THE POETICS OF THE REAL AND AESTHETICS OF THE REEL — MEDIAL VISUALITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

NGIS	No God in Sight	TLJEL	The Last Jet-Engine Laugh
F	Filming. A Love Story	TBM	The Bioscope Man
IEF	Indian English Fiction	TWT	The White Tiger
HP	Home Products	TSOMA	The Story of My Assassins

1. A PASSAGE BEYOND — WRITING INDIA NOW

> *The difficulties facing the Indian novelist are, no doubt, real enough. What is he to write about? To which 'patron' is he to offer his particular 'crocus'? […]. Must the novelist's be a scientific or realistic – or even naturalistic – approach to contemporary social problems? A clinical probe into society's sores? […] Should the novelist write for entertainment – or edification? Should he write for the sophisticated – or for the masses? And the masses being still largely illiterate, what is one to do except turn out film-scripts!* (Iyengar 1985, 321)

> *In the context of the highly politicized field of postcolonial studies, I have suggested that all "truly" postcolonial texts are freighted with great and particular expectations. Within this matrix, the empire does not write, it writes back to an implied reader who is in eager expectation of its recriminations and its transformative message. There is, as it were, a brisk market fort his sort of literature in the metropolitan world […]. This circumstance and the associated phenomena of commodification and "selling out" have occasioned considerable comment, demonstrating a not unworthy concern with the embeddedness of art in the real. (Bahri 2003, 113f)*

> *It is not surprising, then, that the unprecedented integration of the world through money, media, and communication is often experienced as disturbingly threatening and altogether "real." After all, satellites never set on the empire.* (Aneesh/Lane/Petro 2012, 1)

Set in a complex and dynamic social field marked by major faultlines, writing India poses a particular poetological challenge. The social divide which K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar[1] hyperbolically invokes thus seems as topical today as ever — a fact reflected in the subcontinent's demographic divide into two Indias, "the smaller, yet running into more than 300 million people […] that is strident, aspiring and competitive, and the larger India, that is deprived and still awaiting the opportunity to share in the full fruits of democratic equity and development."[2] If Indian English authors are overwhelmingly drawn from among the former group, their writing routinely ventures beyond into this other India, showing increasing interest in this "intractably non-Anglophone country."[3] At a time when the status of English as a global language of power can no longer be reasonably questioned[4], this is fraught with poetological and political implications.

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[1] According to Riemenschneider, "the most authoritative voice" on Indian English writing in the latter half of the twentieth century. (Riemenschneider, Dieter. *The Indian Novel in English: Its Critical Discourse, 1934-2004*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2005, 6).

[2] Som, Reba. *Gandhi, Bose, Nehru and the Making of the Modern Indian Mind*. New Delhi: Viking, 2004, 21.

[3] Trivedi, Harish. "Anglophone Transnation, Postcolonial Translation: The Book and the Film as Namesakes." *Semiotic encounters: Text, Image and Trans-Nation*. Ed. Sarah Säckel, Walter Göbel and Noha Hamdy. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, 32.

[4] Cf. Zare, Bonnie and Nalini Iyer. "Introduction: Problematizing Indian Literary Canons." *Other Tongues. Rethinking the Language Debates in India.* Ed. Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, xiv-xvii.

Assuming that it is "the history of language," rather "than the geographical spread"[5] that determines its literary status, English is undeniably a latecomer in the Indian literary arena. In so far it is hardly astounding that "[p]ostcolonial Indian writing in English is viewed by many Indians as a minor literature written in a major language."[6] In a global world preferring its literary products packaged in English, the choice of literary idiom automatically becomes a matter of commercial viability as Prasad points out:

> So writing India is seen as impossible when you write English. At best, the writers are seen as native informants giving ethnographic briefs to a Western audience, and at worst they are seen as constructing an image that the West wants to see. There seems to be a much greater acceptance now for Indian English writing, but there is still great resentment, perhaps an even greater resentment than before, amongst other Indian writers. (Prasad 2011, ix)

The question of language is also intimately intertwined with the texts' postcolonial identity: While some "cannot help wondering if this valorization of Indian writing (mostly Indian writing in English) is just another form of colonialism come back to haunt us,"[7] others argue that "IEF has shed the trauma of colonial interpellation."[8] It seems clear in any case that the tension between local and global idea(l)s has shaped the force field in which IEF moves, particularly where it addresses life *in* India. The country's fragmented demography and cultural heterogeneity mean that any artistic representation is necessarily partial. In the global literary market however, IEF confronts the implicit expectation of native informancy[9]— a demand to which novels like *The White Tiger* unambiguously cater. Other texts such as *Animal's People* (2007) or *Narcopolis* (2012) too rely on presenting their stories as 'glimpses' of India's dark underside. Such strategies bespeak not only a growing interest in the new India, but readers' need for the 'real' and the corollary problem of circumnavigating the gap of experience which the latter inevitably comprises:

> Obstinately, brutally *there,* the real is not a content, nevertheless. What we don't know, individually or culturally, might be anything or not much. Though it exists as a difference, there is no meaning in the real. Indifferent to description, it exceeds representation and brings language to an impasse. If we experience it, we do so as a gap, or alternatively as a limit, the point at which culture fails us. The real is what our knowledge, individually or collectively, both must and cannot accommodate. (Belsey 2005, 14)

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[5] Ganapathy-Doré, Geetha. *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, 17.

[6] Ganapathy-Doré, *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English*, 17.

[7] Butalia, Urvashi. "The World of Publishing and Writing in 2007." In: Iyer/ Zare (eds), *Other Tongues*, 107.

[8] Sen, Krishna and Rituparna Roy. "Introduction." *Writing India Anew: Indian-English Fiction 2000-2010*. Ed. Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013, 14.

[9] Bahri, Deepika. *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 17f.

But while the real as conceived here necessarily resists any attempt at appropriation, the above mentioned novels seem to fervently deny this, instead taking a microscopic approach towards the real. That the real and the unseen or invisible somehow overlap is an assumption that may have been strengthened by the global spread of television and internet — media perpetuating their own vision of the world even as they tacitly claim objectivity[10]. However, the medium still vaunting the most appeal across all subcontinental regions and strata is cinema film, a circumstance to which Iyengar's introductory quote clearly pays homage. Its immense popularity and central position in the collective imaginary are already marked in texts like R. K. Narayan's *Mr. Sampath. The Printer of Malgudi* (1949) and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980). But their visual excess, bewildering generic mix and bathos as exposed in these texts ultimately reduce this cultural phenomenon to a curio.

When an Indian English novel engages on its own terms with popular cinema however, this merits critical attention: Tabish Khair's *Filming. A Love Story* (2007) and Indrajit Hazra's *The Bioscope Man* (2008) are two cases in point since cinema films are not featured here merely as an escapist fantasmagoria. Instead the medium emerges as a filter of human experience, even "a shared grammar of cultural agency: a texture and style of expression and reflection."[11] Rather than merely narrating the content of real or fictional films, the novels also shed light on the process of viewing as complicit in producing the film, thus exposing the dynamic, reciprocal nature of cinematic vision. In their focus upon the phenomenology of (cinematic) perception however, these novels are not exceptional.

Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* (2008) and Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet Engine Laugh* (2002) mark two other texts venturing into the dark room, the former metaphorically, the latter literally. In the former case however, it is almost exclusively readers' perceptual and media experience which 'projects' the narrative, whereas TLJEL invokes the photograph as a distilled essence while simultaneously deconstructing it as a putatively stable repository of human experience. In both cases the texts rely on visual imagination as an interface between text and media memory. In the absence of any original, unmediated experience, the visual and sensual experience offered by the medium thus becomes the mark of an absence, a longing. I argue that the texts hereby implicitly acknowledge that the real is beyond reach.

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[10] Cf. Rajagopal, Arvind. "Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture." BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies 2.1 (2011): 12ff. 18 March 2011. <http://bio.sagepub.com/content/2/1/11>.

[11] Pinney, Christopher. "Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures." *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*. Ed. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, 5.

"Films are the future, not letters. Films are the world. The bioscope, meri jaan[12], moving pictures, not the fixed alphabet,"[13] exclaims Harihar, a former postman and proprietor of an ambulant bioscope show in Khair's novel. To the awestruck villagers of 1920s rural Bengal to whom he brings his films, using an old bioscope projector are not only real, but *more* than real since they encompass not only the profane but the mythical, divine world. This transcendent world peopled by divinities and demons also lurks underneath the surreal photographs of Paresh Bhatt, protagonist of TLJEL and former photographer. Shut in his private photo gallery he is intent upon fleeing the chaotic flux of life and finding ulterior meaning. Abani Chatterjee, the narrator of TBM succinctly sums it up: "The eyes are, after all, the windows to the soul, the veranda of the heart, the courtyard of the spleen, the attic of the bile, the collapsible gate of dreams."[14]

The fact that the four texts were written by journalists, photographers and documentary film-makers[15] — occupations partly also shared by their novels' protagonists and/or narrators — is indicative. In this way the texts reflect the salient role these media occupy in Indian cultural practice and memory. However, in so doing the authors do not simply submit visuality and iconic logic to textual form, instead allowing the images to enter into a creative, oscillating tension with the formal-aesthetic conception of the text, which is thus informed by the dynamic economy of (the) image. By appealing to the 'eye' and engaging the imagination without harnessing it to obviousness, the corpus texts thus develop an independent impulsion marking them as autonomous artworks reflexive of an essentially uncontainable experience:

> The content of art, subjected to creative processes of formalization, obtains its unique significance within the logic of the work as a whole for [Marcuse, Adorno, Benjamin]. In the aesthetic dimension, language, form, organization, and the artwork's impulse to autonomy become the engines driving the mimetic faculty to imitate a reality incommensurate with the repressive laws of equivalence. (Bahri 2003, 111f)

Bahri's argument that postcolonial literary studies still needs to be more alert to the complex operations of the aesthetic consequently marks a salient incentive for present enquiry. The critical-scholarly discourse of postcolonial and particularly IEF obliquely reflects the difficile reconciliation of social embedment and poetological autonomy and the corollary issue of commoditization, in the light of which the infamous 'authenticity debate' between Vikram Chandra and Meenakshi Mukherjee can also be read.

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[12] "my life", "my soul".
[13] F, 48
[14] TBM, 44.
[15] Tyrewala is an exception here, as are the characters of his text.

The dispute was ignited by Chandra's conspicuous use of Hindu terminology in his debut novel *Red Earth, Pouring Rain* (1995) which Mukherjee interpreted as a clear sign of literary tokenism and exoticism.[16] It is ironic however that such "questions seem to arise from some residue of an idea of a moral custodianship of literature, at a time when no one […] seems to have a clear or reliable notion of what 'literature' is."[17] That the underlying anxiety is not ungrounded for while "[i]mages of India are often reduced to marketable stereotypes which grossly simplify the subcontinent's cultural diversity and complexity,"[18] is clear, but it also bespeaks the wider, transmedial scope of the issue of representation. For Geeta Ganapathy-Doré "this competition between authors and critics is an indirect offshoot of the rivalry between hard sciences and humanities and social sciences"[19] within which theory is "understood as an initial outlay with a guaranteed value or as *shibboleth* with a view to obtaining a cultural recognition, which has taken hold of literary critics in general and postcolonial critics in particular."[20]

In his critical review of TWT wherein he also addresses Chandra's litigation with Mukherjee, author and scholar Amitava Kumar consequently addresses the real as an inescapable obligation, simultaneously poetical and political:

> I don't think there is freedom at hand from the entire question of authenticity, largely because there is no escape from the yearning for the real. The painfully real, the brilliantly, euphorically real, the emphatically real. Either in our lives, or in our writing. And for me, living abroad, this also translates as a parsing of tales about India. (Kumar 2008)[21]

Home Products (2008), Kumar's own attempt at such a tale about India, consequently presents a fictionalized account of the Amarmani-Tripathi case, a political scandal that erupted in 2003 in Bihar. Together with *Animal's People* and other texts, HP thus marks the emergence of a new trend, namely the rise of fictional texts "based on real life incidents."[22] Notably however, these are not exclusively directed at the global literary market.

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[16] Cf. Hawley, John C.."Can the Cosmopolitan Speak? The Question of Indian Novelists' Authenticity." South Asian Review. 24.2 (2003), 27f.

[17] Chaudhuri, Amit. *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008, 85.

[18] Dengel-Janic, Ellen. "South Asia." *English Literatures Across the Globe: A Companion*. Ed. Lars Eckstein. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2007, 133.

[19] Ganapathy-Doré, *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English*, 10.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Kumar, Amitava. "On Adiga's The White Tiger," The Hindu, 2 Nov. 2008, 14 Nov. 2014 <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literaryreview/article1438227.ece>.

[22] Narayan, Shyamala A. "India." Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 43.4 (2008), 99.

Hence also Tarun Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins* (2010) — an example characteristic of the recent spate of investigative thrillers — aims at the growing domestic market in combining the "clinical probe into society's sores"[23] with the thriller:

> The thrillers also provide a sense of accountability, which resonates with readers in a country of deep inequality where systems of justice are profoundly flawed. Many feature investigative journalists on the trail of corrupt big businesses or politicians in league with the police or judges. One recent release describes a "stark and unsettling multidimensional chronicle of tiger-poaching, big-game hunting and the international mafia". (Burke 2014)[24]

According to the reviewer, many of these texts hold little appeal for non-Indian readers, not least because of their manifest predilection for "fast plots and happy endings."[25] Notably these are features also shared, if somewhat ambiguously, by Adiga's TWT. A parable about globalized India, this novel follows the picaresque hero Balram Halwai from "the Darkness", a village in rural north India to Delhi and Bangalore where the protagonist establishes himself as an entrepreneur by using brute force. Awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2008, TWT received largely unfavorable reviews from Indian critics. To one of them "[e]very scene, every phrase, is a blunt instrument, wielded to remind Adiga's readers of his country's cruelty,"[26] while another alleges that the author fell for "the shocking realism fallacy."[27]

Nonetheless, that "some in India lambasted [the novel] as a western conspiracy to deny the country's economic progress"[28] bespeaks not only a colonial hangover, but a determination to police India's international public image. In fact the novels seems flawed from a number of viewpoints: Balram's transformation from 'disposable' property to perpetrator confirms Spivak's suspicion that "claiming to *be* Caliban legitimizes the very individualism that we must persistently attempt to undermine from within"[29].[30] In the act of showcasing the subaltern Indian experience from within, the novel thus exposed its central flaw[31].

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[23] Srinivasa Iyengar, K. R. *Indian Writing in English*. 5th ed. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996, 321.

[24] Burke, Jason. "Indian Publishers wake up to new generation of homegrown thrillers." The Guardian. 12 Oct. 2014, 26 Nov. 2014 < http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/12/india-new-generation-thrillers>.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Kapur, Akash. "The Secret of His Success." The New York Times. 7 Nov. 2008. 26 Nov. 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/books/review/Kapur-t.html?_r=1&>.

[27] Mohapatra, Himansu S. "Babu Fiction in Disguise. Reading Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*." In: Sen/Roy (eds) *Writing India Anew,* 137.

[28] Kapur, A. Op.Cit.

[29] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.* Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, 118.

[30] Cf. Mohapatra Op. Cit., 138f.

[31] Cf. Kumar. "On Adiga's The White Tiger."

For Amitava Kumar, the problem of TWT boils down to one question, namely "[w]ho is looking here?"[32] Hence the passages in which Balram Halwai purportedly looks at his village are clearly inscribed by the critical gaze of the metropolitan middle class author. In his own novel Kumar thus abstains from installing a subaltern protagonist, instead introducing an investigative journalist who hails from the place he is sent to investigate, Patna in rural Bihar. Since the review blurb alerts us to the fact that "the novel is shot through with cinematic moments,"[33] I would like to explore one such moment to discuss whether Kumar succeeded in abstaining from wielding the author(itative) gaze:

> The light from the jeep scoured the dirty walls in the narrow streets. In the vivid darkness of the night, their presence was an intrusion. Lives had been carefully constituted, out of sheer habit, around a routine of darkness. Whole families sat out on cots or on the steps of the houses they passed. Again and again, they surprised people who were eating or resting. Women turned their faces away, and men shaded their eyes, whenever the jeep turned a corner, headlights blazing. (Kumar 2007, 289)

At first look, the passage reads as another exploration of India's 'Heart of Darkness' as the scene presented here is refracted through the prism of social power relations. The 'glimpse' given here thus appears to answer to all notions of rural backwardness from a metropolitan perspective. However, in the Indian context darkness is not only and simply a marker of invisibility or powerlessness. "If the practice of vision in South Asia enfolded a tension between sight as a privileged access to divine truth, and everyday life as profane, unimportant or unreal, […] sharply distinguish[ing] between what was worthy of being seen, and what ought not to be revealed,"[34] the darkness assumes another meaning, turning from a mark of backwardness into a shroud offering protection.

In 'tearing' this veil, the journalist Binod does not come to occupy the centre of this poverty panopticon, but instead becomes complicit in its power logic. Hence the protagonist is soon embroiled in corruption and forced to withdraw. Darkness and light, power politics and its putative antidote — investigative journalism — thus suffuse into shades of grey. Meanwhile, Binod'cousin films young lovers in the cubicles of his Patna internet café to market the films as soft porn over the web, thereby exploring the intersection of voyeurism and new media culture and the shifting territories of the private and the public in India. Here, the exit from the darkness into the new media age amounts only to aggravated subaltern exploitation.

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[32] Kumar, Amitava. "On Adiga's The White Tiger," The Hindu, 2 Nov. 2008, 14 Nov. 2014 <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literaryreview/article1438227.ece>.

[33] The OUTLOOK review is featured on the 2007 Picador edition of the novel.

[34] Rajagopal, "Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture," 14.

Images and visuality thus dislodge the protagonist's investigative mission while tacitly symbolizing resistance "to the world of instrumental reason and administered reality."[35] Meanwhile, India's domestic literary market is burgeoning. But here historic and fantasy novels[36], "motivational novels"[37], docufiction and "[p]opular fiction dealing with young women ('chick-lit')"[38] determine literary consumption, thus answering to a growing demand for diversion[39]. The trend towards docu- and investigative fiction does not contradict this but seems complementary to it, gritty reality being administered in liberal doses on the one hand, entertainment and escapism on the other. In the reviews of Tejpal's TSOMA, commentators conspicuously seize on TWT as *the* critical touchstone: "So make way Messrs Vikas Swaroop and Aravinda Adiga for the definitive story of the Indian underbelly […]," [40] proclaims Dhiraj Nayar of the Indian Express, while Binoo John notes that "this novel makes Aravinda Adiga's Booker winning novel look dipped in treacle."[41]

These remarks, clearly made with the novel's commercial prospects at heart, identify and answer to an implied reader desirous to see 'India Shining'[42] dismantled. Author Vikram Chandra succinctly summarizes the hitch faced by authors:

> All art is born at this crossroads of ambition and integrity, between the fierce callings of fame and the hungers of the belly and the desires of one's children and the necessities of art and truth. Michelangelo knew this, and Ghalib knew this. There is no writer in India, or in the world, no artist anywhere who is free of this eternal *chakravyuha*[43], this whirling circle that is life itself. (Chandra 2000)[44]

Whether and in how far it is possible to reconcile market demand and prevailing trends with poetological integrity and detached observation is thus an acute question. If the visuals of Kumar's novel introduce a discordant note, the novels I propose to analyze in the following go even farther as they set their sights, quite literally, on visual culture and practice. Significantly, these texts appear unconcerned with both the conflicts of contemporary India and the 'real' as authentic.

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[35] Bahri, *Native Intelligence*, 113.
[36] A case in point is Samit Basu's highly successful *Game World Trilogy* (Penguin, 2004–7).
[37] Cf. Sen/Roy, *Writing India Anew*, 16.
[38] Narayan, "India.", 94.
[39] Sen/Roy, Op. Cit.,15ff.
[40] Nayyar, Dhiraj. "Like This Only. An Engaging Look at the dark underbelly of our politics and society." The Indian Express. 15 Feb. 2009. 26 Nov. 2014. <http://www.taruntejpal.com/review_pics/press_09.jpg>.
[41] taruntejpal.com. 2014 <http://www.taruntejpal.com/default.htm>.
[42] "The stunning career of this metaphor began with a massive media campaign launched under the same name by the Bharatiya Janata Party […] in the advent of general elections in 2004."(Brosius, Christiane. *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity*. New Delhi: Routledge India, 2010, 1.)
[43] A circular, military formation in the shape o a disc or lotus flower rendered in the *Mahabharata.*
[44] Chandra, Vikram. "The Cult of Authenticity." Boston Review 1 Feb. 2000. Web. 1 December 2014. <http://www.bostonreview.net/vikram-chandra-the-cult-of-authenticity>.

1.1 ENVISIONED PASTS — IMAG(IN)ED FUTURES

> The wall divides his frame almost exactly into half, the dark huddle of cars on the left and the thicker mess of mist and foliage on the right, the wall stretching away, from full focus next to the banana tree to a soft line where it meets Lower Circular on top of the frame. He is sure the film will register something but he doesn't quite know what. He exhales, locks his breath out, and presses the shutter. The camera mirror slaps up, blanking out the frame from his eye, letting the light onto the film. (TLJEL, 363f)

For Paresh Bhatt, shutter-bug, "optic-driven two-leg"[45] and protagonist of TLJEL, life comprises of moments. Thanks to his photos, he is able to revisit these moments as he is stranded in the apocalyptic future of 2030. Shut in a room covered wall to wall in photographs, he indulges a mnemo-odyssey through his life and that of his parents and daughter, trying to make up for lost time. Having spent his life between jobs, countries and partners, the muddle and the loose ends of Bhatt's biography finally demand addressing. But TLJEL is not merely a (virtual) journey in photographs as it combines photo-technological essays and art historic briefs into its densely layered fabric. As a result, TLJEL oscillates between private memoir, historic chronicle, science fiction and media anthropology. In its intrinsic multiplicity, the novel seems stable only in its photo descriptions where all movement is temporarily suspended. Hence for the protagonist, not even the (hyper-)real images of "Megalopolis 3000"[46], a Mixed Reality software, can compete with the transparent appeal and sense of stasis evoked by photographs.

Past and present also crosscut in Tabish Khair's *Filming. A Love Story* (2007) and Indrajit Hazra's *The Bioscope Man* (2008), both of which illuminate pivotal stages in the history of India and of Indian cinema. Whereas TBM is set between the 1910s and 1950s in Calcutta, F focuses the time around Partition, the violent separation of the subcontinent into two sovereign states, India and Pakistan[47]. As narratives that "focus not so much on individual characters but on complex plots and events—what happens, and how,"[48] popular films are deployed here as templates uniquely suited to communicating the fate of a nation in times of upheaval and violent strife. Scenes in F thus alternately assume the astute elegancee of a Ray movie or the melodramatic pathos and drama of a Raj Kapoor film.

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[45] TLJEL, 56.

[46] TLJEL, 182.

[47] The division of the subcontinent led to massive ethnic cleansings and violence along the new border lines created by the Mountbatten Plan in 1947. In the ensuing violence "over ten million [.] people—Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims—were dislocated from their homes" and "at least a million were killed in retaliatory violence undertaken by members of all three communities." (Gopal, Priyamvada. *The Indian English Novel. Nation, History, and Narration.* Oxford: OUP, 2009, 69).

[48] Virdi, Jyotika, *The cinematic ImagiNation: Indian popular films as social history.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 32.

And while in TBM Calcutta's audience suddenly finds itself interpellated as citizens of a country yet to be born, the protagonist is wary of his fellow Bengalis' romance with film and the idealized nation they invoke to legitimize their existence. Both novels thus examine the medium from several angles at once; the technological; institutional and sociocultural; as well as the semiotic and psychological. And while the cinema's economics and impact upon social life and Indian culture are reviewed, the projection hall emerges as a site of communion. Simultaneously the film finds its sequentiality reduced to individual shots and even single frames. It is at these points that F and particularly TBM assert their prerogative as sequential utterances vis-à-vis the reel's simultaneity. However, both texts vary in their representative approach as F insists upon the life-like flow of images, while TBM elaborates an 'anatomy' of its fictional films. With the cinematic repertory of the early Indian bioscope largely destroyed due to the flammability of the filmstock, TBM thus assumes the dimension of a fictional cinema-historic intervention.

That memory, both individual and collective, has been lastingly shaped by the experience of cinema is a fact discreetly referenced by F's leitmotif — a strand of barbed wire entangled with a film reel.[49] Hence for Rizwan Hussain alias 'Batin', the text's central narrative consciousness and 'grand imagier'[50], barbed wire marks a reminder of the erasure of a brave new cinematic world in the turmoil of Partition. But the intricate plot of F does not lend itself to a fast reading as it interpolates two other figures, whose stories complement and contrast Batin's. These pertain to an anonymous film scholar and a sevak, i.e., the recruit of a Hindu fundamentalist organization. Like TBM and TLJEL, F also features real historic personas, most notably Saadat Hasan Manto, author and former Bombay filmscript writer and Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Sant of Sabarmati'. In this way the thin line between fiction and reality, film and history is blurred right from the beginning when the novel's 'title credits' unfurl. With its 'reels' and evocative scenes, Khair's novel thus purposely challenges its status, oscillating between literary and filmic text.

In contrast to the former novel, TBM is narrated in a strikingly straightforward manner as its autodiegetic narrator Abani Chatterjee relates his accidental ascent to bioscope stardom and subsequent fall. Through Abani's mercurial persona the text explores the early, heady days of the bioscope in late colonial Calcutta. Hence the protagonist is present at cinema's inception on the stage:

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[49] The 2007 Picador hard- and paperback editions both feature this cover motif.

[50] The term is not used here in the sense in which Metz devised it, but with regard to the narrator's highly evocative presentation of the events as inspired by film.

> Twenty-odd minutes later I walked onto the stage. Everything below me—those bobbing heads, those eyes, those faces, […] the stagelight bouncing off those faces—disappeared. If I did see anything at all outside the stage it was a partially illuminated figure […], who seemed to be hiding behind a camera. There was a corrugated strip of smoke curling up and breaking, […] behind the inhaling camera. With Durga and I sharing the stage and Shombhu's sturdy 1913 Éclair-Gillon Grand in front I felt the glare of the shadows and light. I was speaking through the pupils of my eyes, darkened double-fold by the paleness of my face. I was no longer standing on the stageboards. I was being sucked in and faithfully etched on to nitrate to be replayed from the distance. I was underwater and Prahlad. The lines didn't matter. (TBM, 80)

After thus entering the world of the reel, i.e., the world of shadows, the narrator proceeds to become an amorphous persona assuming definitive shape only in front of the camera. As the increasingly popular productions he stars in negotiate the thin line between nationalist propaganda and entertainment, the text also offers insight into the colonial era of Indian cinema. Notably Abani's greatest success with his 'Anglo'[51] co-star Durga is a film based on the infamous incident of the Black Hole of Calcutta, during which over a hundred British civilians purportedly died of suffocation in a tiny cell of Calcutta's old fort[52]. This historically dubious incident provides occasion for a pathos-dripping mise-en-scène which tacitly inverts colonial hierarchies as the imprisoned Britons are played by Bengalis in white make-up. Notwithstanding the lamentable end of the 'Britons', Calcutta's British and native audiences are delighted with the film.

TBM thus delineates a variable subject position for the spectator of cinema, while it simultaneously illustrates how producers increasingly came to rely on engaging audiences as national subjects. In so far TBM and F affirm cinema as "an emotional register and [..] virtual teleprompter for reading the script called 'nation.'"[53] The nation in its fragments — thus one might describe Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* (2005). Comprised of over forty-one interior monologues, the designation of novel appears inapt for this text. And while NGIS has its voyeuristic moments, these are more introspective than spectacular:

> Punita visualized the angle. Long shot? Overhead? Something zany or still? She glanced at the bodies. Fly-infested. Mud-spattered. They were all dressed in shirts and trousers. Some had beards, some didn't. There were no pools of blood drooling from the carcasses. No remnants of gore. For men who had been shot just a few hours ago, these fifteen looked rather comfortable in their deadness. (NGIS, 118)

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[51] A person of British origin and Indian residence and/or birth.

[52] Cf. Chatterjee, Partha. *The Black Hole of Empire. History of a Global Practice of Power.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 6ff.

[53] Virdi, Jyotika. *The Cinematic ImagiNation. Indian Popular Films as Social History*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 7.

The calmly bemused reaction of the news producer Punita faced with the dead bodies of supposed terrorists after a police shoot-out in a Mumbai park, is remarkable not only because of the woman's evident sangfroid, but because of her precise notion of death, unambiguously shaped by media representations. And while the perceived discrepancy between real death and reel death, i.e. cinematic and televisual representation bespeaks a loss of referentiality, it also documents the instrumentalization of death as a means of manufacturing political consent. Comprised of monologues presented in one sustained linear sequence, NGIS is a remarkable text. Notwithstanding the introspective nature of this conception, consciousness is never isolated as the protagonists are continually confronted with other persons, events and objects that incite a reaction.

In reading each monologue, readers thus find themselves catapulted into Mumbai on an unspecified day in the year 2000. But here the narratee is no passive interlocutor of the text, but an intruder seeing through the eyes of the characters as they walk or drive through the seething city: "A Honda City glides by. I am reflected in its windows. The revulsion on my face stuns me. And I am doubly stunned by the disgust on the face of the man *inside* the car, in the back seat, staring out at what must seem just another filthy Muslim ghetto."[54] For a text compiled of 'consciousness reports', the gaze thus becomes an important tool in forging connections between the different character 'snapshots'. The casting and subsequent return of the gaze thus become the mark of an écriture simulating the epistemologically impossible, namely total (in-)sight. As the gaze *at* someone proceeds and motivates the look *into* that person, who in her turn casts the gaze at another, interiority and exteriority are no longer rigorously separated.

With its panorama of scenes, voices and noises, Tyrewala's text conveys an acute sensation of the massive overcrowding of the metropolis which is subtly reinforced by the minimal space each character is granted in the closed circuit of monologues. However, with its multiple 'windows' and maze-like narrative architecture, which includes game options such as multiple endings, NGIS references not only the external, material world, but the digital world contemporary metropolitan subjects have come to inhabit. Moreover, NGIS focuses the city's different social strata, the 'invisibles', i.e. itinerants, rural migrants and paan-wallahs, as well as petty entrepreneurs, policemen, reporters and others more or less precariously perched on the middle class steps of the ladder. But also the odd businessman with a penthouse apartment is among the character cast which thus assembles different strata, genders and social groups.

[54] NGIS, 130.

All of these individuals jostle for a space to live — even if it is only in a shack on top of a high-rise apartment block. Above all however, the text focuses the city's Muslim population and their political and social predicament, which reflects the faultlines marking the nation at large. If "the same limits that plague the novel form—the difficulties of representing the collective, the many voices within a bounded space—are also present in the nation,"[55] NGIS textualizes this dilemma in a fashion that is at once immediate and highly compelling. Because they find their material in quotidian sensual (and) media experience, the novels briefly introduced do not simulate transparency and avoid monocausal explanations. Following Partha Chatterjee's stipulation to "look within the nation rather than beyond it,"[56] these texts do not simply project a gaze unseen and autonomous to penetrate and explain India. Instead the sensual universe of each text is filtered through different lenses or prisms, both embodied/human and disembodied/technological. In this way the texts do not simply visualize or translate the Indian experience, but attempt to cover "the 'experience gap' between the author and the recipient […]."[57]

Assuming that "[v]ision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification,"[58] the following discussion focuses upon the reader as narratee, more precisely the narratee in her role of 'implied spectator' as delineated in the texts. Apart from the incentive which the texts themselves provide, the novels seem suited to addressing a number of theoretical issues intrinsic to contemporary postcolonial literary and cultural discourse, among which that outlined by UP Mukherjee appears paramount:

> I want to ask whether historical development not only compels or permits the fusion of strictly 'archaic' and contemporary cultural forms, but also whether it enables, in addition, a peculiarly pitched relationship between forms that are nearly contemporaneous? We have looked at the Indian English-language novel form's traffic with folk-theatre, classical music and dance. But how do we think about its relationship with forms such as photography and cinema, which, in modern Indian history, evolved more or less over the same historical expanse as the novel, even the novel in English? (Mukherjee 2010, 163)

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[55] Heffernan, Teresa. *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Twentieth-Century Novel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, 91.

[56] Chatterjee, Partha. "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?" *Empire and Nation. Essential Writings 1985-2005*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012, 165.

[57] Durix, Jean-Pierre. *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse. Deconstructing Magic Realism.* London: Palgrave Macmillan 1998, 46.

[58] Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, Mass. u.a: MIT Press, 1990, 5.

The temporal overlap[59] indicated by Mukherjee is reflected in the novels which roughly map the time of celluloid film, i.e. the century between "7 July 1897" and "the early 1990s."[60] After its long confinement to the status of academic outsider, Indian popular cinema(s) is now firmly established as an object of serious academic enquiry[61]. But for while Indian popular cinema may have moved into the focus of film and media studies in India and abroad, postcolonial literary and cultural studies with few exceptions[62] provides only random readings of these phenomena. The preceding survey by contrast irradiates the systemic and historic aspect of the medial concerns evident in the novels. Hence it is possible to view TLJEL and particularly F and TBM as expressions of a post-millennial retro vogue, with 'golden era' Hindi cinema at its centre[63]. Rajagopal provides a decisive clue in this context when he states that "South Asia seems to have arrived at a communicative modernity in the space of hardly two decades,"[64] namely the 1990s and the first decade after the millennium.

This abrupt shift in the surface of the quotidian can be speculated to have provided an important impetus for this fallback. But while it is true that the past two decades saw the massive influx and spread of new technologies such as cable/satellite television, internet and mobile phones, the novels suggest another index of (media) modernity in so far as they expose a photographic and cinematographic practice marked from its inception by métissage and pastiche. The continuation and actualization of older art forms, techniques and visual practices in photography and cinema and now also digital media thus affirms the notion that media evolution is rarely linear and homogeneous.

> This technological entanglement between the present and the past requires a mode of investigation in which contemporary media culture has to be viewed as a sedimented and layered form, a fold of time and materiality. The preferred term here is Media Archeology by way of a method to help understand contemporary culture through the insights of past media practices. […]. The journey from celluloid to digital media offers a critical site for an investigation of the complex ways in which memory, digital culture, and cinematic nostalgia have converged. Media archeology allows us to reflect on these regimes of memory to see if the past may be discovered anew. (Mazumdar 2013, 93f)

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[59] According to Mukherjee, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, published in 1864, marked the first Indian English novel. (Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian writing in English*. New Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 30).

[60] Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid. From Bollywood to the Emergency.* New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009, 7.

[61] Shoesmith, Brian. "Our Films, Their Films: Some Speculations on Writing Indian Film History." *The SAGE handbook of film studies*. Ed. James Donald and Michael Renov. London: SAGE, 2008, 74.

[62] One of them, Mendes' *Salman Rushdie and visual culture* will be discussed in the second chapter, p.27f.

[63] Cf. Rajadhyaksha, Op.Cit., 77f.

[64] Rajagopal, "Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture," 11.

In view of their retrograde trajectory, it seems that the corpus texts[65] indeed seek to discover the past anew. Accordingly, their media archeological and culture anthropological dimension demands outlining, not least because photography, cinema film and VR/MR as socially shaped and shaping technologies expose "a much deeper level, a level which Jameson has described as the ecology of media."[66] Since the texts capitalize on the sensual-aesthetic quality of literature and mnemonic dynamics of images, they also appear suited to exploring contemporary "regimes of memory."[67] But the texts also document that the novel's limited means of expression do not rival its profound of grasp of sensual experience and embodied life. Photos, film scenes or game sequences on the other hand possess intensity. It follows that "whether or not specific mnemonic sources really enrich the memory of a text will depend largely on the intensity with which they are evoked."[68]

Another point worth emphasizing at this juncture is that although the novels inscribe a distinctly north Indian perspective as they are largely set in Calcutta/Bengal and Bombay/Maharashtra, they appear to draw upon the same basic cultural repertoire, a fact reflected in manifold aesthetic and iconographic parallels, overlaps and alterations. These are most marked in popular cinema as Pinney also shows. He demonstrates how important it is to explore the aesthetic economy of popular films, in order to understand India:

> In a nation as dramatically divided as India, there are some curious places of shared desire: the melodies of Hindi film songs, the curves of Amitabh's or Madhuri's body, the vivid materiality of popular visual culture. […]. The existence of such areas (or more correctly, textures and styles) of convergent fixation […] is illuminatingly paradoxical, and has consequences for our understanding of the nature of South Asian society and of the particular forms of economic, political, and religious identity that seem to characterize it increasingly. (Pinney 2001, 1)

That these "convergent fixations" center on the body and the senses is worthwhile emphasizing as it points to an aesthetic sensibility and visual practice in which vision and tactility, eye and body are often (at) one. I argue that the engagement of the sensual body that becomes apparent in the texts is suggestive of a desire for a sensual grounding and stability that demands to be addressed. Even as the texts acknowledge that the real does not answer to a gaze as the Cartesian cosmos sustained it, they manifest a desire for insight, for the im-/mediate and corpo*real*.

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[65] Except NGIS.

[66] MacCabe, Colin. "On Impurity: the Dialectics of Cinema and Literature." *Literature and Visual Technologies: Writing after Cinema*. Ed. Julian Murphet and Lydia Rainford. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 16.

[67] Mazumdar, Ranjani. "Celluloid Memories and the Digital "Present"." BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies. 4.2 (2013), 94. 7 Jan. 2014 <http://bio.sagepub.com/content/4293>.

[68] Eckstein, Lars. *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic. On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, 47.

2. TRAC(K)ING THE REAL

> It has become almost a cliché to say that our age is marked by the disappearance of stable beliefs and a stable social order. The recognition of this collective state of mind was originally associated with the emergence of modernity, but the diagnosis persists in an even more radical form in the recent movement known as postmodernism. It is a commonplace […] that our whole conception of reality has been altered by the advance of the electronic media, especially […] "virtual reality". (Klausen 2004, 115)

The suture of visual world and literary word which the title of the dissertation, "The Poetics of the Real and Aesthetics of the Reel," perpetuates is both suggestive and problematic. After all we have learnt to distrust transparency and the notion of a real. So what real is meant here? The minor 'r' advertises its difference from the Lacanian term, which situates the Real at a remove from the Symbolic, leaving it impenetrable to human sense making activity. Nonetheless, the discussion presupposes the existence of a subjective will or drive towards the real as a vestige of "foundationalism in the postmodern condition."[1] In the corpus novels this will or drive towards the real – so the thesis hopes to show – manifests as a continuous slippage, a phenomenal oscillation between the iconic and the symbolic, the sensual and the material.

In "a philosophical economy that puts all its stock in practices and metaphors of vision, in order to ground its language games in something non-linguistic,"[2] the visual is still tacitly credited with verisimilitude. However, in so far as any scopic regime mediates between epistemology and psychology, answering to the needs of psychology through epistemology,[3] we need to be aware of the ways in which the latter is harnessed to the former. Studying texts that ostentatiously serve the need for visuality and transparency thus exposes the rhetorical manoeuvers of epistemology to scrutiny. If medium marks "the critical *meeting* of the material, the perceptual and the social,"[4] as Elleström maintains, the desire for the real may be assumed to map onto the latter. In other words, the desire to find in media and art something reconcilable with sensual experience is not assumed to have simply died out. It is along these lines also that proponents of literary realism like Katherine Kearns and George Levine argue.

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[1] Belsey, Catherine. *Culture and the Real: Theorizing Cultural Criticism.* London: Routledge, 2005,10.

[2] Engström, Timothy H., and Evan Selinger. "Reinventing Sight: Theories and Practices of Imaging." *Rethinking Theories and Practices of Imaging*. Ed. Timothy H. Engström and Evan Selinger. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 29.

[3] Cf. Belsey, Op. Cit., 81-99.

[4] Elleström, Lars. "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations." *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*. Ed. Lars Elleström and Jørgen Bruhn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 13.

According to Kearns, "[r]ealism's willingness to appeal on a need-to-know basis to the tribunal of experience is then to be held separate from the notion of absolute or ideal 'Truth,' which it typically keeps in mind, but more or less bracketed."[5]

> If it is true that realism as a full representation of the real must fail in any absolute sense, given the nature of the medium itself and the inevitable limits of human knowing and perspective, there are ways in which the efforts of realism [...] continue to matter and to require not passive recording but strenuous art. Once the necessary demystifying takes place; once the limits of the mode are laid bare; once the epistemological and ideological problems and disguises are recognized, realism remains an important, even a necessary mode of literary art. (Levine 2010, 14)

This also seems to hold true for Tabish Khair. Hence for the author of F his novel embodies "a kind of post-realism that takes into account magical realism but is not magical realism." [6] Post-realism thus signals the continuing epistemological purchase of sensual/visual experience and the concurrent desire to expand what is perceived as the limited jurisdiction of magical realism[7]. But what does post-realism mean in the context of F? Here it appears to mark a relationship between material world, senses and subject that is inescapably mediate. A contemporary definition of the real cannot ignore the fact that "[a]ll "reality effects," are first and foremost "subject effects."[8] But it is not only the psychological subject that the medium engages. In his bid to rehabilitate the real, Klausen alerts us to the fact that "our intersensory, bodily 'synergy' gives us a very strong sense of 'being in the world'—and of being in the *real* world, as an equally real, corporeal being."[9] Merleau-Ponty in his turn points out that this corpo*real* experience is premised upon the finitude and spatial situatedness of human perception:

> Thus, it is certainly true that every perception of a thing, of a form, or of a size as real, or that every perceptual constancy sends us back to the positing of a world and a system of experiences in which my body and the phenomenon would be rigorously connected. But the system of experience is not spread out before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator of it, I am a part of it, and it is my inherence in a point of view that at once makes possible the finitude of my perception and its opening to the total world as the horizon of all perception. (Merleau-Ponty 2014, 317)

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[5] Kearns, Katherine. *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism: Through the Looking Glass* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 6.

[6] Personal communication with the author, 2.04.2012

[7] Cf. Sen/Roy, *Writing India Anew*, 20f.; Cf. Parry, Benita. "The institutionalization of postcolonial studies." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Ed. Neil Lazarus. Cambridge: CUP, 2004, 73.

[8] Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener. *Film Theory. An Introduction Through the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 67.

[9] Klausen, Søren Harnow. *Reality Lost and Found: An Essay on the Realism-antirealism Controversy*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2004, 401.

Immanence thus poses the primary obstacle to absolute perception. There can be no autonomous gaze to penetrate the surface of the material world as the subject is always complicit in producing the seen. As each spatiotemporal location comprises a distinct aesthetic-experiential framework shaped by materiality and mediality, a literary discussion of aesthetic perception has to take this fact into account. And while literary scholarship is now seeking to historicize the role of the recipient to forge a concrete analytical category with which to replace the abstract, ahistoric notion of the 'implied reader,'[10] the recipient of postcolonial IEF and her aesthetic and historic sensibility have thus far largely been taken for granted. In the light of the following observation, the privileging of photography and cinema film as 'old', analogue media in the novels invites a critical reassessment:

> In effect, with new technological media of visual production come not only new ways of seeing, and challenges to the visual schemata associated with these older media, but also new ways of using and understanding the older media themselves. Any history of painting, photography, and cinema and also any history of science, medicine, and history itself, will be a history of "seeing" — a history written in the context of how new technologies and media of sight have transformed their predecessor's operations, [...]. (Engström/Selinger 2009, 50)

Turning towards literary texts as an oblique mirror of this "history of 'seeing'" allows us to inquire into its nature. At the same time, it is salient not to reduce media to any single effect or to construct them as autonomous agents simply displacing existent media systems or modes of consumption. When Calvino argues that cinema posits a danger to books because "[t]he mental cinema of our imagination has long been fed by the stream of proliferating, clearly outlined and hyperreal cinematic images," [11] this argument, affiliated with Virilio's lament about "*visual dyslexia*," demands debunking[12]. Nonetheless, the metaphor of the 'mental cinema of our imagination' is appealing with regard to the corpus texts which are variously set in projection halls/tents and dark rooms, both real or imagined. Here reading becomes a visit to the inner cinema where the fare consists of 'recycled' reels.

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[10] „In neuester Zeit ist es ein Anliegen responsorientierter Literaturwissenschaft, sowohl die Kategorie des Rezipienten wie auch seiner Tätigkeit stärker zu konkretisieren und zu historisieren, um ein relativ ahistorisches, abstraktes Konstrukt des impliziten Lesers, wie es von Wolfgang Iser geschaffen wurde, stärker als konkrete Analysekategorie fruchtbar zu machen." (Brosch, Renate."Weltweite Bilder, lokale Lesarten." *Visual Culture: Beiträge zur XIII. Tagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, Potsdam 18.-21. Mai 2005*. Ed. Monika Schmitz-Emans and Gertrud Lehnert. Heidelberg: Synchron, 2008, 61.)

