landscape created the opportunity for the launch of this one. In an age of wide-spread internet use, especially for purposes of research and higher education, it is ironic that academics should participate in a culture that locks up their research and knowledge in expensive closed-access journals. The ethical implications of this are too obvious to warrant a discussion here². Thus, it is imperative that we turn the question around and ask, why not yet? Having lain to rest possible gratuitous scepticism we can move on to the more important issue at hand, namely discussions about screen studies.

The moving image is an integral part of modern human existence and the axiom underscoring the conception of *Wide Screen* is that there can never be an “over-study” of this field. The more new moving image technologies are introduced, for example television, home video, cable and now internet, the more they bring films to the centre of cultural production and consumption. Take for example Youtube.com where you can access full-length films (*Battle of Algiers*, 1966) or clips from films (*Sanders of the River*, 1935). The implication of this is exciting for researcher, practitioner, critic, and lay public alike. The same way as new technologies introduce new norms of distribution and reception, past concerns of pleasure, representation or meaning in moving images continue to persist as previous issues, race for example, morph into newer forms while newer issues emerge. Thus, films and the moving image keep “arriving” with every passing age and technology and consequently require continuous critical attention. The title of the journal *Wide Screen* embodies the complexity of screen studies, spanning from conception, finance, and production to reception. In doing so it asks, and seeks to provide answers to, the persistent question: Why should the moving image be studied? Thus, to meet this goal, *Wide Screen* is not confined to a discipline, method or approach. This is primarily so because, as an open-access journal, it aims to be as inclusive as possible. By not following a narrow research agenda, the editorial team aims to maximise its (voluntary) efforts and best serve a wider audience³. Some academics believe that “too many journals dwell in the land of the esoteric and obscure theorising far away from the dilemmas and challenges of practitioners”⁴. The journal overcomes this false divide by incorporating a wide range of ideas ranging from theory and empiricism to practice. However, this is not at the expense of rigour in research, analysis and criticism. Whilst broad basing our readership we had set ourselves the goal that we would accept only the highest quality scholarship. Our first issue, hopefully, realises this promise.

Wide Screen is not dependant on a commercial publisher. All editorial work is voluntary and we are thankful to the academics and practitioners on our editorial and advisory board from over nine countries whose wholehearted support was without cavil. Each is an academic or a practitioner of outstanding international standing and without their support, *Wide Screen* should be still-born. We follow exacting standards of

blind peer-review and draw from a large pool of experts who act as reviewers. In this opening issue, they have helped us to put together a collection of research papers and critical essays that propose new areas of study or re-problematise films. At the same time interviews with practitioners from different parts of the world provides a much-needed counterpoint to academic theorising. The first issue is divided into four parts: a) essays; b) interviews; c) film reviews; d) book reviews. In the essays section you will find both research and opinion essays. The essays presented here deal with the specific issues of theorising filmic practice as well as making meaning in films by placing them in the wider social, political and historical contexts. Each of the essays raises outstanding points for researcher, practitioner and lay reader alike. Margherita Sprio, in her essay 'Filmic Performance – Authenticity and The Apple', examines the under-theorised topic of performance in films through a detailed examination of the same by non-professional actors in Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple*. By drawing connections with Italian Neo-Realism she examines the practice of re-performing previous experiences in Iranian films and the ethical dilemmas of such. Aniruddha Dutta, on the other hand, introduces us to the under-researched and under-theorised area of Indian film music. In his research paper he points out that Hindi film songs in the post-liberalisation⁵ environment consciously negotiate with the 'global' (or metropolitan) market and mediascape while addressing a national audience at the same time. This leads to a new aesthetics of music and cinema that reworks older forms of hybridity and heterogeneity in the film song tradition. Contrary to the view of critics who argue that some aspects of post-liberalisation Hindi cinema reflects a hegemonic Hindutva agenda⁶ argues that music in these films destabilise coherent and centralising tendencies in narratives of the nation in favour of more tentative, open-ended ones. Jayson Baker's research paper on representation of race in global art cinema opens up questions about the same for American audiences, critics, and practitioners. He argues that global cinematic representations of interracial relationship provide the necessary critical distance to see how 'other' movies construct interracial relationships to instigate a form cultural atonement that is absent in American film.

The second set of research papers critically engage with the social, historical, political and cultural in films to (re)open sites of debates. Here I would like to point at three papers that critically engage with the (re)working of masculinity in films. Deborah Mellamphy's critical reading of Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* provides insights into the inherently contradictory nature of gender itself. She argues that Depp's failed masquerade can be described as an ironic mimesis in which a male's attempt at femininity results in the exaggeration of his own masculinity, which in turn ironically reveals the performative activity of gender and sexual identities and deprives stereotypes of their currency and power. Orla Juliette Borreye re-examines *Amores perros* to fill in for the neglect in the study of the film's queer undercurrent. Through an interrogation of the *machista* role in the film, she points at a crisis in gender order, particularly the way certain inconsistencies in some of the male characters' behaviour or appearance reveal their queerness and thus lack of compliance with the social construction of gender. Through the application of, and a re-imagining of Barbara Creed's concepts Adam P. Wadenius examines Todd Solondz's *Happiness* and argues that while the film conforms to conventions of the horror genre, it strays from the traditional goals of the genre to annihilate the threat to patriarchy; instead the film concludes with images of the paternal order in crisis. The paper argues that the thematic thread that permeates Todd Solondz's *Happiness* is deviant masculinity, and each male in the film is burdened with a particular sexual dysfunction that gradually comes to light through displays of perverse or obscene behaviour.