[11] Assmann, Aleida. "The Shaping of Attention by Cultural Frames and Media Technology." *ImageScapes: Studies in intermediality*. Ed. Christian J. Emden and Gabriele Rippl. Oxford: Lang, 2010.

[12] Virilio, Paul. *The Vision Machine*. 1988. Trans. Julie Rose. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 8.

In this context the depiction of reels being recycled in both F and TBM fashions an evocative meta-medial *mise en abyme*[13]. But for media theorists Bolter and Grusin also the contemporary hyper- and transparent media are not distinct from cinema and photography when it comes to the epistemological and psychological desire they answer to:

> Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined *in terms of the viewer's experience*; it is that which would evoke an *immediate* (and therefore authentic) emotional response. Transparent digital applications seek to get to the real by bravely denying the fact of mediation; digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality. (Bolter/Grusin 2000, 53)(emphasis added)

Here, the real assumes a predominantly affective dimension while media as carriers 'step back behind that which they create,'[14] thus feigning invisibility. This also holds true for photography and film which rely on fabricating an impression of immediacy in spectators[15]. A literary text on the other hand is more limited in its means of expression. However, it also draws strength from the tension between the immediacy of sensual experience and the inevitable mediacy of expression. That a way of seeing may pre-date the medium with which it is commonly identified is a point eloquently demonstrated by Umberto Eco in his reading of Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*[16]. Studying a particularly evocative passage he remarks, "[i]f we tried reading this passage with a map before us, we would see that Manzoni builds his description by combining two film techniques: zoom and slow-motion."[17]

If Eco's imag(in)ing relies on an available cognitive template, namely that of cinema, this alerts us to the fact that a (chrono-) logic according to which each new medium institutes a new visual protocol and mode of perception fails the complex interactions between imagination and media representation. In brief, this striking example of what Erll calls "pre-mediation"[18] documents that we need to complicate our assumptions about media and medial vision.

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[13] These will be discussed in detail in the respective analytical chapters.

[14] "Indem Medien produzieren oder hervorbringen, bleiben sie selbst unkenntlich, treten hinter dem, was sie erzeugen, zurück." (Mersch, Dieter. *Ereignis und Aura: Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*. 4th ed. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2011, 57.)

[15] Cf. Emden, Christian J. and Gabriele Rippl. "Introduction: Image, Text and Simulation." In: Emden/Rippl (eds), *ImageScapes*, 4.

[16] *The Betrothed*, publ.1827.

[17] Eco, Umberto. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 71.

[18] Cf. Erll, Astrid. "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory." In: Erll/Nünning/Young. *Cultural memory studies*, 389.

But above all it illustrates how "image-consciousness"[19] operates across the thresholds of optical perception and visual imagination.

> Image-consciousness is a form of re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*), which distinguishes it from ordinary perception or presentation and places it in the same class of experiences as memory and phantasy. It is a peculiar kind of re-presentation, however, since unlike memory or phantasy, it has a foot in both the perceptual and imaginative worlds. Hence Husserl also calls it "perceptual re-presentation," "perceptual phantasy," or "physical imagination," all terms pointing to imaging's complexity. (Brough 2010, 151)

Operating in both the perceptual and the imaginative spheres image-consciousness thus marks a hybrid. It is also with regard to this state of affairs that scholars like W.J.T. Mitchell and Mieke Bal stipulate that the context in which visuality is studied be expanded *beyond* acts of visual perception. To Mieke Bal the act of seeing as "framed, framing, interpreting, affect-laden, cognitive and intellectual" is linked with other sense activities such as "listening, reading, tasting, smelling" [20] which renders them "mutually permeable."[21] She concludes that "literature, sound and music are not excluded from the object of visual culture."[22]

Summarizing Merleau-Ponty's ideas regarding the embodied nature of seeing, Stemmler argues that 'the concept of seeing cannot comprehend what occurs in the act of looking, in which the body stages its own perception.'[23] Consequently, the act of seeing has to be understood as a 'creative act' and 'poetic effort of the eye.'[24] Viewed from a phenomenological perspective, the act of reading too is a creative act. If its 'decoding springs primarily from an experience of difference, a rupture or gap opening up between signs which inhibits denomination or pronunciation,'[25] it is marked by the experience of the real as a gap or void. Mersch furthermore argues that 'the structure of aesthetic responsiveness pertains directly to the structure of alterity in perception.'[26]

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[19] Cf. Brough, John B.. "Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)." *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics.* Ed. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010, 151.

[20] Bal, Mieke. "Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture." Journal of Visual Culture. 2.5 (2003), 9.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] „Der Begriff des Sehens vermag nicht ausreichend zu fassen, was sich im Akt des Blicks ereignet, in dem der Leib die eigene Wahrnehmung zur Aufführung bringt." (Stemmler, Susanne. "Wider die Unmittelbarkeit des Visuellen. Merleau-Pontys Konzept des leibgebundenen Sehens – eine Skizze zur *visual culture* Debatte." In: Schmitz-Emans/Lehnert (eds), *Visual Culture*, 52.)

[24] „„Sehen ist vielmehr ein schöpferischer Akt, eine poetische Leistung unseres Auges." (Stemmler, Op. Cit., 52.)

[25] „Solche Entzifferungsarbeit entspringt vornehmlich einer Differenzerfahrung, dem Riß oder der Lücke, die zwischen den Zeichen klafft und sicher der Bezeichnung oder der Sagbarkeit sperrt." (Mersch, Dieter. *Ereignis und Aura: Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*. 4th ed. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2011, 28).

[26] „Zur Struktur der Alterität in der Wahrnehmung gehört demnach gleichermaßen die Struktur von »Responsivität«." (Mersch, Op. Cit., 29).

Brosch thus bases her argumentation on the premise that literary texts not only look *at* visual phenomena, but *produce* them and in so doing also uncover their epistemological assumptions and the medial frameworks informing them. Readers are keen to explore the visual space delineated in a literary text, primarily through the perspectives it lays out. According to Brosch, the dominance of a single, personal and thus epistemologically restricted perspective incites resistance in the reader, whereas a succession of different, mutually complementary perspectives is experienced as satisfying by her.[27] This supposition would help to explain the aesthetic effect of a fragmentary text like NGIS. Although Tyrewala's text delineates forty-one different perspectives, these are *spatiotemporally contiguous* so that there appear to be no phenomenal ruptures or voids, resulting in the sensation of a closed text.

But the interpretative approach proposed by Brosch is most effective as a tool with which to trace the links between particular visual techniques, perspectives and spatial outlays on the one hand, and different historic eras and their respective scopic regimes on the other. This approach has two advantages with regard to the corpus texts: On the one hand it allows for treating of the different media and scopic regimes presented in the novels as historically situated phenomena. On the other hand this allows putting 'realism', 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' as decidedly Western cultural concepts into perspective by holding them up against the visual medial regime(s) as presented in the corpus novels. These cover the late colonial to the early and late postcolonial phase in India, in other words, the time of celluloid film.

Ronja Tripp, another scholar pleading for an 'anti-essentialist conception of 'visualization'[28] takes a somewhat different approach as she does not focus the historic correlations between literary visualization and media scopic regimes. Instead she analyzes the cognitive schemata and frames that facilitate imaginative visualization in the reading process. Arguing with Fludernik that focalization requires reconceptualization, she adopts Manfred Jahn's "windows of focalization"[29] to discuss focalization as an autonomous narrative-epistemological process[30]. In her view the window metaphor is heuristically useful in so far as it includes readers' virtual position in the text as defined by perspective, as well as signalling the text-intrinsic limits of the act of focalization.

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[27] Cf. Brosch. "Weltweite Bilder, lokale Lesarten: Visualisierungen der Literatur," 62-75.

[28] "…einem anti-essentialistischen Verständnis von "Visualisierung"" (Tripp, Ronja. "Wer visualisiert? Narrative Strategien der Visualisierung als Gegenstand einer leser-orientierten kognitiven Narratologie." *Visualisierungen: Textualität - Deixis - Lektüre.* Ed. Renate Brosch and Ronja Tripp. Trier: WVT, 2007, 23.).

[29] Cf. Jahn, Manfred. "Windows of focalization: Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Narratological Concept." Style. 30.2 (1996), 241-267.

[30] Tripp."Wer visualisiert?" In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 29.

As the 'process of selection and showing', focalization thus 'marks the transition between reader/spectator and diegetic reality.' [31] At the same time the window communicates and maintains the ontic separation of subject and object, symbolized by the (virtual) glass pane. Moreover, the window marks a phenomenal metaphor with trans-medial currency. In their phenomenal study of cinema film, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener thus point out that "cinema as window and frame […] is ocular- (i.e. conditioned by optical access), transitive (one looks at something) and disembodied (the spectator maintains a safe distance)."[32] To discuss the acts of focalization presented in the novels in terms of 'windows' or 'screens' thus appears a useful approach to opening the novels up for a phenomenal reading in a visual (and) medial context.

Nonetheless, to discuss visuality and visualization in a literary context without referencing either ekphrasis or description would mean to ignore an influential scientific discourse that has produced a sizeable body of scholarly work. Euro-American aesthetic discourse and the institutional development of arts and humanities could thus be said to be encapsulated in the figure of ekphrasis. Originally designating "any verbal description of visual phenomena, including depictions of battles, plagues [...] and artefacts,"[33] ekphrasis long appeared as the primary stakeholder of the 'economy of exchange' between verbal and visual arts. Hence for Krieger ekphrasis inscribes the "semiotic desire for the natural sign,"[34] for Tripp the pursuit of *evidentia*[35]. The early modern contest of visual and verbal arts thus prepared the ground for a "history of literature [..] written as a history of its perennially conflicted response to visual art."[36]

As "*the verbal representation of visual representation*,"[37] the discussion could in fact explore the phenomena at issue under the heading of ekphrasis. Why I do not choose ekphrasis or the other obvious contender, description, thus merits discussion, not least because this may be helpful in preparing my own methodology.

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[31] „Mithin markiert diese Rahmung (der Prozess der Auswahl und des Zeigens gleichermaßen) den Übergang zwischen Leser/Betrachter und diegetischer Wirklichkeit." (Tripp, "Wer visualisiert?" In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 38).

[32] Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener. *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 14.

[33] Klarer, Mario. "Ekphrasis." Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative. Ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan. London: Routledge, 2005.

[34] Krieger, Murray. "The Semiotic Desire for the Natural Sign: Poetic Uses and Political Abuses." *The States of "Theory": History, Art and Critical Discourse*. Ed. David Carroll. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 221.

[35] Cf. Tripp, Op. Cit., 35.

[36] Heffernan, James A. W. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 2.

[37] Ibid.,3.

According to Wolf, description has *transmedial* currency[38] and functions at once as a "semiotic macro-mode[.]" and "mental concept or […] 'cognitive frame.'"[39] In his opinion Genette's famous dismissal of description as the *ancilla narrationis* [40] thus marks an empty slogan, valid only for few literary texts[41]. In the same volume Nünning argues that *Midnight's Children* evidences a kind of "metadescription" that "foreground[s] both the conventions inherent in realist modes of description and the reader's share in the act of concretization."[42] Metadescription would thus appear to commend itself as an analytical category. But here too description appears inevitably suspended between "a dominant referential, object-centred pole" [43] and "a subdominant subject-centred pole, which determines the perspective of observation."[44] However, this binary conception which differentiates neatly between the object seen and its percipient disregards the idea of a dynamic exchange and creative performance of visuality.

Gabriele Rippl sets out on her project of a "poetics of intermediality" with a study of ekphrasis. A passage evoking the layout of a shop window in minute detail is taken by the author to represent a "third category between description and ekphrasis."[45] Incidentally, her chosen example neatly fits Nünning's definition of "metadescription" as a self-conscious description, thereby documenting how analytical concepts often overlap. In so far the example buttresses Rajewsky's critique that such a proliferation of terminology is often more confusing than enlightening.[46]

This leaves me to discuss the concept of intermediality. According to Rajewsky it is a "hyperonym"[47] designating all those phenomena implying a transgression of media boundaries. Significantly she differentiates between intermediality as a *fundamental phenomenon* and as an *analytical category*.

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[38] Wolf, Werner. "Description as a Transmedial Mode of Representation: General Features and Possibilities of Realization in Painting, Fiction and Music." *Description in Literature and Other Media*. Ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007,1ff.

[39] Ibid., 8.

[40] „La description est tout naturellement *ancilla narrationis*, esclave toujours nécessaire, mais toujours soumise, jamais emancipée. » (Genette, Gerard. "Frontières du récit." Communications. 8 (1966), 157.)

[41] Wolf, Op. Cit., 23.

[42] Nünning, Ansgar. "Towards a Typology, Poetics and History of Description in Fiction." In: Wolf/Bernhart (eds.), *Description in Literature and Other Media,* 123.

[43] Wolf, Op. Cit., 26.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Rippl, Gabriele. "English Literature and Its Other: Toward a Poetics of Intermediality." In: Emden (ed), *ImageScapes,* 45.

[46] Cf. Rajewsky, Irina O.. "Intermedialität 'light'?" *Intermedium Literatur: Beiträge zu einer Medientheorie der Literaturwissenschaft*. Ed. Roger Lüdeke and Erika Greber. Gumlottingen: Wallstein, 2004. 30.

[47] Ibid., 31.

For the systemic reference of a text to 'a product of another medium, a medial subsystem or another medium where the reference is constituted *in relation* to this other medium,'[48] Rajewsky devises the category of 'intermedial reference' which also covers the the phenomena under scrutiny in this study. Yet this conceptualization, though useful, focuses mainly on the medial aspects. However, I would also like to focus the recipient/narratee, as well as the cognitive frames relevant to realizing the text imaginatively in my study. Another approach is that proposed by Volker Mergenthaler who studies literary texts for their 'perceptual discourse.'[49] Like Brosch he traces the historic evolution of media and scopic regimes through their literary manifestations. This systemic focus on perception also avoids categorical problems such as the description-narration binary, while marking the salient role of the recipient:

> 'Only as an object of visual perception may a literary text become effective in »formative socializing, historic and medial« processes of perceptual discourse – e.g. in laying open ideological contents and implications of the currently ruling perceptual practices or by inserting medial or perceptual objectives into perceptual discourse.'[50] (Mergenthaler 2002, 4)

From a narratological and linguistic viewpoint however, perceptual discourse is not operative by itself. Since most corpus novels engage with one medium in particular, there is also the question how to conceptualize the transposition of media-specific qualities onto each text. This is a problem understood and addressed by Lars Elleström. In his view the epistemological quibbles of intermediality cannot be settled for while the concept of medium remains so vague.[51] Consequently he proposes an elaborate set of modes and modalities to classify each media reference systematically. Within this systematization, each medium has a "*material modality*," a "*sensorial modality*," a "*spatiotemporal modality*" and a "*semiotic modality.*" These occupy a gamut "ranging from the tangible to the perceptual and the conceptual." Arguing that all media are expressed in *all* of the above modalities, understanding which end of the scale they occupy gives us a better idea of the manner in which media interrelate.

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[48] "Unter intermedialen Bezügen sind demnach Verfahren der Bedeutungskonstitution eines medialen Produkts, beispielsweise eben eines Textes zu verstehen, der sich mit seinen eigenen, medienspezifischen Mitteln auf ein Produkt eines anderen Mediums (Einzelreferenz), auf ein mediales Subsystem […], oder aber auf das andere Medium qua System (Systemreferenz) bezieht und sich insofern — sei es punktuell, sei es durchgehend — *in Relation* zu diesem konstituiert." (Rajewsky, "Intermedialität 'light'?" In: Lüdeke/Gräber (eds), *Intermedium Literatur*, 38)

[49] Cf. Mergenthaler, Volker. *Sehen schreiben, schreiben sehen: Literatur und visuelle Wahrnehmung im Zusammenspiel*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002, 4ff.

[50] „Erst als Gegenstand visueller Wahrnehmung vermag ein literarischer Text an Prozessen »sozialisatorischer, historischer, medialer Formung« des Wahrnehmungsdiskurses wirksam zu werden - etwa indem er ideologische Gehalte und Implikationen der jeweils herrschenden Wahrnehmungspraktiken freilegt oder indem er Medien- oder Wahrnehmungsdesiderate in den Wahrnehmungsdiskurs einspeist."

[51] Cf. Elleström, *Media borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, 2010, 11.

A focus on sense data furthermore allows Elleström to distinguish time and space as "part of the material modality." So while spatiotemporal perception has four dimensions, namely "width, height, depth and time," in pure sensation time and space may be no valid index. Consequently, the lack of time marks the difference between photography and (cinema) film so that the former can only render static images. Meaning inheres to the semiotic modality that relies on the established triad between "convention (symbolic signs), resemblance (iconic signs) and contiguity (indexical signs)." The semiotic categories are correlated also with two different modes of cognition, the "*propositional*" and the "*pictorial.*"[52]

Yet Elleström's system is not complete without the addition of two "qualifying aspects," one of which he designates "contextual", the other "operational." It is on the basis of these only that the limits of a medium are assigned, namely in terms of historically specific "practices, discourse and conventions" on the one hand, and particular conventionalized uses on the other. This may help to explain why "rather old techniques [.] are seen as new media." According to this system cinema film appears a "*qualified medi[um]*" identified not by its inherent modalities, but by its ascribed qualities.[53] On the basis of this tabulatory system Elleström furthermore differentiates between "*combination and integration*" of media, and "*mediation and transformation*" of media. For while the corpus texts participate in the latter their systemic reference is apt to showing the former practices in a historic perspective. Assuming that media sharing a number of modes are more easily and "deeply integrated," whereas those sharing few or no modes allow only for combination or a weak sort of integration,[54] it remains to be established whether and in how far the combination/integration perpetuated in the corpus texts answers to this logic.

If the above disquisition outlines a general analytical framework and renders some conceptual 'tools', the critical texts thus far discussed are not specifically concerned with intermediality or literary visuality in a postcolonial or Indian English perspective. It might therefore be instructive to review a study analyzing visual phenomena in the texts of one author: In *Salman Rushdie and Visual Culture* the authors discuss how a set of different, predominantly visual/iconic media[55] has influenced Rushdie's texts.

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[52] Cf. Elleström, *Media border*s, 15-22.

[53] In this context, Elleström refers to Lessing's assignment of spatial and temporal qualities to image and text respectively as not primarily modal and thus inherent, but as ascribed.

[54] Cf. Elleström, *Media borders,* 24-28.

[55] "There are no visual media. All media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign-types." (Mitchell, W.J.T., "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture." Journal of Visual Culture 1.2 (2002), 170. 25 Aug. 2012 <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/1/2/165>.)

Already at the outset however the editor concedes that the volume's methodology is not consonant with the 'undisciplined' approach of visual studies which it claims:

> The essays in this volume might be critiqued for their 'textualism' and endeavor to 'read' pictures. In defense of this approach, it is an inescapable fact that Rushdie enters into dialogue with visuality on reading terms. The idea of reading is admittedly central to this volume. This dialogue might thus be seen as an enduring manifestation of the linguistic turn and still a long way from W.J.T. Mitchell's 'pictorial turn.' However, following the undisciplining legacy of cultural studies, the work compiled in this volume attempts to surpass restrictive discursive frameworks discourses [sic!], specifically those that reside between literary and visual arts. (Mendes 2012, 8f)

A caveat thus emerges here which is instructive for present study. In keeping with the postcolonial tendency to "constantly interrogate[.] definitions of territories and identities,"[56] Mendes claims an interdisciplinary approach while the separate discussion of each medium in the volume seems to affirm, rather than to transcend these boundaries. In Mendes' volume a cumulative, diachronic methodo-logic thus often seems to prevail over the synchronic, inter- or cross-medial and interdisciplinary approach aimed at by the editor. Following discussion consequently focuses the media-technological, epistemological and sociocultural links and overlaps between photography, cinema film and VR/MR, in order to avoid creating the impression that these evolved in a vacuum of sorts. Yet if F, TBM and TLJEL evince a profound media-philosophical and culture anthropological dimension, the aesthetic and philosophical traditions informing the latter demand addressing too.

2.1 AESTHETICS AND POETICS IN AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The following section which explores two concepts of Indian aesthetic philosophy not only attempts to ground the subsequent readings, however loosely, in an Indian aesthetic and theoretical framework. Instead it aims at establishing conceptual and theoretical parallels and conjunctures between the latter and the scholarly apparatus and critical discourses discussed thus far. This brief foray into Indian philosophy is also meant to shed light on the relation between between art and the senses, art and the body in Indian philosophy. For that reason I have purposely chosen the related concepts of *dhvani* and *rasa*, both of which address aesthetic reception and mark the elementary role of the senses and affect in the reception of art, including literary texts. [57]

[56] Guignery, Vanessa. ""Step Across This Line": Edges and Borders in Contemporary Indian Literature." Études Anglaises. 62 (2009), 306.

[57] Rasa and dhvani notably form part of a much larger philosophical corpus and critical apparatus. However, it is not within the scope of this study to discuss the latter in summary fashion.

> *Dhvani* makes us see the totality unlike in pragmatic experience where only appearance is taken into account. *Dhvani* shows through appearance what the reality is, through what appears, what is; through becoming, being is revealed; through *bhavati, asti* is revealed. (Amaladass 1984, 90)

The above conceptualization of the reception of an artwork as a being revealed in becoming sounds familiar. Indeed it is not unique to Indian aesthetic philosophy, but resonates with Adorno's observations on the reception of the visual artwork as an inherently unstable and dynamic entity, experienced by the recipient as the continuous oscillation between movement and fixed form[58]. Notably however, the focus of dhvani as described by Amaladass is not on the head and, by extension, on the intellect, but on the senses and the body as the interface between the artwork and the mind[59]. Viewed from a phenomenological perspective, dhvani thus has 'corporeal' appeal.

Moreover, dhvani marks "an attempt to realize the Supra-real and to give form to the formless, and to paint the Infinite on a finite canvas."[60] In bypassing the conventional modes of expression, the artwork can attempt to give the Supra-real form, a form which is suggestive and allusive. In the account of H.L. Sharma "[*a*]*ll Indian art is – even the graphic – of the musical or sound-form.*"[61] This would appear to undermine present study's argumentation. With regard to Elleström's system it is the *spatiotemporal* modality that structures sensation in music and defines it musical quality. Perhaps it is this spatiotemporal dimension – as well as the immediate, affective impact of music – we thus need to look out for in the corpus novels.

The fact that TLJEL presents devotional songs, mantras and bhajans besides its numerous photographs, highlights the need to adopt a broader, *synaesthetic* perspective, rather than focusing only on the visual sense. But if dhvani encapsulates the idea of "evocation,"[62] this introduces the question, *what* it evokes. In other words, how is the effect of this sensual stimulus upon the recipient conceptualized. This is where another salient concept of Indian aesthetic philosophy comes in – *rasa*.

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[58] "Die Dynamik, die jedes Kunstwerk in sich verschließt, ist sein Sprechendes. Eine der Paradoxien der Werke ist, daß sie, dynamisch in sich, überhaupt fixiert sind, während sie nur durch Fixierung zu Kunstwerken objektiviert werden. Wie sie denn, je insistenter man sie betrachtet, um so paradoxer werden: jedes Kunstwerk ist ein System von Unvereinbarkeit. […] Sprachähnlich wird das Kunstwerk im Werden der Verbindung seiner Elemente, eine Syntax ohne Worte noch in sprachlichen Gebilden." (Adorno, Theodor W. *Ästhetische Theorie.* Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. 14th ed. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998, 274.)

[59] Amaladass, Anand S. J. *Philosophical implications of dhvani: Experience of symbol language in Indian aesthetics*. Wien: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1984, 79ff.

[60] Sharma, H.L.. *Indian Aesthetics and Aesthetic Perspectives*. Meerut: Mansi Prakashan, 1990, 57.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Amaladass, Op. Cit.

> *Dhvani* proper comes into play between the evocative language of the poet and the aesthetic sensibility of the reader. The relationship between the two conditions the scope of *dhvani.* The poet's expression, however powerful it is to evoke *rasa,* is not without limitations. […] The same expression can elicit different evocations from different readers depending on their background. But this does not mean that the reader's power to realise *rasa* is unlimited. […]. The nature of language used by the poet sets limit to the imagination of the reader and the reader's sensibility limits the evocative power of language. (Amaladass 1984, 114)

Although Nair emphasizes that "[t]he concept of *rasadhvani* is unique to Sanskrit poetics" and that "[n]o theory in the West is comparable to it,"[63] this conceptualization of literary reception as an interactive process epistemologically delimited by both text and recipient is consonant with reception theory as delineated by Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser. But what *is* rasa and what is its function? When Tabish Khair overwrites some of the chapters in his novel F with "Rasa Heroic", "Rasa Erotic" etc., this may have more than symbolic relevance. Ram Adhar Mall accounts for rasa and dhvani as central aesthetic concepts introduced in Bharata Muni's Nāṭyaśāstra which "encompasses all that belongs to the Indian tradition of art and aesthetics"[64] and which dates back to the "second century BCE."[65] In this treatise the rasas represent "eight primordial aesthetic emotional states,"[66] namely the "erotic (*shringara*), comic (*hasya*), compassionate (*karuna*), furious (*raudra*), heroic (*vira*), terrifying (*bhayanaka*), disgusting (*bibhatsa*), and awesome or wondrous (*adbhuta*)."[67]

And while these moods or states may be invoked separately, e.g. in Indian folk theatre by using the gestures and facial expressions adequate to them, their effective combination to achieve *shantarasa* marks a paramount aim. It is a "state of equilibrium"[68] and in so far recalls the Greek concept of catharsis. However, "[s]ince Indian philosophical thought tries to combine a way of thought with a way of life, it deliberately does not exclude the religio-spiritual dimension of emancipatory aesthetic experience,"[69] — a fact of some consequence for the discussion of the texts. Notably popular Indian cinema has been related to rasa theory[70]. However, in the eyes of Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel such

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[63] Nair, Rama. *Indian Theories of Language: A Literary Approach*. Hyderabad: Cauvery Publications, 1990, 6f.

[64] Tripathi, Radhavallabh. *Nāṭyaśāstra and the Indian dramatic tradition.* New Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts/Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2012, xiii.

[65] Ibid., xiv.

[66] Mall, Ram Adhar. "India and Intercultural Aesthetics." In: Sepp/Embree (eds), *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, 163.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Mall, Op. Cit., 164.

[70] Cf. Dwyer, Rachel and Divia Patel. *Cinema India. The Visual Culture of Hindi Film.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 28.

reasoning has mostly been unconvincing[71]. It seems worthwhile in any case to study the moods or affects provoked in the texts and particularly in their visually aestheticized passages closely. *Dhvani* on the other hand has heuristic purchase for cross- or inter-medial references in so far as evocation represents a phenomenon occurring *across* all media and genres, thus linking the different domains of experience and media/artistic practice as Herman points out:

> Thus, rather than being treated as part of an autonomous domain of practice that can be cordoned off and compartmentalized […] aesthetic experiences need to be understood as part of the broader ecology or environment of human experiences from which they emerge and toward which they reflexively redirect our attention in new ways ([...]). From this perspective the sharp division between the fine arts and the productive crafts, for example, can be questioned ([..])—just as the pleasure and engagement afforded by literary narratives can re-integrated with a broader array of narrative pleasures and engagements, all stemming from the way storytelling practices are anchored in human experiences. (Herman 2012, 174)

Assuming that every new aesthetic experience is shaped by previous encounters and that the visual arts draw on an established, culturally specific inventory of stories, motifs and icons, the scope for future transformations and aesthetic 'slippages' is mapped by the affective appeal and structural amenability of this inventory to other media and artistic contexts. In order to map the semiotic and culture anthropological dimension of meaning charted in the texts, the following discussion posits an informed reader aware of the cultural codes, symbols and tropes manifest in the corpus texts. This is not to suggest that the analysis can exhaustively discuss these, but to ensure that the specifically Indian dimension of the texts' aesthetics is adequately accounted for.

Notably neither photography nor cinema film were native to India. Yet the manner in which these technologies were immediately adopted and adapted after they arrived on the subcontinent, bespeaks a powerful and resilient cultural and artistic tradition[72]. Another remarkable fact is the enduring popularity of certain narrative patterns, motifs and figures across the board, i.e. in literature, popular movies, drama, arts and crafts, most of which are informed by or derived from Hindu mythology. Pauwels documents this observation in her study of Indian cinema:

> In India the connection between film and literary classics/scripture was evident from the start and has endured till the present time. This is most obviously true for the cinema's link with the classical epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*. One of the earliest Indian feature films, Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913, remade in 1917), was based on a legend included in the *Mahābhārata*. This inaugurated a persistent trend of epic-derived film. (Pauwels 2007, 4)

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[71] Dwyer/Patel, *Cinema India*, 28.

[72] Cf. Pinney, "Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures." In: Dwyer/Pinney (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation*, 27f.

Of course European and American film makers also adopted mythological and or religious narratives during the nascent stage of cinema[73]. However, the composition of the epics and Puranas[74] with their large casts and complex plotlines is still marked in contemporary popular film, but it is also reflected in the tradition of the Indian English novel, notably but not only in its postmodern, Rushdean version[75]. The above discussed tendencies are thus consonant with the evolutionary logic of cinema outlined by Elleström:

> Cinema, like other new media, borrowed aesthetic and communicative characteristics belonging to old media, and although the first films also had distinct communicative and aesthetic characteristics, of course, it took a while before the many qualifying characteristics of the mediated content developed into recognizable media forms. Eventually, there came to be two notions attached to the same term: cinema as a set of techniques and cinema as a multifaceted qualified medium developed within the frames of, but not determined by, the technical aspects. (Elleström 2010, 25)

Whether and how this process of borrowing becomes manifest in the texts, remains to be analyzed. Another tenuous genealogical link may be traced between photography and portrait painting. It is mainly from the latter that the former derived its iconography[76]. Perhaps the most curious and interesting sign of painting's resilience as a cultural technique becomes evident in the tradition of over-painting photo portraits, practiced from the mid-nineteenth century right up to the 1990s and 2000s[77]. Deepali Dewan concludes that "painted photographs are […] part of a transcultural image-making practice" [78] documenting how "[p]hotographic technology became incorporated into, and changed from within, existing image-making practices in South Asia."[79]

I hold the 'ambiguating' practice of portrait painting to be symptomatic of Indian artistic and media practice in so far as technology, often deemed the primary and ultimate determinant, is subordinated to established artistic practices, tastes and quotidian uses in this case. In the above reported cases the established tradition and new technology do not merely co-exist but augment each other, rendering their borders permeable, even obsolete.

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[73] Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* or Lang's *The Nibelungen* are two well-known cases in point.

[74] Simply put, the Puranas are a cycle of stories relating to the heroes and divinities of the Hindu pantheon. According to Thapar, "[t]the category of purāṇa refers to that which is believed to be of the ancient past". They are texts which "record the religious beliefs and practices associated with a particular deity." (Thapar, Romila. "The Purāṇas. Heresy and the 'Vaṃśānucarita'." *Ancient to Modern. Religion, Power, and Community in India*. Ed. Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Saurabh Dube. New Delhi: OUP, 2009, 28.)

[75] *Midnight's Children* but also Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* or Narayan's Malgudi novels are cases in point.

[76] Cf. Mitter, Partha. "The Dawn of Photography in India: A Complex Legacy of the Photographic Studio." *The Artful Pose: Early Studio Photography in Mumbai, 1855-1940*. Ed. Partha Mitter and Tasneen Zakaria Mehta. Ahmedabad: Mapin. 2010, 9.

[77] Cf. Dewan, Deepali and Olga Zotova. *Embellished reality. Indian painted photographs. Towards a transcultural history of photography*. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum Press, 2012, 46-119.

[78] Dewan, Deepali, "The Painted Photograph in India." In: Dewan/Zotova (eds.), *Embellished Reality*, 16f.

[79] Ibid.

The fluidity and interpenetration of technology, artistic practice and mythology becomes strikingly obvious in 'Raja' Ravi Varma's work as a painter. While his oil paintings "were elaborately dependent on photographic referents,"[80] the finished paintings were "photographically reproduced […] before serving as prototypes for the outpouring of chromolithographs produced in Bombay in 1894."[81] The 'migration' of the Ravi Varma aesthetic concludes as his "voluptuous [.] object world leaves its unmistakable mark on many late 20th- and 21st-century televisual products."[82] It is in this dynamic artistic-aesthetic field that the corpus texts are embedded and within which they have to be discussed, all the while focusing the specific historic juncture(s) at which they are set.

2.2 AN ANALYTICAL SKETCH

The forgoing discussion in which many diverse concepts and theories were reviewed was aimed at delimiting the study's analytical scope while assembling theories and concepts from literary theory, aesthetics, phenomenology and visual culture to establish how and in how far these can be mutually illuminating. After surveying the territory in which present enquiry moves, the concluding section is meant to render some viable tools for the ensuing text analyses. The following pages consequently map an analytical trajectory for the texts, based on the following premises: First of all, the aesthetic text and particularly the *visual texture* are supposed to respond to an innate desire for seeing/the figural acknowledged. Secondly, the reader as narratee is complicit in producing the visual, nowhere so overtly as in the visual textures as passages evoking processes of perception and/or images. Thirdly, the narratee's imagination of these is constrained by the text's intrinsic frames.

To discern these frames or schemata and their impact upon the narratee as *implied spectator* is thus the foremost aim of the following analyses. These constraints are understood to be not only cognitive and narratological however. They at once bespeak specific pictorial, media specific and epistemological frameworks and regimes and thus stand representative of a particular visual culture. But how precisely does the textual positioning affect imag(in)ing psychologically? How is one perspective authorized and another marginalized or negated? In *Culture and the Real* Belsey makes a number of observations pertinent to these questions:

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[80] Pinney, Christopher. "Mechanical Reproduction in India." *Art and Visual Culture in India, 1857-2007*. Ed. Gayatri Sinha. Mumbai: Marg Publications. 2009, 75.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

> Perspective gives, then, and it takes away. It gives the miracle of a simulated reality so palpable that we might be there, and in the process installs us as viewing subjects sovereign over all we survey. At the same time, perspective narrows that reality to a moment already lost (or, just possibly, in the future), so that, conversely, we cannot be there. Is there thus a sense in which it also takes *us* away, subtracts the viewer from the viewing process? (Belsey 2005, 100)

Here Belsey implicitly affirms the idea of the text as window in so far as everything is laid out before the reader, thereby simulating a sovereign, stable gaze. However, the 'seeing subject is rarely in a position of total stasis and looks with one eye at a scene in front of her.'[83] Moreover, the pastness of the moment confirms the experience of the real as a void. In so far focalization also provides information about the epistemological and subject psychological impact of the 'window'. Focalization is thus understood here as a trigger of imaginative visualization, a dynamic 'framing' and as a phenomenal interface between reader and diegetic reality[84]. Consequently, its cognitive-phenomenal impact is here conceptualized with Bal by the function of the *implied spectator.*

> Theoretically, each agent addresses a receiver located on the same plane: the actor addresses another actor, the focalizer addresses a "spectator"—the indirect object of the focalizing—and the narrator addresses a hypothetical reader. In some texts these receivers are referred to explicitly, like the reader in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, in others they remain implied. In either case, the only way to comprehend how narrative communication functions is to distinguish among these receivers. (Bal 2004, 273)

The implied spectator may seem an unnecessary supplement, yet it allows for conceptualizing the cognitive-phenomenal impact of focalization *independently* of the narratee, for while the empirical and ideal reader are not viable as heuristic constructs here. This approach allows for discussing focalization also where an anthropomorphic focalizing agency or figural reflector appears absent, as is the case in a number of passages in TBM, TLJEL and F. By interpolating such a hypothetical construct, the effect of focalization can moreover be established regardless of the factors constraining focalization on the side of the recipient. However, the implied spectator remains a heuristic construct that cannot measure the actual, subjective impact of a given visual text(ure) or text image. Instead, it delimits its phenomenal-epistemological scope.

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[83] „Kaum je befindet sich ein sehendes Subjekt in absoluter Ruhe und schaut mit einem Auge auf eine vor ihm liegende Szene." (Brosch, "Visualisierungen in der Leseerfahrung." In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen,* 63.)

[84] „Mithin markiert diese Rahmung (der Prozess der Auswahl und des Zeigens gleichermaßen) den Übergang zwischen Leser/Betrachter und diegetischer Wirklichkeit." (Tripp, "Wer visualisiert?" In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 38).

In so far however as "a text cannot force a reader to experience a narrative world," [85] this construct is nonetheless serviceable in studying the visual-aesthetic structures and 'windows' of the corpus texts. But how does the implied focalizer's agency tell on the text where it *lacks* all markers of subjectivity, as in the *camera eye style*? Also Chatman is intrigued by the epistemological-narratological implications of the latter:

> That the camera depicts but does not describe seems confirmed by a term often used by literary critics to characterize neutral, "non-narrated" Hemingwayesque fiction – the *camera eye* style. The implication of "camera eye" is that no one recounts the events of, for example, "The Killers": they are just *revealed*, as if some instrument – some cross between a video tape recorder and speech synthesizer – had recorded visually and then translated those visuals into the most neutral kind of language. (Chatman 1981, 124)

The camera eye style (CES) thus relies on a dual illusion, the textual illusion of transparency and the camera's purported transparency. However, both are authored. It remains to be seen how and in how far passages affiliated more or less closely with the CES reflect subjectivity/agency and more importantly, what the use of such a mode of representation tells us about the novel's underlying epistemological regime. In its marked artificiality, CES lucidly illustrates how much our perception and imagination are configured by visual apparati. It would seem that because of its ostensibly 'neutral' language, CES gives the implied spectator most freedom, an assumption to be checked against the evidence. In brief, given the diverse visualization strategies deployed in the corpus texts and literature's capacity to dispose of and mobilize different scopic regimes, the implied spectator seems suited to preparing the ground for the novels' aesthetic-epistemological discussion.

However, this does not mean that the social, cultural and psychological frameworks determining visualization are not relevant to the discussion. On the contrary, the narrating agency and/or protagonists provide vital clues as to the psychological and socio-cultural frameworks giving the visuals sociocultural significance. From a narratological viewpoint, the spatiotemporal position and ideological disposition of the narrating agency by itself *and* vis-à-vis the focalizing agency/agencies merit particular scrutiny as they give important evidence about the phenomenal-aesthetic and psychological scope of the text. Hence their identity/overlap or divergence has a salient impact upon the latter. The fact that all corpus texts posit autodiegetic narrating agencies whose views are complemented by reflector figures and/or other, partly anonymous focalizing agencies seems particularly salient in this context.

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[85] Gerrig, Richard J.. *Experiencing Narrative Worlds. On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 5.

To my mind this bespeaks a will towards both an authentic, personal and *verisimilar* representation. In this context the question of perspective arises: Where the text produces multiple perspectives, their homo- or heterogeneity, reliability, representativeness and authority decide, whether and how these are adopted[86]. But perspective is also inevitably tied to the question of locality. Brosch accordingly distinguishes mono-, bi- or polylocal texts[87]. Perspective changes consequently also effect a shift in the deictic centre[88], i.e., the central position in relation to which all else is constituted. In the following discussion the deictic centre is conceptualized as a virtual standpoint orienting imaginative visualization.

An example seems expedient here: For TLJEL the photo room, each of the images of which allows the central narrating agency Paresh Bhatt to 'travel' to the locales and moments represented in them, marks both the deictic *and* epistemological centre. As such it is suited to holding together a text effecting many perspective shifts. In so far, the logic of the (photographic) image prevails over spatiotemporal continuity here. In NGIS on the other hand, the high frequency of perspective shifts effects a continuous dislocation, albeit without inciting a corollary sensation of disorientation. Tyrewala's text then tests the limits of perspective, hence the analysis has to look for signs of narrative or aesthetic counter-strategies.

In search of an approach to studying the perceptual mode[89] of world-making in the corpus novels, the discussion turns to Brosch again. In her view, the equal information level of reader and focalizer is far more important in determining readers' imaginative reaction to the text, than the anthropomorphic entities determining narrative discourse. If it is 'seeing and perception itself and not the figure of the focalizer, which is visualized more clearly by readers'[90] as Brosch maintains, we need to focus the different qualities and intensities of looking. Adopting Norman Bryson's dyad of the *gaze* and *glance* as modes of textual appropriation, Brosch proceeds to map their epistemological premises and psychological effect.

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[86] Cf. Nünning, Vera and Ansgar Nünning. "Multiperspektivität aus narratologischer Sicht: Erzähltheoretische Grundlagen und Kategorien zur Analyse der Perspektivenstruktur narrativer Texte." *Multiperspektivisches Erzählen:Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Perspektivenstruktur im englischen Roman des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts*. Trier: WVT, 2000, 54.

[87] Brosch, Renate. "Visualisierungen in der Leseerfahrung: Fokalisierung - Perspektive - Blick." In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 66.

[88] „Perspektivwechsel erzwingen einen Transfer des Visualisierungsstandpunkts bzw. des „deictic centre"." (Brosch, Op.Cit., 66.)

[89] „Wahrnehmungsmodi" (Cf. Brosch, Op.Cit., 47.)

[90] „Und es ist dieses Sehen und Wahrnehmen selbst und nicht die Figur des Fokalisierers, was Leser in den meisten Fällen deutlicher visualisieren." (Brosch, Op.Cit., 59.)

Hence if the gaze marks an attempt at dominating the seen and submitting it to universal standards of normativity, the glance is more subversive in so far as it facilitates reciprocation. And while the glance signals kinesis and is in flux, the gaze means stasis[91]. To establish the visual-epistemological configuration at a given point, I correlate gaze and glance loosely with different descriptive situations as mapped by Philippe Hamon:

> Two possibilities are especially common: (a) a stationary character (leaning on something, lying down, squatting, sitting, standing motionless) before a panorama or an object which is moving or changing; (b) a moving character (walking, visiting, a tourist, an explorer) observing a fixed but complex scene (a street, a landscape, a monument, a flat). (Hamon 2004, 312)

Evidently the two modalities sketched above can be directly correlated with the literary traditions of realism and modernism respectively[92]. If the glance is furtive in so far as it forestalls domination and appropriation, instead turning the look back upon its source, this modality of vision would seem ideally suited to postcolonial texts. However, it remains to be seen in how far this dyadic conception of looking is applicable to the Indian visual cultural context as represented in the novels. This approach in any case opens up the subterranean psychological and power-political charge of the act of looking, which is salient to the postcolonial cultural and historic (con-)text.

The psychological charge of looking is also salient where the text does not provide much in the way of visual data, description etc. – in other words, where gaps prevail and the focus is on the interior world as is the case in NGIS. As a "multiperspective narration[.]"[93] couched in a „multi-narrator novel[.],"[94] the text is marked by countless gaps. As a discipline devoted to the study of gaps and voids, it thus seems worthwhile to adopt psychoanalysis and integrate it with narrative analysis.

> To interpret "psychoanalytically" would then mean to fill in the gaps that the text signals by its distortions, its incoherencies, and its violations of the rules of the implied systems; gaps on which we confer a meaning that explains their status as gaps. For the narrative text is not only an assertion. Like the text of analysis, it is also a product of, as well as an occasion for, transference. (Bal 1991, 147)

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[91] Brosch, "Visualisierungen in der Leseerfahrung." In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 75ff.

[92] Cf. Brosch, "Weltweite Bilder, lokale Lesarten." In: Schmitz-Emans/Lehnert (eds.), *Visual Culture,* 67-73.

[93] Cf. Nünning/Nünning,"Multiperspektivität aus narratologischer Sicht." In: Nünning/Nünning (eds.), *Multiperspektivisches Erzählen,* 42.

[94] Ibid.

Linking the above ideas with Brosch's supposition that reading is driven by readers' intrinsic 'scopic drive'[95] that cues readers to seek and occupy as many different perspectives as possible, I argue that it is this scopic drive which renders the experience of reading such a notoriously 'gappy' text as NGIS satisfying. Precisely because they invite readers to 'jump in' and form hypotheses, gaps are elementary to the process of visualization, as is kinesis or movement. The effects and impliciations of gapping and kinesis will thus be studied in depth in the following reading of NGIS. But the texts comprise not only of gaps but also of their opposite – points of visual excess at which visual data and stimuli coincide. As noted earlier these will be addressed as 'visual textures' since this term evokes both a visually-aesthetically engaging surface and the integration of different narratological, linguistic and cognitive-schematic 'threads' into a more or less smooth textual fabric. It is also inclusive as it encompasses the minute description of a photograph, as well as a highly schematic camera eye passage on the other. Above all, the concept of visual texture implies that these textures serve as *interfaces* between the text as a sequence of discrete signs and the senses, memory and affect.

But while they may focus and spur the visual-aesthetic reading of a text, visual textures are not the only passages that demand to be considered. Therefore their analysis has to be complemented by an in-depth study of the narrative at large. When and where the texts shift attention from the '*what*' to the '*how*', thereby drawing attention to their spatiotemporal dimension, rather than their visual content, it is the former we need to focus. But determining visuality cognitively and structurally is fraught with problems. As Hampe points out, to date there is no "set of clear-cut criteria to set image-schematic representations apart from other basic or schematic concepts."[96] The original supposition that "image schemas are both *internally structured*, i.e. made up of very few related parts, and highly *flexible*"[97] prevails however. Among "the core of the standard inventory"[98] reported among others by Lakoff and Johnson, is the following, basic list comprising of "CONTAINMENT/CONTAINER, PATH/SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, LINK, PART-WHOLE, CENTER-PERIPHERY, BALANCE."[99]

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[95] „Die Vorliebe für eine weite Überschau entspringt einem Bedürfnis nach Erkenntnis, Wissen und Wahrheit. Wir besitzen eine inhärente Neigung, unsere Perspektive zu entgrenzen, im Leseerlebnis favorisieren wir den allwissenden Überblick, […]." (Brosch, "Visualisierungen in der Leseerfahrung." In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 65.)

[96] Hampe, Beate. "Image schemas in Cognitive Linguistics: Introduction." *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics*. Ed. Beate Hampe and Joseph E. Grady. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005, 3.

[97] Ibid., 2.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

Notably, all of these either imply a frame or a spatial trajectory. In contrast to cognitive image schemata, description marks a well-documented phenomenon, particularly where literary texts are concerned. As a central frame or schema, description is premised upon a "'branching metonymy'" [100] which features a "global introductory theme (IT)" that automatically "triggers a series of sub-themes, a vocabulary (V) whose constituents bear the relation of metonymic inclusion with the IT."[101] This can be 'filled in' imaginatively by the reader so that the imaginative realization depends on the range, diversity and depth of the cognitive schemata available to her, employed on the basis of idealization[102].

Media in their turn shape particular perceptual schemata during reception. These may then be devised in and applied to other perceptual and/or media contexts. Drawing upon Rancière, I propose conceiving of the phenomenal structure and particularities of a given medium here as a *sensorium*,[103] a term he uses in the context of cinema but which encompasses the phenomenal and cognitive-psychological structures of a medium addressing readers through the text. In other words, a sensorium is a way of *experiencing* and *imagining* that can be mobilized in different contexts. As recipient of the visual (-medial) stimuli and 'projections' of the texts the narratee is interpellated by this sensorium in both the cognitive and psychological sense. Interpellation is elementary to both textual and visual/cinematic discourse as Silverman points out:

> Althusser, Benveniste, and the theoreticians of suture all argue that it is only through discourse that ideological identifications occur, and that the subject emerges. They also agree that discourse can be activated only through subjects who permit themselves to be spoken by it.
>
> We have seen that the match of subject and cinematic discourse occurs not just at the level of the shot, but at that of the story—that films re-interpellate the viewer into pre-established discursive positions not only by effacing the signs of their own production, but through the lure of narrative. (Silverman 1984, 220f)

Silverman's theorization of suture will therefore play an instrumental role in the text discussion, most notably of NGIS. Owing to Althusser's conceptualization of the term within his theory of the ideological state apparatuses however, interpellation has an inevitably political ring not altogether irrelevant in present context.

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[100] Hamon, Phillippe. "What is a description?" *Narrative Theory. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Mieke Bal. Vol. 1. London: Routledge, 2004, 321.

[101] Ibid.

[102] "The term idealization will refer to this process of 'application,' where a referent spatial entity is conceptually idealized in terms of a schema applied to it. Idealization thus includes the process by which familiar objects, in all their bulk and physicality, are differentially 'boiled down' to match ascribed schemas." (Talmy, Leonard. "How Language Structures Space." *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader*. Ed. Vyvyan Evans, Benjamin K. Bergen and Jörg Zinken. London: Equinox, 2007, 801f.)

[103] Cf. Rancière, Jacques. "Re-Visions: Remarks on the Love of Cinema. An Interview by Oliver Davis." Journal of Visual Culture 10.3 (2011), 295. 22 Nov. 2012. <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/10/3/294>.

The culturally and nationally specific configuration of the (mass) media addressed here thus marks a salient part of the novels' discussion. Consequently, the sensorium is understood to also code the communal and cultural configuration of medial vision because interpellation is effected on the basis of schemata common to a viewing community. The sometimes opaque and sometimes highly obtrusive figuration of well-known Hindi/Bengali films and/or their epigones marking F and TBM thus interpellates the participants of a particular viewing community. Nonetheless, the contextual information provided and universal appeal of the cinematic sensorium also allows the uninitiated reader to enjoy the texts.

Summarizing the preceding remarks, the specific blend of phenomena presented in the corpus novels demands an integrative approach that complements an aesthetic reading with a narratological, cognitive, media-theoretical and psychological discussion. I argue that the theoretical framework of visual culture accommodates and sustains all these approaches, while providing a footing for their execution. Assuming that "the object of visual culture can be distinguished from object-defined disciplines such as art history and film studies through the centrality of visuality as the 'new' object,"[104] it is vital to analyze the frames and implications of visualization from a variety of angles, in order to do justice to the systemic nature of visuality. Nonetheless, in his plea for visual culture/visual studies[105] Mitchell concedes that it is a "'dangerous supplement,'" [106] the primary virtue (and drawback) of which is that it opens up a potentially unlimited field of inquiry[107]. In aiming at an open, multi-level discussion this study consequently has to avoid compiling an ultimately incoherent text.

However, if "interdisciplinary study consists of *creating* a new object *that belongs to no one*"[108] as Bal argues, present study cannot fulfill this stipulation in so far as literary visuality has long since been appropriated and fruitfully debated in a variety of disciplines. Moreover, the study remains firmly grounded in the literary practice of reading and analyzing texts. Yet it can shed new light on an all too familiar phenomenon, using literary/narratological analysis as a 'primer' for a phenomenological, media-theoretical/-historic and visual cultural debate.

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[104] Bal, Mieke, "Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture." Journal of Visual Culture. 2.5 (2003), 9. 3 Dec. 2014 <http://vcu.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/2/1/5>

[105] I adopt the former term "because it is less neutral than visual studies, and commits one from the outset to a set of hypotheses that need to be tested […]." (Mitchell, W.J.T. "Showing seeing: a critique of Visual Culture." Journal of Visual Culture. 1.2 (2002), 166. 4 Dec. 2014 <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/1/2/165>).

[106] Ibid., 165.

[107] Ibid., 167.

[108] Bal, Op. Cit., 7.

That said the observed suffusion of the textual fabric with visual textures and effects must be answered by a four-pronged analysis addressing the (reception) aesthetic, narratological, media-theoretical and visual cultural phenomena as they arise from the novels. After these propaedeutic remarks I would like to stress that the following disquisition does not see itself as a text image study tendering old wine in new, postcolonial bottles because the novel's visual discourse is set on multiple levels, resulting in fluctuating rather than stable visual intensities. Secondly, the texts highlight their extensive and creative borrowing from a long and dynamic cultural tradition and media/artistic practice, thus opening up a rich field for a media historic and culture anthropological debate.

Within the latter the ideas and theories of seeing, visuality and image formed in the context of Western philosophy and epistemology may not always hold or demand extension. Concepts such as that of spectatorship might require critical revision in the specific historic and medial context(s) sketched in the texts[109]. Moreover, the short synopses indicate that the texts do not simply invite and authorize the gaze for the reader to wield, but deflect and inflect it in different ways. Only a discussion that does not determine its object from the start thus seems suited to tracing the ways in which texts allude to and circle the experience of the real in the phenomenal realm. "In granting the primacy of the object,"[110] as Bahri reminds us, "critical aesthetics obliges us to instate alterity as beyond instrumental reason and thus beyond the limiting terms of exchange value in a world of commodities."[111]

Assuming that the novels' 'tryst with visuality' simultaneously marks their passionate interest in and attempt to come to terms with the multi-headed Hydra of 'modernity', the following readings attempt to work their way right into the midst of the "eternal chakravyuha, this whirling circle that is life itself."[112] In this way the study ultimately aims to show that "[i]t's not that the real is lost, but that it comes to us under a variety of possible descriptions, through a variety of different media, to serve a variety of interests and uses."[113]

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[109] The fifth and sixth chapter will address the complexities of cinematic and religious spectatorship in the context of early and pre-/post-Partition cinema.

[110] Bahri, *Native Intelligence*, 109.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Chandra, Vikram. "The Cult of Authenticity." Boston Review 1 Feb. 2000. 1 Dec. 2014. <http://www.bostonreview.net/vikram-chandra-the-cult-of-authenticity>.

[113] Engström/Selinger, "Reinventing Sight." In: Engström/Selinger (eds), *Rethinking Theories and Practices of Imaging*, 24.

3. NO GOD IN SIGHT

> *So NGIS captures a direct, maybe naïve, but non-intellectual rendition of a city space that I knew most intimately. I would say that any social space is extremely complex and demands an abandonment of traditional categories. Every place can be rendered in a ground-breaking manner, it just has to be experienced intensely enough. That's something I am always trying to do: to ensure that form dictates content, and never the other way round.* (Tyrewala 2013)[1]

If citing an author's opinion à propos her text may seem a departure from the established protocols of literary enquiry in which authorial opinion is largely an absence, the above quote nonetheless offers a stimulating exposition to *No God in Sight* (2005), the literary debut of Altaf Tyrewala. The idea that "the dense particulars of perception can be made luminous to thought" [2] and even give rise to a radical literary recreation may appear naïve to a critic like Barthes[3]. The author's stated desire to break up the surface of the familiar and quotidian bespeaks a romantic sensualism at odds with postmodern notions of the subject. As Jameson reminds us, "[t]he disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal *style*, engender the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche."[4] At first sight however, pastiche also appears to be the structural principle upon which the text of NGIS rests.

While feted by reviewers and critics, it remains to be seen how and in how far NGIS meets its aim of jettisoning the dead weight of literary history to forge a radically new, contemporary idiom. Its brevity and 'bite-sized' chapters in any case reflect an acute awareness of the reading habits and limited attention span of contemporary readers[5]. But Tyrewala's mission statement also reverberates with the echo of postcolonial critical debates regarding questions of representation and authenticity. The author does not shirk these issues, but consciously engages with the subaltern experience and the challenge of representing it. The text is extraordinary not only because of its brevity—it counts hundred and seventy-one pages—but because of its astounding number of characters and narrators.

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[1] Written correspondence with the author, 8 June 2013.

[2] Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, 17.

[3] "True, I can today select such and such mode of writing, and in so doing assert my freedom, aspire to the freshness of novelty or to a tradition; but it is impossible to develop within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own." (Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero. Elements of Semiology*. London: Vintage Classic, 2010, 23.)

[4] Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or The cultural logic of late capitalism." *The Jameson Reader.* Ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Oxford: Blackwell. 2000, 201.

[5] Cf. Assmann, Aleida. "The Shaping of Attention by Cultural Frames and Media Technology." In: Emden/Rippl (eds.), *ImageScapes,* 21ff.

NGIS introduces no less than forty-one characters who serve as centers of consciousness[6]. Their interior monologues vary in length between half a page and ten pages and are interspersed by typographic gaps. It is these gaps also that determine the recipient's interaction with the text. But the text is also economic with words, hence its prose appears discreet to the point of frugality. And while the scope of human experience represented is broad as human existence and suffering are shown in all their shades, the straightforwardly linear narrative structure places the emphasis on the content, rather than on the form.

The manner in which this metropolitan panopticon arrives at readers' cognitive threshold is both compelling and unusual since the monologues are compiled as fleeting portraits or psychological snapshots presented without narrative mediation. In this way their sensual worldliness and immanence in the moment are foregrounded. Admittedly this is no new technique, after all Virginia Woolf already used it in her short story "Kew Gardens" of 1919[7]. As impressions upon consciousness traced on the surface of the text however, these narrative 'vignettes' are engaging for the sense of existential thrownness they project. If NGIS does not trust itself to language, instead occupying the interstitial space of encounter, this requires a carefully engineered textual system, the 'machinery' of which is to be discussed in depth in chapter 3.3[8]. However, I would like to begin by exploring the communal/religious, social and gender politics of NGIS while simultaneously mapping the text's narratological framework.

Mrs. Khwaja

I used to be a poetess and would dwell on minute metaphors for days.
Now all day long I cook for Ubaid and Minaz, spend the thousands their father earns every month, and contemplate television absent-mindedly.
I have nothing more to say.
The hum of air-conditioned rooms and twenty-four-hour TV has silenced me.

Mr. Khwaja

Twenty-six years ago I married a mediocre poetess. She gave me two kids—a son who spends every waking hour online, and a daughter who's never home.
We live together and are still married, the woman and I.
The poetry has escaped our lives. I don't know her any more. (NGIS, 1-2)

[6] Not counting the anonymous, heterodiegetic narrating agencies and random figures in 'mass scenes'.
[7] Cf. Brosch, "Visualisierungen in der Leseerfahrung." In: Brosch/Tripp (eds.), *Visualisierungen*, 64f.
[8] Cf. page 72ff.

Ubaid

> Home is where mom chases me with a plateful of food and frozen poems in her eyes. Where dad is vocal with his disapproval and where my sister Minaz, on witnessing the scenes, runs out the door like an anxious squirrel. (NGIS, 3)

Assuming that the interior monologue "describes the long, continuous, first-person passages or whole texts that contain uninterrupted, unmediated free direct thought,"[9] the passages seem conceived within this format. This has a peculiar effect: In granting readers access to a hidden world of the mind, they make her feel somewhat like Alice in Wonderland. However, the Khwaja's home appears a place of bleak isolation and stasis. The typographic gaps interspersing the paragraphs thus mirror their narrative configuration as windows onto the private thought-world of the protagonists, while simultaneously underscoring their psychological isolation. Conceived in free direct discourse, the monologues address the narratee directly as in a "figural or reflectoral narrative."[10] Here, the protagonists' consciousness serves as the "anchorpoint order[ing] narrative experience."[11] In so far the text epitomizes an experiential, rather than narrative mode of presentation.

NGIS thus offers no stable deictic center but perpetuates a continual perspective shift which commands an (inter-)active, associative reading focusing the thematic and causal links implicit in the monologues. Hence, it is the spatial collocation or more precisely the purposeful juxtaposition of monologues that sparks an implicit dialogue between them. The monologues thus appear cohesive despite the evident lack of markers of mediation. Instead, each monologue somehow discharges into the next, manufacturing cohesion by an implicit call and response pattern. This points to spatial form as the underlying structural principle of NGIS for "[d]espite its disjunctive organization, spatial form possesses an underlying coherence based on thematic analogies and associative cross-references […] established by the reader."[12] But while the mutual direct and indirect references establish the reliability elementary to first-person narratives[13], they also imply language's inadequacy to bridging the gap between subjects. However, Mrs. Khwaja's speechlessness reads not only as a statement of emotional bankruptcy, but also as a programmatic declaration of independence vis-à-vis the reader's expectations of the text:

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[9] Palmer, Alan "Stream of Consciousness and Interior Monologue." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative*. Ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan. London: Routledge, 2005, 571.

[10] Fludernik, Monika. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge, 1996, 49f.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Cf. Mickelsen, David J., "Spatial Form." In: Herman/Jahn/Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative*, 555.

[13] Cf. Lodge, David, *Consciousness & the Novel. Connected Essays.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002, 56f.

> The word, dissociated from the husk of habitual clichés, and from the technical reflexes of the writer, is then freed from responsibility in relation to all possible context; it appears in one brief act, which, being devoid of reflections, declares its solitude, and therefore its innocence. This art has the very structure of suicide: in it, silence is a homogeneous poetic time which traps the word between two layers and sets it off less as a fragment of a cryptogram than as a light, a void, a murder, a freedom. (Barthes 2010, 81f)

In their verbal economy, the monologues are not only eloquent testimonies to the total isolation of the psychological subject from others *and* from itself, but to an experience of reality as totally simultaneous, ubiquitous and cyclical. In so far, the monologues challenge the assumption "of a self synonymous with consciousness,"[14] instead installing an unstable, alienated subject seeking refuge in established rituals of social signification and identification. Permanent exercise of the latter thus provides at least a vague sense of self. But the last member of the Khwaja family breaks the pattern of contemplation, at last plunging the textual trajectory into action. An 'absent presence' in the prior monologues, Minaz' figure eventually comes into its own with a bang.

> I won't be pregnant for too long now.
>
> After we park the car near Colaba Post Office, my 'friend' and I walk to Pasta Lane under the severe afternoon sun. I spot Shamma Nursing Home on the ground floor of a decrepit building.
>
> 'We're here,' I say, and push open the clinic's door. Kasim doesn't follow me in. I come out to the footpath and give him my trademark tough stare—the look that has everyone fooled. (NGIS, 4)

While the rest of the family is caught in psychological self-effacement, Minaz is about to go one step beyond, effacing a part of her physical self. Now the reader is able to comprehend why Minaz has been fleeing her family like "an anxious squirrel."[15] Her pregnancy threatens her, an unmarried girl, as well as her entire family with becoming social outcastes. But while her interior monologue conveys her gradually mounting tension and fear in the manner of a report, her actual thoughts and feelings largely remain obscure. As she enters the surgery room, tension reaches a climax. At this point the perspective shifts to 'The Doctor' who runs the clinic and is about to perform Minaz's abortion.

> I am an abortionist. I run a nursing home in a seedy by-lane of Colaba. On the steely innards of trains crawling along the Harbour Line, you will find badly spelt fliers advertising my services. I get one or two customers every day. […]
>
> This afternoon a client walked into my nursing home with her companion. Her stomach had just started to stick out. I could see through her expensive cotton T-shirt. Three more weeks and it would have been obvious. But she was safe now. (NGIS, 7)

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[14] Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 130.
[15] NGIS, 3.

The temporal coincidence of Minaz' anaesthesia with the cessation of her narration and the beginning of the doctor's has the effect of naturalizing the transition, bearing out Nagarkar's analogy of NGIS with a "relay race in which the baton is passed on from one character to another and one story to another."[16] Unlike the preceding passages however, this confession directly addresses the narratee as an interlocutor. Seen through the doctor's eyes, Minaz now becomes 'visible', if only as a nondescript body announcing its pregnancy. But as "an abortionist, and a Muslim to boot"[17], the doctor finds himself in a moral dilemma. For while he saves women from stigma and poverty, his own wife rejects his wish to have children. Moreover, the persistent enquiries of his patients render an emotional disengagement from his occupation impossible:

> If only my wife could see the gratitude in my clients' eyes. Like the girl this afternoon, the one in the expensive cotton T-shirt. She kissed my hand before I administered the anaesthesia. When she regained consciousness she wanted to know if it was a boy or a girl, she wanted to know to know if it was fair or dark, she wanted to know if it was normal or deformed, she wanted to know… (NGIS, 8)

As the doctor's fragile sanity is further punctured by Minaz' questions, the carefully built wall of anonymity threatens to break, while the reification of the female body as the carrier of socially sanctioned notions of purity and tradition is implicitly critiqued. The primal tension between individual and society that was latent in the first monologues emerges even more clearly here. But the doctor's monologue leaves a gap as the question *why* he chose to work as an abortionist remains unanswered. The concluding sentence of the doctor's monologue – "I see him sometimes" – is obliquely answered in the next vignette: "I saw him this morning. From the time he arrived at Dockyard Road station till he got off the train at VT, I watched him"[18].

> For the twenty minutes the train ride lasted, I gawked at him secretly, watching every eye-blink, every twitch of his jawbone. Akbar has grown slimmer. He looks somewhat like me, but mostly his features have gone on his mother. His lower lip was red as usual. He has a habit of chewing it till the blood clots and tiny bruises appear.
>
> As Akbar studied the flier, his lips suddenly plunged into a fleeting smile. And for that brief moment the lump in my throat disappeared. (NGIS, 14)

As Kaka[19] scrutinizes his son during his commute, the narratee as implied focalizer of the passage is invited to share in his voyeurism, facilitated by the crowd behind which the implied focalizer is hidden. But in a crowded place like Mumbai's trains, one is never

[16] The statement is a review blurb on the back cover of the 2005 Penguin Edition.
[17] NGIS, 9.
[18] NGIS, 14.
[19] Respectful, familiar address designating the elder brother of one's father.

only seeing but always also seen. The text thereby obliquely alerts readers to the fact that we are constituted simultaneously as spectators and spectated, subjects and objects of the gaze. Moreover, Victoria Terminus as a Mumbai landmark familiar from films like "Slumdog Millionaire," epitomizes the existential loneliness of the big city dweller, devoured by the crowd. The scene thus resonates with the echo of crowd scenes in modernist novels such as John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer.* After the family breakup Kaka's mind appears enveloped in a maelstrom in which past and present, memories and events blend. The relief at his son's smile bespeaks an unspoken guilt complex.

> There is no Allah, no heaven, no hell. No life after death. No sense in wasting precious hours of life inside mosques and temples and churches. When the stomach buckles and the skin sizzles, money is the only god who can answer prayers. How to tell the idiots in the world this? How to have told the idiots in my family this? (NGIS, 8)

The statement is a little too programmatic to go uncommented. For while the text's title, *No God In Sight*, allows at least for the possibility of divine existence, Kaka's monologue bespeaks total disillusionment. Sensing his imminent demise, Kaka instead indulges in sepia-tinted memories of better days while blaming their mutual estrangement on his son. But the latter's recollections tell a different story, challenging readers to establish who lies and who speaks the truth[20]. Yet the old man's loneliness and miserable life ensure that readers' sympathies are with Kaka whose work place is a "hole in the ceiling"[21] in which he has been officiating as the storekeeper of a small Colaba shoe shop for thirty years.

As Kaka indulges in his reminiscences, the store prepares for its final closure. Hidden in a hole in the mezzanine, Kaka's visual effacement thus foreshadows his actual demise and ascent to the other 'up above'. Six pages into the next monologue readers learn that the old man has passed and is now "a closed chapter, finished and done under six feet of fertile graveyard grime."[22]

[20] In Kaka's monologue readers also learn that his son failed his medical exams. His father therefore bribed a gynaecologist to instruct his son to perform abortions in order to make a living.

[21] NGIS, 15.

[22] NGIS, 26.

3.1 MEMENTO INDIA

> And even then, if my idiot nostalgia refuses to die, I will remember the protection money demanded, the covert and blatant religious slurs, the riots, the aftermaths, the newborn niece named Nidhi, the rewritten history books, the harassment at the passport office. Wasn't it enough that we lived in our ghettos and worked in our holes and paid our taxes and demanded nothing in return?
>
> The aircraft's projection screen will show a blue India, with our plane's route so far outlined in white like an anaemic tapeworm in the belly of a diseased nation.
>
> I will sit back in my seat and pretend to breathe easy. *Forget it,* I will tell myself, *let go.* Let them have it, let them have what they have killed clergymen for, razed mosques for, driven out fellow Indians for.
>
> Let them have their Hindustan for Hindus. (NGIS, 28)

The final paragraph of Amin Bootwala's monologue marks the climax of the first section of the book which it simultaneously also concludes. It comprises a swan-song to Nehruvian India which confirms that after 1992[23], "[t]he constitutional credo of secularism and equality was no longer perceived as a satisfactory way of safeguarding the multiple anxieties and concerns of a pluralist nation."[24] Here, Muslim life in India presents itself as an unending cycle of oppression and discrimination. The tapeworm, a parasite widely found among poor Indians in rural areas and urban slums symbolically hollows out the diversity of the nation, opening it to communal strife. The Hindutva rally cry echoed in the last sentence reverberates throughout the text, affirming both its sociographic conception and didactic function.

Amin Bootwala and his family, presumably Ismaelites of the Bohra group[25], are leaving the American Embassy in Mumbai, visas in hand, as the protagonist begins to project the last days and hours before their long-anticipated departure. The anger and fear pent up for years now find their outlet in his monologue. But only in the final paragraph do readers learn the motifs for the Bootwalas' emigration. The mood of defiant resignation and the nexus thereby struck between Muslim identity and exile, emerge as defining motifs of NGIS in the following. Within the political framework thus established, Amin Bootwala, but also Kaka and the 'doctor' assume added significance as deliberate counter-images to "popular Hindu perceptions about Muslims as a backward, deeply religious, and

[23] The year 1992 marks demolishing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by Hindu fundamentalists that sparked large-scale communal riots in Bombay in December 1992 and January 1993.

[24] Som, *Gandhi, Bose, Nehru*, 6.

[25] Cf. Blank, Jonah. *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 210.

conservative community."[26] Their Muslim identity appears "not as a positive identity complete with a sovereign self-consciousness but as the product of a network of differential, potentially contradictory strands." [27]

> The bourgeois urban Hindu male discourses of Indian nationalism had as their 'others' the 'subjects' who struggled for citizenship from marginal fringe-spaces, *the rural, the non-Hindu — especially Muslim — and women*, not to mention many other class-caste based groups absent in the selective and exclusive, dominant postcolonial Indian nationalisms. (Dasthakur 2007, 111)

The historic and sociographic weight of the text is further augmented by the fact that its monologues are set around the millennium[28]. Amin-bhai's monologue thus testifies to the fact that even seven years after the nadir, i.e., the "December 1992-January 1993 Hindu-Muslim riots, Muslims at least have not yet regained the confidence to regard the city in which they were born and grew up in […] as their own."[29] But NGIS also aims at elucidating the demographic and social fault lines contemporary India suffers. Hence if the first section of NGIS explored the psyche of urban middle class Muslims, the second section marks a counterpoint as it is set in a village. But Barauli appears a rural idyll only on the surface. Significantly titled "The very beginning", the second section of NGIS heralds a return, while implying a chronological or causal trajectory thus far absent.

In its tragicomic, Shandean vein, Babua's monologue rehearses the motifs of the confessional narrative while highlighting the text's symbolic dimension: "Namaste. My name is Babua. I live in Barauli, *a village like any other village.*"[30] But if the village boy's story initially appears merely comic, a discreet psychological undercurrent soon emerges:

> *What should I do? Oho-rey,* I cry to myself, *what should I do?* I want to be a man like my grandfather; a man like my father, whose rare words and ample riches make people tremble. I want to be like the barber, doctor, bus driver, and even our orchard workers—they are all men, siring sons like rabbits, unmindful of their bodies.
>
> Mahant Suyansh would say, *Men must fulfill their dharma.* (NGIS, 35)

The incident of his aborted deflowering shames the local landlord's son, called Babua or 'baby' by all villagers. He is thus marked as a naïve character whose soliloquy echoes with picaresque motifs while the Arcadian setting suggests pre-lapsarian innocence. Unable to conceive of himself outside the hyper-masculine feudal identity performed by

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[26] Kumar, Priya. *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008,179.

[27] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.* Ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean. London: Routledge, 1996, 204.

[28] The reader learns that a character lost his shop during the Bombay riots, "eight years" ago.

[29] Punwani, Jyoti. "'My Area, Your Area': How Riots Changed the City." *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition.* Ed. Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, 237.

[30] NGIS, 34.

his father, Babua's obsession with sexual performance precipitates an existential crisis. It is at this point that the Mahant Suyansh makes a sudden, urgent appearance as the first of two pitiful holy men who has come to deliver a crude speech.

> 'Your safes. Keep them open. Your women's legs. Keep them parted. Right now, lambs and goats. The outsiders are sharpening knives on animals. One day, it will be your necks. Your women. Your money. Hai-hai, sixers[31]! Who is not eunuch here? By their beards, grab the outsiders. Out. Throw them out. Which man will do it? Throw out the outsiders from your house, your village, your country. Hindustan for Hindus! Hindustan for Hindus! Understand, donkey eunuchs? Not for outsiders, our Hindustan! Who? Who will correct history, who will avenge the past and drive the outsiders out…?' (NGIS, 37)

Despite the Mahant's strikingly obvious attempt to rhetorically grab his male audience by its testicles, the villagers are simply bemused and seem unable to make sense of this aleatory jumble of slogans, jargon and scraps of rhetoric from RSS[32] rallies, popular Indian gangster films and cricket. Devoid of real substance and content, the Mahant's speech act foregrounds its illocutionary function to instigate villagers' suspicion against the purported outsider. Yet the Outsider/Other which the speech is supposed to identify, remains a void only vaguely identified by the beard. The gaping holes in the speech thus also bespeak the Mahant's own haphazard indoctrination. Nonetheless, his diatribe finds a susceptible target in the unsuspecting, desperate Babua who jumps at this chance to prove his masculinity.

The subject position sketched here reflects a deeply conservative, feudal, misogynist and xenophobic worldview based on the *ius sanguini*, indicting all persons of Muslim descent. The imagined community the speech thus aims at restoring, namely the *Hindu* village community as the kernel of a Hindu nation thus appears premised upon numerous exclusions, not only of Muslims but also of women from the status of full Indian citizens. Instead, woman is appropriated here as a trope of Muslim/foreign occupation:

> The link between woman-as-mother and nation-mother serves the important function of staking claim to the land of one's birth which has been forcibly controlled by foreigners and foreign historiographers. As the expanding metaphor of the mother widens beyond its personal significance to a larger national significance, the nation also gets united by 'ties of territoriality' ([…]). (Sethi 2007, 20f)

As the Mahant's invocation addresses only landed males, the speech tacitly also excludes poor villagers, OBCs[33] and Dalits. In so far the diatribe also illuminates the post-

[31] The term designates a high score in cricket.

[32] Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, literally the National Volunteer Organization, a right-wing, paramilitary organization ostensibly devoted to promoting civil duties and national pride, founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.

[33] Other backward castes.

1992 political climate in India, in the wake of which a new "'cultural model of history'"[34] was advertised. The latter departs from the assumption of "a 'golden age' of the distant (Vedic and post-Vedic) past described in the classical Hindu epics (i.e. *Ramayana, Mahabharata*) and characterized by social harmony [and] spiritual enlightenment […]."[35] If the latter purportedly ended with the Mughal era and British colonization, the "dawning new age of national revival and reconstruction"[36] promises to reestablish the erstwhile harmony. Babua proves the ideal receptacle for the appealingly simple logic of the Mahant's speech that conflates nationalist aggression with manliness. Hence, Zail Singh, a bearded Sikh villager, is identified and dragged up by Babua as an 'outsider'. His fault and the Mahant's chastisement are followed by a comic tussle unveiling the absurdity of the situation[37]. But Zail Singh leaves and is soon followed by other villagers:

> There were a few who merely chuckled with indulgence at these impromptu skits and continued with their tasks. The sudden reticence of these few went unobserved. No one noticed that their businesses were opening late and closing early. That the stocks in their shops and workshops weren't being replenished. That the men amongst these few went on mysterious trips with their wives and children, carrying trunks and cartons, and that these men returned next day empty-handed and alone. The withdrawal of these few was like the invisible dwindling of an invalid. When they were all finally gone, no one in the village even noticed.
>
> And then it was too late. A month, later, the Mahant reappeared with eighty men. They poked the air above their heads with tridents. The motley crew kicked up dust and startled birds with roars of 'Hindustan for Hindus! Out with outsiders!' (NGIS, 41)

Thus begins the exodus from Barauli, almost unnoticeable except for the eyes of the focalizer of the above passage, an 'omniscient villager' who remains anonymous. It is thus by the backdoor that an omniscient narrating agency enters the text to focus the following events. It is noteworthy that the text abandons the interior perspective at this crucial juncture to give a more comprehensive report. Yet if the speaking 'I' is nearly unmarked, the 'eye' is not as it betrays a panoramic perspective. Poetologically the effect induced resembles that of the chorus in Greek theatre or Brecht's epic theatre. The comparison is legitimate also because the episode operates with masks in the sense that all characters are designed in a conspicuously flat, stereotypical fashion. With the "Omniscient Villager" a stage manager enters who adds a grave, historic significance to the otherwise farcical events by implicitly highlighting the villagers' failure to acknowledge what is happening. Here it begins, or so the speaker tells readers.

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[34] Karner, Christian, *The Thought World of Hindu Nationalism. Analyzing a Political Ideology.* Lewistown: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006, 163.
[35] Ibid., 164.
[36] Ibid.
[37] NGIS, 38f.

But the villagers' "impromptu" reenactments of the tussle document that they are not merely victims of a demagogic priesthood and the henchmen of the RSS: "Over several replays, hyperbole morphed the original event into something else entirely: after a lewd dispute over pubic hair, an incensed Zail Singh would thrash a stone-blind Babua and chase away a high-strung Mahant."[38] Invoking India's folk theatrical tradition represented among others by Nautanki, Jatra and Tamasha or the farcical interludes of popular cinema, the skits assume not only a sublimating function but simultaneously displace the Mahant's speech from the realm of meaningful discourse.

> Seeing that the Mahant was responsible for this early morning ruckus, the villagers calmed down and squatted outside their homes. They looked forward to another juicy farce and one more vain witch-hunt for an outsider who just didn't exist here, in this village, where everyone knew everyone.
>
> The Mahant and his men broke into seven cottages. They forced up the shutters to five workshops and two shops. Bare walls and cupboards were all they found. (NGIS, 41f)

But the Muslim villagers as the implied addressees of the diatribe have clearly received its message, vacating the village and thereby surrendering their place in its community. Comparing the gradual disappearance to "the dwindling of an invalid," the text thus implicitly harks back to the metaphor of the "diseased nation." The shift from individual narrative to historic narrative thus becomes increasingly obtrusive while Muslims emerge as a community of exiles and thus as a community of suffering. With this brief excursion into village India, NGIS thus stakes its claim to giving a comprehensive account of the Muslim experience.

The following episodes narrate the fate of three of the victims of the exodus; Suleiman, his partner Nilofer and Suleiman's old aunt Shazia-dadi who have fled to Mumbai[39] where they live on the roof of Ismat Towers, a high-rise Muslim apartment block. Their lofty station allows the refugees to preserve their village community at least partially while it implicitly turns urban spatial hierarchies upside down. Since Shiv Sena[40] leaders hold much of Mumbai's slums under their control, thus forcing Muslim slum dwellers into 'safe' areas, the place seems to offer maximum protection.[41] The name of the apartment block is indicative in this regard as 'ismat' literally means protection.

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[38] NGIS, 41.

[39] However, the text makes a brief stopover at Namnagar where Suleiman questions his great-grandfather about his conversion to Islam. During the questioning the old man dies and Suleiman is forced to take his solitary spinster-aunt Shazia-dadi with him to Mumbai.

[40] 'Shivaji's army' is a rightwing, nationalist-Hinduist party in Maharashtra founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray that has enjoyed widespread electoral support in the state since the 1990s.

[41] Cf. Patel, Sujata, "Bombay and Mumbai: Identities, Politics, and Populism." In: Patel/Masselos (eds), *Bombay and Mumbai*, 22f.

To the newly-arrived Nilofer, "a Muslim slum on the terrace of a Muslim skyscraper in a Muslim area" represents "[t]he best of the best of the best.'"[42] However, Nilofer is yet to discover the absence of religious or social loyalties in her new community. Moreover, the nine hovels offer neither comfort, nor privacy or work. And while Suleiman finds employment in the traditional Mumbai trade of tailor, Nilofer seeks work as a maid with the wealthy Muslims in the apartments below their humble dwelling. But her desperate efforts are not rewarded:

Flat 1401

'A servant? Mad or what! We have nine daughters. The last thing we need is a servant.'

Flat 1402

(Still in bed,— will not rise for another hour no matter who's at the door, it being Sunday morning, a day for waking late, although neither has slept all night, anxious as both are over unpaid credit card bills for the garments, gizmos, gifts and gourmet meals recklessly consumed in conformity with current social aesthetics, and that's how everything happens here, in Flat 1402, slaves to the bandwagon decree, who will not, will *not* rise for another hour no matter *who's* at the door, it being Sunday morning—a day, for waking, late.) (NGIS, 57)

Notwithstanding the fact that the door remains closed for Nilofer, the second paragraph presents a 'glimpse' of the occupants that implies movement. The text thus opens a window onto the consciousness of the people in the apartment. Notably this is achieved without description and only few deictic expressions. Instead, the aesthetic effect derives mainly from the use of free indirect discourse which implies no spatial anchor, seamlessly blending narrative and figural discourse. At the same time, the passage evidences two cognitive image schemata, namely that of the container and that of the path[43].

Here, form and content are at one as the paragraph typographically reproduces the enclosed space of the apartment, the brackets symbolizing the apartments' walls while the inverse sentence structure creates the sensation of a seamless sequence, comprised of a zoom in and a zoom out, correlated with the brief awakening and falling back to slumber of its occupants. But although the passage focuses the consciousness of the inhabitants, the "narrator-focalizer"[44] interpolated to relate the latter is not entirely unobtrusive. Notably however, this seems to even reinforce the 'candid camera' effect evoked in this vignette.

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[42] NGIS, 53.

[43] Cf. Hampe, "Image schemas in Cognitive Linguistics: Introduction." In: Hampe/Grady (eds), *From perception to meaning,* 3.

[44] Bal, Mieke, and David Jobling. *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology*. Sonoma, Calif: Polebridge Press, 1991, 94.

The voyeurism intrinsic to the above passage is continued in the next which invites readers to an even more intimate place, offering a glimpse of another marginal existence.

Flat 1403

> An hour. Or maybe longer. Doesn't' matter. When one is trying to shit, time is unimportant.
>
> So I have been straining on the commode for what seems like an hour, when I notice a drop of blood on my shirt, just below the left pocket. I squint. […] I rub my eyes.
>
> […]
>
> I look into the mirror above the basin. No other stains. […]. Strange, right? It was so dark last night; I must have struck that hotelier's artery. (NGIS, 58)

The man's reaction again suggests a character keen not to be reminded of his bloody profession. In Mumbai novels and thrillers notably, the professional killer marks a stock character. Unlike in the preceding passages however, the continuous use of the present tense acts as a slight irritant, foregrounding the presence of the narratee as interlocutor and even more as an observer. By recording every action and thought, the text strives to create the impression of 'real time'. Suddenly the contemplative exertions of the killer are interrupted by Nilofer who rings the doorbell, unaware of who lives here.

> The doorbell rings again. Bhengcho! This doorbell is not supposed to ring! […]
>
> Holding my loaded gun up, I crouch against the wall, beside the door. 'Who is it?'
>
> [..].
>
> 'Salaam-aaley-kum, brother. M-my name is Nilofer,' some woman stammers in a girl-child's voice.
>
> 'What do you want?' I ask.
>
> 'Work!' she blurts
>
> […]
>
> The patronizing saali. 'Sure,' I say, 'I'll open the door and give you tea-biscuit also. First tell me, madam, how you knew I was here? Who sent you?'
>
> 'I-I just rang the bell. I-I did not know who would be there!' she replies.
>
> *Liar,* I want to shout, *lying madakcho saali*!
>
> […]
>
> 1…2…3…4…I start counting.
>
> At 20 I will throw open the door and shoot that haraamzaadi's brains out. (NGIS, 60)

But at this 'cliffhanger' moment, the text leaves readers suspended, switching to another, less dramatic scene occurring "*[m]eanwhile, on the Floor Above*". If the visual sense was already teased by the previous passages, this dramaturgic device unambiguously advertises the filmic or televisual subtext. At the same time the sudden cut interrupts the lurid fantasy of bloodshed systematically built up by the text. The nonchalance of the filmic interpolation relies on the narratee's familiarity with the narrative patterns of the episode film or television series, so that she can leave off with the certainty that this narrative strand will be picked up again later.

In so far as the preceding episodes all illustrate the failure or refusal to communicate, they affirm non- or miscommunication as a leitmotif of the text. 'Sales executive' Kishore Malhotra who roams the corridors of Ismat Towers in search of trade, is another grave example of miscommunication as he greets potential customers with his standard opener "'Someday you will catch a horrible disease, linger and die.'"[45] He is clearly desperate to sell his insurance policies but unable to recognize the flaw in his address. For him and Vinti who sells women's hygiene articles, Ismat Towers marks a place of struggle. "*Soon, soon* […] *we'll send you people packing to Pakistan*,"[46] Vinti fantasizes when faced with two jeering youths. Fate seems to come to their aid when Moin Chariya, a guru called by a couple "to exorcise their Nepali ayah"[47] steps out of the lift.

> On my way up to the sixteenth floor of Ismat Towers, the lift mysteriously halts on the fourteenth. The metal doors rumble open to reveal a veritable mob in the lobby. My mentor Gaffur Chishti used to say: *Moin, where there people, there always something bad waiting to happen.* So I jump out of the lift to investigate. (NGIS, 64)

The lift doors opening like the curtains of a theatre herald another entertaining scene which unfurls in front of 1403, the apartment in which the killer is still counting. As a *deus ex machina* the self-professed guru advises Nilofer and the others not to wait for the man to open. The ensuing exchange between the reverent Vinti and Nilofer and the skeptic Kishore on the one hand and Moin Chariya on the other, recalls Beckett rather than Bollywood as the text foregrounds existential questions in a farcical, melancholy manner. Chariya's monologue thus exposes his blatant lack of education and fear of being discovered a conman. An archetype of Orientalist and Indian exotica, the guru, saint or sadhu (ascetic) is here staged with gusto as a dressed up, maladroit fortune hunter, even as his moral dilemma is sympathetically portrayed. The Orientalist cliché of India as the land of saints and sadhus thus undergoes a tongue-in-cheek deconstruction.

"Munaf, the Unsuitable Boy"[48] on the other hand confronts a more existential problem—Polio. An ironic variation on the central them of Vikram Seth's 1995 novel *A Suitable Boy*, the next episode focuses the fiercely competitive Indian marriage market in which handicapped 'contestants' are at a disadvantage. A salient motive of popular Indian cinema, the arranged marriage is infused with sober realism as neither groom nor bride answer to the ideal types projected in popular cinema. Here, the text at once explores the rituals of Indian matchmaking and the representative protocols of portrait photography:

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[45] NGIS, 61.
[46] NGIS, 61.
[47] NGIS, 67.
[48] NGIS, 68.

> In the photo—which arrived via circuitous route involving several strangers and relatives—Sophiya is in a red salwar-kurta with red lipstick and red cheeks. She is holding a red rose and is standing against an immense poster showing a field full of deep-red roses. Everything else about Sophiya is either powder white or jet black. (NGIS, 69f)

Notably, the photo provides no spatial outlay or frame for orientation, instead focusing entirely upon color. The overwhelming effect of this 'red tide', apparently meant to entice the male addressee of the photo, is that of a figure drowning in this elaborate image, while also being drowned out by it. Seething with romantic clichés of virginal beauty adopted from popular films, the photo contrasts sharply with the real Sophiya that arrives on the same evening. Although possessed of a "modest bust"[49] and "dusky complexion,"[50] the contrast between image and reality does not surprise Munaf who appears accustomed to the discrepancy. It is Sophiya's decided intervention on behalf of Munaf not to "parade his handicap,"[51] which earns her his gratitude and respect. He will marry her or no other. But once again, the reader is stopped short as the following title announces "*A Digression with a Purpose.*"[52] At this juncture the text takes the narratee by the hand so that the presence of the narrating agency is acutely felt here.

In the following vignette, the internal focalization is on Hamida who is desperate for money to marry Rafik, a serial adulterer with three wives. Again, the text is presented in the heterodiegetic mode of narration. Hamida hopes to strike it rich by marrying a handicapped boy from Mumbai. But when she rushes to her friend Sophiya to ask her his number, she unwittingly strengthens the latter's resolve to marry Munaf[53]. With all threads thus leading to the same end, the text exposes its tightly woven narrative fabric. The narrating agency is in full control, leaving no loose ends. The successful conclusion of Munaf's and Sophiya's 'courtship' is presided over by the matchmaker "*Jeyna-bi, The Buffet Fiend*" who is the following monologue's centre of consciousness.

As one plot-line is concluded, another is introduced with Yasmin-bhai, a woman desperate to marry her son Nawaz. However, she is ungraciously dismissed by Jeyna-bi who calls him "a number one bum."[54] Thus readers are introduced to the text's second 'unsuitable boy'. In the four following monologues Nawaz is presented successively through the lens of his mother, his paanwallah[55], his Urdu poetry student Abhay Joshi and the latter's father, Mr. Joshi.

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[49] NGIS, 70.
[50] NGIS, 70.
[51] NGIS, 71.
[52] NGIS, 73.
[53] NGIS, 75.
[54] NGIS, 79
[55] NGIS, 80-84.

Seen through their eyes, Nawaz appears a gauche, inscrutable young man. But despite the multi-focal observation, his persona he remains elusive. Clad in the flowing sherwani[56] of his father, he appears insubstantial in both the physical and psychological sense, a "destitute prince of some newly impoverished territory."[57] But to his US-returned student Abhay whom Nawaz teaches Urdu poetry, he is the repository of a cultural capital Abhay is desperate to share in. His Urdu lessons are not merely an "alienated Indian's attempt to discover his/her 'own' culture,"[58] however. Having promised his US girlfriend Swati to "be dripping with the humanities like you won't believe"[59] after his return to the US, Abhay relies on Nawaz to make him eligible. Notably, it is again the boy rather than the girl who struggles to become eligible.