Tom Austin O'Connor's study of Harmony Korine's oeuvre presents us with a fresh perspective to the way we can conceive of representations, particularly in the move away from the ones that normalise dominant ways of looking and presenting. He

argues that Korine's work are significant because they utilise Pier Paolo Pasolini's notion of the cinema of poetry, which presents the diegetic realities of the films from wholly-subjective perspectives which, because they allow for poetic re-mediations of our perceptual habits, can re-write and transform any tendencies toward disaffection and desensitisation. Finally, Megha Anwer engages in an analysis of Gillo Pontecorvo and Tomas Alea's films *Battle of Algiers*, *Queimada* and *Memories of Underdevelopment* to ask questions about a revolutionary cinema and critique Hollywood melodramas. She argues that revolutionary cinema rejects the cult of the individual, the couple or the family. It may launch its narrative on the shoulder of the individual, but the culmination of the film downplays the role of the 'hero'. Where Hollywood films valorise the talents and tenacity of the individual and attenuate the significance of the masses as secondary, revolutionary cinema is geared towards merging the trajectory of the individual with that of his/her community.

The third set of essays is critical expositions of particular films to propose new areas of study and debate. Gerry Coulter echoes Tom Austin O'Connor's point in his essay where he proposes that those who lament the disappearance of poetry would do well to look for it in films. By examining Anthony Minghella's *English Patient*, Gerry argues that people who have studied and written about the film for over a decade have entirely missed this point. It is far from a perfect film – but it is a film rich in the poetry of reversibility and the Other. Kuhu Tanvir on the other hand engages with Guillermo del Toro's use of the fantastic in *Pan's Labyrinth* to allegorise the Spanish Civil War on the one hand, but more importantly, to explore and expand the field of the historical narrative in cinema. Kartik Nair focuses on the production of visual information and how it draws attention to make us a witness. In doing so, Kartik points to the role of a film in pursuing a revelation towards an articulation of historical guilt. Finally, Rajiv Kannan Menon's paper opens up the Indian cinematic space for its (non)articulation of gendered subalternity. By analysing *Vanaja*, *Naalu Pennungal* and *Water* Rajiv asserts that films such as these are important to understand the plight of disempowered individuals.

In the interviews section, award-winning practitioners from Denmark, India, Indonesia, Israel, Iran and Pakistan share their insights and perspectives to provide a contemporary account of their respective practice and filmmaking landscapes. The interviews with Ralf Christensen, Pritish Nandy, Christine Hakim, Eran Riklis, Hana Makhmalbaf and Omar Ali Khan not only provide contemporary insights but also open up new spaces for research and debate. For example, Ralf Christensen talks about the impact of copyright culture in his documentary *Good Copy, Bad Copy*, while Pritish Nandy provides an Indian producer's perspective to the globalisation of Indian cinema. Hana Makhmalbaf, who was interviewed shortly before she won the The Special Jury Prize in the Competitive Section of the 55th San Sebastian International Film Festival, Spain, 2007 talks about the making of film *Buddha Collapsed out of Shame*, which finds a direct resonance in Margherita Sprio's essay. Omar Ali Khan, the director of Pakistan's cult horror film *Zibakhana* talks about the state of cinema in Pakistan. Finally the interview with Christine Hakim provides insights into Asian cinema, young directors, and working women.

Conclusion

Film studies suffers from the irreconcilable differences of the Bordwellian notion of "post-theory" and critical theory⁷. If one were to pay attention to Todd McGowan's clarification of this needless divide⁸, film studies could move away from the "either or" position to realise the true purpose of the study of films, namely "what they are", "why they are", and "why we watch them". Of course this is an over simplification of a complex intellectual problem, but the provocation is necessary to move towards the enjoyment in an inclusive and rounded study of film. *Wide Screen* realises that it will

be hard pressed to always do full justice to this goal, but feels that the risk is worth taking in order to promote further the challenge this work poses for film studies. This journal is therefore designed to provide the sustained consideration this work merits. We look forward to your support by way of participation, feedback and criticism.

About Author: Dr Kishore Budha is one of the editors of *Wide Screen*. He has published a chapter on genre and nationalism in Hindi films in the book *Filming the Line of Control* (Routledge). His forthcoming book includes *Historical Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (Scarecrow Press).

NOTES

¹ See <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/filmstudies/allfilmjournals.html>

² For a detailed overview on Open Access see Peter Suber (2007) "Open Access Overview" <Online> <http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>, accessed 12 Feb, 2009. On the other hand, it is worth reflecting on the fact that in the last eighty to a hundred years far too many academic journals have been launched. There is simply too much in print, and has been for a while. New journals, new series, new academic publishing ventures are often launched to enhance academic careers and reputations, improve job prospects, shove departments up research rankings, and advance the special interests of the partisan. Former thesis supervisors, elder-statesmen (and women), over-worked colleagues, all have all been cajoled into collaborating with publishers too given to promoting novelty over real scholarship and hungry for better returns on already meagre outlays.

³ Specialism and its attendant benefits are not the only reasons that explain specialised and narrowly focused journals. There are other intended or unintended sociological factors at play as well.

⁴ See Keeble, Richard (2005) *Communication Ethics Today*, Troubador:Leicester

⁵ Widely considered to have been introduced in the 1990s

⁶ Pinney, Christopher (1995) 'Hindi Cinema and Half-Forgotten Dialects. An Interview With Ashis Nandy' *Visual Anthropology Review* 11(2):7-16

⁷ See Misek, Richard (2008) 'A Parallax View of Psycho' *International Journal of Zizek Studies* Vol 2, No 1

⁸ See McGowan, Todd (2007) 'Introduction: Enjoying the Cinema' *International Journal of Zizek Studies*, Vol 1, No 3