Unlike his son, Mr. Joshi is less taken with "[t]his scrawny man with a mouthful of paan."[60] Nonetheless he joins his son in learning Urdu poetry, thereby causing Nawaz intense discomfiture. The reason for this emerges as Mr. Joshi demands to learn the translation of a verse which Nawaz is unable to give. As his fragile façade of knowledge – probably the result of rote learning – is about to crumble, Nawaz leaves in a flurry. As his story is concluded, a new plot begins with "A Prelude to the Death of Sohail Tambawala"[61] in the kitchen of the Joshis' house. Here Mrs. Joshi calls her daughter Avantika. Since her daughter is estranged from her father after marrying a Muslim nobody, she has to call her secretly. In her isolation and utter subjection to her family's needs Mrs. Joshi appears a double of Mrs. Khwaja. And her daughter too is distraught as her husband Sohail has not been home for three days. Afraid that he may be injured or dead, Avantika is determined to file a missing person report at the police station. Being married to a Muslim however, she is wary of the implications of this act.

While her enactment of the perfect Hindu wife clad in an orange shalwar-kameez, bindi and borrowed mangal-sutra[62] appears exaggerated, the peculiar encounter with "*Shenior Conishtable Shegde*" at the police station legitimizes this travesty. The only reluctant official present at Sampada Police Station because it is his last day before his suspension, Shegde soon emerges as Avantika's nemesis.

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[56] A coat-like garment commonly worn by Muslim men on festive occasions.
[57] NGIS, 84.
[58] Pinney, "Introduction." In: Dwyer/Pinney (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation*, 4.
[59] NGIS, 86.
[60] NGIS, 89.
[61] NGIS, 95.
[62] The mangal[a] sutra is the sacred necklace ceremonially tied by the groom around his bride's neck. It is a ritual particular to South India while not being widely diffused in North India.

With his lisping English and misogynist attitude – he immediately ascribes Sohail's disappearance to his wife's unappealing looks – Shegde is at once a caricature and an acute portrait of India's wily, underpaid administration. Having run afoul of his superiors, "new-generation officials"[63] who dismissed him for exacting small bribes from street vendors, Shegde believes himself a victim of the system. To convince him to help her find Sohail, Avantika resorts to tears but is eventually caught out by Shegde's suspicious questions. In the end, Avantika is reduced to the status of an outsider who cannot claim the assistance of the Indian state. "Yes, madam, this is Hindustan, not Arabastan. […] If you do not like it here, take your miya-ji husband and go to Pakistan.'"[64]

But Shegde is partly redeemed by his reflections about the Indian penal system:

> We are not police for the rich and salaried only. We are also police for Nimmi the whore and Manilal the gutter-cleaner. Once Nimmi joked with me, 'Shegde, the day I get a license, you dare not ask me for money.' A customer told her that the government is thinking of giving licenses to sluts. Good, let them; […]. When all these people are respected by the government, so-called corrupt officials like me can run after real criminals who loot and murder. Question is, will there be any such criminals left? (NGIS, 108)

Here, the line of (il-)legality is coextensive with the dividing line between the politically empowered middle classes and the vast underclass whose economic survival depends on activities at the margins of legality. It is economic need and (false) morality that produce illegality, which is maintained and reinforced by the uneven distribution of power and money which excludes the poor but also women, Muslims and Dalits[65]. It is indicative that the author chooses Shegde's character to critique India's stark political inequalities when the latter's wayward character makes him a less than ideal mouthpiece for this critique. However, in his clairvoyance, slyness, Shegde recalls other noted literary (anti-heroes), most notably Balram Halwai and Animal, two marginalized characters and cynics who have learnt to adjust themselves to the state of affairs, even as they criticize it. In this way the political and social critique formulated is implicitly displaced from the realm of lofty intellectual contemplation and firmly embedded in the bedrock of gritty social reality.

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[63] NGIS, 107.
[64] NGIS, 112.
[65] "Social groups which have numerical strength do not necessarily occupy the centre stage of politics. Notwithstanding the possibilities of mobilization, the structure of urban politics is such that Muslims, Dalits, as well as the slum dwellers find themselves politically powerless and marginalized." (Vora, Rajendra and Suhas Palshikar, "Politics of Locality, Community, and Marginalization." In: Patel/Masselos (eds), *Bombay and Mumbai*,161.)

3.2 SPEC(TAC)ULARIZING MEDIA

NGIS' exploration of India's ailing political-administrative system does not end with Shegde's monologue as the text now ventures into the boudoirs of power. The following section opens with a bedroom scene whose protagonists, the news anchor GK and the aspiring journalist Rina collaborate and cohabitate to mutual profit:

> The day Rina's story broke, a few hours after copies of *India Informer* had been home-delivered to thousands of subscribers, Breaking News would air a detailed TV report on the story, anchored by GK, of course, while other newspapers and news channels looked about stupidly […]. Last night while coordinating their joint efforts, it wasn't clear who had buckled under whose advances—or whether any advance had even been made. It was assumed that everyone would screw everyone, because that's how the news world was run—by a hyperintelligent, manic, sensualist population of bedfellows. (NGIS, 115)

At this juncture the heterodiegetic narrating agency unambiguously exerts its omniscience to the fullest while directly conferring judgement, albeit conveyed in reportage style. As a caller informs GK of one of "the biggest ambushes on terrorists in months,"[66] the anchor departs to get exclusive coverage of a police 'shootout' in a suburban park, certain that the caller, Balbir Pasha, will not jeopardize his hefty bribe to call in another news team in the meantime. With the fate of Sohail Tambawala momentarily suspended, the plot gathering momentum and the sleaze of police and news industry moving into the foreground, the text switches from reportage to thriller[67]. But as the text unveils the city's underside, reality fails to meet news-making standards:

> Punita visualized the angle. Long shot? Overhead? Something zany or still? She glanced at the bodies. Fly-infested. Mud-spattered. They were all dressed in shirts and trousers. Some had beards, some didn't. There were no pools of blood drooling from the carcasses. No remnants of gore. For men who had been shot just a few hours ago, these fifteen looked rather comfortable in their deadness. (NGIS, 118)

That the plain appearance of the dead bodies does not shock the producer is indicative, as is the fact that their aspect refuses the label of 'the Muslim terrorist'. Accustomed to televisual, cinematic and web images of death, contemporary audiences require more than what this scene offers to receive the intended message. Punita's dexterous, dramatic mise-en-scène consequently works to highlight the political subtext of the images, namely the men's purported plot to assassinate the Prime Minister. Through the use of internal focalization which renders GK and Punita perceptual lenses, the text thus undermines the idea of news images as neutral or objective representations.

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[66] NGIS, 113.

[67] Cf. Burke, Jason. "Indian Publishers wake up to new generation of homegrown thrillers." The Guardian. 12 Oct. 2014, 26 Nov. 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/12/india-new-generation-thrillers>.

Simultaneously, the scene draws attention to the shaping of viewer attitudes by the existent protocols of representation: If "the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; [as] that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response,"[68] the images have to meet this implicit expectation. Equally noteworthy is the libidinal investment of the passage: The combination of eros and thanatos, the naked bodies of GK and Rina and the bodies of the fifteen dead men, mobilize scopophilia, the former of a sexual, the latter of a morbid nature. Ultimately however, both evoke the carnal as corpo*real*.

If the thrust of the text had thus far been towards the surface, i.e., towards discovering and exposing underlying social problems, the narrative itself now appears to be constituted entirely by and as aesthetic surface. In mobilizing primal drives the scenes and particularly the scene at the park alert readers to the manipulation and monopolization of attention through images. In Punita's production which is not so much a reconstruction than a dramatization of the incident, the dead bodies become traces of the Other, silent 'evidence'. The figure of the dead Muslim terrorist as a cynosure simultaneously allocates Mumbai's specific communal history with its conflicts within the global post-9/11 matrix. As a rigorously aesthetic elaboration, the inside of the news industry is turned out at this point, rendering the spectacle a speculum to reveal not only spectators' unconscious desires, but the construction and determination of social experience and practice through and by images.

> As go-betweens or subaltern entities, these images are the filters through which we recognize and of course misrecognize other people. They are the paradoxical mediations which make possible what we call the unmediated or face-to-face relations that Raymond Williams postulates as the origin of society as such. And this means that the social construction of the visual field has to be continuously replayed as the visual construction of the social field, an invisible screen or lattice-work of apparently unmediated figures that makes the effects of mediated images possible. (Mitchell 2002, 175)

Among the dead is a man called Sohail Tambawala – Avantika's missing husband, or so readers are left to assume. As closure comes within reach the narrative withholds it yet again, instead introducing a few more twists and turns: "Prime minister slapped chief minister! We have to be there!"[69] The departure of the news team and subsequent action precipitated by that momentous event is presented in two alternative versions, however: "*What Happened Next*" heralds another climax, but in fact marks a narrative dead end.

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[68] Bolter/Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, 53.
[69] NGIS 118.

"*What Really Happened Next*" finally sees Balbir Pasha obtaining coverage for the successful completion of his mission, i.e., the killing of the suspected terrorists. Having started at a fairly low, even pace, NGIS now goes into narrative overdrive as the meta-narrative and meta-fictional level are now emphatically signposted. Vis-à-vis the latter the plot appears increasingly irrelevant as satire and farce prevail:

> The MCBC News van arrived at the park.
>
> In a matter of minutes the country's TV-owning population—the only one that really mattered—was regaled with a badly scripted eighty-second report on Balbir Pasha's heroics as well as his unit's stealth and precision. The names of the fifteen dead jehadis were ticker-taped.
>
> As planned, the slap-happy prime minister incorporated the police-terrorist encounter into his rally speech.
>
> Troublesome activists raised uncomfortable questions in comfortable living rooms.
>
> Poll analysts predicted a second run for the ruling party.
>
> Balbir Pasha was upgraded, like a desktop computer, to Joint Commissioner.
>
> And in the same city, for the first time in their lives, several ordinary men grew conscious of their name, for they shared it with a dead terrorist—Sohail Tambawala. (NGIS, 120f)

The rhetorical devices of cumulation, parallelism and antithesis generously deployed here generate a staccato rhythm highlighting the underlying teleological trajectory which drives all events to a climax. Closely interlocked as they are, politics and news industry no longer work towards reporting, preventing or punishing crime. Instead, both engineer a public-political discourse directing the attention of citizens. In a "new(s) economy"[70] based upon the "scarce resource"[71] of attention, the media as its monopolists can redistribute it at will, while the need for creating a feeling of public safety simultaneously creates political pressure resulting in killings. 'The Muslim terrorist' thus ultimately emerges as the straw man of politics and police. According to Suketu Mehta, encounter killings such as the one presented here increased sharply in the late 1990s, correlating with a growing anti-Muslim sentiment in India[72].

After tendering two alternative narratives, the text now compiles the monlogues of no less than five Sohail Tambawalas. This 'multiple choice' framing creates momentum as the narrating agency momentarily suspends its directive function while leaving readers to guess who of the five speakers the 'real' Sohail Tambawala is.

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[70] Assmann, Aleida, "The Shaping of Attention by Cultural Frames and Media Technology." In: Emden/Rippl (eds), *ImageScapes*, 21.

[71] Ibid.

[72] "In 1998, forty-eight men that the police labelled 'gangsters' were killed in encounters. In 1999, the numbers shot up to eighty-three and declined slightly to seventy-four in 2000. In 2001, more than a hundred men were shot dead by the Mumbai police." (Mehta, Suketa. *Maximum City. Bombay Lost and Found.* London: Review. 2005, 592).

The cursory mode of attention which this multiplicity encourages is characteristic of new media contexts where multiple images, plots and tasks simultaneously claim attention. If "[s]pectators are no longer separated from these images, but authorized to enter them in different ways"[73] as Assmann argues, the text herewith seeks to create apertures and 'footholds' for reader interaction. In providing numerous narrative signposts and hints however, the text also actively delays the conclusion of narrative. From this point of view, NGIS appears an intensely manipulative text. In any case it shows that "interaction or immersion"[74] mark modes of reception not confined to new media such as VR/MR and the internet, even if they may be most fully realized in the latter.

Increasingly, Tyrewala's text "constrain[s] to a continuous voracity; […] but not *pensiveness*"[75] – an effect with which Barthes diagnosed film. I hope to show in the following that the 'voracity' engendered by the text's tight serration on the structural-aesthetic level, codes its claim to the real. The following soliloquys of the five Sohail Tambawalas thus signal a moment where narrative progress is suspended. From a postcolonial perspective, this meta-diegetic manoeuver partly lays open the textual economy of signification. Hence the text purposely juxtaposes socially and culturally opposite subjects at this juncture – Sohail Tambawala, 13 and Sohail Tambawala, 42:

> I found my name on page 2. Sohail Tambawala. He was dead as I am barely alive. A half-living terrorist waiter runaway small-town boy with stars in his eyes and bullets in his stomach. He, I, me, we—we were in the paper. *You're famous*, I whispered, striking a karate-chop pose on the rat-infested landing. (NGIS, 123)

Unambiguously, the monologue relates an act of identification in which the Other, i.e., the dead terrorist, is consciously appropriated as an integral component of a precarious self. The invisibility of the narrating consciousness who is kept as a slave by the restaurant owner is diametrically opposed to the hyper-visibility of the dead terrorist, whose notoriety the boy now aspires to. Despite its brevity the monologue thus sketches a subaltern psychology which is expanded over the course of the following monologues.

> 'I am not embarrassed,' I will say, […]. 'I am happy. I think all those lower-class butchers and bhais and stinking bearded bastards must be shot dead for giving the community a bad name.' Mrs D will stroke, unseen, the back of my neck. 'Waawaaaah!' Mr T will lampoon the azaan and we will all laugh, a tad too loudly till we choke on our whiskys. (NGIS, 124)

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[73] Assmann, A. "The Shaping of Attention by Cultural Frames and Media Technology," 37.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1980. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2000, 55.

By juxtaposing the boy's monologue with that of the businessman Sohail Tambawala, the text cramps the opposite ends of the social spectrum. The clichés expounded by the speaker thus answer to a popular stereotype of Muslims, spread by media and cinema. Hence "when Muslims find figuration in [popular Hindi] cinema, their representation has largely been in keeping with popular Hindu perceptions about Muslims as a backward, deeply religious, and conservative community."[76] Yet it becomes apparent that Tambawala 42 is merely acting in accordance with expectations for fear of being accused of sympathizing with the terrorists. He is not free either.

In the last-but-one monologue, Avantika's Sohail finally materializes in a hospital bed, his "smoker's lungs festering with cancer,"[77] attended by his wife and her parents. The closure offered here thus smacks of the sickly-sweet endings of popular Hindi films. Proceeding to the last Sohail Tambawala, aged twenty, the text introduces us to another identity dilemma as the protagonist plans to give up his Muslim name as an obstacle to becoming a lawyer. But he is afraid of also losing his family. When he is sent to fetch a chicken for dinner Sohail traverses his quarter, "a ghetto of seven buildings and a mosque on the outskirts of a larger unruly Muslim inner city,"[78] contemplating his decision. Notably this is the first occasion on which the Muslim inner city of Mumbai is portrayed.

> I walk past Shabir-bhai's shop; he is seated on a chair, contemplating air, oblivious to the worker beside him running a tile-cutting machine over a ceramic slab. In the flat above the din, through the clothes hanging at the window, I can see a woman bleaching her face. I pass by Inshallah-Mashallah Watch Repairers […]. Huddled around the tobacconist are my childhood friends, some of whose names I no longer remember, and all of who I know have nothing to do. (NGIS, 129f)

> I cross the street (the footpath I was on is blocked by a grey heap of garbage which the municipality is in no hurry to clear out). I cut across a gully. I am now on the parallel street. Squatting on either side of the road are hawkers, their wares spread before them like guts. Most are smoking. Everyone is spitting. And hovering over us all are the absurdly amplified screeches of the muezzin beckoning the faithful to prayers. In a hell like this, I guess God too must yell to be noticed. (NGIS, 130)

If the first paragraph evokes a panoramic view, the second shifts readers' attention from landscape to soundscape. It raises a crescendo of spitting and screeching while adding an olfactory component. The mundane and intimate acts in which the focalizer as *flâneur* vicariously participates, all seem to occur nearly synchronically as the narator's cursory glance links them. The narrator-focalizer as flâneur thus functions as a prism joining the fragments of this disorienting landscape, while simultaneously investing it with meaning.

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[76] Kumar, P. *Limiting Secularism*, 179.
[77] NGIS, 125.
[78] NGIS, 129.

In the second paragraph the innermost is turned out as the "guts" raise uncomfortable associations with the clogged pathways of a decrepit body. This inferno can only be endured at the cost of perpetual sensual torpidity – or radical disidentification:

> A Honda City glides by. I am reflected in its windows. The revulsion on my face stuns me. And I am doubly stunned by the disgust on the face of the man *inside* the car, in the back seat, staring out at what must seem just another filthy Muslim ghetto. (NGIS, 130)

An archetypal mirror moment, the episode shows the psychological subject's disengagement from the social/religious subject projected onto the car's windows. Having exited the social body, the speaker is no longer Sohail Tambawala but Jiten Mehra who now in his turn wields the gaze to look down upon the surrounding mess. But the last incentive to confirm Sohail-Jiten's decision to change his identity comes by way of another encounter as a man with a cleaver runs towards him, trying to catch a fleeing chicken[79]. This comic scene inaugurates one of the most memorable and subtle monologues of NGIS. "*Amjad, The Slayer of Lesser Life Forms*" suffers a severe form of sensual overload, induced by the abysmal stench, squawking and the lingering gaze of dying chicken which he confronts every day in his occupation as the quarter's chicken butcher.

> The cage has five levels. The chickens in the top row are fresh arrivals. They come from the farm in a round wicker basket, twice a week, ten at a time, clean and calm and unsuspecting. They gape like awe-struck villagers, not understanding why the old-timers in the racks below are so noisy and difficult. As they begin their row-wise descent, these new chickens, worn out by heat, fear and lack of space, gradually become restless and cranky, till at last they turn so unlovable as to deserve to die. (NGIS, 133)

The sustained confrontation with death has Amjad philosophize about the human condition which he regards as not altogether unlike the animal. Hence the image recalls the Barauli refugees who share the condition of the newly arrived chicken, living as they do in tiny, cramped shacks on top of Ismat Towers. The comparison of the chicken to "awe-struck villagers" clearly sustains the implicit nexus. As a powerful metaphor of the transformations to which the experience of the city submits particularly its subaltern subjects, it is also highly effective. The crowding and sensation of suffocation are thus ubiquitous, but particularly inescapable for the poor. In TWT Aravind Adiga notably devises a similar metaphor, namely that the "rooster coop".

This overlap testifies to the authors' acute awareness of the cramped living conditions faced by the vast mass of metropolitan dwellers. Like the abortion doctor, Amjad is unable to disengage himself psychologically from his profession, mainly because of the lingering smell of death which follows him everywhere and which no amount of water and detergent can eliminate.

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[79] The scene and its reception aesthetic effect are discussed in depth on pages 75ff.

Notably, the butcher's monologue features the only explicit mention of the Bombay Riots of 1992/93[80], the events of which are encapsulated in the story of Mushtaq:

> [Mushtaq] has been circling the city yelling mother-sister abuses for eight years, ever since his laundry-cum-clothes-rental shop at Anjeerwadi was gutted by neighbouring slum-dwellers. It was the night after the masjid was broken. The night people stopped being neighbours, cobblers, tailors, bakers, vendors or drivers, and everyone turned Hindu or Muslim, Hindu against Muslim. It was the night some Hindus wished they weren't Hindu and most Muslims wished they weren't Muslim. When the curfew lifted three days later, Mushtaq rushed out like other anxious businessmen. He searched Anjeerwadi for his shop, not finding it where it should have been, as if shops could be mislaid. […]. He has been searching ever since, refusing to believe. (NGIS, 134)

The suppression of the event as an elementary psychological function results in a temporal vacuum. Hence the riots are not over for Mushtaq as long as he cannot find his shop. Notably the paragraph conveys little of the scale and brutality of the violence then unleashed upon the city, instead focusing upon the riots' psychology. Consequently the text highlights the economic motivation that drove the perpetrators to pillage and destroy[81]. But Amjad too is suppressing a memory. He has learnt that killing "out of hatred or fear hardens the heart"[82] and remarks, quite casually, that he has had "[his] share of such killing and want[s] no more."[83] It is not until five pages later that the narrator is again confronted with the memory of his deed.

Barely risen from the "four-feet-deep sewer"[84] in front of Medina Chicken Mart, a man enters to demand justice for his brother. His strong myopia which precipitated the fall is rivalled only by his blind hatred of Hindus. "This man killed my seventeen-year-old brother! Had he been a Hindu I would have hacked his neck by now. But when one of us is at fault, what to do?"[85] Amjad is not surprised by the accusation which he has evidently anticipated. Confronted with his deed, the memory suddenly comes back to him, regurgitated like undigested food in a continuous stream:

> Which one was Wasim Sheikh anyway? The one kissing the girl or the one kneading her bare buttocks? *To think would have been a sin*. There was my hand lifting a nearby brick. There was the brick in my hand. There was the brick coming down with two sure strokes. There were the two men, now dead, their skulls split open by the brick. There was the girl lying on the grass. A dumbfounded eight-year-old. I picked her up. She was trembling like a chicken. […] For once it had nothing to do with who I was, what I did, or Whom I revered. *It was simply about two perverts, a low-caste girl and a butcher who did what he had to do.* (NGIS, 138f)(emphasis added)

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[80] Amin-bhai's monologue references the riots only fleetingly (Cf. NGIS, 28).
[81] Cf. Punwani "'My Area, Your Area': How Riots Changed the City." In: Patel/Masselos (eds), *Bombay and Mumbai*, 238ff.
[82] NGIS, 135.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] NGIS, 138.

Yet the perspective implicit in the account with its repetitive passive construction does not appear that of an involved party, but of a bystander. Following his instinct the speaker finds himself killing the rapists as if directed by an external force. In its linear succession of movements, each a consequence of the preceding, the effect created resembles that of a flip-book wherein each frame is still discernible as a separate entity. The interior perspective reveals no aperture, no moment in which the rapid succession of actions might have been stopped. Being a Muslim and poor, Amjad too is vulnerable and familiar with the low-caste girl's predicament in so far as both cannot hope to rely on the police for help. It is not mere altruism then, but the acute awareness of their vulnarability which fire Amjad's rage in that moment. Notwithstanding the strong motive, Amjad does not to tell the accuser of the rape his brother was about to commit. Instead he flees the cross-examination by the latter and his boss to the mosque.

> The muck on his sleeve rubbed off on my shirt. There was now a black blot on my chest smelling like hell itself. I was wrong: I could never get used to a smell like this. […] For the first time in three years I stumbled through the passageways of the market looking to douse myself with attar or spices or turpentine—anything to mask the stench of me. (NGIS, 140)

As the accuser's gutter stain passes on from the latter to Amjad, it becomes a symbolic mark of guilt. Unlike the tiny blood stain on the contract killer's shirt however, Amjad's stain is unignorable. Having meticulously eliminated all odors from his life in order to cope with his profession and provide for his family, the narrator is now tortured by a stench he cannot escape. But also the existence of the owner of Medina Chicken Mart is determined by the impulse to escape. Armed with a handkerchief against the stench of the dead chicken, "Jamal Seth, the Desperado"[86] is anxious to preserve "a last vestige of [his] humanity, or whatever little of it is left."[87] Morally and emotionally he seems indifferent.

> The propriety of my actions remains unknowable, and my attempts to ascertain right from wrong resemble a blind man opinionating on colour. I wonder: is it like this with everyone? Does Amjad *feel* anything as he slaughters away to glory from morning to night? Did he *feel* anything when he killed those two men? I don't know for sure whether he did, I don't *want* to know, but assuming he did, did Amjad feel anything while taking human lives? I do not think so. The feelings are missing. They have vanished. What's left are instincts, sensations, drive and passions. Inside, everything is dead. (NGIS, 142)

Unlike Amjad, Seth is content to blame his dour life for his absence of sympathy and humanity: "With the lives we live it's never too early or too far to watch half-naked women gyrate."[88] But on that particular night the hurried ride to Samudra Mahal, a dance

[86] The surname suggests that he is descended from a wealthy, landowning family.
[87] NGIS, 141.
[88] NGIS, 144.

bar, brings disappointment as a power cut delays the marvellous metamorphosis of "[t]he cage [..] replaced by a stage; the poop-streaked grilling with disco lights; the chickens […] turn[ed] into bar girls."[89] Instead, the narrator finds reality amplified by heat. Just like the chicken in his shop, the women are mere merchandise for Seth. For the dancers in their turn, the cage-stage is all too real. To prevent the male audience from leaving, one of the girls begins an improvised dance in the darkness. However, her performance soon metamorphoses from sensual enticement to provocative parody:

> The girl is not quite dancing any more. She swaggers about like a drunk. She twitches like an epileptic. Lurches. Marches around like a soldier. Rolls on the floor. Slaps her own face. Paces back and forth like a tigress. *Huh*?
>
> Then she starts beating her own chest. Whack! Whack! She paces the floor and beats her chest. The other girls continue to clap like machines. Thuck! Thuck! (NGIS, 150)

Aware that she is in full command of her audience's attention, the bar dancer uses the moment to render her exploitation and vulnerability visible. Forced to smile and keep silent under the hungry gaze of customers, she uses the only language at her disposition to stage her resistance. In her performance she alternately assumes the poses of beauty and temptress into which male projections and media images cast women. In the end however, it is only by violating her body – the only 'commodity' she commands – that she succeeds in galvanizing the audience, rupturing their indulgence and sensual stupor. In this way she forces Jamal Seth to withdraw his gaze, flummoxed and revolted, albeit unwilling to recognize his own implication in the objectification her performance aims to expose. But for the narrator-focalizer "our eyes are now our cocks and to ogle is to hug, kiss, fondle, undress, mount and fuck, all rolled into one."[90]

If "scopophilia [.] tak[es] other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze,"[91] this is scopophilia at its most exteme as the body becomes implicit and complicit in the gaze, a gaze more powerful since its source is obscured by the dark. The object of the gaze is thus unable to return it and consequently finds herself reduced to pure spectacle. In so far, the situation resembles that of the projection hall. But the passage simultaneously testifies to the displacement of sexual desire onto images. This is presented here as the inevitable result of a rigid social code circumscribing male-female encounters between non-relatives. His prolonged abstinence has thus led Seth to develop fantasies in which the woman assumes an entirely passive role.

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[89] NGIS, 146.
[90] NGIS, 145.
[91] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 200.

> The abduction of a girl is a tempting course of action. Not to rape and discard the abductee, but to detain her long enough to win her affection. Half a chance to impress is all I ask for. I cannot remember the last time I spoke to a girl I was not related to, […]. We would talk, I would ask about her likes and dislikes, birth sign, and then I would propose. Why can't my sisters hurry up and get married? Being the elder brother, I must wait till both have wedded. My sisters, however, seem in no hurry […]. How did they grow so willful under their burkhas? […]. Some of *us* are tired of honking at girls and driving across town to watch sluts dance. (NGIS, 145)

If marriage primarily means sexual fulfillment for Seth, for the women it means above all sacrifice as the monologues of Avantika, Mrs. Khwaja and Mrs. Joshi indicate. In the context of the public debate on violence against women that erupted after the 2012 Delhi gang rape, Jamal Seth's monologue is instructive as it sheds light on the problematic albeit pervasive assumption that women are subject to men's will and exist only to observe the roles of wife/mother or prostitute. Not least, the episode at Samudra Mahal also marks a play with darkness and its socio-psychological implications. The suspension of social conventions and simultaneous emergence of suppressed desires and feelings is confined to the dark. Notwithstanding that Jamal Seth notices the "defiance" and "malicious smile"[92] on the face of the dancer as she concludes her performance. Finding his gaze returned in this way, the narrator-focalizer becomes angry.

The events occurring during "*The Rest of the Enjoyable Evening*" are related in the following section, again presented in the heterodiegetic mode by an omniscient narrating and focalizing agency. With the return of electricity, the dance girls again begin to 'function' to their audience's satisfaction, the scenery resembling that of the 'cabaret numbers' of popular Indian films where scores of scantily clad dancers perform their synchronic routines: "Hands jogging, heads swinging, their long black hair whipping each other's faces. […] Customers' gazes darted across the barroom and clung to the women's bodies like bats."[93] The exploitative gaze of the men thus finds its apt symbol in the bat – a blood-sucking, nocturnal animal. "*Much Later That Night*" the text resumes the bar dancer's story, or so the text implies when it tells of a woman tired of dancing and smiling, sitting in the backseat of a taxi when a beggar appears. But he is turned down by her:

> He regretted having tried at all. What a waste of precious energy. The beggar believed he had received *nothing* from the woman in the taxi.
>
> He was wrong.
>
> He had been given. The virus transmitted. The score settled.
>
> The woman in the taxi had made the beggar—a *man*, a representative of his detestable kind—endure the agony of his own insignificance.
>
> (Not that it amounted to much.) (NGIS, 156)

[92] NGIS, 151.
[93] NGIS, 154.

Again the short main clauses aligned in parallel fashion invoke the report, but the grave tone alerts us to the encounter's symbolic meaning. The 'gift' thus marks a symbolic rejection of *man*-kind at large, represented here by its most vulnerable exponent. While unable to afford rejecting 'customers' like Jamal Seth, the bar dancer can afford to reject him, the social outcaste. But instead of consigning the beggar to the void again, the text proceeds to present life from his perspective. As a speech act conceived entirely in the second person as an appeal to humanity, "*When You Are a Beggar…*" is exceptional.

> You can shit wherever, piss wherever, sleep everywhere and anywhere. You will eat anything. No matter how putrid, no matter how many mouths have bitten into that paratha in the trash can, you'll take it. You can wear anything; sometimes nothing at all. You could be lying naked under the seat of a jam-packed train and no one would even notice. (NGIS, 157)

Being 'invisible' is no freedom but a bane as it erases his presence and that of the marginalized and poor. As Rajagopal reminds us, India's is "a visual culture that sharply distinguished between what was worthy of being seen, and what ought not to be revealed."[94] Hence the 'invisibility' of poverty is not only socially pernicious, but consigns the subject itself to oblivion, body following psychological self. As a result, the former constantly seeks the means for its annihilation. As the sensual experience of the beggar's life maps out on two and a half pages – the relatively small space underscoring the reduction of a life to physical survival – the impetus towards embodiment, palpable in some of the preceding monologues, becomes eschatological. The acrid, toxic fumes of batteries and rubber soles thus transport the reader into a beggar's trip:

> There is no pleasure in a beggar's high, no relief. It is black and airless, like being tied to the seabed. While your mind floats in ether, starvation drags your body around like a toy. The searing pain in your veins makes you run to and fro looking for something to burn and inhale. And always there is the ache of semen piling up every second, seeking release, seeking some soft moist crevice in which to spill itself—a dog, a chicken, a dead body… (NGIS, 158f)

Notably the text does not paint an image of the beggar as altogether passive and victimized, instead sketching a thoroughly human figure with human needs. Nowhere is the sense of existential loneliness that seems endemic to NGIS evoked as powerfully and painfully as in the beggar's monologue, from which any hint of irony that could provide relief or distraction is conspicuously absent. Driven by an almost naturalistic obligation to detail, the text relentlessly explores the deepest depths of human existence where the only relief comes from self-absence, i.e., a total loss of consciousness.

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[94] Rajagopal, "Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture," 14.

> You scramble for the nearest shadowy corner where you are certain to find, huddled under filthy blankets, dirt-black people concocting the means to flee the world you have just re-entered. You don't speak to them; they don't even glance at you. The understanding is of a superior order. The chef is efficient; he is also just a twelve-year-old urchin. You wonder if he is your son. When he hands you a slit of foil with a drop of fuming battery acid, you want to kiss his hands.
>
> And then you black out. (NGIS, 158)

At this point, the darkness is both literal and metaphoric and thus absolute, annihilating any sense of self, resulting in speechlessness. Like his body and his entire existence, the language and vocabulary of the speaker have atrophied and are now reduced to those six words that spell survival: "*Please, friend, money, food, hungry, God*—these are the only words you need as a beggar; to charm the tourists, you learn to render these words in every tongue spoken under the sun."[95] In this world of darkness, grand and abstract concepts are meaningless and even God is "just something you say to vex the indifferent fuckers."[96] The beggar's monologue really marks the emotional climax of NGIS as the harrowing second person underscores the psychological impossibility of 'I'.

Through the beggar's monologue, Mumbai changes in appearance. Hence the entire city here seems pervaded by the invisible presence of misery and suffering, so that the slum appears no isolated or stable site like the rooftop shacks on Ismat Towers. Instead, "slum-dwellers loom large on the urban consciousness as a dark, ominous, ill-understood, unmanageable presence."[97] NGIS gives this ominous presence a shape and acuity while neither mystifying nor glorifying it. Unlike in media images that rely on the stark, visible aspect of poverty, the text projects it as a psychological condition of total abandon that becomes accessible only through the presentation of consciousness.

In what overtly appears a manoeuver to offset the beggar's perspective, the text now turns to "*Rahul Adhikari—Siddharta in Denial*."

> My Bombay is a cold, dry city.
>
> I sleep under a blanket in my Bombay. (Preferably with someone who will go away before I get up, leaving strands of her hair on my pillow and traces of stale perfume on my sheets.)
>
> On waking I turn on my cellphone.
>
> […]
>
> I microwave a cup of coffee. I sit at the kitchen counter with the newspaper—Times of India. There, there's your Bombay again, swamping my mind, bringing the whole of India with it. Before the clamour can mar my dignified morning, I chuck aside the chaos making news in your world. (NGIS, 160)

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[95] NGIS, 185.
[96] NGIS, 159.
[97] Nandy, Ashis. "Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics." *The Secret Politics of our Desires: Innocence, Culpability, and Indian Popular Cinema*. Ed. Ashis Nandy. London: Zed Books.1998, 3.

The contrapuntal function of this monologue becomes evident almost immediately as the exposition marks a willful denial of Mumbai's hot, humid reality and a declaration of independence. In the quiet, cold fortress inhabited by the speaker, the chaotic, loud and dirty city is present only in the newspaper. A successful albeit emotionally vacuous executive who has perfected the art of looking away, Adhikari excels in the art of denial. But life on the other end of the social spectrum is equally marked by loneliness and isolation. The fortress not only shuts others out, it also shuts the resident in. Notably the second person pronoun cropping up in the last sentence effectively consigns the narratee to a distinct social position, namely one below that of the speaker. Whereas the beggar addressed the narratee without reservations, Adhikari condescendingly casts the implied reader among the lot of those not having the means or will to negate social realities.

The interpellation thus imposes a distinct position upon the the implied reader that the real reader need not necessarily adopt. This implied reader thus serves the sole function of counterpoint or foil for the self-centered Adhikari against which he perpetuates his performance of anti-social profiteer. The robotic precision of the parallel sentence structure relating the protagonist's daily routine is not sustained throughout, however. The 'I' that begins every sentence, thus underscoring the speaker's self-centeredness, is continually challenged by minute irruptions.

Living and working in air-conditioned, guarded high-rise blocks between which he commutes in a chauffeur-driven car with "nearly black" windows, the narrator inhabits a carefully constructed bubble under perpetual threat of exploding. When a beggar approaches Adhikari's car, he consequently orders the driver to hand out a five-rupee-note to be rid of him. It is the second time in the text that a ghastly beggar "look[ing] like a corpse"[98] approaches the passenger of a car. That it is the speaker of the preceding monologue is implied, but of little consequence. It is the beggar's symbolic charge representing social descent, illness and death that is relevant as it speaks to primal fears. Unlike Buddha Siddharta who is referenced in the title, Adhikari is (as yet) unwilling to exit the bubble of his princely existence. Nonetheless, his life is that of an ascetic or *sannyasi* fleeing the world to avoid involvement in any potentially painful matter of human life. "For one more day, for another twelve hours, I can, I must, I *will have to* forget that your Bombay exists."[99] But his carefully guarded, sanitized bubble is too fragile to withstand random attacks:

[98] NGIS, 162.
[99] Ibid.

*Bleep-bleep-bleep….bleep-bleep-bleep…*the direct line rings.

[…]

'Let's just go this afternoon and get it done with,' a woman says.

'What?'

'There's no way out, okay!'

[…]

'Hello?' the woman says. 'Kasim, are you there?'

I fling the handset on the carpeted floor. 'IT'S THE WRONG NUMBER!' I yell at the receiver. 'HANG UP THE FREAKING PHONE! YOU HAVE THE WRONG FREAKING NUMBER!' (NGIS, 163)

As contingency links two strangers, one in desperate need, the other in denial, the latter is eventually confronted with an existential dilemma he cannot simply ignore. Enjoying regular one night stands with random women, Adhikari cannot be sure if he is soon confronted with the same question by another woman. In so far, the call is not actually misdirected. But the name Kasim simultaneously effects a rollback of the narrative machinery: At last the narrative is turning full circle here as the caller must be Minaz, trying to reach her boyfriend Kasim on the morning of the planned abortion. All of a sudden, the previously linear narrative trajectory curves to connect the end with the beginning. But by having the end discharge into the beginning, the logic of temporal succession is controverted. By this unexpected sleight of hand order is (re-)established, albeit not in a teleological sense.

Herewith NGIS could be said to adopt Hindu cosmology as a narrative principle in so far namely as the latter is premised upon the principle of *samsara* or cyclical return. The cyclical narrative pattern is after all a familiar one in IEF and in so far could be regarded as a trope or affirmation of its alterity. Moreover it is a fitting irony that this last and most important of all connections is facilitated by Minaz' cell-phone – one of the mundane apparati determining human existence in the twenty-first century. In this way technology emerges not as a sovereign monopolist of human communication and attention, but as another emissary of dharma or destiny. Paradoxically, meaning is thus communicated through contingency. In the text's conclusive monologue it is the morning of the abortion again and a determined Minaz tries to arrange the trip with a reluctant Kasim.

Tonight, while she and I sleep in our respective bedrooms twelve kilometers apart, only one of our private parts will ache from the penetration of a surgical instrument, and it won't be my penis.

My penis!
That
bloody
bane
of an appendage (NGIS, 164)

Here the text for once deploys iconic visuality as the text typographically reproduces the form of what Kasim identifies as the root cause of their problem, his penis. In other words, the text assumes a figural-iconic form consonant with the content. But no matter how hard he tries, punishment of the guilty party inevitably transforms into sexual pleasure. When Minaz calls again, Kasim is shocked at his lack of control, his sexuality asserting itself as if unaffected by the existential risk of their situation[100]. As he rides an overcrowded bus through the city, he resolves to steer his life on a new course. "It's the way I intend to live my life from now—on the periphery. Tethered, but only just."[101] Kasim's following down the path of Rahul Adhikari is thus presented as a survival strategy of the subject. But it comes at a high price, namely kenosis.

When Kasim picks Minaz up at her home, the text is suddenly back in a familiar setting – Ismat Towers. All of a sudden the narrative strings are tightened so that the narrative universe of NIGS now appears compressed to the proportions of a miniature. By discovering the underlying pattern or plan, the text ultimately disavows contingency in a rather forceful fashion. Everything is connected. And yet, even before the final denouement the text appeared closed. Why this is so, will be discussed in the following.

3.3 IN/SIGHT — THE AESTHETICS OF POLITICS

> At the same time, [the narrative text] is an identification: the subject is formed here. It is a provocation, to the extent that it demands a reaction. This feature necessitates the study of the narratee, to be distinguished from real readers, but then to be compared with them. The narrative text is an apologia: it anticipates a reaction to which it already responds. The presuppositions which are inscribed within the text are manifestations of it. […]. And since immediate expression is no more possible than access to the image of the self in the mirror, it is also alienation. (Bal 1991, 147f)

The foregoing discussion rendered a number of instances at which the text anticipates or forecloses the response of the narratee so that the latter is immanent to the text's implicit movements. Bal's proposition of reading the text psychoanalytically is therefore appealing in so far as it focuses the connection between textual structure and phenomenal-aesthetic effect. The manipulation of the narratee via focalization and the 'hinge-joints' between the individual narrative vignettes can thus be rendered accessible to a systematic exploration. At the same time I try to show how the text addresses and presupposes a particular experience, shaped by the encounter with the screen, whether in the context of cinema or digital media.

[100] NGIS, 166.
[101] NGIS, 169.

This discussion is elementary to understanding NGIS' cognitive, aesthetic and psychological effect in the given context, which is understood to be defined by the ubiquity of screens. The following analysis departs from the premise that the intimate nature of the monologues as confessionals simultaneously casts the narratee as the Other *and* spectator of the text, simultaneously situated within and without.

> Because of the aesthetic distance of the spectator, one cannot resolve the problem by asserting that the literary work will open up, as it were, by itself. […]. If, in a literary dialogue spanning different temporal moments, an embodiment of the experience of others becomes possible, the aesthetically mediated otherness has to include something identifiable which can also be discerned in the alien text. (Jauss 2001, 9)

It thus remains to be established, what constitutes this identifiable element or moment in NGIS. Also in view of the rather precise spatial and ideological configuration of the narratee in the latter half of the text, the suggestion to "define the textual unconscious as that which is systematically eliminated from the narration and which can be interpolated into the gap in the narration"[102] appears heuristically productive.

> There was a phase during the writing of NGIS when I used to imagine myself pointing a camera in the face of the next person in the spotlight. I would beg them to give me their story, to start talking to me in my head. But I also knew that I was doing something that no film ever could: I was taking people *inside* my characters' heads. [...]? I used to write mission statements for the work in progress. One of them was, *This book must outdo cinema.* (Tyrewala 2013)(emphasis added)

Once again, the author's testimony provides an inroads into the discussion. The surreal situation in which each character is presented is after all an ambivalent one, at once immediate and distant. In choosing the form(at) of the interior monologue, the author privileges the closed psychological subject world over the external, material world. However, it is the latter and the other subjects populating it that provoke the reactions and incidents that comprise the plot substance of NGIS. In so far the text affirms the shibboleth that there is no self-sufficient subject, only many subjects with and against whom the speaking 'I' assumes form.

If "self-consciousness [.] is precisely what film as a medium finds most difficult to represent, because it is not visible,"[103] the opposite seems to be true of literature, most notably when conceived in the form of the interior monologue. The interior perspective marks the presence of the Other as an impression upon the senses and psychological reaction to it. The Other as presented in NGIS thus alternately appears a nuisance to be evaded (Nilofer), a threat to the self (the beggar), or as an object of scopophilia (the bar dancer).

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[102] Bal/Jobling. *On Story-Telling*, 147.
[103] Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel*, 202f.

In their function of focalizers, the protagonists grant the narratee as implied spectator access to the world as they see it. As noted in the beginning, NGIS perpetuates continuous perspective shifts. With every shift, the epistemological anchor in the narrative world changes. However, "[t]extual space involves not only a set of distinct locations but a *network of accesses and relations that binds these sites together into a coherent geography*," [104] as Ryan reminds us. To explain how the text generates this implicit network of accesses, I adopt the concept of *suture.* Originally a surgical term used by Lacan in his Seminaire XI, it was then adopted and conceptually elaborated by Jacques-Alain Miller as the insertion of the subject "into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier." [105] Drawing on Miller's conceptualization, as well as upon the cinema-psychological accounts of suture by Baudry and Metz, Silverman deploys the concept to theorize how the cinema film inserts the viewing subject *into* the filmic text.

Assuming that "the images which figure so centrally in the imaginary register exceed any strictly specular definition, and [..] can be generated by many other sources,"[106] including cinema, films dispose of the means to insert the subject into a "discursive position […] which necessitates not only its loss of being but the repudiation of alternative discourses." [107] In other words, films define the viewing position of the spectator qua psychological subject. The efficacy of a film consequently "depends upon the subject's willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to 'stand in' for it, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees."[108] In so far as literary texts too dispose of a set of visual-epistemological constraints compounded in the terms focalization and perspective, the narratee as implied spectator is also assigned a determinate 'viewing' position here by the focalizing agent which Margolin defines in the following fashion:

> The focalizing agent is a human or human-like story world participant who concentrates or focuses selectively on a portion of the available sensory information. At its core is a mind or recording device with its capabilities, faculties, structures and constraints. These would include embodiment, situatedness or space-time position (=vantage point), architecture (mechanisms, categories, routines) and, for human minds, also norms, values and epistemic attitudes. A focalizing agent may consequently be termed "perspective" and it is an agent that performs numerous acts of focalization [...]. (Margolin 2009, 43)

[104] Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 123.
[105] Silverman, Kaja,"Suture [Excerpts]." In: Rosen (ed), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 219.
[106] Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, 159
[107] Ibid., 222.
[108] Ibid., 205.

Assuming that "the operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, 'Yes, that's me,' or 'That's what I see [.],'"[109] identification becomes the base or premise to 'seeing'. The act of imaginary identification thus becomes a precondition for suture. Assuming that "[e]ach image is defined through its differences from those that surround it syntagmatically,"[110] the film thus emerges as the result of the continuous creation and subsequent dissimulation of difference. Something quite similar occurs in the corpus text as each perspective presented here is defined by its difference from the preceding and following. In so far each monologue codes an absence or lack, which the following monologue appears to compensate for. In essence, suture thus denotes a continuous oscillation between the seen and the unseen or invisible that is implicit in it.

In classical cinema, the shot/reverse shot technique is a major tool and primary sign of suture being perpetuated:

> Consequently, the shot/reverse shot formation derives its real importance and interest for many of the theoreticians of suture because it demonstrates so lucidly the way in which cinema operates to reduplicate the history of the subject. The viewer of the cinematic spectacle experiences shot 1 as an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. Shot 1 is thus the site of a *jouissance* akin to that of the mirror stage prior to the child's discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass. (Silverman 1984, 203)

It is to this primal psychological need to which the shot-counter shot technique as an integral part of continuity editing implicitly answers. "Continuity editing," as Hoesterey points out, "rendered all junctures invisible, which resulted in a tight, self-absorbed work that did not refer to itself as medium or constructed artifice."[111] The illusion that there *are* no voids in the filmic text is thus created purely on the level of the Symbolic. In NGIS this symbolic engineering of suture by way of the shot and counter shot technique is reflected in a narrative technique by which each focalizing agent adumbrates and prefigures the next, to whose perspective the text then switches. While this may sound strikingly simple it is salient in this context that each monologue is relatively short. Not only is narrative tension thus upheld throughout the text. More importantly the distance between one 'shot' and the next is minimized, so that the chain of identification is never suspended. In this way the oscillation between presence and absence is effectively sustained, resulting in a sensation of seamless transitions.

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[109] Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 205.
[110] Ibid., 222.
[111] Hoesterey, Ingeborg. *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, 45.

However, the manner in which the implied focalizer as psychological subject is 'borne across' the perspective gap is not always identical and merits attention. While the transition between Minaz' dialogue and that of the doctor was implicit, the following transition is narratively dramaticized and yet quite smooth:

> 'Catch it!' a man shouts again.
> I watch the chicken flee, but don't move an inch. […]
> 'Moove!' Coming straight at me is a man in vest and lungi with a cleaver in his hand.
> I sneer and step aside.
> […]
> 'Moo… (NGIS, 130)
>
> *Amjad, the Slayer of Lesser Life Forms*
>
> …oove!
> Out of my way! If that chicken reaches the street, it will be crushed under some car or scooter. *I'll* have to pay forty rupees from *my* pocket while crows and cats enjoy a risky mid-road feast. (NGIS, 131)

Here the first protagonist Sohail/Jiten is directly addressed by the following protagonist but strains to ignore him. Between them there is no communication, perhaps only the most fleeting of glances as Sohail seeks to ignore Amjad. But the butcher's urgent appeal marks an *interruption*, even an *irruption.* To Sohail, the butcher is a merely another reminder of the life he is trying to evade. The minimal spatiotemporal distance between the two monologues correlates with the sense of spatial compression and lack of privacy suffered by Sohail. At other junctures however, the transition between two monologues is underscored by an exchange of the gaze. Hence Minaz' look at the 'doctor' is inverted by his acute perception of her figure. In the text's concluding scene, the doctor is eventually also submitted to Kasim's appraising gaze. What results is a chain of inverted looks as a protagonist appraises another, tacitly trying to exert power over her. In the scene at the clinic, this reversible gaze thus replicates the shot and reverse shot formation.

However, the gaze is reciprocated in different ways. In fact the text reveals an economy of the gaze that simultansously lays open the uneven power relations between the protagonists. Particularly the female characters like Nilofer, the bar dancer or Avantika are primarily objects of the gaze. And while Shakila the dancer succeeds in interrupting and upsetting Jamal Seth's gaze, Avantika feels highly vulnerable when moving outside her apartment as male onlookers immediately start insulting her. In the public sphere she wields no power to deflect or evade the gaze. But the gaze and the (im-)possibility to return it also implicitly demarcates social barriers.

At Ismat Towers, Nilofer, Vinti and Kishore are outsiders, solicitors and supplicants. In their own view, their plea is legitimate, namely to make a living. Their perspective is mirrored and inverted by the inside perspective, represented by the anonymous couple, the family with nine daughters and Munaf. For them, Nilofer and the others mainly mark a disturbance. It is up to them to answer their call and open the door. Social polarities thus intersect here with spatial polarities – wealthy and poor, inside and outside. It is clearly no coincidence that the beggar is cast opposite the executive, the wealthy Hindu NRI opposite the destitute Muslim Urdu teacher and the career woman[112] vis-à-vis the depressed housewife. In this way the gaze alerts readers to the manner in which the Other relates to and shapes the subject, as an object of rejection and disidentification on the one hand, or as an object of longing.

If each monologue delineates a subject in isolation, the Other is always proximate, a factor vital to the formation and maintenance of the self. Moreover, the Other demarcates the narrative horizon on which a new story dawns. In so far, it is only through the gap that the textual subject is created while the implied spectator is continuously repositioned. In so far, the process of spectator identification proceeds on the same primary mechanism. And yet, while in the film "[a] maximum of technique and technology seeks a minimum of attention for itself, thereby […] succeeding in creating a transparency that simulates proximity and intimacy,"[113] the literary text carries the imprint of its manufacture. But here readers' familiarity with the conventions of cinematic spectatorship helps them.

When the text finally returns to the moment and place where it began, the potentially endless narrative horizon previously delineated, is effectively closed. Here, all perspectives are suddenly brought to a convergence. If each perspective implied a negative, unseen space, this negative space has now been delimited. There is nothing left to see, or so this manoeuvre implies. The implied spectator cannot be left wanting. Visually and epistemologically, NGIS then represents an overdetermined text. It is imperative to note at this point however that there are junctures in the text, which do not feature a shot-reverse shot formation and do not effect suture. These are conceived in the heterodiegetic narrative mode and imply an omniscient focalizing and narrating agency. While these do not sustain the chain of suture, they have a textual function clearly marked in their titles: A Digression, A Prelude, On That Very Same Afternoon, What (Really) Happened Next, The Rest of the Enjoyable Evening, Much Later that Night.

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[112] Represented by Rina the journalist and Punita the producer.
[113] Elsaesser/Hagener, *Film Theory*, 18.

All of the aforementioned titles directly advertise their causal or chronological function. Their purpose is to order the endless chain of encounters, while assigning the section a determinate position and function within the text's narrative architecture. In this way the narratee is intermittently assured that the narrative trajectory of this "relay race" is not arbitrary and that its various detours are meaningful. In a narrative which perpetually defers its conclusion, this is a task of paramount importance. In so far, their semiotic function could be compared to that of punctuation marks in a text. In cinematographic terms, some of these passages resemble a pan shot or a tableau in so far as they (dis-)close or summarize the narrative situation.

If the rapid succession of monologues and the prevalence of direct speech evokes real time, this impression is triumphantly subverted in the final monologue. Narrated and narrative time thus diverge. By the same token, the narratee is catapulted back to the start. As in a virtual gameworld, the player is sent back to the first level, to the point where everything began. And there are other parallels linking NGIS to games and Virtual/Mixed Reality applications[114]: Hence the text comprises of a series of brief encounters that determine the trajectory of the characters as fictional game avatars. However, each character engages in only one encounter before being consigned to the void again. And yet, the fictional world of NGIS recalls a maze comprised of different levels, spatially and socially. More than the text or film, the computer game relies on interactivity. NGIS in its turn relies on the *simulation* of interactivity since its scope for interaction and play is necessarily more limited.

Games are furthermore associated with "spectacular, showy displays of effects at the expense of subtext and character, […]."[115] There are inexplicable spatiotemporal 'leaps' and multiple choice options – in other words, situations that do not arise in text or film in their conventional format as finished products. And yet, while NGIS does not choose the hypertext format that allows texts to be written, expanded upon and altered, one of its salient features is germane to the game and popular film, namely its deployment of character (stereo-)types. With Mrs. Khwaja and Mrs. Joshi on the one hand and Kasim, Jamal Seth and Munaf on the other, we have the frustrated middle class housewife here and the young, disaffected middle class male seeking a female companion there.

[114] Games like Sim-City come to mind in so far as they project the city as a social microcosm in which different agents interact under a variety of spatial, social and other constraints.

[115] Brooker, Will. "Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Videogames and the "Cinematic"." Cinema Journal. 48.3 (2009), 123. JSTOR 1 Apr. 2014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20484483>.

The list goes on, including the disenfranchised young male (Nawaz, Suleiman, Sohail) and the lugubrious yuppie (Sohail 42, Rahul Adhikari), alienated from society and himself. By way of doubling and inversion the characters are tacitly invested with symbolic weight, if not necessarily with psychological acuity and depth. More even, they are implicitly ascribed the validity of sociographic types. Returning to the question, in how far NGIS relies on the game, it is interesting to note that death is no absolute in the text. Hence before introducing the 'real' Sohail Tambawala of whose death the reader has been informed in the title (Prelude to the Death of Sohail Tambawala), several eponymous characters are featured. Then the actual Sohail is given a second lease on life, if only for a brief time.

Such a "character-death and reset"[116] is also increasingly staged in films: As Brooker notes "[t]he deliberate association with a lower-status form like videogames brings a movie down to a trashier, edgier, funkier level; it sacrifices any claims to serious art […]."[117] The situation is different here however as NGIS does not compromise on its social and political message, even as it occasionally diverges as in "What Happened Next/What Really Happened Next." The playful gesture thus only augments the political message conveyed in the text. Notably however, repetition and non-linearity are also structural principles of "websites [and] hypertext stories."[118] Ryan consequently distinguishes four phenomena in the virtual world which can also be traced in 'traditional' narrative formats, namely "virtuality, recursion, windows, and morphing."[119]

I argue that all of these are salient to the machinations of the text to a higher or lesser degree. As previously noted, the conception of each monologue resembles that of a window. However, the epistemological impossibility of consciousness addressing readers directly, underscores the virtual status of this window. Recursion meanwhile is central to the narrative structure of NGIS as each new character adds information vital to understanding the previous monologue. In so far as each monologue blends into the next, the sum of these transformations might be likened to the morphing of an image. But beyond its 'reel aesthetics' the text's *real* poetics offers more points for discussion in so far as the city captures and encapsulates the multifarious social, political and demographic challenges of contemporary India as Geeta Ganapathy-Doré points out:

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[116] Brooker, Will. "Camera-Eye, CG-Eye: Videogames and the "Cinematic"." Cinema Journal 48.3 (2009): 124. JSTOR 1 Apr. 2014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20484483>.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Cyberage Narratology: Computers, Metaphor and Narrative." *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Ed. David Herman. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999, 115f.

> On the traces of Rushdie, other novelists such as Rohinton Mistry and Vikram Chandra have tried to capture this city [Bombay] with a thousand faces that is perpetually subjected to monstrous metamorphoses. [...] Such Bombay based novels and Suketu Mehta's docufiction translate the city's global empowerment and the effervescence of artistic creation found there, while also rendering visible the slums, the mirror of the misery paradoxically generated by free market capitalism. In this sense, slums are to Indian cities what suburbs are to European cities, a marginal space where a potential for violence (poverty, drug, criminality, fundamentalism, terrorism) co-exists with equally important forces of invention and renewal. (Ganapathy-Doré 2011, 75f)

For Catherine Pesso-Miquel, the Indian context in which "murders, rapes, communalist progroms […] are deliberately falsified, twisted or even denied," [120] poetological questions are of immediate political significance so that "sticking to the catechism that all truths are relative or questionable is a rather cowardly luxury, a kind of autistic stance for an artist and an intellectual […]."[121] Altaf Tyrewala consequently addresses these problems not only through his characters and their stories, but by having them address the narratee privately. Moreover, the text perpetually confronts the reader with her Other – be it in terms of gender, social class or religious/ethnic community. NGIS thus incessantly seeks to extend, undermine and reform received notions and ideas. If the text stages an "act of resistance," it also obliquely reflects the obligation towards authenticity and verisimilitude. Its polyphony thus appears the consequential result of the poetological pressure to represent not one, but many experiences. To this end the author adopts the narrative pattern of the composite novel which "has thrived almost exclusively […] in (expatriate) Indian fiction in English."[122]

As Fludernik points out, "[t]he connection between stories in the cycle can be sporadic and superficial, with the emphasis on the individual tales (Janowitz, Mistry), but some composite novels use the form to portray the life of a community […]."[123] While the aim of portraying this community, i.e. Mumbai Muslims, is clearly palpable, the individual tales possess acuity and have the power to engage readers affectively. Whereas "composite novels often alternate between homo- and heterodiegetic narration, and external and internal focalization," [124] present text privileges the former over the latter, thereby indicating that the stories are ultimately of less significance than the characters and their state of mind.

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[120] Pesso-Miquel, Catherine. "Addressing Oppression in Literature. Strategies of resistance in Indian and Indian English Contemporary Fiction." Journal of Postcolonial Writing. 43:2 (2007), 149. 14 June 2013. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449850701430473#.VLJK8iuG_C4>.

[121] Ibid., 150.

[122] Fludernik, "Composite Novel." In: Herman/Jahn/Ryan (eds), *Routledge Enyclopedia of Narrative*,78.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

While it may be true that "episodic narratives" [125] are found in "much of third-world, postcolonial literature,"[126] the episodic is given a different inflection here through the use of the recursive pattern:

> In the recursive pattern — which occasionally combines with iteration — little stories are a structural component of a larger constituent, to which they contribute input. The trademark of this pattern is a sense of interruption: each new story is pushed on a stack of unfinished stories, and upon completion, returns information necessary to the continuation of the lower level. ([…].) While iterative structures respect the forward movement of time, recursive embedding typically sets the narrative clock back to some point in the prehistory of the current situation. (Ryan 1999, 122)

In and through the heterodiegetically presented text sections, this "larger constituent" gradually becomes apparent while the narrative onus is on the individual characters, whose circumstances the text illuminates. Inevitably, it is characters' social and religious and gender identity which determines their lives, often leaving little or no room for individual desires and aspirations. It is this sense of ineluctability, of individual submission under a label and identity not freely chosen which unites all of the elementary particles of this "atomic" or "molecular narrative."[127] As a result, the community *can* only be narrated through its component parts.

It is interesting to note in this context however, that the characters representing the city's Muslim community appear to have strikingly little in common: Not only do they belong to different social strata, but also to different religious subgroups with different lifestyles, convictions and attitudes towards life. This 'cross-section' of Muslims is counterbalanced and complemented by a group of Hindu characters conceived as mirror images of the former. This becomes most obtrusive where the middle class characters are concerned. Like the Joshis, the Khwajas have withdrawn into private life but seem to experience an insurmountable sense of vacuity which the creature comforts of wealth cannot alleviate. As a subtheme of the text, the pathology of (upper) middle class depression outlined here underscores the text's aspiration to comprehensive sociography while at the same time contradicting the images of consumerist bliss communicated in popular media and particularly popular Hindi film.

As a social unit, the family thus appears incapable of replacing a functional civil society. But the religious community presents itself as equally unsuited to the task. NGIS thus repudiates the essentialized notion of community as a 'natural' unit – a critique also raised by Sumit Sarkar with regard to the contemporary drift of scholarly discourse:

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[125] Ryan, "Cyberage Narratology." In: Herman (ed), *Narratologies*, 122.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Herman, David. "Atomic and Molecular Narratives." In: Herman/Jahn/Ryan (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative*, 29.

> Today, the dominant thrust within the project — or at least the one that gets most attention — is focused on critiques of Western-colonial power-knowledge, with non-Western 'community consciousness' as its valorized alternative. Also emerging is a tendency to define such communities principally in terms of religious identities. (Sarkar 2000, 300)

Summarizing these points, the conceit of an organic community held together by faith, a common lifestyles and common aspirations is dismissed. If there is a sense of community in NGIS, it manifests itself primarily in the form of a community of suffering. Where most characters manifest a conspicuously secular orientation, the differences in gender, social status, lifestyle etc. always outweigh their common ground. Nilofer's naïve assumption that the residents of Ismat Towers cannot possibly "refuse to assist a pregnant refugee from their own ummah,"[128] is an indication of the failure of the community as a functioning social organism. Amjad's intervention on behalf of the low-caste girl on the other hand, in so far as it is directed against a man of his own community, testifies to the fact that individual rights can only be defended where faith or group alliances do not prevail over them. Group loyalty thus emerges an inadequate, even dangerous reponse to a corrupt state and pervasive social inequality.

Notably it is not only the poor who suffer from being ignored in this text. The wealthy too experience their forced withdrawal into the private sphere as deadening. Mrs. Khwaja's monologue is indicative here: In the face of so much poverty and suffering she cannot possibly ask for more and so has no words to express what is lacking. In this context it is worthwhile addressing the plight of women as portrayed in the text – be they comfortable middle class housewives, struggling professionals or slum-dwelling refugees. In this case too, the text provides variation on the familiar narrative. Hence it is not only educated women who struggle to assume agency, but also Nilofer the refugee and the bar dancer Shakila. While more vulnerable than the middle class women, the absence of effective social control allows them to navigate their gender role with greater liberty. Hence Shakila is not only a victim as her occupation affords her financial independence, even as it stigmatizes her socially. Also Avantika, Rina and Punita prefer to earn their own money and are willing to make sacrifices for that.

Aware that the "subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow,"[129] – darkness literally obscures Shakila, the village girl and Nilofer – the text places her figure in the limelight, albeit without assuming the prerogative to speak (for) her.

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[128] NGIS, 55 (ummah = the community of the faithful)

[129] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 287.

But if their bodies and those of Minaz, Avantika, Rina and the other women are inscribed by male desire or rejection, the male body is not exempt from symbolic inscription in NGIS. Hence the physical insubstantiality of Nawaz, Sohail Tambawala and the beggar symbolizes and affirms their social marginality. Notably, each body presented in NGIS inscribes its social, gender and health status. More often than not, the latter is at odds with the body politic, whether because of its gender, its physical disability, or failure to conform to established beauty standards. Minaz' abortion may be read in this context as the most drastic example of the policing the body, while Avantika's treatment by men, both from her own family and strangers, critiques the reduction of women to their bodies. Munaf the handicapped boy on the other hand is forced to compensate for his dysfunctional body by his wealth. At the same time however, Munaf is a winner in so far as he is an IT entrepreneur who has 'made it', epitomizing the rising economic superpower. Like Rahul Adhikari and Abhay Joshi, he represents 'India Shining'.

Assuming that "one of the most powerful strategies of literature is that it turns statistics, numbers of anonymous, faceless victims, into individual people whose humanity, uniqueness and dignified suffering is illuminated,"[130] NGIS largely succeeds in this regard. With its high integration and calibrated network of repetitions, parallels and inversions, the text unequivocally lays claim to being representative. And although NGIS occasionally indulges in the postmodern aesthetics of play, it formulates its message emphatically. In its inherent polyphony, NGIS is geared to represent social diversity. In so far it seems valid to compare the text to non-fictional genres such as the documentary, reportage or sociographic report. In focusing the minutiae of quotidian life from an interior perspective however, the text reads as an insider report above all.

The images, sounds, smells etc. inscribed upon the text thus facilitate a subtle, pre-linguistic link between reader and character. It is one of the text's defining qualities that it does not presume to evoke the real through language only. The textual simulation of suture thus observes a primer function as it does not allow readers to assume a detached stance vis-à-vis the plight of the characters. For the characters – regardless whether beggar or businessman – language cannot express their experience in its acuity and immediacy. By contrast, NGIS offers proof of how superbly language lends itself to the bland rhetoric of politics and media. NGIS thus unsettles assumptions of text providing stable meaning, as much as of the stable subject.

[130] Pesso-Miquel, "Addressing Oppression in Literature," 149.

In its dynamic, intricate circuitry engineered to unsettle the epistemological position of the recipient, NGIS recalls Marcel Duchamp's "*Roto-Reliefs* (*Optical Discs*)":

> The object […] is consistently destabilized in Duchamp's work, or presented in such a way as to problematize the processes of recognition; it calls in question the identity and disturbs the 'knowledge' of the viewer. How then are we to read it? Is it playful, mischievous, designed to surprise and entertain or is there a serious imperative to be free of the constraints of the perspective tradition, to challenge the rules with a view to discovering in practice new forms that reveal what w*ill have been* the rules of their production? (Belsey 2005, 134) [131]

In so far as NGIS largely abandons narrative for consciousness, it does not afford the sovereignty of linear perspective. NGIS is therefore at once a liberating and castigating reading experience, liberating as it freely grants access to consciousness, castigating in its denial of release from this claustrophobic experience. But while each vignette may be read and interpreted independently, their critical, destabilizing potential only unfurls in their combination. In this way, the narratee is not merely enabled to perceive the Other, but to perceive herself through the eyes of the Other. Indifference, rejection and clichés faced by the characters glare back at the narratee who is thus made to feel their impact.

> I took the crowd in, so to speak. As a middle-class convent-schooled and foreign-educated Indian, I had been conditioned from a very early age that the crowd is what one must keep out at all times, come what may. NGIS was me rebelling against the exclusionary politics of my class. Through monologue upon monologue, by repeatedly imagining myself to be someone else, often someone belonging to radically different social and economic circumstances, I made the Other a part of me forever. (Tyrewala 2013[132])

The simulation of such a face to face dialogue between the narrating consciousness and the narratee grants only a fleeting sense of communion, apt to documenting how little we understand and know each other when interaction is almost always forced and compressed into a minimal space — not only the crowded streets of the city, but the minute bits of visual and textual information heaped upon the metropolitan dweller, demanding her continuous attention. Real communication seems impossible here.

> The claustrophobic space of the screen existed in a force field with crowded urban spaces in the city, producing a periodic warping of media experience. The commodified mingling of surfaces and objects recognizes no limits today: paper flyers in local newspapers, television channels that implore their viewers to call in on shows or text their opinion, […], SMS and text solicitations, a hyperstimulus that presumes an active anthropology of the senses of readers, consumers, viewers, participants. (Sundaram 2014, 43f)

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[131] "Made to spin mechanically, these lithographs produce a variety of bulging circles, alternating spirals and vortices, receding depths and projecting surfaces, creating the illusion of movement in three dimensions, without for an instant concealing the point that this *is* an illusion." (Belsey, *Culture and the Real*, 134.)

[132] Written correspondence with the author, 8 June 2013.

In more than one way, NGIS emulates and harks back to these "solicitations" and in so far realigns itself with our experience, rendering the text an extension of the claustrophobic sphere outlined by Sundaram. By conceiving of narrative consciousness as a screen or projection surface and a resonating body, the "transient phenomena" – images, smells and sounds – leave an impression. This effect/affect is largely the result of the text's privileging of reduction over literariness so that NGIS might be read as an attempt at "writing degree zero"[133] from a (post-)postcolonial, metropolitan perspective. In the face of a human condition marked by the unavailability of agency in a social and cultural framework rigidly determining who we are and what we want, the individual loses acuity vis-à-vis the multitude in this corpo-*real* space of simultaneity.

> The move to depict the city as a site of struggle, repression, expectation, and industry through images whose meaning are predicated on the position of the artists as participants and not just observers, is relatively recent. […]. The ever-changing chaotic and turbulent urban landscape has meant that the visual sensory experience of city life informs the work of artists in diverse ways, the most important being a desire to translate the corporeal experience of living in a constantly changing environment into a tangible condensation of transient phenomena. (Karode/Sawant 2009, 191)

If novels like TWT or *Animal's People* tacitly allow readers to occupy the moral high-ground, NGIS confronts them with the mechanisms by which a subject becomes complicit in indifference, marginalization and oppression. Ultimately, the text is not only about India's communal and social divide. It marks an open, dynamic and transformative text, an act of resistance in so far as it undertakes to chart nothing less than "the human condition"[134] in extremis. In one bold stroke it demarcates the experiential realm of the here and now – incredibly close, often loud and sensually as well as emotionally straining. Its alter-n(arr)ative idiom thus reconciles the two dimensions elementary to postcolonial literature, confirming that it is "possible to bring aesthetics and politics onto the same page without capitulating either to a facile rapprochement or a relentlessly divisive schism."[135] NGIS lucidly demonstrates that "[t]he site of passion is now no longer the individual's interiority but the contact zones of intersubjective encounters."[136] Here, at the gap the Other briefly comes in sight, albeit at a price: (In-)sight is provisional and its effect potentially destabilizing.

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[133] Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero. Elements of Semiology.* 1953. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Vintage Classics, 2010, 21.

[134] Written correspondence with the author, 8 June 2013.

[135] Bahri, *Native Intelligence*, 4.

[136] Wiemann, Dirk, and Lars Eckstein. "Introduction: Towards a Cultural Politics of Passion." *The Politics of Passion: Reframing Affect and Emotion in Global Modernity*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2013, 12.

4. THE LAST JET-ENGINE LAUGH

> *How do I explain that first moment of magic, when I was six, when I pressed down on the shutter lever of my Click Three, the kad-dank sound it made, and then the excitement of getting the photos back from Bombay Photo Stores under the Grand Hotel arcade? And from much later in life, how do I convey the idea of a darkroom and the sea shift that happens when you first watch the paper give birth to a photograph in the developer tray?*
> (TLJEL, 60)

Photography comprises of moments. The second the shutter closes, an infinitesimal fragment of time has been captured, holding the promise of an epiphany. Few contemporary texts explore photography's shaping impact upon human memory and experience as profoundly as *The Last Jet Engine Laugh* (2002). Drawing upon his own experience, the author casts a former photographer as the novel's primary narrating agency. For Paresh Bhatt who reviews his life from the year 2030, the photos he collected over a lifetime now constitute his psychological habitat and only refuge in the post-apocalyptic world in which he lives out his final days. The text consequently utilizes photography at once as a biographic and historic prism. In so far the novel recalls Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995), another Indian English novel with a shutterbug protagonist-narrator. But while the latter actually travels back in time, Paresh Bhatt's journey is mnemonic. As with all corpus texts the visual is reproduced textually here[1].

With time and place being flexible vectors in TLJEL, photographs provide the only stable reference points in this odyssey of memory. Confronted with the looming threat of death, he looks back upon his life from a time of total war in which potable water has seeped out of human existence. If the dystopian vision charted in TLJEL marks Joshi's novel as a "postcolonial science fiction,"[2] this is only one of the novel's constituent elements as the narrative oscillates between past and narrative present (future). Photographs thus signpost the narrative and its movements as UP Mukherjee points out:

> Photographs and descriptions of photography clearly play a crucial role in Joshi's novel. Large sections are devoted to detailed descriptions of photographs and their importance to Paresh's life. [...]. As a narrative device, the descriptions of these photographs and many of the others that Paresh offers the readers work to reveal the deep and complex emotional ties between the characters, which in turn frames our understanding of Paresh's interpretation of the history that drives and is embedded in them. (Mukherjee 2010, 167f)

[1] The text features small vignettes at the beginnings and/or ends of most chapters.
[2] Guttman, Anna. *The Nation of India in Contemporary Indian Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 135.

The use of photography as an aesthetic and symbolic device is signposted at several junctures in the text. One particularly crucial point is demarcated by a photo show in Delhi: "*The show was called 'Shadowing the Nation - Thirty Years of a Life in Photojournalism', with a second, inelegant, subtitle: 'Paresh Bhatt - A Retrospective'*."[3] Since Bhatt has been a press photographer working mainly with black and white film, the title assumes an ambivalent meaning in this context. The monochrome filmstock thus throws into relief the shadows obscuring both India's twentieth century and the protagonist's biography. Photo-philosophy from Benjamin to Barthes and Sontag identified photography's main function as that of being our memory, of showing here and now what was *there* and *then*. However, as "the inventory of mortality,"[4] photography is fraught with a sense of melancholy. In so far it is hardly suprising that death is a leitmotif of Joshi's novel.

In the following I will discuss the novel's photos and references to photography under two headings, that of photography's indexical or testimonial function[5] with particular emphasis on iconography on the one hand, and that of its mnemo-cognitive impact on the other. Spanning nearly a century from the 1940s to 2030, TLJEL squarely captures the "second photographic era in India."[6] In so far it can be understood to survey photography's evolution in the private and public realm. As the protagonist's life is bound up with Indian history, he is poised to become not only its spectator, but its active recorder and by extension, a quintessentially postcolonial narrator. But if the narrative at once delineates a historic and media-historic trajectory, it does not do so in a straightforward fashion. Since "photographs do not only supplement memory but actually configure it,"[7] it remains to be seen how this configuration tells on the text as a narrative of memory. The discussion departs from the assumption that photos are not transparent but function as dynamic repositories which can create, interrupt or link narratives.

> Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively; or they look back at us silently across a "gulf unbridged by language." They present not just a surface but a *face* that faces the beholder. (Mitchell 2005, 30)

Notably, faces mark the primary motif of the photographs evoked by the text.

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[3] TLJEL, 252.

[4] Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Penguin Books, 2008, 70.

[5] According to Baudrillard 'the photo [..] largely contributed to secularizing history, fixing it in its visible, «objective» form' (Cf. Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacres et simulation*. Paris: Editions Galilée, 1981, 76.).

[6] Gordon, Sophie. "The Colonial Project and the Shifting Gaze." In: Sinha (ed), , 58.

[7] Keenan, Catherine. "On the Relationship between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory." History of Photography. 22.1 (1998), 60.

Each face codes a biography in some way linked with that of the protagonist and it is through narrative that these links are successively validated. In this regard however, the novel is not groundbreaking: "Since 1839, fiction writers have recorded their responses to photography."[8] Whether Mitchell's argument that "[t]he literary treatment of pictures is […] quite unabashed in its celebration of their uncanny personhood and vitality, perhaps because the literary image does not have to be faced directly"[9] is true, remains to be discussed. If the photos invoked here are fictional, they are also sketched in minute detail. Their aesthetic and iconography thus merit scrutiny with regard to the novel's visual and culture anthropological dimension. To analyze and comprehend the 'aesthetic politics' of TLJEL's photo-textures ultimately appears elementary to understanding the text.

The central role played by photography and the novel's focus upon the machinations of memory recall yet another text, a masterpiece of memory fiction, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The mnemo-cognitive and affective impact of photography also comprises the substance of Benjamin's "Short History of Photography," Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Sontag's *On Photography*[10], three of photography's most influential theoretical accounts which consequently comprise a reference frame for present reading, all the more so where these texts are explicitly referenced in the novel:

> *Susan Sontag, an American critic, said once, long ago, that people take photographs in order to forget the thing they are photographing. In the same way, maybe we used to exhibit photographs in galleries in order to then forget about them. In order to forget about those trace-frames of earlier forgettings….these ghosts that you can't put back….* (TLJEL, 253)

Sontag's focus on photography's mnemonic and psychological impact apparently constitutes the text's main draw for the protagonist, a man who has experienced a number of events that continue to haunt him and which he is keen to put to rest now. For him photos are consequently not merely a key to opening up the past, but also a mediator between the needs of the present (2030) and the ineluctable facts of the past.

> Another topic of central importance is marked by the keywords »time« and »memory«. Photographic images preserve moments of the past, or at least seem to do so, and therefore they serve as models for reflecting on memory processes which can either be traced back from the present to the past or demonstrate that the present is always and in principle infiltrated by the past. (Schmitz-Emans 2010, 122)

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[8] Larkin, Ainé. *Proust Writing Photography. Fixing the Fugitive in* À la recherche du temps perdu.London: Legenda, 2011, 4.

[9] Mitchell, W.J.T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 31.

[10] Keenan remarks on the similarities between the texts, all of which address the functionality and adequacy of photography to subject memory. (Cf. Keenan, "On the Relationship between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory," 61.)

Emanating from an existential crisis, the narration begins in a moment of acute eschatological need:

> I need new prayers, the old ones don't work anymore.
>
> I mean, I'll try the old ones again, keep turning the key in the ignition, but I know the sound that will come — I could try my father's old favourite, try like the good Brahman I've never been, *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrityor ma amrutam gama*[11]— nope, no way, no way I can say that straight. (TLJEL, 3)

Once again, language appears to have exhausted itself already at the outset. A "technique[.] of the body […] *learned in a social context*, and thus consigned to habit, to bodily automatisms,"[12] the mantras fail to elicit the desired effect. As an integral part of his "corporeal memory"[13] however, the narrator relies on them. Living the life of a recluse, the narrator resembles a *sannyâsi*,[14] a man waiting to attain deliverance (*moksha*)[15].

> I take a sip. Kadvi, the dark burns even through the milk, like a zen blow to the tongue — 'Wake up!' — and then the sugar as a second pleasure and for a moment I'm back in New York, in Paris, in a hotel room in Holland, anywhere but here, anywhere but now. Back, safe, *as if in a photograph* with nothing before or after it, safe with the taste of coffee forever suspended in my mouth. (TLJEL,7)(emphasis added)

The intense sensation propels the narrator from his small apartment in Kolkata in 2030 into other places and times, briefly illuminated as if by a flashlight. But this archetypal 'Madeleine moment' in which coffee becomes a vehicle to the past and a means to flee the present, bespeaks a tremendous horror vacui. With different memories inextricably attached to each other, the 'transportation' may produce unanticipated displacements as Rafael Narváez observes: "It seems to me that the French *souvenir* (*sub-venire*: "comes from below") is a Proustian word, in that it suggests that a memory can come from below, from the body […] to then go "up" and gather around the abstractions of the mind."[16] Like Proust's Marcel, Paresh Bhatt too is old, of frail health has retreated into the hermitage of his apartment to venture into the dark room of memory.[17] Here this is both a literal and a metaphorical place, the "photo room, [being] the only other room besides the

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[11] This recital of the Gayatri mantra suggests that the narrator has undergone the sacred thread ceremony reserved for males of the three varnas, i.e., Brahmans, Kshatryia and Vaishya.

[12] Narváez, Rafael F. *Embodied Collective Memory. The Making and Unmaking of Human Nature.* Lanham: University of America Press, 2013, 2.

[13] Ibid.

[14] "[T]he renunciation of all social ties (samnyâsa, sannyâsa) by the renouncer (samnyâsin, sannyâsi) was [.] the fourth stage of Brâhmanical society." (Williams, George M. *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 253.)

[15] "freedom; emancipation of the soul from rebirth." (Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology,* 338.)

[16] Narváez, Op. Cit., 1.

[17] Cf. Larkin, *Proust Writing Photography*, 55.

kitchen and the balcony."[18] Covered with myriad photographs, the walls of the room have become invisible over time, material space being supplanted by mnemonic space. The room functions not only as a private gallery however but as a container for the protagonist's 'hemorrhaging' memory.

> There's a photo of me that my parents had turned into a Diwali card. On one side of a rectangle of photographic paper a boy of about six, wearing a conical straw hat, a farmer's hat, ice-cream cone in hand, a clown-mask of vanilla around his mouth, grinning thinly at the camera. Behind the boy, out of focus, boats on the Hooghly, the ghat at Hastings. To the right of the boy, though you can't see it in the picture, a restaurant from where the ice-cream comes. Calcutta 1966.
>
> Next to it is a photo of a little girl, also eating ice-cream next to a river. The flavor? Either raspberry or pistachio ─ I can't remember now and you can't tell from the black and white. They could be twins, the boy and the girl, except this second photo is taken in August 1998 in Paris and the girl has light eyes. (TLJEL, 7)

The two photos have been juxtaposed for a purpose, or so readers are invited to assume. Indeed the children pictured here are Paresh and Para, father and daughter, doubles of each other in both appearance and name. The mise-en-scène of the two children clearly marks the photos as thematically related while signposting the aesthetic protocols of children's portraiture. Here ice-cream serves as a ritual associated with childhood. But this visual doubling is deceptive as the attitudes towards life of the adult Paresh and Para could hardly be more divergent. In their pointed likeness, the images thus counterbalance the temporal and psychological distance implicit in them.

> The spatial as well as the temporal span captured in the juxtaposition of the two photographs emerges as a central feature of the novel, where vastly different scales and segments of space and time are fused with each other, often in the same sentence, to offer something different from the normative stately linear progress […]. The detailed, almost pointillist, technique of visual description - including colours, angles and points of view - emerges as a key strategy, not to further the progression of the plot and narrative in any banal sense, but to achieve a deeper and richer understanding of what Walter Benjamin would call an aura of a particular historical era. (Mukherjee 2010, 177)

The identical motif thus establishes a link between the two scenes, Calcutta in 1966 and Paris in 1998. This link emerges as a "peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be,"[19] in other words, as what Benjamin designated 'aura' in his "Short History of Photography". The evocation of the two photos thus draws attention to the central effect and affect of photography. When the narrative turns back to a moment shortly before Paresh took Para's portrait in Paris in 1998, this affirms Mukherjee's argument that the narrative privileges iconologic over chrono-logic.

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[18] TLJEL, 7.

[19] Benjamin, Walter. "A Short History of Photography." Screen 13.1 (1972), 20. 9 Dec. 2014 <http://screen.oxfordjournals.org.512779821.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/content/13/1/5.full.pdf+html> .

The following two chapters, "My Father's Tongue" and "Mummy's Belt", herald a relapse to the primal scene, a legitimate association since father and mother are assigned the symbolic functions of tongue and belt respectively. If the narrator's father is thus initially associated with the realm of Logos, his mother who carries the Indian tricolor represents the nation, *Bhārat Mātā.* This "'matriotism'"[20] blends Hindu concepts of the goddess with "European political concepts of the nation-state"[21] and as such is particularly potent in Bengal. The collapse of nation, goddess and mother in one figure is crucial to TLJEL and marks one of the text's cynosures.

While I do not want to reduce my reading of TLJEL to a psychoanalytical framework, the narrative focus on the psychological dynamics of the family and particularly the relation between parent(s) and child determines the text to a high degree. As a child the narrator was unable to grasp the metaphorical meaning of words, rendering him an imbecile in the eyes of his notoriously sharp-tongued journalist father Mahadev[22]. In Lacanian terms, this failure reads as an incomplete disidentification from the mother and unsuccessful insertion into the Symbolic. Interestingly however, in Hindu mythology speech or *Vāc*[23] is embodied by the eponymous goddess. Hence Mahadev, formerly a reporter is soon failed by words and resorts to photography while Suman Bhatt emerges as a woman of deeds. His son Paresh too remembers and communicates primarily through images, such as the following photographic 'tryptich':

> On the left was a smiling Jawaharlal, alias Nehru-chacha, his expression and posture conveying dignity, humility and elegance. He had what I would later identify as a certain feminine quality of grace. All that legendary, country-running, Kashmiri steel and cunning remained totally invisible to the eye of a seven-year-old.
>
> At the centre, naturally, was Gandhiji. Short dhotyu, stick, eyes hidden behind benign spectacles, striding, it always seemed to me, on his way out past me and Dwivedi towards the sunlight and freedom. Being a Gujarati myself it was from this picture that I always took heart. […]. I'd keep staring at Bapu, thinking, 'Take me out of here with you,' and […] 'It took a Gujarati to win against the British and it will take another one to win against Dwivedi.'[24]
>
> Dwivediji took his dress sense from Nehru — long black sherwani and white chust pajamas; he took his rhetoric from Gandhi — […]; but his soul belonged to the third photograph in the Trinity: for some reason, the picture of Netaji Subhash was slightly bigger than the ones of Nehru and Gandhi. (TLJEL, 11)

This depiction of the 'fathers' of Indian independence presents an ideal opportunity to study the rules of Indian political iconography as each figure is subtly constructed as

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[20] McKean, Lise. "Mother India and Her Militant Matriots." *Devī. Goddesses of India.* Ed. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 253.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Mahadev means the ""the great god, Śiva" (Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 338.)

[23] Cf. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 288f.

[24] Dwivedi is Paresh's dictatorial school headmaster.

representative of a different political creed. Gandhi's image which creates the impression that he transcends his photo in the narrator thus underscores his other-worldly, ascetic appeal. But while Nehru and Gandhi are consigned to the void again, Bose, the most military among the three leaders, makes a personal appearance in TLJEL.[25] In this regard however, the novel is not exceptional. With reference to the "elevation of Subhash Chandra Bose over Gandhi and Nehru" in the film "*Bharateeyudu*", Pinney observes that this preference for "Bose and the Indian National Army [.] validates 'direct solutions to present-day problems: fearless, violent struggle and instant justice' ([…])."[26] This is relevant in so far as TLJEL focuses military conflict in both twentieth- and twenty-first century India. But "Mummy's Belt" also evokes another triad:

> There is a photograph of my mother that I no longer have: my mother, flanked by two of her friends – three girls standing on open ground, sunlight, white saris fluttering around their pencil-thin bodies, hands on each other's waist. Around each girl's midriff is a striped sash. Light grey on top, white in the middle and dark grey, almost black, at the bottom.
>
> The photo is printed on good paper, thick, the matt finish only slightly yellow with age. On Sunday mornings my mother would pick it out of a pile of others and move it back and forth as if looking for something to fall out of it. When she turned it to a certain angle in the light you couldn't see the picture, just the rich, shining skin of the rectangle. […] There are other photographs too, from that time, all black and white of course, but that was never a problem – my mother used to like filling in the colours. (TLJEL, 31)

The three girls, each of whom proudly wears a homemade Indian tricolor – then still "'Jail' colours"[27] – appear driven by a common sense of purpose. The photograph radiates optimism. Not only are the girls united by wearing the tricolor, their figures are connected also by their interlocking arms in a way strongly reminiscent of *tridevi* figurations. In the latter, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati are figured as aspects or manifestations of Devī, the Divine Mother. The political struggle implicit in the image is thus invested with a religious subtext augmenting the photo's nationalist currency.

> To begin with, goddesses observe an important ground rule that does not apply to gods: when they appear in sculpted form, as images, they are almost invariably anthropomorphic. […]. For example, goddesses are characteristically described as bearing a close relation to power or energy per se (*śakti*). […]. Hence, goddesses tend to be strongly associated with the forces of nature (*prakṛiti*) and the earth—sometimes in its nurturing, maternal aspect, sometimes in its natural periodicity, sometimes in its uncontrollable, destructive power. (Hawley 1996, 7)

The photo of the "Three Musketeers" thus already advertises the nexus between woman and nation that is to be salient for the narrative.

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[25] Cf. chapter 4.2.1, p.112ff.
[26] Pinney, "Introduction." In: Pinney/Dwyer (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation*, 29.
[27] TLJEL, 31.

The different aspects of Devī as consort, mother and nurturer and warrior/destroyer become manifest in the female figures central to the protagonist's life who are introduced over the course of the text. It is noteworthy however that the girls' figures, unlike those of Nehru, Gandhi and Bose, feature no markers of individual identity. From a historiographic perspective the image thus implicitly calls attention to the long neglected role of civilian women in the struggle for independence. In so far the image highlights photography's role as a historic lens or prism of the freedom movement. Originally deemed a "'cure' by the colonial state," [28] photography's wider availability and deployment in the freedom movement caused colonial officials dismay[29]. Photos such as this consequently posed a risk to the depicted.

Simultaneously, the photographs' volatile appearance foregrounds its material substrate, alerting readers to the fact that "[t]he Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both."[30] If the narrator is an eloquent source with regard to the photo's composition and visual details, the meaning it has for his mother obviously eludes him. But also for Suman the photo evidently fails to report the fullness and significance of that moment as it turns opaque, withholding any ulterior meaning.

4.1 SHOOTING HISTORY

> Though it was my father who took the pictures it was my mother who told me about them. She used to play a game with me on Sunday mornings. While my father read the newspaper […], my mother would pull out photographs and tell me stories connected to each picture. Then, […], she would actually shuffle around photos she had told me about and quiz me: […]. (TLJEL, 45)

This peculiar, playful adequately reflects the constitutive function of photographs in the construction and legitimation of subjecthood, particularly with regard to familial identity. With photography marked as a male dominion, memory and its interpretation are confirmed as the domain of women. In so far the text inscribes a traditional 'division of labor'. While the man exerts his authority in wielding the gaze, woman is both its object and its exegete. "I sometimes feel I exchanged my mother's womb for my parents' house, where the amniotic fluid was made up in equal parts of words and images."[31]

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[28] Pinney, Christopher. "Seven Theses on Photography." Thesis Eleven 113.1 (2012), 154. 7 Jan. 2014 <http://the.sagepub.com/content/113/1/141>.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

[31] TLJEL, 44.

However, this balance is soon upset. Moreover, the abundance of words and images covers and codes an absence: Mahadev and Suman were able to marry only after the death of Mahadev's first wife, given to him in an arranged marriage. Neither his nor her family condones Mahadev's and Suman's marriage[32], hence the couple and their son live largely without familial attachments. When the narrator states that "[t]he pain of love turned my father into a very good amateur photographer," [33] photography becomes an act of sublimation. The photos decking out the family home thus mark the years spent in separation and the absence of family – a constant reminder at what price their union was attained.

Suman Bhatt's Sunday photo quizzes not only function to root her 'un-familiar' son who has grown up without the extended family elementary to Indian sociality. She wants him to understand their commitment to India and the troubled moment in which their love was born. When Mahadev lays eyes on Suman after he was nearly killed during a freedom march in Ahmedabad, the young man has an epiphany:

> At seventeen, Mahadevkumar Bhatt woke up into his new life and saw Suman Pathak standing there, *caught in a crossfire of light*. He didn't see the other people in the room. He looked past his aunt, his third sister, and his cousin brother, looked through them as if they were shadows and locked his gaze on his future. (TLJEL, 44)(emphasis added)

The halo of light that surrounds Mahadev's future wife foreshadows his obsessive 'flashing' of Suman after their long-awaited marriage. When their son Paresh is born, he is automatically assigned the role of eye and ear for their photos and stories. His parents' need to compensate for lost time and for the absence of loved ones also characterizes their son whose collecting zeal verges on the obsessive and encompasses not only human subjects and family:

> Now, approaching the end-game of an unsuccessful life, I have come back to Calcutta. Many of the images that fed me as a child are no longer with me but some I've managed to hold on to. They are on the walls of my room. They punctuate other pictures that I've picked up along the way – postcards from places like Poughkeepsie and Erevan, drawings from forgotten lovers, stills from films to remind me of the time when there was cinema, snapshots of my own family, newspaper photographs, still-lifes by Matisse and Morandi, digital reconstructions of lost neighbourhoods. (TLJEL, 44)

If the postcards of Erevan and Poughkeepsie document Bhatt's professional endowments, Matisse and Morandi, modernist classics, bear witness to the protagonist's artistic formation and aesthetic refinement. But there is no photo documenting his parents' first encounter during the freedom march in Ahmedabad.

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[32] The narrator does not tell us, when exactly Suman's and Mahadev's first meeting occurred. Presumably it was in the late 1930s. Their marriage only took place in 1952 in Calcutta.

[33] TLJEL, 44.

Notwithstanding that, the protagonist's imagination of the event formed over years of listening to his parents' reminiscences is astoundingly vivid:

> […], this is how I imagine it: pandemonium, dust, people running in all directions. A fifteen-year-old girl sees Green knock down a frail old woman. The girl gathers up her sari and begins to run towards the woman. A boy, seventeen, also sees the old lady crumple, a huge horse rearing over her. He also starts running towards her.
>
> From the bridge, a wider view of the one-sided battle. Three colours ─ swathes of white emptying out of the river like froth, the yellow sand swirling up into dust, the police in khaki chasing after the froth. Two dots break out of the white and run in the opposite direction, into the horses instead of away from them. (TLJEL, 39)

The descriptive excess communicates a strong urge to paint the pivotal moment encapsulating Mahadev's and Suman's romance and their future family's indissoluble bond with the nation in cinemascope images. Strikingly, the couple are represented anonymously here. Making full use of his demiurgic power as 'director', Paresh endows the event with heightened symbolic weight. Hence, the 'panoramic shot' implicit in the second paragraph highlights Mahadev's and Suman's strategic inferiority vis-à-vis the khaki tide of British police forces. But the yellow, white and khaki in the image also recall the saffron, white and green of the Indian tricolor. In this way aesthetics is tacitly aligned with politics. For Paresh's daughter Para who has hardly known her grandparents, this momentous event crystallizes their lives and simultaneously provides a source of identification. When Para is gifted the software "Megalopolis 3000", she finds it an ideal tool to animate her fathers' verbal accounts:

> Megalopolis Asia gave you the detailed environment of two hundred and fifty of Asia's major cities along with their basic histories since the year 1900. What you had to do was choose characters ─ up to seven ─ and give them roles to play against the architecture of the city. You could select anything from a riot to an intimate dinner for two and the game would put you in that. After you chose your basic situation, the game then plotted back against you, giving you new things, incidents, to deal with, and you could change the balance by adding in additional factors, new elements and the game would then respond. (TLJEL, 182f)

In "provid[ing] digital information that is integrated into the user's view of the physical environment,"[34] Megalopolis furnishes a compelling example of a Mixed Reality application. Through its combination of historic data with the user's input, Megalopolis mobilizes historic reality to a degree no other medium previously allowed, thus proliferating spatiotemporally specific representations or chronotopes[35].

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[34] Bolter, Jay David et al. "Benjamin's Crisis of Aura and Digital Media." *Media Encounters and Media Theories*. Ed. Jürgen E. Müller. Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2008, 93.

[35] „Den grundlegenden wechselseitigen Zusammenhang der in der Literatur künstlerisch erfaßten Zeit- und Raum-Beziehungen wollen wir als *Chronotopos* (»Raumzeit« […]) bezeichnen." (Bachtin, Michail M. *Formen der Zeit im Roman. Untersuchungen zur historischen Poetik.* Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989, 7)

But for Paresh and Para the software is not simply a game or a way to 'outsource' memory. Instead, their use of the software documents how "[l]ate twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed."[36] After the lines have blurred, digital technology offers a new means of keeping and altering memory. Indirectly, this also affirms Pinchevsky's argument that the relinquising of a "heterotopic logic"[37] has given rise to an archive as "an eminently social practice, a veritable living memory."[38] However, since the perspectives of the human participants in the event turn out to be too restricted, Para reconstructs the proceedings as perceived by the tall horse on which Sergeant Green, Mahadev's nemesis, is sitting. Ironically it is the horse that saves Mahadev's life by throwing Green out of the saddle before he can deal Mahadev a fatal blow.

Yet the game refuses to bend to the logic of events. Since the software cannot envisage the minute probability of Mahadev's survival, his game character dies, algorithmic probability prevailing over historic reality. Here the limits of the application as a digital archive emerge. Since this outcome denies her own existence, Para persists in her quest to reenact the event which is so important for her because it inaugurates the connection between her, an aspiring fighter pilot for the Indian Army, and her freedom fighter grandparents. For Para's father on the other hand, sounds and aromas as mnemonic triggers serve a function complimentary to photographs, thus highlighting the metonymic nature of memory as outlined in the following by Assmann:

> Our memory, which we possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with "things," outward symbols. With respect to things such as Marcel Proust's famous madeleine, or artifacts, objects, […], or landscapes, the term "memory" is *not a metaphor but a metonym* based on material contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object. Things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, […], and other "lieux de mémoire." (Assmann 2008, 111)

Assuming that "to reconstruct th[e] disappearing self, we would have to reconstruct the world that disappeared with it,"[39] Megalopolis is ideally suited to the task, all the more so as it allows integrating photos into its comprehensive visions.

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[36] Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991, 152.

[37] Pinchevski, Amit. "Archive, Media, Trauma." *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. Ed. Mordechai Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 254.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Narváez, *Embodied Collective Memory*, 16.

To re-member the self is a challenge rendered all the more acute for Paresh as his relationship with the German artist Anna Lang estranged him from his mother. The protagonist consequently uses Megalopolis to go back to the moment at which mother and son fell apart. Yet even in the virtual reenactment his mother remains unforgiving. However, Megalopolis also merits studying with regard to its visual-aesthetic effect:

> A frame comes up, a tall building with steps going up to the main entrance, which gets filled in—a huge wooden double door with intricate carvings, ornamentations of brass. Inside, a hollow wire tower into which colour gets poured. A large marble-tiled courtyard with rooms leading off on all sides. Three floors with balconies looking down into a courtyard. Rooms with windows, occasionally, in the room of a privileged member of the family, a small balcony looking out over the roofs of the poel. Up above everything the dhaabu — the roof from where the sheths can fly kites with the advantage of height. (TLJEL, 188)

The construction process showcased in the above quote decomposes the experiential surface into spatiotemporally contiguous units, thereby dismantling the 'there-ness' that objects tend to assume in photographic or filmic images. Unlike the latter, the game facilitates free navigation and a mobile viewpoint from which new perspectives continually open up so that the user is authorized to 'walk through' the imaged space. In the text this phenomenal effect is achieved by directing the implied spectator along a virtual, linear path marked by deictic expressions (up, down, into, inside etc.) which enact the basic image schemata of path-source-goal and centre-periphery[40]. The windows and doors in this context motivate a glancing mode of attention in so far as they invite the user to 'look', thus distributing, rather than focusing attention.

However, layout and geometry are also salient when it comes to 'reading' the human body. Notably Green's baton attack on Mahadev, though it did not kill him, has left him permanently marked:

> In a sense, this bruise belonged to [Suman], and from time to time, when my father happened to have his kurta off, she would point to it proudly. It was a near perfect circle of reddish skin about two inches in diameter, a little above the solar plexus, forming a triangle with the nipples.
>
> From the time I was about five, I remember the bruise and it stayed constant even though the body around it changed and aged. The last time I saw it was in the Calcutta General Hospital […] just before we took him for the cremation. I suddenly realized how old and wrinkled my father's skin had become, all of it except the red circle above his solar plexus which still looked strangely fresh. (TLJEL, 42f)

The inscription of Mahadev's body proves resilient, the freshness and conspicuous, circular shape of the scar advertising the eternal presence of the Ahmedabad freedom march as a pivotal event exempt from linear clock time.

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[40] Cf. Hampe, Beate, "Introduction." In: Hampe/Grady (eds), *From Perception to Meaning,* 2.

Read with Barthes, the scar could be interpreted as the *punctum*[41] in the image of Mahadev's body which stands out and teases the spectator. It is indicative that this scar is geometrically aligned with the nipples, as if it were a natural part of the body. If the concept of an "embodied collective memory"[42] accounts for an experience defining the social *and* the individual body as Narváez implies, then Mahadev's scar can be said to epitomize that memory brilliantly. History thus literally assumes corpo-reality in this scar. The violent birth of the nation through Partition bodes ill for its future, a fact obliquely communicated by another photo in the Bhatt family album:

> 'What's this one?'
> 'That is the body of Saraswati, Motakaka's daughter. She died in Pappa's lap when she was eight months old, on 15 August, 1947, the day we got our Independence. Everybody was out celebrating except Pappa and Saraswati's mother.' (TLJEL, 45)

Even in the absence of an actual, material photo, the passage signals a disturbance. A staple of 19th century photography, this memorial photo is startling simply because it shows a dead baby. If photography marks a symbolic death as Barthes claims, this photo marks the closest conjunction of apparatus and epistemological object[43]. The girl's death on the day of India's independence endows the image with immense symbolic weight, augmented further by her name – Saraswati, the goddess of rivers, wisdom and the arts[44]. Her premature death at once threatens the victory of unreason and draught, a vision which the narrator's alarming description of life in 2030 directly validates. The date ensures that the image's symbolic weight is understood, namely as a harbinger of the death toll the new-born country would exact in the immediate aftermath of Independence and in the following decades.

In the last but one chapter of Book One the narrator receives a phone call. The intrepid caller asks for an "obituary update for Shri Poresh Bhatt."[45] This unexpected and harsh *memento mori* brings Paresh to contemplate his life and the figure of the photographer as the epitome of (post-) modern man:

> What a strange creature this thing, this semi-human with machinery attached to its face. This twentieth-century spawn, this one-eyed monster, this close-elbowed, crouching-bending-stalking spine-curved thing. This animal with its life centred on the nerves of one finger. This optic-driven Two-Leg. I saw something that made me bring my camera up and almost without noticing I removed myself from pretending to be a person and rejoined my species. (TLJEL, 56)

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[41] Cf. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 40.
[42] Narváez, *Embodied Collective Memory*, 3.
[43] Barthes Op.Cit. , 92.
[44] Cf. Eck, Diana L. "Gaṅgā. The Goddess Ganges in Hindu Sacred Geography." *Devī. Goddesses of India.* Ed. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 146.
[45] TLJEL, 54.

This phenomenology and psychopathology of the shutterbug is sparked by Paresh's observation of a friend and fellow photographer, Borun Talukdar, during a demonstration in Delhi. Where the camera as the prosthetic 'eye' of technology is attached to a human body, the photographer emerges as the veritable cyborg birthed by modernity. In taking photographs the body thus becomes an extension of the camera which it serves slavishly. In so far as "the Photographer's organ is not his eye ([…]) but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens,"[46] the passage resonates with Barthes' and Sontag's observations à propos the photographer as "an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes."[47] Unlike his parents and his daughter, a fighter pilot daughter in the Indian Army, Paresh is an observer content to record the state of affairs, rather than intervening.

The above quote also documents however that the protagonist is acutely aware of the camera's uncanny resemblance to the gun:

> The camera/gun does not kill, so the ominous metaphor seems to be all bluff—like a man's fantasy of having a gun, knife, or tool between his legs. Still, there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder—a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time. (Sontag 2008, 14f)

If photography implies violence and an act of appropriation, this also calls attention to what may be called with Lyotard the libidinal economy of photography. Mahadev's obsessive 'snapping' of Suman in the first years after their marriage is indicative in this regard. For Paresh however, his father's camera is primarily an instrument to attain fame. He is determined to become a 'Time-Life' photographer. It is noteworthy that he first comes into close contact with the camera during the East Pakistan War[48]. During the Emergency four years later, the adolescent Paresh comes into contact with a real gun:

> I reached for the Colt with one hand and almost dropped it, it was so heavy. Then I took it with both hands. It was even heavier than my father's Nikon F. (TLJEL, 300)

> My right hand had got used to the weight of the gun and I turned away from my parents and pointed it at the window. The gun wobbled slightly as I took aim at a crow sitting on the ledge. It felt strange and beautiful. The metal of the trigger was cool to the touch, and even though I could barely get my fingers around it, the textured grip felt right, as if it belonged in my hand. (TLJEL, 301)

[46] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 15.
[47] Sontag, *On Photography*, 55.
[48] The Indo-Pakistani War of December 1971.

Here the gun instantly becomes an extension of the protagonist's body, its mere touch automatically inducing the movements of aiming and 'shooting', so familiar from the camera. Unable to satisfy his desire for the gun, Paresh takes (to) the Nikon F instead. In so far, the camera assumes a sublimative function while it clearly marks Paresh's withdrawal into a position of observant passivity. However, on one occasion the camera realizes its potential as a weapon, namely when Paresh is unexpectedly embezzled in a local turf war over water on the occasion of his Delhi retrospective in 2010. On that momentous day, the camera lives up to all its symbolic charges, the predatory, as well as the libidinal and ceremonial.

The text reports this episode at length, beginning with the events occuring at the retrospective which are not presented from Paresh's perspective however: "Bhatt is wearing a kurta-pajama but even he has a small camera like a garland around his neck."[49] But the text offsets this external, anonymous perspective with the protagonist's own, as he mocks the adulatory representation of his oeuvre:

> The Calcutta photographs from the '80s and early '90s, *om swaha*, the signing by Magnum in '98, *om swaha*, the European pictures, *om swaha,* the '02 solo show at the Photographer's Gallery in London, *om swaha*, the prints from the Vahlabai collection bought up by MoMA in New York when the textile empire collapsed, *om swaha*, the Ten-Year project […] funded by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, *om shantih shantih shantih*… (TLJEL, 253)

It emerges clearly at this juncture that Paresh is an internationally renowned photographer. But his mock-ceremonial tone signals annoyance at the litany codifying his assumption into the canon of postmodern photography, namely in so far as the curriculum vitae encapsulated in the passage also spells the subsumption of a postcolonial under the protocols of Euro-American artistic patronage. If this illustrates the cosmopolitan currency of photography, it begs the question if Bhatt's photos are valued for their artistic and journalistic merit, or for their anthropological value as objects of native informancy. "British and French photography is just photography," [50] as Pinney notes, but "African or Indian photography is always configured by an unshakable 'local' specificity."[51] The paramount role which foreign patronage and also foreign residence play in obtaining international success is thrown into sharp relief by a lugubrious Borun Talukdar whose comments on the international art market are as revealing as his view of the protagonist:

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[49] TLJEL, 254.
[50] Pinney, Christopher, "Seven Theses on Photography," 142.
[51] Ibid.

> 'But tell me, Anusha…when…when…can *I* have a retrospective? […] Do I have to be living in Paris? I mean, you know, I have seen the *Shadows* of this Nation in a much bigger way than this - this *art* photographer!' […]
>
> 'Borun-da, I'm away in Buenos Aires from the end of the week, for the Salgado show, but why don't you give me a call next month? Let's talk then Hm?'
>
> 'Arrey! Kabhi [52] Buenos Aires, kabhi Los Angeles, kabhi Sydney, Australia, Anusha! Sometimes you should put your feet on the ground of this country you know. Let your beautiful body cast a shadow, cast a *shadow*, on the streets of this poor nation, han? What do you say Poresh? (TLJEL, 258)

As Paresh and his friend Shibu convey a drunk Borun to Shibu's place in the latter's BMW, Borun gives them his sinister "futurospective."[53] But just as Talukdar alerts his commercially successful colleagues to India's dire political realities, these begin to manifest themselves in physical form as the nocturnal Delhi is occupied by angry citizen militias, trying to ensure the passage of the water tankers servicing the city's middle class colonies. As the fog becomes more and more dense, the fears of the car's occupants mount. Shortly before entering the putative safety of New Friends colony, a gang of its denizens outfitted as guerillas intercepts the car to urge its occupants to join them. They barely escape the unfurling battle between them and the denizens of another colony. After passing the guards with their "sub-machine-guns,"[54] the fortress-like atmosphere of the colony with its "[e]lectric wire, spotlights, surveillance cameras"[55] envelops them.

But even here peace proves deceptive as two of the self-appointed colony vigilantes are about to lynch one of the water tanker drivers who abandoned his truck in the fracas. They are determined "to make an example."[56] Despite the driver's desperate pleas to be spared, the men continue as Borun steps in, identifying himself as a journalist. Yet Talukdar's solicitous tone has little effect upon the men so that he now takes the blow intended for the driver. At this point only, Paresh joins the melee:

> Paresh has no memory of taking the camera off his neck and no memory of wrapping the strap tight around his wrist. There is just a bit of slack so that the camera can swing. The rod is heavy and the man is just beginning to lift it up off Talukdar when the camera catches him with force on the side of the head, just behind the eyes. There is a noise of small glass breaking as he stumbles sideways, […] but Paresh is already on the back swing, the camera smashing into the top of the man's skull this time, […]. The man goes down on his hands and knees. The viewfinder assembly shatters as it hits the road. (TLJEL, 279f)

Unlike Borun, the camera sustains fatal damage. Notably, it is the same camera with which Borun photographed the demolishing of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992.

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[52] maybe
[53] TLJEL, 258.
[54] TLJEL, 277.
[55] TLJEL, 277
[56] TLJEL, 279.

The Ayodhya photos constitute Borun's only claim to photographic fame. At this point the 'natural' social order appears briefly disrupted while the three photographers simply stand by, again returning to their observer positions as the driver delivers the final coup de grace to his would-be killers before he "melts back into the shadows where millions of his fellow beings throng, impoverished and doomed"[57] as Mukherjee puts it. In contrast to the colony men who are described at some length, he eventually remains a shadow. After removing the shards of the shattered camera objective, the trio withdraws into the security of Shibhu's guarded luxury apartment. Having assisted in the murder, they do not report it to the colony guards or to the police.

In so far as it mirrors India's social relief structure, this act of lynch violence testifies to the topographic and psychological proximity of the slum to India's middle class enclaves. I therefore argue that the incident affirms Nandy's thesis that "the slum […] has now come close to the heart of India's urban, middle-class consciousness."[58] While Anna Guttman reads the incident as proof that "[a]rt […] is ever inadequate in a crisis,"[59] the intervention to a certain extent also militates against the assumption that ideology is total and intervention therefore impossible.

> What there is are simply scenes of dissensus, capable of surfacing in any place and at any time. What 'dissensus' means is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside […]. (Rancière 2011, 48f)

The brief transformation of indifferent middle class citizens into people assisting in an act of lynch justice marks an aperture in "the field of the possible,"[60] even as its real impact may be marginal. A comparison betweent this event and the freedom march at Ahmedabad in 1932 renders some interesting insights: If in the former a social subaltern suffers the violence of his 'superiors', in the latter case it is a colonial subaltern. But while British brutality united Indians against the oppressor in 1932, the incident at New Friends Colony presents an India irreconcilably divided between a disenfranchised majority and an empowered, ruthless minority. This view of the Indian polity is also communicated in some of Paresh's press photos, among which the image of a woman protesting against the explosion of two nuclear devices stands out.

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[57] Mukherjee, U.P. *Postcolonial Environments*, 172.

[58] Nandy, Ashis. "Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics." *The Secret Politics of our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*. Ed. Ashis Nandy. London: Zed Books, 1998, 3.

[59] Guttman, *The Nation of India*, 155.

[60] Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2011, 49.

Again the incident is set against the background of a historic event, namely Phokran II – India's second nuclear experiment conducted in 1998 in the Thar Desert. During the tests, five devices were exploded. But the momentous event seems curiously absent from Paresh's photograph of the protesting woman[61]:

> In that frame you can't even see her face properly, she is in silhouette, back almost fully to the camera, looking left. There is a hint of an eye as she holds up her placard and you can't read what is says, but there is an energy in her shoulders. Beyond her is a DTC bus passing with a row of people poking their heads out of the windows, staring at the woman as if she is from outer space. What happens, because of the angle, is that the row of heads seems to be coming out of both sides of the woman's own head, like some strange black and white reverse-Ravan. (TLJEL, 57)

Here any pretense towards mimesis is ostentatiously abandoned as appearance is subordinated to fiction[62]. Despite the narrator's self-critical assessment of the photo as one of his "trick jobs" and "cheap jokes,"[63] it fulfills a salient function in his life: "I have enough reasons to commit suicide, but […] the woman with the placard is one of the six–seven things that stops me from taking it any further."[64] Therefore the photo cannot be dismissed as mere artistic play, particularly not when the Ravan motif marks a mainstay of Indian popular iconography. For while Guttman reads the image as epitomizing the protagonist's approach, which "functions to aestheticize the performance of dissent,"[65] I argue that its surrealist style evidences a more complex situation. "As an aesthetics that yearns to be a politics, Surrealim opts for the underdog, for the rights of a disestablished or unofficial reality,"[66] as Sontag points out.

The many headed demon Ravan who abducts Rama's virtuous wife Sita to the island of Lanka in the Ramayana epic, offers another reading in this context as he 'abducts' the image's meaning, while foregrounding its political charge. The epic reference thus discretely alludes to the Hindutva movement that used Ram, whose supposed birth place lies in Ayodhya, as a pretext for demolishing the Babri Masjid in that location in 1992.[67] At that time, the political organs of Hindutva, most notably the RSS[68], VHP[69] and BJP[70] had succeeded in convincing a broad public that India was threatened by Islam[71].

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[61] According to Guttman, "neither the identity nor the cause [the woman] supports (communicated via the placard) is visible." (Guttman, *The Nation of India*, 150.)

[62] Cf. Knaller, Susanne. "Descriptive Images. Authenticity and Illusion in Early and Contemporary Photography." In: Wolf/Bernhart (eds.), *Description in Literature and Other Media*, 295.

[63] TLJEL, 57.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Guttman Op. Cit., 151.

[66] Sontag, *On Photography*, 54.

[67] Cf. Som, G*andhi, Bose, Nehru*, 6; Kinvall, Catarina, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India. The search for Ontological Security*. London: Routledge, 2006, 92.

[68] Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the National Volunteer Organization.

In contrast to Nargis' iconic Mother India who colludes with modern technology for the benefit of the country[72], her latter day avatar, marked out by the narrator's description as a rustic appearance, warns of the dire political and ecological consequences of nuclear warfare. In contrast to the other protesters, she is "looking for a response, for contact"[73] but her urgent appeal cannot stand up to the lure of power intrinsic to nuclear sovereignty. Her image does not then preclude critique or dissent, but embodies it in so far as it inscribes the antinomy inherent to the novel at large:

> The key paradox of Hindu nationalism outlined in *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* is that an independent India remains reliant on the iconic currency of the Anglophone West, because it wishes to borrow their symbols of power. The humane values on the grounds of which Independence was fought for, namely the Gandhian espousal of non-violence (this is something Marxist critics have contested), have been betrayed by Hindu nationalism's nuclear belligerency. (Williams 2011, 205)

Not only is the bomb at the centre of a deterrent policy directed at the major enemy – Pakistan – it also encapsulates a projection of hypermasculinity implicitly directed at the former colonial ruler[74]. However, to Paul Williams her photographed silhouette also recalls "the outlines of people burnt into the built environment of Hiroshima."[75]

Warfare and death are also the overarching themes of "Contact Sheet" which comprises the last chapter of Book Two. At this juncture two distinct temporal moments are montaged in a way creating overlaps between the years 2017 and 1971, the year of the second Indo-Pakistani War. While on the former time level Para is engaged in a dangerous flight manoeuvre over Pakistani territory, on the latter the Bhatts are travelling with the adolescent protagonist, his friend Viral and the latter's parents to Jessore in former East Pakistan. Here they come across a deserted village:

> *A clump of huts, the thatching slightly different from the ones they've left behind in India, a little pond with steep banks, palm trees bending over the water as if they are dipping to have a drink. The water an uneven circle of opaque bright green, shimmering in the winter noon— […] — but no people that they can see. Four dead goats on one side of the pond, their swollen bodies covered with a sprinkling of crows, but Paresh can't see any people.* (TLJEL, 221)

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[69] Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the World Hindu Council

[70] Bharatiya Janata Party, People's Party of India

[71] Cf. McKean, "Bhārat Mātā. Mother India and Her Militant Matriots." In: Hawley/Wulff (eds.), *Devī. Goddesses of India*, 250ff.

[72] In the final scene of Mehboob Khan's eponymous 1957 film, the mother inaugurates the new dam of the village, an augury of industrialization and future prosperity.

[73] TLJEL, 56.

[74] Cf. Williams, Paul. *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011, 108.

[75] Ibid., 209.

It is a compelling post mortem in a dual sense. On the first level, the image is an index of the violent expulsion or massacre of the village population, while on the second, symbolic level it marks the erasure of a country, East Pakistan. The image's spatial arrangement is noteworthy as the circle of huts and palm trees effectively focuses the gaze, while the lake at its centre absorbs it. A smooth black surface, this empty centre stares at the implied spectator like an open wound, reminding her of the villagers' fate. The scenery also fascinates Paresh while the others show remarkable aplomb at this disturbing sight. However, the preceding section showed Mahadev during his mission reporting from Bengali refugee camps where he has been sent to cover the massacres of the West Pakistan army:

> When they came to his village everybody was fast hiding. But one family was caught. This time, this one soldier, he made the whole family line up, father, mother, four children. […]. He lined them up, this whole family, and, and, and …
> The reporter's words die in his throat and he starts to swallow. His chest begins to heave.
> […]
> The father of the family and the mother of the family where just begging the officer to kill only them and leave the children, but this man, he told the soldiers to hold the father and mother and then he started from the smallest child first, a boy of two or so and then, one by one, one by one, one by one. (TLJEL, 214f)

At this juncture words and images develop a mutual attraction, enjoining the reader to read crosswise. The void symbolized by the image of the deserted village is thus implicitly filled with a story showing a brutal family massacre. But this link remains for the reader to establish. The 1971 episode is then connected with Para's situation in 2017: Sitting in a fighter plane attacking Pakistani ground troops, she is in the perpetrator role, unable to see the civilian casualties her attack causes. The automatized, technological warfare of 2017 is thus no less violent and challenges Para's emotional loyalty to India[76]. In the end "The Nation of Your Love", the programmatic title of Book One, assumes an ambivalent ring, patriotism and war, love and death appearing indissolubly intertwined.

4.2 ELEMENTARY PARTICLES – THE SUBJECT IN/OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The only image of the adult Paresh which the text offers, is portrait taken by his friend Borun which shows the narrator in the exercise of his profession. However, the depiction does not render the photographer whole, sovereign over the territory of his photographs depict and inventorize, but as an inherently fragmented body:

[76] The incident will be discussed in detail on pages 134f.

> That picture Borun took of me was one I always found strange. It's almost like a still-life. I mean, here is a man, a tallish man, bending forward, short-sleeved light-coloured shirt, nondescript pants which you can't really see, frame being cut off around thigh level, camera held before face but not to the eye, looking. You would expect some sense of movement […] but what you get instead is a sense of stillness. The man bent like the handle of an art deco teapot, the sun slicing his body into two, his eyes, my mother's eyes, wide, staring at something, you can't see what. Study of Looker. Looker being looked at. (TLJEL, 59)

The generously provided detail of the image invites attentive scrutiny or *studium*[77]. Notably it decomposes the photographed subject into single, describable units or particles. If the excess of adjectives communicates the speaker's desire to convey an acute, detailed image, the latter does not correspond with the image he has of himself as a photographic predator. Instead of casting his gaze upon others, here he finds himself submitted to it – and unfavourably so. What seems more remarkable from an aesthetic and artistic viewpoint is that his figuration as a teapot recalls his series of black and white photos, inspired by the paintings of Giorgio Morandi. The Italian modernist's visual minimalism thus finds an eerie echo in Paresh's photo series:

> I suppose I made this one and the others in the series for myself and not for some idiot non-understander. Just objects that meant something to me, put next to each other bald, like a visual list. Like an identification line-up in the police station of my memory. I don't think I even remembered Morandi and his etchings when I took those photographs but he must have been there, […], this mad Italian who spent most of his adult life drawing nothing but bottles and pitchers […]…
>
> Everyday this Morandi would rearrange things on a table and draw them, paint them, make etchings. […] The thing with the guy was that he managed to pull out stories from things. Standing alone or grouped, his objects almost become like characters in a book and you start to follow them. (TLJEL, 58)

Even if the narrator claims stylistic autonomy for his photos, their artistic descent seems undeniable – also to the curator of the Fondazione Morandi in Italy who buys some of the photos[78]. Their referentiality, whether intentional or not, thus proves lucrative and helps Paresh to establish himself in Europe. "'I llaik a the way your objects a look at each other,' she'd said. 'There is a ka-ranzi of look that I really llaaik.'"[79] But this 'currency of look' which Paola Venezia, the Fondazione's fictional curator ascribes to the still-lives emanates from inanimate, quotidian objects. Consequently the anthropomorphism foregrounds the images' appeal to and psychological investment by the spectator, rather than their intrinsic qualities.

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[77] Cf. Barthes *Camera Lucida*, 26ff.
[78] The eponymous foundation is based in Bologna, Morandi's native town.
[79] TLJEL, 59.

> The first pictures they bought were from the Dalda tin series. The faded yellow of the tin mimicked all kinds of whites and light greys on the black and white film, with the black outline of the date-palm sharp sometimes, and sometimes out of focus, but always there like a stamp on the memory. Other objects, the tin of Bustelo, a sandsi, empty glasses all nodding obeisance to this fat round tin with the tree. The Dalda would not have had the same resonance for them as it would for Indians of my age as, and here is what people don't understand about photography, it is ultimately *not* a 'universal language' like they still keep saying. As a photographer, it doesn't matter if you don't speak English or French or German – the question is, can you take photographs in American or Dutch or English or French? (TLJEL, 59f)

Consisting of a series of variations on the same motif, the difference imparted by each image of the series is at once relative and relational. In so far, the images encapsulate the art of *dhvani* or allusion. In line with his configuration of the still life as an utterance structured by differential relations, the protagonist rationalizes Paola's enthusiastic response by a theory of photography as a speech with many national idioms[80], capable of "creating weird bridges between two people who've never met." [81] Within the grammatology of the series, the ubiquitous Dalda tin marks a cynosure. Its central position thus implicitly confers the status of subject of the utterance upon it, while the relative position of the other objects vis-à-vis this subject comprises the image's 'narrative'. The Dalda[82] tin with its palm frond simultaneously also conveys the images' Indian identity.

But the images have another historic antecedent: They hark back to the dinner table photographed by Nicéphore Niépce in 1823, reputed to be the first photo ever taken.[83] Here too, glasses and plates are recognizable mainly as gradations of black and white. À propos this image Barthes contends that "the first photographs a man contemplated (Niepce in front of the dinner table […]) must have seemed to him to resemble exactly certain paintings (still the *camera obscura*)[…]."[84] With the Dalda series Paresh thus turns away from photography's reproductive quality, while embracing its artistic potential.

> In order to gain recognition as an art form, photography had to confront itself with mimesis as a mode of rendition and illusion, as a value and renditional effect respectively. Existing conventions, as for instance offered by the medium of painting, therefore lent themselves to adaptation. Indeed, many artistically ambitious photographers of the 19th and early 20th centuries were geared to styles and motifs of painting. (Knaller 2007, 294)

In foregoing both color and the human subject, the 'natura morta' of the Dalda series offers the opportunity of testing the limits of the basic photographic vocabulary, i.e.,

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[80] However, „[t]o ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis" (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88).
[81] TLJEL, 60.
[82] A popular cooking-oil brand in South Asia.
[83] Cf. Barthes Op. Cit., 86.
[84] Ibid., 87.

geometric forms and light. In so far Paresh's still-lives mark representation in its primal state. In their chiaroscuro quality the images advertise not only photography's artistic potential, but simultaneously invite a meditation on the transience of life as "the photograph possesses an evidential force [.] and [.] its testimony bears not on the object but on time."[85] The only testimony to the presence of human life in its absence, the tableware in the Dalda series communicates a deadly melancholy which transcends the apparent artistic aspiration. It thus bespeaks the subject's existential loneliness. In so far as the still-lives advertise legibility and thus fathom the epistemological and linguistic limits of photography, they can be regarded metapictures, namely in the following sense:

> Tension between word and image is particularly obvious in the case of "metapictures" (Mitchell 1994) or pictorial paradoxes, where the very conditions of visual representation and perception are called into question. The destabilizing effect of the metapicture, its "wildness" and resistance to interpretation demonstrate both "the impossibility of a strict metalanguage," which would provide an adequate description of the metapicture and "the imbrication of visual and verbal experience" (Mitchell 1994: 83). Such "metapictorialism" is characteristic of modernist and avant-garde art in general. (Grishakova 2010, 313)

But the still-lives also provide information about their maker's state of mind and bespeak a subject trapped in a relational constellation. The latter only appears to be continuously changing, but effectively remains the same. When the final two chapters of Book One discuss the protagonist's relationship with his mother Suman, his partner Anna and their daughter Para, this relational constellation emerges more clearly[86]. The concluding chapter of Book One offers a highlight as it takes readers into the 'camera lucida'. When Paresh quizzes his father about the missing photo of his aunt Vasundhara[87], Mahadev recalls his sister's aborted photo session at Hirabhai's salon in Ahmedabad in the 1930s. Here the text explores early twentieth-century photographic practice while shedding light on the new social customs that developed after the introduction of photography.

> The studio consisted of a front room on the ground floor of an old haveli, […]. Up a short flight of stairs, two back rooms, one where the photographs were actually taken and then an adjacent little, black, cupboard-like space where they were developed and printed. The framing was done by Khalid Mian at Dili Darwaja but Khalid Mian didn't exist in Hirabhai's explanations to his clients because most of them would have been horrified at the thought of their daughters being touched, even in a photograph, by a Muslim man, old and skilled though he was. (TLJEL, 79)

The tripartite procedure of shooting, developing and framing, each being performed in a separate space, evidences both the technical complexity of photography and its continuing affiliation with painting.

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[85] Ibid., 88f.
[86] Their relationship will be discussed in chapter 4.2.2., p. 118ff.
[87] Notably, sundhar means beautiful.

Notably, "European photographers also used paint, both to retouch negatives and to enhance colour on the final print."[88] In India however, overpainting could take extreme forms where "the overlay of paint completely replaces the photographic image in such a way that all or most of it is 'obscured.'"[89] Although no longer practiced in the salon context, coloring and overpainting survive in contemporary art photography[90]. If painting allowed the practitioner to flaunt his artistic skills, photography showcased his technological prowess, bringing both to a profitable synthesis. The artistic intervention thus produces a compelling hybrid, while challenging the assumption of a clear-cut border between painting and photography, old and new art.

> The apparatus of the painter's studio was easily adopted by photographers, and the idiom of art and the persona of the artist — replete as they were with the transcendent and scarce — were much more amenable to commercial manipulation than those of the technician, whose mere proficiency was less marketable. Studios were commercial concerns in competition with others, and 'artistry' was an obvious realm in which individual excellence could be demonstrated. (Pinney 1997, 77)

However, the elision of Khalid Mian's role in retouching the photos also bespeaks a spiritual investment of the photograph. This contrasts with the empirical concept of photography as an index, a mere copy. Assuming that the photo conserves the spiritual aura of the photographed subject, the pictured body is subject to the same restrictions as the material body. In the case of unmarried women this meant that their chastity was to be protected by all means from 'contamination', i.e., the touch of unrelated males. Hence the photograph was not exempt from Indian social etiquette. While black-and-white photos then marked the realm of the profane and private, chromolithography is reserved for the divine:

> Under the fan and light was a row of bhagwans and bhagwanesses: Vishnu, Shiv, Brahma, Parvati, Amba, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh and, punctuating all these, various images, big and small, of Krishna. None of them photographs, all lithographs because they were in colour. Under the gods the photographs, black and white, sample brides, sample bridegrooms, sample patriarchs sitting, surrounded by well-organised peaks of families, flanked by wives standing next to chairs, sons and daughters sitting at feet, older ones standing next to wives. (TLJEL, 79)

In their strictly hierarchical collocation, the images inscribe the bifurcation between the profane and the divine, but they also reflect the narrowly circumscribed social roles assigned on the basis of gender.

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[88] Pinney, Christopher. *Camera Indica. The Social Life of Indian Photographs.* London: Reaktion Books, 1997, 77-79.

[89] Pinney, *Camera Indica*, 78f.

[90] Cf. Dewan, *Embellished Reality*, 46-119.

And yet, with regard to their ontological status as virtual presences marking an absence, i.e., as *apparentia* or *phainomenon*[91], photos and chromolithographs are also alike. In the case of Mahadev's sister Vasundhara, her photo marks her previous existence as daughter, now to be concluded:

> This was standard practice in the Bhatt family – all the daughters had their portrait taken just before they got married. 'Beta, we will lose you, but this daughter will always stay with us,' my grandmother used to say when the framed picture arrived from the photographer.
>
> 'Those photos would hang there like photos of dead people,' my father told me one time when we were in the darkroom. 'I mean, we knew that Tara was around the corner […] , but the girls in those photographs were dead.' (TLJEL, 78)

As images recording the pivotal passages in an individual's life, each defined by its own representative protocols,[92] the photos are at once of ritual and symbolic value. The comparison of a girl's wedding with the death of her old self bespeaks an experience defined by the logic of property. Hence marriage marks the passage of the daughter from her father's 'property' into that of her husband and in-laws. Accordingly, the girl's status is marked by an iconography underscoring her preciousness. This idea also legitimizes the somewhat paradoxical use of a "Mona Lisa"[93] backdrop, evoking a "scene near some river in Italy."[94] "Backdrops and props that often had little to do with the everyday existence of the client," Malavika Karlekar notes, "introduced an element of fantasy and role-playing, if not a misplaced voyeurism, a yearning to belong to a world known only at second-hand."[95] From an Indian perspective Italy thus symbolizes the quintessence of exotic splendor.

Elaborately set and prepared for the shooting, Hirabhai's salon also demarcates "the space of the pro-filmic."[96] However, the run up to the shoot during which the object has to sit immovable is dreadful for Vasundhara. Her discomfiture recalls Benjamin's view of the studio: "It was the time when those studios appeared with draperies and palm-trees, tapestries and easels, looking like a cross between an execution and a representation, between a torture chamber and a throne room […]."[97] As Hirabhai is preparing his camera, Mahadev who surveils the whole procedure experiences unexpected rapture:

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[91] Cf. Knaller, "Descriptive Images." In: Wolf/Bernhart (eds), *Description in Literature and Other Media*, 295.
[92] Cf. Pinney, *Camera Indica*, 120f.
[93] TLJEL, 81.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Karlekar, Malavika, *Re-visioning the Past. Early Photography in Bengal, 1875-1915.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, 12.
[96] Pinney, "Seven Theses on Photography," 146.
[97] Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," 18.

> The camera was a Thornton Packard, with an 80 mm Zeiss lens. Mahadev's growing dislike for Hirabhai mingled oddly with an emotion that he had never felt before. Looking at the view camera, Mahadev found himself caught between desire for the object and revulsion for its owner.
>
> The box of the camera was crafted from some dark brown wood. […] The lens itself pulled Mahadev's eyes in, pulled them through the sparkle of the front element into a dark and deeply pleasurable cave. It was a cave from which Mahadev would take many years to emerge. (TLJEL, 81)

The psychoanalytical implications of the passage are rich, Mahadev's scopophilia for the camera being more ambivalent, if structurally similar to Hirabhai's apparent scopophilia for the pretty Vasundhara. The deep-seated psychological desire to return to the maternal womb is hosted here by a 'hermaphrodite' apparatus combining male and female features; the penetrating gaze as whose prosthetic extension the lens objective functions, and the dark lacuna with a small round aperture for an entrance. In this way the camera symbolically authorizes both acts, that of looking and that of being looked at.

If "[t]here are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at,"[98] the camera's resplendent body invites and perpetuates the gaze: "As if to spite Mahadev's gaze, Hirabhai [.] put a burkha of black cloth over the camera body and then flipped half of the cloth over his own head, joining the hated and the loved under one covering."[99] Here, the union of photographer and camera assumes explicitly sexual overtones, underscored by the concealed 'consummation' of the act.

Mahadev's sojourn in the cave reaches its climax after his marriage to Suman when he begins photographing her non-stop, the camera becoming an instrument to both instigate and consume his passion. Meanwhile, Hirabhai stuffs Vasundhara's mouth with vast amounts of puffed rice to make her "look healthy."[100] Resembling a stuffed animal, she strains to smile with "love [and] devotion."[101] But with "his hand clapped on his mouth"[102] Mahadev distracts his sister, foreclosing an imminent bodily reaction. Although the narration leaves off here, the absence of her photo implies that Vasundhara spewed the rice out at the moment of the exposure, dismantling in a split second the laboriously prepared portrait. In so far the incident advertises the indomitable force of contingency, which the photographer can never entirely control:

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[98] Mulvey,"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In: Rosen (ed), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 200.
[99] TLJEL, 81.
[100] TLJEL, 84.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

> In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression. (Barthes 2000, 4)

On another occasion relayed directly after the story of Vasundhara's photo, the protagonist succeeds in capturing a similar situation, albeit in an entirely different context. After many years, the protagonist meets his childhood friend Viral on a beach in Goa. After a few drinks both are literally in high spirits when the narrator suddenly asks Viral a provocative question with which he elicits the same reaction:

> A photographer can only do so much to make a great picture. The rest is up to the universe. What I wanted was Viral spewing beer with an unspecified beach behind him. When I finally printed what I got, it was one of the most amazing images of my life. What I got was Viral bending forward, eyes wide and looking at me over the rim of the mug, Patel pupils catching the glint of the lights behind me, the spew from his mouth somehow forming two blurs that bracket his face while leaving the features clear and – and here is where the universe, or god-cheez, comes in – behind him […] a wave hitting a rock on the beach and forming a halo of spray. […]. In the photograph it looks as if Viral Patel has swallowed the sea and is spewing it out. (TLJEL, 85)

Through the textual collocation of these two moments, the logic of the image is tacitly installed as the text's impulse generator at this juncture. By a rather unsubtle manipulation,[103] Viral's photographed body assumes the semblance of a gargoyle or a mythical sea creature. But this approach also requires the narrator to be ever-ready for the potentially perfect moment, the perfect picture, as life passes him by. Viral's photo and that of the protesting woman in so far as they unveil a hidden, surreal universe populated by demons and mythical creatures, manifest an underlying eschatological curiosity. They bespeak the need to discover a trace of the sublime in the profane and quotidian. This need becomes more apparent still in the protagonist's tendency to seek cosmological and mythical antecedents which will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.2.1 DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

Connecting distant places and themes, Book Two "Gulag Archipelago" comprises of two contrasting narrative strands, the first inspired by Alexander Solshenyzin's eponymous three volume novel[104], the second a map of lost lovers. These are embedded in the main narrative that begins on September 24, 2030 as the protagonist's Calcutta flat is illuminated by the bright, post-monsoon light that marks the season of Durga Puja.

[103] Paresh asks Viral whether he ate a dish containing his own semen.
[104] *The Gulag Archipelago* first appeared as a self-publicized, illegal text in the Soviet Union in 1973.

The perspective shift from Calcutta in 2030 to Sibiria in 1963 consequently marks a caveat. In taking readers to the Gulag Archipelago in Sibiria, "Exiles"[105] renders the pervasive climate of fear ruling the Soviet Union at the time palpable. While officially inexistent, the Gulag was a looming threat omnipresent in the minds of both Russians and foreigners living or working in the Soviet Union between the 1920s and the late 1950s.[106] Mediated through memoirs, documentaries and films, the gulag represents a traumatic *lieu de mémoire*. Its deployment as a chronotope in present context consequently appears an ill omen but it does not prepare the reader for what is then coming. When Kalidas Dutta, "a-twenty-five-year-old seaman"[107] imprisoned in Vladivostock for smuggling American cigarettes is sent to the Gulag to play interpreter for a fellow Bengali "who had committed unspecified crimes and was now going mad,"[108] he is understandably terrified. Although the episode is relayed by an anonymous narrating agency in the heterodiegetic mode, Kalidas' reflector figure provides an intimate perspective on the events.

Upon entering the anonymous prisoner's abode in the gulag, Kalidas smells something he "had known all his life but couldn't quite put his finger on."[109] But his surprise is even greater when the man turns out to be no stranger either:

> Despite all the light, Kalidas had to search the room to find the old man. He saw him when the armchair developed a piece of padding that seemed to move by itself. Kalidas was, at this point, twenty-five years old, which meant that he had been seven when the war ended in 1945. I didn't matter that the face in the photographs and paintings that had pervaded Calcutta since then was frozen from a likeness from before or around 1944. It didn't matter that the death had been a famous and well-documented one, as ingrained in the public consciousness as the life itself. None of this came in the way of recognition.
>
> It took Kalidas no more than a minute to get over the impossibility of it. It took him a terrifying further five minutes to control the shock on his face. (TLJEL, 120)

It is thus diminished that the former leader of the Indian National Army, Subhas Chandra Bose or 'Netaji'[110] enters the stage, if only to peform in a cameo role. Afraid that he too may become a permanent resident of the gulag, Kalidas does not let on that he has indeed identified Bose. While in his frail state the man no longer poses a risk, his unexpected return from the dead might still cause major political upheaval. Absurdly, the Bose is talking about Calcutta's dysfunctional sewage system. Unable to distinguish present and past, the old man still believes himself to be the mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation.

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[105] TLJEL,113-151.

[106] The gulag archipelago was officially abolished by the Soviet government in 1959, yet the system may have been maintained for yet another decade or so, presumably on a much smaller scale.

[107] TLJEL, 114.

[108] TLJEL, 117.

[109] TLJEL, 119.

[110] ‚uncle'

The ensuing historic précis of the different cuisines traversing Calcutta's drains since its institution appears an odd detour, yet this exploration of Calcutta's nether regions possesses its own logic. The old man is after all constantly troubled by his own 'sewage system'. The blockade of his urinary tract carries a dual significance for the narrative in so far as it is a condition Bose shares with the late Paresh Bhatt. In this way the apparent non sequitur eventually turns out to be a nexus – if also one for the attentive reader to discover. Charged with translating the old man's febrile ranting, Kalidas is witness to one of Bose's more lucid moments and his account of a momentous event: April 28, 1943 marked his conveyance from a German to a Japanese submarine at the confluence of Atlantic and Indian Ocean, southeast of Madagascar. Then "Kommandant-Marschall" of the Indian National Army, Bose is to disembark the German submarine after weeks of confinement in its dark bowels. But he emerges to a devastating scene:

> *Three of them, then down, then three of them again, up out of the water in a cappella, a tripled curve, then down. Then more following, twinned, single, once five young ones bridging across the waves together, the sunlight a single wet rippling on their grey bodies.* (TLJEL, 130)

> *Herr Kapitan laughs and calls out a command to his men. Something with the words 'Feuer' and 'Fisch' and the Spandau opens up a few moments after the Japanese gun.* […]
> *Three of them, then down, out and then up and one is hit, the curve broken, cleaved in half, then another twisting in the air, then two at once, the blood making its own bridges over the sea, the ones coming behind, at first not understanding what was happening, then an adult knocking two babies down out of sight before catching bullets, flipping half-alive, churning up the sea surface, its tail slapping the water, thrashing left and right, left and right, till the gunner fires another burst to silence the sound. Sunlight rippling wet on still grey bodies. Sunlight on the blood as it spreads on the still sea.* (TLJEL, 134)

Although it is implied *who* focalizes, the mode of presentation initially bespeaks no embodied perspective. Instead, sight and verbal cognition appear instantaneous, making this the most immediate and visually appealing passages of the novel. As "a technique for representing in a non-mediated fashion the process whereby the mind registers incoming instantaneous sensations and tries to identify and relate them to other current or remembered sensory experiences,"[111] the stream of consciousness is ideally suited to evoking immediate and preconscious perception. The rhythmic movement of shapes thus represents a "highly *schematic* gestalt[.] which capture[s] the structural *contours* of sensory-motor-experience."[112]

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[111] Margolin, Uri. "Focalization: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modeling Mediation in Narrative*. Ed. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 43.

[112] Cf. Hampe, "Image schemas in Cognitive Linguistics: Introduction." In: Hampe/Grady (eds), *From perception to meaning*, 1.

As the schematic image transits into conceptual cognition, it becomes clear that it is a school of dolphins which is perceived here. The cognitive schema 'dolphin' deployed here thus serves the purpose of communicating total absorption in the act of perception. Psychologically, the leaping dolphins resonate with Bose's ambivalent state of mind, happy as he is to be on the surface again, yet anxious to reach Singapore undetected. The parallel sentences introducing the first and third passage thus highlight the spellbinding sight of the dolphin school which Bose takes as an auspicious welcome, abruptly cut off by the automatic machine-guns' "high staccato."[113] If the submarine in which the focal consciousness spent nearly three weeks marks a dark, unary space – a "*sadhu's gufa*"[114] resembling the maternal womb – the subject's emergence and simultaneous perception of a school of playing dolphins may be regarded to precipitate an affective identification, foreclosed by the dolphins' brutal killing. Moreover, the shooting clearly echoes the mass murder occuring at that moment on a global scale.

The narration of the incident which occupies just over four pages is presented in a particular notation system as the italicized stream of consciousness passages alternate with narrative discourse in plain type. In this way the percipient's immediate sensations, as well as the relevant narrative information are alternately presented. Bose's severe disturbance at this needless act of violence suggests a man at odds with his chosen allies, a man driven by by political acumen, rather than disposition. Assuming that "the parts and the whole of [the] outside world defy any forms of directly sensuous representation," as Lukács maintains, "[t]hey acquire life only when they can be related [.] to the life-experiencing interiority of the individual lost in their labyrinth."[115] The bipartite perceptual-narrative discourse devised here offers a compelling solution for this dilemma, while implying a rift between psychology and politics.

Had Bose previously issued an invitation to the German commander "to go tiger-hunting *im Frei Indien*,"[116] thus underscoring his moral investment in the devil's pact, he is now forced to acknowledge that he is in league with a predatory, incalculable power:

> Bose's single-minded absorption in the cause of India's independence led him to ignore the ghastly brutalities perpetrated by the forces of Nazism and fascism in Europe. By going to Germany because it happened to be at war with Britain, he ensured that his reputation would long be tarred by the opprobrium that was due the Nazis. A pact with the devil: such was the terrible price of freedom. (Bose 2011, 203)

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[113] TLJEL 134.
[114] TLJEL, 131.
[115] Lukács, Georg. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. 1920. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993, 79.
[116] TLJEL, 132.

Ultimately, the dolphin massacre symbolizes the inheritance of violence that was Bose's and subsequently also India's. When the old leaves his room accompanied by Kalidas, the latter becomes witness to Bose's passing – a momentous occasion shrunk to mundane dimensions as Bose simply collapses in Kalidas' arms while urinating: "*Die ich rief, die Geister, werd ich nun nicht los*,'"[117] are his last words. Having cooperated with the Nazis, the German invasion of the Soviet Union automatically rendered Bose an enemy of the Soviet Union and its lifetime prisoner.[118] In the historio-logic of TLJEL, war and violence determine India's past, present and future. This fact is also brought to readers' attention on the symbolic level as dolphins, whales and fish often appear outside their wet element in TLJEL. The "fragile bridge of frozen urine"[119] Bose left in the snow thus brackets his life's lesson and political inheritance:

> The water images that Joshi employs in connection to the Bose story capture both the (thwarted) hopes and catastrophic consequences of a certain kind of nationalist imagination. [...]
>
> Bose's demented musings, delivered nearly two decades after India's independence and in the context of abiding conditions of abject poverty (and his own marginalization as a historical actor), are a testament to both the pathos and the power of the dreams of a pure and strong nation. Yet, the flipside of this dream – its structural relationship with a violent will to power – also forms part of Bose's last testaments. (Mukherjee 2010, 174)

The second narrative strand intersecting with the events at the gulag sees a young Mahadev Bhatt arriving in Calcutta, "the final destination of his exile."[120] But the station is inundated by the Ganges and the content of Calcutta's leaky sewers – proof of Bose's failure as mayor of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. While Mahadev does pranam to the river, his wallet is stolen. It is this (dirty) water which symbolically links the various narrative strands. Here also, Kalidas Dutta's link to the narrator-protagonist emerges. He is Paresh's uncle who returned from the Russian gulag after Bose's death. While Mahadev has been sent to Calcutta, Suman stays back in Ahmedabad, their destiny unfolding against the background of India's struggle for independence and the Second World War:

> Yes, at one point, Mahadev Bhatt asked Suman Pathak to marry him. It was a hot day in late August 1939 and time was running out, not just for the world but also for a nineteen-year-old boy and sixteen-year-old girl. Time would run out for both them and the world. And time would then reinvent itself, reappear like some clown Dracula, rise out of its coffin with bits of dhokla, shrikhand and human flesh hanging from its fangs. The blood of vampired empires smearing its cheeks, burping nations and lovers, it would come out again, time, with the hunger for more polishing its eyes into a deadly shine. (TLJEL, 162)

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[117] TLJEL 134. Bose attributes the line to Goethe's *Faust*, rather than *The Sorcerer's Apprentice.*

[118] Cf. Bose, Sugata. *His Majesty's Opponent. Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, 203f.

[119] TLJEL, 144.

[120] TLJEL, 124.

As the narrator contemplates the strange conjunctures of biography and history, the coincidence of personal and national tragedy retrospectively gains heightened meaning. Hence time assumes the guise of a voracious revenant cannibalizing nations ad infinitum, each of its genocidal returns repeating and exceeding the preceding. What clearly takes shape in this metaphor is a cyclical concept of time. And while the principle of *saṃsāra*[121] is intrinsic to Hindu cosmology, it also finds expression in Nietzsche's concept of Eternal Recurrence[122]. With two world wars, the Holocaust, the invention of the nuclear bomb and the Cold War, the twentieth century presents itself as an endless spiral of disasters. This perception is in line with Paresh's dystopian account of the world in 2030 which suggests that humanity has reached the last stage of Kali-Yug[123], the age of vice and strife preceding the world's total destruction.

A circular pattern also appears to inform the narration itself as it often reverts to events related earlier. Thereby the text not only jogs readers' memory, but also challenges the idea of linear, chronological time. But whereas eternal recurrence ultimately assumes an affirmative, positive valence in Hindu cosmology and Nietzsche[124], here it appears ineluctable and harbors only suffering. At one point the narrator describes his mother's experience of confinement during Mahadev's 'exile' in Calcutta as "*the concentration camp that was Ahmedabad*."[125] If this appears a rhetorical hyperbole, it draws attention to the fact that over 60,000 members of the Indian National Congress were imprisoned by the British between 1942 and 1945 because they opposed sending Indian troops into the war.

Although it is not clear at this point whether Suman was actually imprisoned or only lived in hiding, it is clear that both she and Mahadev were in grave danger at the time since they had secretly spread Congress pamphlets and thus helped organizing Indian resistance. Beyond its immediate relevance in this specific context, the concentration camp imposes its own historio-logic however.

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[121] „*Samsâra* has the essential meaning of the cycle of rebirths or simply rebirth." (Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mytholog*y, 254.)

[122] In aphorism 341 of "The Gay Science", Nietzsche explores the idea of eternal rebirth in a similar fashion, using the metaphor of a demon. (Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft.* Köln: Anaconda, 2007, 237f).

[123] Cf. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 172.

[124] "In the light of traditional approaches to the problem of time […] eternal recurrence can be seen as Nietzsche's formula for the 'redemption' of time and becoming. As I read Nietzsche, eternal recurrence is the only authentic alternative to all other conceivable models of time with respect to affirming natural life and its temporal flux." (Hatab, Lawrence J. "Shocking Time: Reading Eternal Recurrence Literally." *Nietzsche on Time and History.* Ed. Manuel Dries. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008, 152).

[125] TLJEL, 162.

As the defining caesura of twentieth century history, the Holocaust is pervasively assigned the status of a "[g]lobal [m]emory."[126] Its import into this historic context at once affirms and problematizes its universal validity which Assmann also calls into question:

> There are other countries that lie outside the historic constellation of the Holocaust. China and Japan are preoccupied with their own memories of defeat and victimhood; India and Pakistan commemorate the partition; […]. These countries are the inheritors of their own historic traumas and burdens. This corroborates Halbwachs' view that collective memory is by definition particular and limited, because it is based on experience and cannot be stretched beyond certain bounds to become all-inclusive. (Assmann 2010, 108)

Given a pervasive Euro-American historiographic bias, the Indian experience of the Second World War and its aftermath — Partition — and its afterlife in Indian collective memory have occupied only a marginal space in global memory discourse. And while the concentration camp primarily serves as shorthand for the trauma of congress members and other freedom fighters, on the meta-level it also reflects the ongoing oppression of resistance, its technology being relentlessly recycled across the world.

4.2.2 DURGA'S DAUGHTERS

Whether as namesakes, visual icons or powerful portent of deliverance — divinities and manifestations of the divine are prolific in TLJEL. For an Indian English novel, this may not be astounding. As a familiar inventory of icons and tropes these manifestations testify to the salient role religion and Hindu cosmology play for the characters, while simultaneously opening up another level of meaning for the text. For the narrator particularly Hindu cosmology serves a vital function as it has the potential to give both his own, emotionally unfulfilling life and the lives of his parents, partners and daughter ulterior meaning, while submitting their drives and psychology to a legible template. In the process, the hold of these icons over the popular imaginary and their political instrumentalization emerge equally. This seems far from a folkloristic embrace or display of Hindu religion and mythology as a complex of exotica.

A photo portrait of Paresh's ex-partner Anna Lang in which the artist poses as Durga marks a striking example of an artistic appropriation of a divine icon. Not only does the photo adopt and subvert the established Durga iconography, it simultaneously problematizes Anna's gender and social roles:

[126] Assmann, Aleida. "The Holocaust — a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community." *Memory in a Global Age. Discourses, Practices and Trajectories.* Ed. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 97.

> Anna took off not only from Frida Kahlo but also from other well-known self-potraitists closer to her own time, the Americans Chuck Close and Cindy Sherman. My favourite is the one where Anna poses as Durga. Wearing a drab housecoat Anna stares at the camera with her own arms plus eight mannequins' arms coming out from behind her. In her ten hands she holds the following items:
>
> 1. TV remote
> 2. Scissors
> 3. Riding whip
> 4. Small vacuum cleaner
> 5. Saucepan
> 6. Breast-pump
> 7. Bubbling test-tube
> 8. Biography of Frida Kahlo
> 9. Chainsaw (small model)
> 10. Shopping bag from a German supermarket (TLJEL, 193)
>
> Anna is standing precariously on a big motorcycle covered with fake tiger skin. And the front wheel of the motorcycle seems to have gone over a man with two buffalo horns coming out of his head. The man is blond, eyes wide open in the rictus of death, and the weapon he clutches is a smashed video-camera out of which tumble the entrails of a tape. (TLJEL, 194)

The image marks an ironic variation on the classical motif "of Durga astride her lion, striking down the buffalo-demon with her trident."[127] Here, Anna assumes the semblance of Durga in her Mahisha-asura-Mardanî[128] avatar.[129] This violent, vengeful icon "curiously coexists in Bengal with her image as mother and daughter – especially as a married daughter."[130] With its proliferation of symbolic tokens, Anna's re-enactment reflects the inherent ambivalence of the goddess while it shifts the icon's signified from object of veneration to a carrier of feminist critique. The household and professional paraphernalia in this context symbolize the diverse, often irreconcilable social demands women are confronted with. But the projected polyvalence of woman as seductress, career woman, mother, wife and dominatrix also appears a source of power, giving license to assume different, even conflicting roles in the performance of femininity.

Above all, the image critiques the subjection of women to the male gaze, the destroyed video-camera unambiguously symbolizing the camera-man's 'visual castration'. Yet the gaze is not singular but dual here. *Within* the image, the camera's gaze redoubles and prefigures the implied spectator's look from *without*. In this way, the implied spectator of the description is both implicit and *complicit* with the man's "controlling gaze."[131]

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[127] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. "From Spectacle to Art." In: Pāla (ed.), *Goddess Durga*, 55.
[128] Cf. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 124.
[129] Cf. Guttman, *The Nation of India,* 151.
[130] Guha-Thakurta, Op.Cit.
[131] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In: Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* 200.

In this context, the "drab house coat" can be understood to mark Anna-Durga's purposeful refusal to submit to the gaze. But the narrator's reference to Kahlo highlights another aspect of the image, namely its composition which harks back to Kahlo's symbolist collages. What is more the photo's arch mise-en-scène also tacitly references the visual protocols of Indian portrait photography: In the latter, props such as motorcycles are employed to illustrate the portrayed person's 'modernity'[132]. The excess of dramaturgy and symbolic tokens characteristic of the salon and fairground photography thus find an ironic inversion here as the woman juggles the objects defining and confining her. It is noteworthy in this context that Anna's daughter Para – the epitome of a tomboy – does not identify with her unconventional mother, but with her very conservative grandmother. In trying to comprehend his daughter's motives, Paresh thus takes recourse to mythology:

> And talking about vehicles, Para's done the whole bit, trainers, ancient Jaguar two seaters, actual combat in her Ishir, which did have a Durga sitting on a Lion painted on it and now something that's about as different from a Lion as you can get – something that looks like a bhakhri ([…]), this space station Varun-Maachan that pretends to be innocent but is deadly for all that. […]. […], there is a whole passage in the Chandi Paath[133] where the warrior Devi takes on different avatars and each avatar has a different animal that she rides. (TLJEL, 106)

> For her side-gods Para has two egg-heads, two men, one Ghaati called Ashok something Nalvekar? Navlekar?, and a Punj, some Gulati who is the one who photographs the universe, the one who looks up while Para looks down. And one girl, Reba Banerjee, who is some technical whizz who keeps the whole plant running while Para hides behind all this civilian action and does what she has to do. […]. Stuff that's going to make some demon buffalo try and gore her sooner or later, the stuff that she does, stuff that still drives me to stupid prayers. (TLJEL, 107)

Here Para appears as pure energy or saktī, continuously assuming new forms and different (technical) mounts. The narrator's familiarity with the Chandi Path suggests he is a devotee of Shaktism, i.e., worship of the Divine Mother. Since his daughter's martyr disposition seems to defy logic, the Chandi Path and Hindu cosmology become sources of eschatological meaning for the protagonist. In conceiving of Para as saktī in her various manifestations, Paresh implicitly places his daughter in the realm of beyond, thus anticipating her death. The symbolic identification consequently bespeaks an "attempt[.] at concretizing the concept and providing representations of the multifarious aspects of the Goddess," [134] in order to "assist[.] the integration of psychic life."[135]

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[132] Cf. Pinney, *Camera Indica*, 183.

[133] The Chandi Paath is a text of seven hundred verses narrating the struggle and victory of Goddess Durga over the demon Mahisha-asura read on ritual occasions such as Durga Puja and burial ceremonies.

[134] Cf. Berkson, Carmel. *The Divine and Demoniac. Mahisa's Heroic Struggle with Durga.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, 7.

[135] Ibid.

As an unmarried, celibate woman willing to sacrifice her life for the nation, Para represents the quintessence of virtuous femininity, if not from the liberal perspective of her artist parents, then certainly from a conservative Hindu viewpoint. By painting the lion – Durga's mount – on her fighter jet, Para overtly adopts the Goddess as her talisman and guide. But also events that are less obviously religious or spiritual merit scrutiny in this context. Hence Para adds a significant part of herself to her grandmother's game character when she sets up Megalopolis to re-enact her grandparents' courtship:

> First we scan the photographs of the two main characters into the computer and name them. Then we give them eyes. Para works very carefully on Suman's eyes. She takes about two hours for what I think is a small thing, scanning one of her own recent photographs, cropping out the eyes and then carefully putting them into her grandmother's face. (TLJEL, 184)

This digital pastiche, entirely within the logic of Mixed Reality, has numerous implications. Above all the act affirms Para's identification with her grandmother whom she resembles conspicuously in both character and physique. After looking at herself in the mirror, the child Para studies a photo of Suman: "'Hey, […] this looks like me. I've just been looking at myself and now I'm looking at myself again!'"[136] This mirror moment and the absence of her mother[137] lead Para to imitate Suman in nearly every regard. From a cosmological viewpoint this identification also affirms the idea of samsara or rebirth. Yet reincarnations not only inherit character traits, but also unresolved trials. Para's martial disposition and seemingly inexplicable anger at her father thus mirror the late Suman's profound disillusionment with and alienation from her son.

Notably, the eye-giving motif surfaces elsewhere too:

> Putting lenses in suddenly reminded – got to re-frame that photo P[aresh] gave me of man painting in Durga's eyes[sic!]. Chokshu-daan he called it. God, ten years ago exactly, no? Yeah, New Year's Day '86 he gave it to me. (TLJEL, 208)

> Must find that photo. Like the way the tip of the brush touches the eyeball. Like the tender precision. Chokshu-daan. Giving of Eyes, that's what you have to do, give eyes to your life. The rest is all bakwaas[138]. (TLJEL, 209)

The photo was a gift to Sandhya, a woman with whom Paresh enjoyed a brief romance which is narrated through her diary entries, reproduced in the text. The painting of the eyes marks the last and most important stage in producing divine effigies for temples or ceremonial occasions. Only through the eye-giving or *chokshu-daan*, the effigy attains the power to bless its devotees, i.e., to convey *darśan*:

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[136] TLJEL, 184.
[137] Her parents have split and Para is living with her father in Paris at the time.
[138] A noun sometimes also used as a verb synonymous with nonsense.

> Indeed, South Asian understandings of perception may more broadly inform studies on the phenomenology of perception, for Hindus see vision as a material exchange, a kind of touching ([...]). As a result, *darśana* is a means for devotees to partake literally in the deity's qualities, especially, as C.J. Fuller argues, its power (*śakti*). Through visual exchanges devotees obtain "good fortune, well-being, grace, and spiritual merit" (Fuller 1992: 59; […]). The deity's power emanates from the eyes of the image, and care is taken to protect devotees from dangerous and prolonged exposure to this power ([...]). (Mines 2008, 140)

In montaging her eyes onto her grandmother's face, Para thus emulates the eye-painting or *chokshu-daan* ritual, whether purposely or unconsciously. The child Para moreover assumes the game pseudonym Sudarshan[139] at one point. Since Sudarshan is the flying disk of god Vishnu, she thereby invests her game avatar with invincible power. Notably, Durga also wields Sudarshan to kill the demon Mahisha-asura[140]. Para's childhood as Paresh narrate it is defined by her aspiration to become a fighter pilot – a circumstance underscoring the force of her dharma. Once a fighter pilot, Para becomes a deadly weapon whose looks can kill: By projecting a light sequence with her helicopter or batting her "[p]oison eyes,"[141] Para lures enemy fighters into an ambush, thereby securing a decisive victory for India. This deadly gaze presents itself as the inverse of darśan.[142] But her name is also fraught with eschatological significance since Paramita translates as "[g]one to the opposite bank or side" or "[t]ranscendent."[143] This may be taken to symbolize her permanence in orbit, as well as the looming threat of death.

Para's mother Anna Lang too transgresses assigned gender roles, albeit in the interest of formulating a social and political critique as the following image conveys it:

> The other one I like is simpler, the background is not a flat red studio backdrop, as in the Durga picture, but a cow-shed in a German farm. The photograph is shot almost naturalistically and there is only a little bit of tampering with the colours. Anna is squatting, wearing a tinny Krishna crown which was one of the things she took back from India. With a plastic peacock feather and all. Around her waist she has a bright orange-yellow dhotyu, Krishna's pitamber. Above the waist Anna wears nothing. But her face, arms and body are painted a shiny black – it looks as if she is covered with engine oil of some sort.
>
> Anna smiles at the camera, young Krishna's guilty caught-stealing-butter smile, teeth white, eyes green, tufts of yellow-brown hair poking out from under the crown, and her black arm is buried deep inside a bucket of incandescent cream standing under the oversized udders of a square German cow. (TLJEL, 194)

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[139] vision of which is auspicious

[140] Cf. TLJEL, 172.

[141] TLJEL, 213.

[142] Notably, "many chromolithographs circulated by Indian presses during the Quit India struggle mobilized Durga as their central trope and part of a "long line of political manipulations of the Mahishasuramardini trope." (Pinney, *Photos of the Gods. The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India.* London: Reaktion, 2004,131.)

[143] Cf.Apte, Vaman Shivaram. "Pāramita." The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Vers. June 2008. Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. 10 Dec. 2014 <http://dsal1.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.3:1:4051.apte>.

For a devotee, this image of Krishna — one of the most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon — enacted by a half-naked white woman covered in oil represents a rank provocation. The image consequently causes a rift between Suman, a Krishna devotee and her son Paresh. However, the image's subtext is not religious as the black-face act endows the photo with a racial innuendo, underscored by the fact that Krishna's skin is blue and not black. Moreover, the bucolic god is here transported onto the scene of Western agro-industry. The engine oil thus symbolizes both industrialization and contamination. While in Hinduism the cow is holy since her milk nourishes gods and humans alike, the "oversized udders" of the German cow symbolize her degradation into a milk-production machine. The subsumption of nature under the capitalist mode of production thus looms large over the image.

When the image arrives at the Bhatt's Calcutta home in the form of a picture postcard, Suman is outraged, all the more so as her son is romantically involved with this blasphemer. The union of brown and white, India and Germany which the image cheekily advertises is thus doomed from the outset as Anna's artistic candor has irrevocably transgressed the boundaries of religious and social propriety. Why Suman is so upset becomes clearer still as the narrator reveals his childhood nickname: "Ranchhodlal. Ran = Hrin = debt. Chhod = release. Lal = son/youth. The-young-man-who-releases-you-from-debt = Krishna."[144] Fittingly, the little vignette marking the end of the chapter "Gulag Ranchhodlal" depicts a small flute — Krishna's instrument. However, the association with the flighty god of romantic love turns out to be prophetic as the adult Paresh drifts from romance to romance, unable to commit himself fully.

If each family member is implicitly or explicitly assigned a divine counterpart by his name and/or character traits — Mahadev that of Shiva, Suman that of Parvatī[145]/Bhārat Mātā, Para that of Durga/Mahisha-Asura-Mardani and Paresh that of Krishna — Anna who 'usurps' the roles of both Durga and Krishna inevitably marks the destabilizing element. Introduced into this harmonious family pantheon, she upsets the balance of power. This may help to explain Para's deep disregard for her mother. And while Para is unwilling to assume the role of obedient daughter towards both of her estranged parents, the example set by her grandmother who fought the British is one that she, a whizz kid and ace fighter pilot, can emulate and even surpass.

[144] TLJEL, 168.
[145] Parvatī is Shiva's consort.

The fact that the protagonist is drawn to different types of women at different stages in his life implies that Paresh is seeking different manifestations of saktī. Among his many affairs and partnerships however, one woman stands out: With Ila Teesta Ray, a fellow Bengali journalist, the narrator felt that their "frames overlapped well."[146] During the brief period of their collaboration she interviews people while he photographs them – an ideal constellation which conspicuously mirrors Suman's and Mahadev's relationship. Even fifty years after they split up, Paresh still clings to his memories of Ila who he seems to feel with hindsight, might have been a better partner. And while all of Paresh's former partners are smart, successful women, his last, young lover Sonali appears a bland character to whom he feels attracted on a purely bodily, sexual level. In TLJEL the feminine is thus ultimately the manifold, the multiple, a transformative energy without which the protagonist appears unable to exist. The novel thus presents its dramatis personae not so much as characters, than as momentary aspects or manifestations of a (spiritual or divine) essence. Hence "[c]haracter is not an enduring individual substance [but] an ever-changing set of intersubjective relations"[147] in TLJEL.

4.3 READING IMAGES, PUZZLING PIECES

> To hell with connecting all the dots. […]. Me, I'm … like, just talking okay? It's not as if I'm Chandler writing a thriller or anything, novel-types you know, all the body-bags of narrative tied up neatly by the end, all the stiffs delivered intact to the precinct morgue of your mind. Not that there isn't a pleasure in that — being the receiving officer at the morgue — 'At least wid a fuckin' DOA you kinda know what ya got! […]
>
> Not that someone like you has ever opened and read one, you know, a *whole-complete* bodybag of a book. What you would call in Gujarati a 'navalkatha'. […]. 'Upanyaas' in Hindi, Bengali — 'boi', though Bongs used to call a film a boi as well, so bright nomenculturally, Bongs, same word for book and film, or another word for film same as picture as in painting or photograph, chhobi. Boi, indeed. I could, you know — write a nov [sic!] — anyway, fuck explaining. (TLJEL, 247)

The introduction to Book Three marks an exceptionally self-conscious literary excursus. Suddenly the narratee finds herself directly addressed and berated for her outmoded desire for closure, while she is also construed as a digital native. Having thus far shown a loquacious attitude, this gruff address marks an unexpected departure. In underlining the locutionary function of the utterance the narrator now claims his right to *not* make a statement. Yet he does precisely that, thereby highlighting the ambivalent nature of narrative fiction as an equally public *and* personal utterance.

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[146] TLJEL, 209.

[147] Murphet, Julian. "The Mole and the Multiple: A Chiasmus of Character." New Literary History. 42.2 (2011), 274. 5 Jan. 2015 <http://www.jstor.org.359218229.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/stable/23012543>.

After his vaguely propaedeutic introduction[148], the narrator now refuses any responsibility towards the reader. If this may be in line with the 'pocomo' tradition of reluctant narrators epitomized by Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, this rabid critique of the naïve reader appears at odds with the preceding text, which assumed an informed and engaged narratee. While signposting the text's metafictional dimension, the insolent disclaimer also advertises the novel's media-critical tendency, encapsulated in the comparison of popular novels to body bags. The text as a dead body is thus held up to the scrutiny of an implicitly necrophiliac reader. The analogy strikes a visceral cord. Indeed popular literature and narrative film rely upon providing closure and keeping their narratee/spectator in a stable position from which to comfortably follow events. TLJEL by contrast construes an amorphous narratee, first invited then spurned. The text's varying intensities are thus reflected in its changing address which now invites resistance from the real reader.

Instead of relying on character to provide a determinate trajectory for the narrative, the text presents the dramatis personae, including the protagonist himself, as possessed of few defining qualities. Their lives assume definitive shape and structure only in the different social and professional roles they perform. The protagonist's life consequently assumes shape in his occupations of student, professional photographer, lover and father. Now, as an old man facing long, empty days, the protagonist struggles to give his life ulterior meaning. The changing intensity of the text at this juncture also bespeaks an acutely felt recognition of narratorial responsibility that has little to do with postmodern narratorial resistance rhetoric.

The narrator's jeremiad is also a swan song to the Gutenberg Galaxy. The semantic-etymological précis delivered in the second paragraph is particularly interesting from a media comparative viewpoint as it highlights the generic affiliation of novels and films. The semantic conflation resonates with Mitchell's argument that "[a]ll media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign-types."[149] But the drive behind this rally speech only emerges over the course of the following paragraph:

> The books just sit there on my bookshelves, all old finished explanations, bound and gagged, surrounded by the profound unfinishedness of photographs different invisible stories coming out of the four sides of each picture, besieging those books, done for those books, […], but it won't matter to you and you will never read one because you can't imagine it, opening one and holding it actually in your hand, this boi jinish thing, and reading from start to finish like we used to do. Now you fuckers have it all on your screen. (TLJEL, 247f)

[148] Cf. TLJEL, 6f.
[149] Cf. Mitchell,"Showing Seeing," 170.

> Download pages at random, just like you do porn clips, I like this pussy, add it to this piece of ass, add it to Dietrich's fingers holding wine glass, take glass out, flip the hand. […]. Same thing with 'books', this chapter from here, this character from here, make up your own story, your own bloody random soap all doing nothing but framing and fingering the 'I'. At least it's more difficult with photographs. Why?
>
> Because people have been cutting up pictures from way before they did with text. So now people are tired of that, now tˆo [sic!] of course everyone craves the whole image, Archeology Zindabad! 'Can we have the original frame please?' 'Can we have the photographer's own original unfinishedness back?' Yeah, *nishhchoi* bokachoda, *sure*, why not? Some of us spent a lot of time making those frames, risked blood sometimes and more. But it's true also, somewhere —why shouldn't you? What are books? (TLJEL, 248)

The subsumption of images and books under the postmodern cult(ure) of pastiche,[150] vociferously denounced here as the cannibalistic practice of cut and paste, undoubtedly had a profound impact upon the practices surrounding text- and image-based media. But if "[t]he visual or pictorial turn[151] is a recurrent trope that displaces moral and political panic onto images and so-called visual media,"[152] the speaker is certainly no naïve iconoclast. As such he acknowledges that the transfer of texts and images into digital data sets has rendered them amenable – and vulnerable – to a partial, indiscriminate use which reduces their intrinsic complexity. Nonetheless, his 'diagnosis' of readers' severely limited attention span and inability to realize texts imaginatively appears dated:

> It is a question of *visual dyslexia.* Teachers have been saying for a long time now that the last few generations have great difficulty understanding what they read because they are incapable of *re-presenting* it to themselves….For them, words have in the end lost their ability to come alive, since images, more rapidly perceived, were supposed to replace words according to the photographers, the silent-film makers, the propagandists and advertisers of the early twentieth century. Now there is no longer anything to replace and the number of the visually illiterate and dyslexic keeps multiplying. (Virilio/Rose 1994, 8)

Rancière alerts us to the fact that the "obsessive concern with the baleful display of commodities and images, and this representation of their blind, self-satisfied victim, did not arise in the age of Barthes, Baudrillard and Debord."[153] Instead he traces it to the latter half of the nineteenth century, a time during which the human nervous system began to be investigated, giving rise to fears of growing cognitive incapacity and political discontent among the working classes.[154] If the speaker seems content to identify the "screen" as the culprit to be blamed for this imaginative dyslexia, this appears more dubious in the third paragraph as the desires projected onto images move into the foreground.

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[150] Cf.Jameson, "Postmodernism." In: Hardt/Weeks (eds), *The Jameson Reader*, 201f.

[151] Cf. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 11f.

[152] Mitchell, "Showing Seeing," 170.

[153] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 46.

[154] Ibid.

After all the speaker is not among the "imbeciles who still think such things as concealed messages in images and a reality distinct from appearances exist."[155] Instead the (ab-)use of the image appears a corollary of the fragmented contemporary subject. Pastiche thus becomes the medial manifestation of a new subject politics "framing and fingering the 'I,'"[156] rendering digital media a vital extension of the subject field. Paresh's and Para's mnemo-psychological use of the Megalopolis software testifies to this. Such use then indicates a shift of subject formation processes from mirror and cinematic images to digital ones. Conversely, the growing desire for the 'original' reported by the narrator appears to express a longing for stability and ontological security vis-à-vis a rapidly changing social and cultural environment. But in the future of 2030, new technologies also allow the body to 'speak' for itself:

> Some of the more expensive shirts even have chips that are controllable. I've seen two youths have a fight without using any spoken words, one turning his shirt red, the other a bright purple with the words 'Your Mother' flashing across his front before they took to blows. […]. [Sonali] has a couple of saris she wears and one I particularly hate has a […] group of synchronized swimmers […]. She will say, 'Well, you are wrong!' and her sari pallu will drop. As she pushes it back, the swimmers will perform some number, […] wagging their legs like fingers. I just hate it. (TLJEL, 271)

Here the idea of a 'language of fashion' appears to have been literally realized as the garments 'speak' for their wearers, or rather, express their emotions. But while in the latter situation the sari only underscores the spoken words, in the first case speech appears to have been rendered altogether obsolete. However, this reduction spells a dangerous drift into purely affective, rather than rational modes of communication. As one of the sites in which communicative memory[157] is actualized, the body is elementary to the enactment of social rituals generating a sense of community. The titular jet engine laugh marks a particularly striking example of (embodied) communicative memory[158]. Upon meeting Viral Patel in Goa after both men have just separated from their respective partners, the protagonist and his old schoolfriend once more attempt to start their vocal jet engine:

> We start well — two grown men trying to reproduce the falsetto taste of childhood. Viral goes high. I go high. We climb, but suddenly the laugh loses power halfway through take-off. The guffawing, which I was king in, is now impossible for me, and Viral chokes every time he tries the whine. Our throats are too brittle, we have swallowed too much life, too much feni, talked many hundred thousand more words since the last jet-engine laugh. Both engines go down for different reasons and both of us peter out into silence. (TLJEL, 86f)

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[155] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 48.
[156] TLJEL, 248.
[157] Cf. Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*. Ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara B. Young. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010, 110.
[158] Ibid., 111.

It is the last flight of the Bhatt-Patel jet, whose pilots have evidently exhausted their vocal capacity. With their synchronicity — so characteristic of "learned bodily events"[159] — now expired, the disharmonious sound emerging from their throats is an apt index of the experiential and emotional distance now separating the friends. But his voice's failure is only the first harbinger of old age for the narrator. In 2030 his body stages its exhaustion in a more dramatic fashion still as his kidneys and prostate refuse to work properly now. At this point, the small world of Paresh's apartment is on the verge of collapse as both his body and household appliances simultaneously surrender to blockage:

> Some days this Alessi also has a prostate problem. It sort of solidarnocs with my urinary tract and silts up, a trade union of jammed pipes, and I can hear the steam pushing and nothing coming out, a trickle, an escapee drop or two, a smudge of espresso drying at the bottom of the top compartment and the smell of coffee and rubber burning. I have to act fast when that happens […]. One day, the castle-prison is working perfectly and then, suddenly, the next day the inmates are rioting. (TLJEL, 51)

The mix of medical, political and technical jargon and the anthropomorphization of the stove espresso cooker not only throw the narrator's frail physical condition into relief, but reflect the chaos enveloping the world outside his secure "castle-prison." As Paresh is struggling to release the water in his body, the subcontinental drought has reached the stage of a global crisis. UP Mukherjee consequently argues that "[t]he historical water wars here have assumed an embodied form, for not only are bodies at war over water, but wars of water have entered those bodies."[160] But the emphasis on water not only communicates an ecological critique: The Sabarmati in whose empty bed Paresh's parents had sought to "sweep away the colonial regime"[161] thus finds its inversion in the overflowing, dirty Ganges inundating the platform when Mahadev first arrives in Calcutta, the city in which he and Suman will make their home in exile. In this way the ebb and flow of water symbolizes both the migrations and displacements of the protagonists, and the way in which the universe may hinder or promote individual designs.

But while life in 2030 unfurls in the almost total absence of water, "the whale of memory"[162] is all but stranded. As the protagonist's body runs dry, the torrent of memory flows on. Yet this whale follows continually changing trajectories. On the momentous occasion on which Para informs her father of her decision to become a fighter pilot, the narration of the event is frequently interrupted by other memories. Mahadev Bhatt's voice keeps interfering, exhorting his son to be courageous like his daughter, instead of "hiding

[159] Narváez, *Embodied Collective Memory*, 2.
[160] Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments*, 176.
[161] Ibid.,173.
[162] TLJEL, 272.

behind a camera."[163] Yet the protagonist's attempts "to stuff him back into the other game where he belonged"[164] fail, leading the narrator to the conclusion that his "software [is] faulty."[165] The mnemonic overload and resulting 'system hang-up' at this juncture are indicative: The mingling and collapsing of strands of memory now becomes rampant, the following hundred pages switching from scene to scene, story to story. In this way the text signals that the end is imminent. On November 16 2030 a computer message eventually informs Paresh that Varun Machan, his daughter's operative base in orbit has stopped responding.

It is not until over thirty pages later in Book Four, "Knocking on Heaven's Door" however, that readers learn, what happened on the station. Although the entire crew of the vessel has been killed by an ultrasound weapon, Para has survived the attack and is able to escape in the ice-cream cart, a supply ship on its way back to earth. Since she is in a ship not built for the transport of humans however, she might not survive the drop through the earth's atmosphere. The reader learns all this through a heterodiegetic narration in which Para serves as reflector figure and focalizer. Para who always hated handwriting, takes an old Pelikan to pen a last letter to her father in a final bid of farewell before departing. The subsequent narration of her preparations discharges into the report of a bicycle race between Mahadev and Suman in 1930s Ahmedabad and then into an episode set between Para's birth and Mahadev's death. Thematically, the episodes are united by "the old green and black German Pelikan 120" pen Mahadev then consigned to Para as his legacy to her.

Spinning into its last revolution the text turns back to an earlier moment, Paresh's and Para's walk on the cliffs over the landing beaches of Normandy. As Para trips and threatens to go over the edge, Paresh catches her. As a symbol of Europe's liberation from the Nazis, the landing beaches recall the immense casualities of the Second World War, the price at which freedom was won. Now however, Paresh cannot stop her fall through orbit. Notably Para immediately settles her 'debt', namely when armed gendarmes mistake Paresh for a terrorist and prepare to shoot him. It is the presence of the little girl that prevents them from doing so. The novel's last 'frame' shows father and daughter in the car on their way back to Paris as "[t]he road picks up an escort of trees. Light and shadow drum across the car."[166]

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[163] TLJEL, 282.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] TLJEL, 376.

The cycle of life and death, light and shadow repeats ad infinitum as eternal recurrence prevails. And although the narrative offers no definitive closure, there is the certainty that Para and Paresh will die soon. In the end Para's fall from the skies confirms Paresh's fears, voiced in the vey beginning while rendering her an Indian martyr. Ultimately, none of the images and photos invoked by the narrator grant an epiphany and arrest meaning. The closer the narrator looks and the more acute and detailed his descriptions become, the more obscure the image becomes. Ultimately however, this acuity bespeaks the impossibility of rendering image and word fully consonant:

> It is an old topos that the contemplation of visual arts holds out the promise of perfect atemporal communication equated with love; therefore most ekphrasis addresses desire. It obsessively repeats a cycle of promise and ultimate failure of this perfect communication by evoking the power of the silent image only to subject it to the rival authority of language. The resulting tension or dilemma is often strategically manipulated by the text in order to involve the reader emotionally or to provoke his or her disagreement. (Brosch 2002, 109f)

From 'reading' the photos of TLJEL it appears that the image can be subsumed under the textual economy and the process of semiosis only when multiplied. The narrator's manifest tendency to double images, i.e., to present images bearing a resemblance in terms of motif, framing and structure in this context bespeaks not only a will to order, but the search for symmetries as affirmations of an ulterior, cosmological truth. Two images seem particularly suited to document this claim, the first of which shows Suman on the eve of her secret wedding with Mahadev in Calcutta.

> Black and white, but taken with a flash, which my father never used. A woman sits erect in an aircraft seat. She is sharp, smiling for the camera, but the smile doesn't quite reach her eyes. Her body is pulling against the tight little silver seat belt that crumples her sari into a funny hourglass shape. Behind her is an oval window and through it the ground is blurred, three palm trees barely recognizable, also blurred as if in a desert storm and slightly tilted. (TLJEL, 47)

Although the narrator no longer possesses the photo, his memory of it appears strikingly clear – a fact which sustains the assumption that the image's "mnemonic stability"[167] is not only the result of an acute, photgraphic memory, but of a "process of transformation"[168] attaching distinctive emotions and meanings to it. This seems all the more likely as the narrator acutely feels the loss of his mother. The second photo which shows Para is hanging in the protagonist's photo room.

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[167] Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 15
[168] Ibid.

> There is a harness which straps the pilot's body, the seat with the ejector jets and the twin parachutes into one compact unit. The straps of the harness form a cross with the centre point just under the pilot's solar plexus and the flash has turned the material bright white so it looks like someone has taken a fluorescent marker and crossed the pilot out. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I didn't put the cross there myself, that it is part of the photograph.
>
> Underneath the newspaper version the caption reads: *Dec. 6, 2017, the Return Match for 2007 begins: Squadron Leader Para Bhatt led the first sortie of the new Ishir fighter-bombers in the pre-emptive attack against forces of the Pak-Saudi alliance early yesterday. All targets were successfully destroyed.* (TLJEL, 48)

Both photographs show young women in an aircraft before take-off, at a moment of high tension. If Para's mission may be said to mark her symbolic 'union' to the nation, both photos could in this sense be referred to as pre-wedding photos. Their structural similarity and the fact that both subjects also look alike, underlines the link between the two women pictured. Yet Paresh as their "spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has […] seared the character in the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which […] the future so persuasively inserts itself that, looking back, we may rediscover it."[169] In this case, Para's harness symbolizes this tiny spark as it threatens Para's erasure. Aware of the danger of his daughter's mission, the protagonist cannot but read this as an omen of his daughter's death. Here, as in most cases it is the narrator who draws attention to this spark, thereby tacitly affirming his interpretative authority.

The ulterior link uniting the photos is internal to the second photo, however. The reason why Paresh is no longer in possession of the first photo is simply that Para has taken it and carries it "in [her] pocket just over [her] heart"[170] during the sortie. After all, this was Suman's first flight, a symbolic act of liberation which Para hopes to repeat.

> From another point of view, photos seem to have the magic power to make time stand still. They seem to isolate the objects they represent from the flow of time and to transform them into monuments; they even seem to transform common and everyday objects or moments into elements of another reality of greater intensity and impressiveness. In this regard, photographic images are used as devices to reflect upon epiphanic moments – and to point to the epiphanies of art and literature themselves. (Schmitz-Emans 2010, 123)

In the case of the second photo, the significance of this moment for Para is further underscored by its historic relevance. The talisman has been effective, the sortie marks India's first decisive strike against the Pak-Saudi alliance and moment becomes monument. Nonetheless, for Paresh the image reminds him of what he lost.

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[169] Benjamin,"A Short History of Photography," 7.
[170] TLJEL, 48.

As noted earlier it seems no coincidence that nearly all of the novel's characters have divine or otherwise symbolic names which ascribe particular character traits to them.[171] By implicitly invoking the concepts of rebirth (samsara) and avatars, the narrator purposely engages a mythical past, i.e., a past beyond human reach. In so far as the narrative covers nearly a hundred years and thus the lives of "3-4 interacting generations,"[172] it covers the scope of what Jan Assman designates "communicative memory."[173] However, communicative memory answers only incompletely to historic rationality. Having begun with bloodshed, India's path as delineated in TLJEL thus seems doomed to continue in violence. But for histories' subjects – Suman, Mahadev, Paresh and Para – the past is still too close. Where trauma forestalls a 'proper', historic narrative, images assume a vital function[174].

Unlike history, Hindu eschatology measures time in kalpas and yugas, not centuries or millennia. Moreover it answers to an appealingly simple logic, namely that of the cycle in which creation and destruction form an unending cycle like water in the earth's atmosphere. If the current age is the age of Kali-Yug, the experience of Suman, Mahadev, Paresh and Para whose lives are defined by chaos, violence and sacrifice is reflected in the former. Furthermore, no element in Hindu cosmology is superfluous. Every existence and occurrence is answerable to a grand scheme.

In this context I would like to discuss the text's narrative strategy and perspective structure. After all Paresh's authority as autodiegetic narrator and focalizing agent does not extend to the whole text. A number of episodes are thus presented by an anonymous narrating agency, employing a character like Mahadev, Kalidas Dutta or Viral Patel as reflector figure through whose eyes and minds the events thus appear filtered. While attuned to illuminating the character's psyche, this mode of narration simultaneously maintains a critical distance[175]. A conspicuous exception in this regard is Sandhya whose brief romance with the protagonist is relayed through seven diary entries conceived in the confessional mode. As such however, they appear irreconcilable with the experiential and informative horizon of Paresh Bhatt. In so far they mark 'orphaned' stretches of text or superimpositions to use a photographic metaphor. This refusal of emplotment is indicative.

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[171] Notably Paresh means 'Supreme Spirit' or 'Supreme Lord'.
[172] Assmann, J. "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 117.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Cf. Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 21.
[175] Alber, Jan and Monika Fludernik. "Mediacy and Narrative Mediation." *Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009, 174f.

Notably, Sandhya is also suffering estrangement from the surrounding world and as a result has remained single, despite having a large circle of friends. Both Paresh and Sandhya thus orbit around other characters and in so far are 'satellites'. In Sandhya's case, this 'eccentric' position is also marked in the text as the diary entries are dispersed across the text. Superimposition as a photographic technique on the other hand offers itself as a metaphor for the text's pastiche arrangement of different perspectives, episodes and time scales without attention to chronology. However, when the final section montages Para's writing her letter with the episode in which a dying Mahadev gifts baby Para the pen, there is clearly causal coherence. At other junctures however, the text generates meaning through the interferences created through superimposition or transference.

As integral procedures of analogue photography, transference (the contact sheet) and superimposition are thus adopted in TLJEL as constituents of a poetics of memory that is simultaneously a poetics of multiplicity. Initially, this multiplicity creates the impression that little narrative control has been exercised and that the narrative presents itself in its 'natural' state which is messy and multifarious. Gradually however, the "mimesis of memory"[176] emerges through "the ensemble of narrative forms and aesthetic techniques through which literary texts stage and reflect the workings of memory:"[177]

> Fictions of memory can vary greatly with regard to the ordering of the analepses. Typically, the analepses are ordered chronologically, [...]. [...] Yet, especially, in contemporary fictions of memory, this chronological order is dissolved at the expense of the subjective experience of time. In such instances the strict sequence of events is undercut by the constant oscillation between different time levels. Deviations in sequential ordering (anachronies) are often semanticized because they illustrate the haphazard workings of memory and thus contribute substantially to highlighting the memory-like quality of narratives. (Neumann 2008, 336)

In other words, TLJEL simulates memory in its actuality, i.e., as a working structure, rather than as a finished narrative product. In this way the perpetual process of revision and reelaboration of the past in the present, to the needs of which the former is submitted, are laid open. Paresh takes this somewhat further in trying to understand his daughter and her motives by reviewing his mother's life and his memories of her. Instead of specifying a narrative order, readers are thus invited by the text to trace the links between different memory events and their respective retainers. The 'web of memory' thus produced relies on (con-)junctures, superimpositions ands contact sheets.

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[176] Neumann, Birgit. "The Literary Representation of Memory." *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara B. Young. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008, 334.

[177] Ibid.

Paresh Bhatt's mnemosyne clearly documents that "[w]e do not, any more, simply remember with the aid of photographs; we remember in terms of them, even […] in the absence of an actual camera."[178] One salient example of such a narrative superimposition connects the Bhatts' and Patels' visit to former East Pakistan in 1971 with Para's 2017 sortie. And while the chapter title "Contact Sheet" advertises transference, the chrono-numerical inversion ('71-'17) subtly underscores this. While touring the war-ravaged landscape, the tourists spot a burnt-out tank:

> *There is a slash of yellow in the frame, startling against the green of the paddy field, just behind one twisted arc of metal curving out of the wreck. Mustard flowers, some grown-up has pointed out, from where these Bengalis get their funny-smelling oil. Paresh wishes he has colour film, but his father has loaded black and white. I don't think today you will find subjects for colour. Paresh takes the picture anyway, trying to place the sweetish odour. It doesn't smell like a Bengali kitchen [.].*
>
> *It's a ghost of a machine, and it looks as though someone has carved out the insides, scooped all the substance out, like a knife scooping out the insides of a coconut, leaving just the shell.* (TLJEL, 215)

Viral's father is immediately aware of the origin of the peculiar smell: "*These Pakistanis weren't cooking, they were cooked! They are the meat!* […] *No tˆo even you - especially a patriot like you - have to become non-vegetarian.*'"[179] But Paresh's mother, a Brahmin, is undaunted by the crude joke: "*This is Durgamata's land and she has awoken to answer these demons!*'"[180] The direct confrontation with such stark brutality seems to transform Suman from a docile Parvati into Durga-Kali, warrior and avenger. In the chronology of events the incident marks the first time that Durga is invoked as a militant, avenging goddess. For the adolescent Paresh the encounter also marks the moment in which his father succumbed to trauma, opening a rift between his parents. Back in the car Suman commands her son to hand the camera back to his father, but the latter declines: "*You keep it from now on. I'll take it if I need it.*'"[181]

> *Mahadev remembers the pleasure he used to feel at hearing the noise of the Nikon's shutter. Another linked sound, the film being pulled forward as he worked the winding lever. He remembers the satisfaction he used to feel in his hand when he did that. The smell of a new roll of film as he opened the little can. Suddenly, these things are gone from him. The sound of the camera clicking just brings back the story, the father running after the army truck, then flipping over and over on the ground like a fish snatched from water, trying to scream but no sound coming out from his mouth.* (TLJEL, 221)

[178] Keenan, Catherine. "On the Relationship between Personal Photographs and Individual Memory." History of Photography. 22.1 (1998), 60.
[179] TLJEL, 217.
[180] Ibid.
[181] TLJEL, 220.

After his stint as a reporter at the refugee camps, bearing the camera has become a burden for Mahadev. The passing of the camera is thus no gift, but a surrender legitimized by Paresh's evident sangfroid. In so far as his future career is premised on this ability to disengage himself, the passing of the camera also marks a rite of passage. But the gift of the camera simultaneously inscribes the eclipse of conjugal love as Mahadev's desire to photograph his wife has waned. At last, the spell cast forty years earlier by the camera in the photo studio in Ahmedabad is broken. Hence Vasundhara, the cause of his long love affair with the camera is again present, presiding over Mahadev's 'resignation'.

Meanwhile in 2017, Para completes her first air strike:

> As Para's Ishir comes low over the target area she sees smoke where her pilots have already hit. The sun has now reached down past the surrounding mountains, and the columns of smoke shine, sculpted almost solid by the dawn light. Her pre-programmed target-radar comes alive […]. Her eyes rake over her numbers, altitude 500, 400, 300, 200, 185, at 185 she blinks, once at the centre, twice-twice on the left, and her Ishir begins its war by *decapitating two camels and taking out an Abrams 8 tank* belonging to the 2 Armoured Corps of the Saudi Arabian Army. (TLJEL, 215)(emphasis added)

Back at headquarters, Para realizes her squadron has also blown up the tents of a group of refugees. At this she is overcome with guilt and unwilling to simply acknowledge this as collateral damage, until her superiors threaten her with discharge and she aquiesces. In so far as the gutted tank symbolizes the beginning of warfare in 2017, whereas it is shown after the battle in the 1971 episode, this might be regarded an example of transference, the 1971 event constituting the negative for the 2017 episode. In this way the potential immanent to both episodes is brought to entelechy. If the 1971 war is evocatively encapsulated in the image of the gutted tank, this image could be regarded a *pregnant moment*[182]:

> Necessarily total, this instant will be artificial ([…]), a hieroglyph in which can be read at a single glance (at one grasp, if we think in terms of theatre and cinema) the present, the past and the future; that is, the historical meaning of the represented action. This crucial instant, totally concrete and totally abstract, is what Lessing subsequently calls (in the *Laocoon*) the *pregnant moment.* […] The pregnant moment is just this presence of all the absences (memories, lessons, promises) to whose rhythm History becomes both intelligible and desirable. (Barthes 1978, 73)

The centrality of this moment is further underscored by the distinct mustard smell which characterizes not only this moment, but also Kalidas Dutta's encounter with Bose in the gulag. Whether it is espresso coffee, hot bhakris[183], shrikhand[184] or Mango pickle — smell and taste observe a salient function in the embodied memory of both the protagonist

[182] Barthes, Roland. *Image - Music - Text.* Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978, 73.
[183] An Indian flatbread variety.
[184] A yoghurt-based Bengali dessert with fruit and nuts.

and other characters. Their recurrence at different junctures in the text thus not only signposts the fiction of memory, but also 'flavors' the text in a manner blending the cosmopolitan (espresso) with the local (mango pickle, shrikhand, bhakris). In the novel smell and taste thus serve to literally re-member sensual experience, even if the synaesthetic totality of actual experience necessarily remains unattainable. In so far all attempts at recovery are partial and wanting. But as a literary text TLJEL is also wanting in another important regard, namely in terms of character.

All the while readers learn about Paresh's life, career, partners and even his sexual encounters, the persona Paresh Bhatt appears strangely detached from these. An ideal trait for a photographer, this detachment has proven fatal in his private life. Although the protagonist successively adopts the roles of son, journalist, partner and father he seems ill at ease and unable to identify with these. As a result, all his relationships including that with Para's mother have failed while his erratic behavior towards the juvenile Para – the result of his refusal to act as an authoritative father – has also produced a palpable disregard for her father. On social occasions such as his retrospective, Paresh also fails to act as the renowned photographer and successful artist as which he is recognized.

Assuming that character is produced in the literary text "as a disavowal of the multiple"[185] as Murphet maintains, Paresh Bhatt does not conform to this idea. Instead of presenting a clearly contoured character, Paresh remains elusive, a quality apparently enforced by his circumstances. The experience of finding all the hopes and deferred joy of his parents projected onto him, proves trying. Ultimately, both his father and mother are in different ways dissatisfied with their son. Yet the ability to occupy different roles and slip into new situations and lives with ease, that he develops as a consequence recalls the way water finds its way over stony ground. In so far his fluid character links in significant ways with the text's water metaphors.

With water seeping out of the planet, hydration comes by way of little tablets which the protagonist detests because they fail to alleviate his thirst for the real thing:

> The tablets come in little ammunition belts, a bit like those round, soft, plastic bags with sealed little boils of ice that you used to have in the late '90s, […]. And there is a grinning blue fish on each boil of tablet. You take the transparent tablet out and put in in a glass. After a few moments of contact with air, the tablet turns into about an inch and a half of clear liquid that looks like water. You drink this and it tastes nothing like water. What it does is hydrate your body and get rid of thirst for some time. (TLJEL, 250)

[185] Murphet, Julian. "The Mole and the Multiple." New Literary History. 42.2 (2011), 256.

Like these water tablets, the photos evoked in the text mark a distilled, static essence. These 'capsules of memory' expand and form links only as they are connected with each other through narrative. Nonetheless, they remain unsatisfactory, a sorry replacement for the real (thing) — lived experience as an uncontainable, all-encompassing and synaesthetic flux. However, as carriers of meaning and *lieux de mémoire*, the photos serve an integral function. They bespeak not only a desire to recover the past and anticipate the future, but a longing for connections, symmetry, meaning. Unlike the static photographs, the memories pertaining to the images are in flux. Consequently, they map onto the text like a Moebius strip. Nonetheless, Paresh continues to seek the aperture in the strip. In so far, the photos or rather photo textures signpost the loss of the real, or more precisely, the experience of this loss.

> The real, then, surrounds us. It also inhabits us as the condition of our ex-sistence. Human beings remain uneasy composites, the conjunction of an unreachable real organism and the subjects they become. The unconscious is not the real, nor the repository of the real, but the consequence of its loss. Driven through it is, and constituted by culturally constructed images of reality, the subject remains ultimately empty. (Belsey 2005, 50)

The protagonist relies on the photographs to compensate for his existential loneliness and to visualize the different people and roles that gave his life form. And while their meaning may appear immediately evident at first glance, it slips away upon closer scrutiny. For the reader on the other hand these visual textures are salient points of attraction, at once 'capsules of memory' and *tableaux vivants*. Assuming with Barthes that the "*Dearth-of-Image*" of literary texts is contrasted by "the Photograph's *Totality-of-Image*"[186] and that the photo leaves no space for additions, TLJEL documents that this totality is meaningless if not animated by (a) consciousness. Therefore photographs are functional as narrative 'engines' only where the protagonist's memory animates them. Only in conjunction with memory and other images do they produce narrative. In that sense the textual photos adequately reflect the degree to which the text actively *generates* memory:

> Rather than indicating a mimetic quality of literature, [mimesis of memory] points to its productive quality: Novels do not imitate existing versions of memory, but produce, in the act of discourse, that very past which they purport to describe. […]. All it can do, therefore, is tell a story in a manner which is detailed, precise, and alive, and in that way create the "illusion of mimesis." (Neumann 2010, 334)

[186] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89.

If the "novelistic totality depends on a reader's 'abstraction' or forgetting of both the techniques of literary composition and the process of reading itself"[187] a Novak claims, then the photos are not exempt from this process, yet they possess a certain residual quality. So much so in fact that Paresh Bhatt at times appears to vanish behind all the photos he invokes. Perhaps the absence of a transcendent, fully formed and stable subject is also a precondition to the effective mimesis of memory. The concept of character which TLJEL endorses emerges most lucidly with regard to the specter it raises and which it also quickly buries again, that of Subhas Chandra Bose namely. An episode related at two crucial junctures, in the very beginning and at the end of the novel, Bose's ICS[188] examination renders a lucid metaphor of character:

> One of the stories was about the great man's ICS examinations. Having passed the 'written' with flying colours, the young Subhash was called for the interview by his British examiners. This was the final and most dreaded of tests.
>
> 'How would you pass yourself through this?' one examiner demanded, holding up a small gold ring. Subhash paused only a moment. Then he wrote out his name on a slip of paper, folded it and passed it through the ring - thus stunning the panel into passing him without any further questions. (TLJEL, 12)

For Paresh the incident documents the "stupidity and vacuousness of the British."[189] However, the episode subtly highlights how the subject in its multiplicity is reduced to a one, i.e., a proper name. As Murphet points out, "the proper name sutures us into identification via its unique supplement to the sheer accretion of semes."[190] If Bose is here adjudicated by the board, he is simultaneously also appropriated by colonial officialdom as a native agent of British rule. What may seem a curious historic incident thus assumes symbolic weight, also because the act of writing one's name with a pen relates Bose's story to Para's and Mahadev's, whose Pelikan pen connects the following two narrative episodes.

In this context it is also worthwhile to discuss the text's 'body politics' again. Hence the protagonist's body exhibits the peculiar tendency to behave in alignment with the external, material world. As a consequence his body runs dry when the planet's water resources are dwindling. Being thus bound up with material reality and historic circumstance is a condition Paresh shares with another literary creation of IEF ─ Saleem Sinai. Yet Paresh is by no means a figural type unique to IEF or postcolonial literature, in fact, he could be regarded a distant relation of Proust's Marcel or Joyce's Stephen Dedalus.

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[187] Novak, Daniel A. *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 8.

[188] Indian Civil Service

[189] TLJEL, 12.

[190] Murphet, "The Mole and the Multiple," 256.

According to Julian Murphet, the latter two are multiples and can be designated "non-characters"[191] in that sense. Viewed from this perspective, Joshi's novel affirms a concept of character as a dynamic set, rather than as a static essence:

> Character is not an enduring individual substance, it is an ever-changing set of intersubjective relations. It is a lesson with serious repercussions for what we call "American individualism," […]—for what it suggests is (à la Macpherson) that every supposed self is in fact a "commonwealth" (Faulkner) or "multitude" (Whitman) of shifting heterogeneous beings. (Murphet 2011, 274)

I furthermore argue that the concept of character informing TLJEL is directly reflected in its form as the multiple is contrasted and competes with the one also on the level of narrative structure. For while the 2030 sections have one narrative consciousness at their origin that grants narrative cohesion, the episodes relating (to) Viral, Kalidas or Sandhya do not obviously inscribe a singular or hegemonial narrative authority. In so far as the narrating agency steps back behind these reflector figures in the passages to dissimulate its presence, experience and consciousness in their lived immediacy are again foregrounded. In this way, the dynamics of character and consciousness come to determine the novel's reading experience. However, the novel's virtual album offers moments in which the the narrative flux briefly comes to rest and in which meaning appears at least momentarily stable.

In the end TLJEL presents itself as a deeply heteroclite text, a many-headed creature like the protesting woman in Paresh's photo. It is at once a "fiction of memory,"[192] a "photo-novel,"[193] a historic fiction, science fiction and, not least, an artist novel. Being all of these, these labels carry little heuristic value in this context, an observation that also holds true, if to a lesser extent, for Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*. The generic polyvalence of TLJEL thus underscores the impossibility of singularity and stability and the force of historic experience in the age of Kali-Yug – an experience not unlike that of being submerged by a massive floodwave. In so far, Joshi's novel resonates with the narrative tradition of IEF, a tradition marked by 'fluid', dynamic texts that never quite come to rest. However, when Guttman diagnoses the novel with a "total refusal of logic,"[194] she seems to overlook the diverse textual strategies stabilizing semiosis and creating a semblance of memory itself.

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[191] Murphet, "The Mole and the Multiple," 256; 263.

[192] Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory." In: Erll/Nünning (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, 334.

[193] Mukherjee, U.P., *Postcolonial Environments*, 177.

[194] Guttman, *The Nation of India*, 153.

The perpetual recurrence of particular motifs, the conjunctures and overlaps aesthetically perpetuated by the photographs and photographic techniques applied onto the text thus found if not a sense a cohesion, then certainly a will to form. But what historic role does TLJEL assign its protagonist with? As a photographer, Paresh Bhatt provides an ideal historic prism. Hence he cannot help "becom[ing] mired in history in a way which implies that the historian can provide not a clear window onto the real, but only a lens which frames and refracts what it sees."[195] Here, that lens is literal and belongs to the camera. This may be the specific value and virtue of Paresh's photographs, including his ostentiously vacuous, repetitive still lives: They all exhibit their epistemological insufficiency as refractions and reproductions.

In the outmoded conception of perceptual realism, photography was *epistêmê*, i.e. knowledge as a particular modality of appropriating the world. For Paresh by contrast, photography is primarily a set of techniques allowing him to trace symmetries and conjunctures – *technê*. In their posed, artificial appeal, his compelling photos seem opaque, affirming only their own reality. And while there is a palpable will to form and to meaning underlying the text, its images and photos do not wholly submit to the centrifugal pull of narrative. The pieces of the puzzle do not fall into place, no matter how long Paresh contemplates and rearranges them. The radical sense of disengagement communicated in TLJEL consequently abets a deeper engagement with the sensual surface of the world as an extant real – the only trace of the real accessible – casting the subject head-long into the matrix, the eternal, circling dance.

[195] Mee, John. "After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s." *A History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed.Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. London: Hurst & Co, 2003, 329.

5. FILMING. A LOVE STORY

He smells the smoke and doesn't know, for a confusing second, whether it is a fire burning in his memory or whether the nightmare of the past has come alive again. But the smoke cannot obscure the bright realms of his memories of the years before the riots. They appear through the rent shreds of 1947.
His mind, used as it is to the idiom of cinema, often replays scenes from that time. They come back to him and with each viewing lose a bit of their colour, each time becoming more jumpy and jerky and disjointed. They come back to him day after day now, like the stones that land on the studio walls and roofs night after night after night. Each stone is a memory. Each memory is a stone. (F, 230f)

With *Filming. A Love Story*, the second novel of Tabish Khair[1] (2007) the study engages with another fiction of memory[2] which addresses Partition as both a seminal and deeply traumatic event in the history of the subcontinent. The 'black border'[3] encroaching upon the achievement of national independence in 1947, Partition was nonetheless sidelined by national historiography and marginalized in public discourse for decades.[4] Now a historic revision appears to have set in as "writers, historians, cultural critics and psychologists" [5] turn back to Partition. However, the novel is less concerned with recounting the events of 1947/1948, than with the socioeconomic and cultural climate within which they occurred and their grave socio-psychological impact. Above all, F addresses the impact of trauma upon individual memory as the latter assumes the guise of film(s). In so far, F inscribes the aporia of memory.

True to its title, the narrative often appears an exercise in filming, or more precisely, in presenting events in a cinematographic aesthetic. The introductory quote marks one of the few instances in which the text self-consciously addresses cinema film as a medium channeling and stabilizing memory. Granted that the mind is "*used […] to the idiom of cinema*," it offers a vehicle ideally suited to mediating between individual and collective memory[6].

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[1] Khair is Associate Professor of Aesthetics and Communication at Aarhus University. His publications include *Babu Fictions. Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. (2005) and *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness. Ghosts from Elsewhere*. (2009). He recently co-edited *Transnational and Postcolonial Vampires : Dark Blood*. (2013.)

[2] Cf. Neumann,"The Literary Representation of Memory." In: Erll/Nünning (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, 334.

[3] *Siyah Hashiye* or *Black Borders* is the title of a short story collection by Sadat Hasan Manto published in 1948. It provides one of the earliest and most harrowing fictional accounts of Partition.

[4] Cf. Jain, Jasbir. "Introduction. Creativity and Narratability." *Reading Partition/Living Partition*. Ed. Jasbir Jain. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007, 1.

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] Cf. Zierold, Martin. "Memory and Media Cultures." In: Erll/Nünning/Young (eds), *A Companion to Cultural Memory* Studies, 403.

If cinema film implies a specific address of the spectator, this address is expanded here to include readers as virtual film spectators. By embracing the aesthetic of popular Hindi cinema and luring the recipient "into the boudoirs of its fantasies,"[7] the text consequently promotes the latter as a prism through which to view and comprehend history. Yet if the term 'Bollywood' that gained currency around the millennium courts connotations of trivia and trash[8], the text clearly refutes these. In contrast to other 'filmi' novels such as Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business* (1991), Allan Sealy's *Hero: A Fable* (1991) or even R.K. Narayan's *Mr. Sampath. The Printer of Malgudi* (1948) – all of which consummately critique the cinema industry – F lacks the pervasive undertone of irony that defines the stance of the former vis-à-vis the Indian popular film.[9]

What is more, F explores the heterogeneous cultural influences and social milieux that informed cinema in its first decades, its potential for generating profit luring individuals who previously enjoyed only limited opportunities in India's rigid social hierarchy. "Films are the future, not letters. Films are the world. The bioscope, meri jaan[10], moving pictures, not the fixed alphabet."[11] This statement made by the ambulant bioscope operator Harihar marks the pervasive change in sensual experience inaugurated by cinema. More than words, films appear to embrace and recreate the phenomenal world. And while the fixed alphabet may be the building block of Khair's novel, it is film(s) that haunt its letters and words. However, the bioscope not only paves Harihar's road to success, it eventually also seals his fate.

The pivotal role of cinema in establishing a new attitude towards vision and worldly experience thus challenges its purported triviality. And if Khair's choice of theme testifies to an awareness of the increasing international popularity of Indian cinema, I argue that it does not simply cater to film buffs suffering literary estrangement. This assumption would fall short of recognizing popular cinema's role as the primary cultural arena in which national identity and historic consciousness are still shaped. Moreover, F also meditates upon the phenomenal parallels between cinema spectatorship and the processes of dreaming and remembering, processes to which it assigns a distinct tendency to spill over into each other.

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[7] Saari, Anil and Partha Chatterjee. *Hindi Cinema. An Insider's View.*3rd ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, 28.

[8] Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid. From Bollywood to the Emergency.* New Delhi: Tulika, 2009, 77.

[9] However, these novels address different historic periods and film industries.

[10] my love/my soul

[11] F, 48.

However, while granting readers familiar with Hindi popular films and its narrative and aesthetic conventions moments of *déja-vu*, it is noteworthy that the cinematic 'texts' referenced here do not work to exclude readers not versed in Indian culture and film. The following discussion will address the ramifying routes along which aesthetic and historic experience, film and novel intersect and mutually influence each other. Based on the premise that "Indian cinema, more than any other media, whether newspapers or the novel ([…]), has mediated the imagination of the Indian nation,"[12] I argue that F explores the formation of a specifically Indian imagination at a crucial historic juncture, in so far namely as it focuses "the 'golden age' of Indian cinema."[13] If the scope of this imagination appears severely limited because it is only *Hindi* cinema that is referenced here, it is worthwhile pointing out that it vaunted supraregional appeal and relevance at that time.

The overlap between the films featured on the book cover – "Aag,"[14] "Barsaat,"[15] and "Pyaasa"[16], three of the most popular Bombay 'socials' of the 1940s and 1950s – and the narrative presented motivates a reading based on the deployment of the former as an aesthetic matrix and figural inventory. The enquiry thus proceeds on the premise that Khair's novel is not a novel about cinema or some films, but a *novel (in) film*, i.e., a mode of writing engaging cinema as a sensorium, an unfinished, dynamic text:

> Cinema is not only an art; cinema is a specific sensorium, cinema is a way of living the shadows. I think it is very important that a film is never given as a whole. So the film is a sensation, the sensation of an apparition, of shadows, and it lives in our memories. Cinema exists in memories as much as it exists in real shadows. (Rancière 2011, 295)

This may sound vague but a look at the text's aesthetics documents the legitimacy of this approach: From the novel's 'title credits' and its subdivision into 'reels' interspersed with an 'intermission', it is evident that the text structurally emulates cinema film. The six quotes preceding the title credits can therefore be read as 'admission tickets for while they appear oddly mismatched as prefatory remarks. The sources cited here include Bharatamuni's dramaturgic treatise, the Nāṭyaśāstra, Ahmad al-Biruni's observations on shadow[17], Thomas Carlyle's "On History again", a Hollywood director, the 1954 blockbuster "Jagriti", as well as Mahatma Gandhi. The quotes thus delineate a vast temporal and thematic arch.

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[12] Dwyer, Rachel. *Filming the Gods. Religion and Indian Cinema.* London: Routledge, 2006, 1.
[13] Ibid., 2.
[14] „Fire", dir. Raj Kapoor, 1948.
[15] "Rain", dir. Raj Kapoor, 1949.
[16] "Thirsty", dir. Guru Dutt, 1957.
[17] The name is variously spelled 'Alberuni' or 'Al-Biruni'.

The first quote however, soon assumes relevance in the process of reading: The reference to the the Nāṭyaśāstra which Sharma deems an Indian_"psycho-aesthetics"[18] links up with seven text sections that mark the preludes to each 'reel' or chapter. Each of these sections has one of the primary rasas or moods elaborated in the Nāṭyaśāstra for its leitmotif. However, Al-Biruni's quote which defines darkness as the endless expanse of shadow appears somewhat gratuitous. Not until late into the narrative is the 11th century Persian scholar and traveler to India mentioned again[19]. But while most quotes appear to be set on different divergent trajectories at first look, a distinct resonance haunts the quotes of Al-Biruni and Carlyle: Notably, both are concerned with an epistemological impasse, i.e., the ontologically relative status of darkness and past, concepts which are relative to and defined by light and present.

The phenomenological dimension is salient to Alexander Mackendrick's quote which addresses film's central paradox, namely its implicit claim to transparency which is contrasted by its manifest potential for depicting the imagined and fantastic. The last two quotes pertain to Ghandi, the first comprising the refrain of a song from "Jagriti"[20], a eulogy to the 'Saint of Sabarmati' who freed India "without shield and sword," while the second reiterates his purported last words – "Hé Ram!" This utterance which has been disputed since Gandhi's death encapsulates the debates surrounding his historic role and in so far prepares the ground for a literary revisiting of India's national icon.

Shadows and darkness thus establish a melancholy and sinister ambiance, but also an ambiance in which the imagination thrives. In so far, the quotes delineate the intersection of film and history as fields of practice that impose an arbitrary barrier between the visible and the invisible, the admissible and the inadmissible, now and then. The introductory quotes are thus an index of the text's concern with history and phenomenology, with *what* is perceived and *why* it is perceived. In the following I argue that F explores and also muddles the border of perceptibility between darkness and light, past and present, fiction and truth staged most spectacularly in the novel's evocative 'twilight' scenes. The novel moreover features a number of mercurial characters – a fact obliquely reflected in the bifurcation of the dramatis personae featured in the 'title credits'. But the major 'stars' featured therein are indisputably the historic figures of Mahatma Gandhi and Saadat Hasan Manto who feature in cameo roles.

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[18] Sharma, H.L. *Indian Aesthetics and Aesthetic Perspectives*. Meerut: Mansi Prakashan, 1990, 26.
[19] Cf. p. 169.
[20] 'The Awakening', dir. Satyen Bose

As an approach "concerned with the material circumstances of viewing: the nature of filmic projection […], the textual componentry of what is screened, and the psychic mechanisms engaged,"[21] apparatus theory furnishes the groundwork for the discussion of Khair's text. In view of F's literary and textual nature however, the analysis has to address the visual schemata and frames evoked by the text. In so doing, particular attention will be paid to the textualization of focalization and its effect upon the *implied spectator*, particularly where a story world participant matching the implied focalizer is absent, as is frequently the case here[22]. But also the aesthetic and phenomenal (re-)presentation of events and characters putatively marginal to the central plot will be paid due attention. Instead of obliterating these 'surplus' items, they are assumed to perform a salient function with regard to F's poetics and politics.

5.1 THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL

> Once upon a time, or, in reality, exactly nine days after Holi in 1929, a bullock cart could be seen trundling up the narrow dirt track leading to the village of Anjangarh. A six- or seven-year-old child was running after the cart. He would sometimes be lost in the white dust churned up by the huge wooden wheels and the hooves of the bullocks. Then he would emerge again, running up to the cart and hanging on to it, swinging from the back timber before jumping down and skipping into one of the adjoining fields or pausing to examine the spare trees or bushes by the sides of the track. (F, 7)

The fairytale incipit functions as the prompt s(t)imulating a relapse into an affect-driven mode of reception offering the simple comforts of nostalgia. By implicitly inviting the narratee to shed the critical reception straitjacket for a while, the text implicitly switches on the 'film projector of the imagination' to depict an Arcadian scenery. With the narrating agency expressing itself primarily as an act of focalization at this juncture, the passage exemplarizes a phenomenon which Bal describes in another (con-) text as "narrator-focalizer":

> We see that at the beginning of this narrative, as at the beginning of many narratives, narrator and focalizer go hand in hand. As long as both those agents are on the same level in relation to their objects, conceivably they can be referred to by a term that recognizes their interdependence while respecting their autonomy. The term "narrator-focalizer," a formulation in which they are simultaneously together and apart, fulfills these conditions. (Bal 2004, 279f)

[21] Miller, Toby. "Apparatus Theory." *Film and Theory. An Anthology.* Ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller. Malden: Blackwell, 2000, 403.

[22] Cf. Margolin, Uri. "Focalization: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modeling Mediation in Narrative*. Ed. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, 51.

It is by dint of this narratological device that "the interaction between spectators, texts and technology"[23] elementary to cinematic reception is established here. Bal's statement therefore points up one of the primary 'cinematic' strategies or aspects of literary texts. The deployment of the narrator-focalizer aims at evoking an illusion of transparency, an illusion premised upon the dissimulation of the underlying narratological 'machinery':

> Classical cinema keeps its disembodied spectators at arm's length while also drawing them in. It achieves its effect of transparency by the *concerted deployment of filmic means (montage, light, camera placement, scale, special effects) which justify their profuse presence by aiming at being noticed as little as possible*. A maximum of technique and technology seeks a minimum of attention for itself, thereby not only masking the means of manipulation, but succeeding in creating a transparency that simulates proximity and intimacy. (Elsaesser/Hagener 2010, 18)(emphasis added)

In other words, phenomenal transparency is achieved through the momentary equation of narration with focalization. The wide open field in this context simulates a clear 'view', tacitly installing a sovereign spectatorship[24]. Placed against the infinity of terrain, the solitary boy walking behind the bullock cart marks a figure still awaiting its emplotment. Four pages later, the "strange animal [.] tied down under the thick brown tarpaulin"[25] on the bullock cart is revealed as a bioscope projector, identifying the boy and the two people on the cart as operators of an itinerant bioscope show. While "licensed travelling cinemas amounted to 354"[26] in Bengal in the early twentieth century, they are still found across rural India today. Excited at the novelty, the villagers of Anjangarh gather around the cart. But at this point, the text departs from the events in the village:

> *'Have I mentioned that Seth Dharamchand had two main sources of income: investing in films in the black - the interest rates were exorbitant during the war and official funding even less likely after independence - and manufacturing barbed wire in the white? He owned a mill* […].
>
> *It was a good time to be manufacturing barbed wire. In the 1930s and 40s, barbed wire started being used widely by the authorities: its usefulness had been established by two world wars and a series of concentration camps, set up for the Boers by the British, for the Cubans by the Spanish, for the Filipinos by the Americans, for the Jews by the Germans, and then finally by almost all modern nations for the peoples of other nations.* […] (F, 10f)

While it is not initially clear *who* is speaking, this 'incursion' effectively ruptures the cinematic illusion. But the sujet of this techno-historic discourse is not entirely incongruous with the surrounding text as the village compound of Anjangarh is surrounded

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[23] Miller, "Apparatus Theory." In: Stam/Miller (eds), *Film and Theory*, 403.

[24] Cf. Belsey, *Culture and the Real,* 108f.

[25] F, 10.

[26] Mahadevan, Sudhir. "Traveling Showmen, Makeshift Cinemas: The Bioscopewallah and Early Cinema History in India." BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies. 27.1 (2010), 37. 20 Feb. 2014 <http://bio.sagepub.com/content/1/1/27>.

by barbed wire – "an oddity in the villages and always, the boy knew, a sign of links to urbanity or the regime."[27] Once inside the compound, the boy and his parents are bound to the protocols of village etiquette which accentuate their status as social outsiders, belonging neither to the feudal elite, nor to the peasant class. As the book cover also features a strand of barbed wire, the latter can be said to mark a cynosure of the text. The intrusion at once highlights the oral nature and situational context of the narration. Nonetheless, it is not altogether incompatible with the 'cinematic' illusion thus far evoked.

> […] for it captures I think, a template of "first encounters" with the cinema that is reproduced over and over again in contemporary documentary and fictionalized accounts […]: the conspicuous work of the "decrepit" apparatus […], the visual pleasure interrupted and then resumed by the operator's tasks of hand-cranking and reloading the film and the performance of man and machine that binds all this together. (Mahadevan 2010, 35)

Given that the novel is concerned with early cinema, the incursion may be read as symbolic of the early cinematic experience in its performative, haphazard nature. The ritual of storytelling is thus reminiscent of the procedure of projection in early cinema, full of background noises and interruptions as they inevitably are. The offhand mention of concentration camps on the other hand works to endow the peaceful village with a sinister atmosphere. This may not be coincidental as Anjangarh is also the title of a social realist film by Bimal Roy, produced in 1948. "[A] political allegory about collusion in colonial times between the aristocracy and a rising indigenous bourgeoisie,"[28] Roy's film thus focuses a quintessential topos of modernity which partly overlaps with the central conflict delineated here. Hence the newly arrived confront the Munshi, the estate's imperious overseer who refuses the woman's request to set up their bioscope tent near the feudal lord's mansion.

Since her husband Harihar is ill while their only aide has run away, the woman, Durga, takes on the task negotiating their business with the Munshi. In her well-studied jeremiad, the names and lamentable situation of the bioscope troupe emerge. At this juncture all that was latent in that first shot of placid rurality becomes certitude as the cinematic intertext of this 'establishing shot' is unveiled, namely Satyajit Ray's "Pather Panchali"[29]. Set in rural Bengal, Ray's film narrates the story of the ingénue Apu, his father, the priest Harihar, his wife Sarbajaya and Apu's insouciant sister Durga.

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[27] F, 8.

[28] Willemen, Paul and Ashish Rajadhyaksha. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Cinema*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 289.

[29] 'Song of the Little Road', 1955

The internationally most renowned work of Indian (neo-) realist cinematography, Ray's film was based on Bibhutibhushan Banerji's eponymous novel of 1929[30]. In so far as "[d]ramatizations are concerned with implicitly adapting specific content or structures of older material without necessarily explicitly naming it,"[31] F's establishing 'shot' qualifies as an intermedial reference presented in the form of a dramatization. Since the film's aesthetic and aspects/figures of its story are adopted here, the dramatization occupies both the levels of story and discourse[32]. The reference to "Pather Panchali" thus signposts the conjuncture of film and literature, while it simultaneously affirms the aesthetic primacy of Ray's magnum opus as the quintessential work of Indian art cinema[33]. By adopting Ray's spare aesthetic, the text moreover conveys a sensual impression of life in rural Bengal.

The presence of barbed wire in this putative *locus amoenus*, combined with the gothic, fort-like mansion of the local feudal lords, the Thakurs, marks the resilience of the archaic in the face of an emergent but still contourless new, symbolized by the bioscope show. In this regard the text also reprises Ray's film, the pivotal scene of which stages the encounter of Apu and Durga with technology, symbolized by telegraph wires and an oncoming train[34]. However, unlike in Banerji's novel and Ray's film, here the "poet-priest" is a 'bioscopewallah', a 'priest' of the modern age so to speak. And while the boy is called Ashok, his character[35] and behavior identify him as Apu's soul mate. Also the following scene seems framed by Ray's distinct "economy of expression"[36] in so far as it focuses attention on those visual features and sensual qualities reflecting social reality:

> The two burly men pulled the gate shut behind the tiny Munshi. Durga stood there, dwarfed by the enormity of the gates. She looked back, and the bullock cart appeared so small in the open field, Harihar and the villagers inconsequential before the sullen, stolid might of this three-storeyed haweli, its shuttered windows, its dank, lime-washed walls, its immense brass-studded gate. At times like these – especially lately, with Harihar ill more often than not – she would begin to doubt the dreams they had once shared. (F, 14)

As petty entrepreneurs in the film business, then still financially unstable and deemed disrespectable by most Indians, Durga and Harihar make a living by showing dated films, bought cheaply in Calcutta, in small towns and villages.

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[30] "The word *panchali* […] refers to a devotional narrative song which continue for a long stretch of time without any obvious climax, and where the story does not follow a rigidly sequential order." (Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Realism and Reality. The Novel and Society in India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, 131.)

[31] Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 42.

[32] Ibid., 44f.

[33] Cf. Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 164f.

[34] Ibid., 162.

[35] Cf. Mukherjee, M. *Realism and Reality*, 141.

[36] Ray, Satyajit. *Our Films Their Films.* 3rd ed. Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2010, 11.

Socially, they belong neither to the urban professional bourgeoisie, nor to the peasant or feudal class. This and their evidently dire financial situation help to explain the Munshi's evident suspicion towards them. "With the primary barrier to entry into the film business being capital accumulation, itinerant cinema exhibitors became one of the key consumers of "junk" films ([…]), since they could not afford the expensive first-run or new prints for exhibition."[37] The small family thus makes a meagre living by bringing old reels to rural audiences paying only three anna[38] or even only a handful of rice for the show. Since the narration installs Durga as a reflector figure of the passage, the narratee is also affectively engaged in the lives of the trio, underscoring the text's subtle psychological realism.

At the same time the narrative incursions are redoubled as another speaker enters to serve as the text-immanent recipient and critic of the first speaker's account. The latter is now identified as a former scriptwriter for the Bombay film industry in the 1940s named "Batin" who is interviewed by an anonymous "young scholar". It soon becomes clear however that the scholar is not convinced by Batin's evocative tale – a fact also underscored by the clear typographic bifurcation of their comments. As the gap between Batin's narration and the scholar's expectations begins to widen, a relation of primary and secondary narrative takes shape[39] where the latter fashions a critical apparatus to the former. But the source of the scholar's distrust of Batin is not purely rational or academic:

> ***And perhaps, as I was to realize later, there was also the pull of resentment, the irksome bewilderment of a Muslim from a family that had not left India for another Muslim who* had *left for Pakistan after Independence.*** (F, 20)

At this point Partition and the issue of religious/national identity ineluctably intertwined with it, emerge as a central theme of F. The reason for the old man's talkativeness becomes clearer as readers learn that Batin and his wife reside in Copenhagen, "removed from all established routes of Urdu, Commonwealth or postcolonial narratability."[40] The remark highlights the strongly localized audience and publishing circuits of diaspora literatures. Being topographically 'eccentric' to this circuit, Batin has consequently remained a marginal author of little note. Since the novel's author also lives and works in Danmark however, the comment could also be interpreted as an oblique address of his own postcolonial eccentricity.

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[37] Mahadevan, "Traveling Showmen, Makeshift Cinemas," 38.
[38] four paisa, approximately 0.09 Euro cents
[39] Cf. Bal, Mieke. "Narration and focalization." *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Mieke Bal. Vol. 1. London: Routledge, 2004, 266.
[40] F, 21.

In the primary narrative Durga meanwhile resorts to tears in order to convince the imperious Munshi to let her set up their bioscope tent near the mansion. Her wailing eventually attracts the attention of the Chotte Thakur[41], the feudal lord's younger brother. He defies the obstinate Munshi and even condescends to inaugurating their first show during which he demands to see "*Krishna Arjuna Yuddha*,"[42] a mythological characteristic of 1920s cinematic production. The motives of the young landlord emerge as the reflector function shifts from Durga to the Chotte Thakur, a social misfit secretly immersed in the world of music, film and art:

> And then a memory from even earlier; he must have been five or six, when he had, unseen by anyone, stolen into his mother's dressing room and emerged with lipstick on, and rouge on his cheeks, talcum all over his face, clips in his hair, a grinning hybrid of a girl and a clown. He had come out expecting to be congratulated, for he had achieved something and he felt he was someone. But his father's face had blazed. His mother had made a half-hearted effort to defend him: just a child, he is just a child. And his father had only slapped him once, hard enough to send him reeling into the bedclothes, but still only a single slap, not that flaying of the skin with a riding whip. (F, 29)

Through the use of free indirect speech, the narrating agency dissimulates its presence at this point, while foregrounding the Thakur's psychological turmoil. Evidently, his father's repeated beatings have not 'cured' the young Thakur of his passion for cinema. It is thus tacitly implied that the visit of the bioscope show will affect his life, as well as those of Harihar, Durga and Ashok who are struggling, financially as well as psychologically. Grateful for the Thakur's favour, Harihar is keen to please the man and consequently prepares elaborately for their first show. Eventually, the expectant audience is ushered into an improvised projection room set up like a ceremonial hall:

> Harihar even brought out his prized Aladdin lamp. Or Aladdin-model-6-style-150-made-in-America floor lamp, as he used to put it, the entire description sounding like one long aristocratic name. […]
>
> He had bought the lamp mainly because of its name - Aladdin, the discoverer of magic, the projector of wonderment, the man who had his wishes fulfilled - than for its long and elegant shape or its lost status in the Englishwoman's world of lamps. This evening he cleaned it carefully, filled it with kerosene, and stood it next to the screen. […]. In the gathering gloom, the Aladdin lamp burned more brightly than any of the other lanterns, its thin white stem and the golden enameled decorations at its base and the top of the stem scratched and peeled, the original silk shade replaced by coarse cotton. (F, 45f)

The above passage stages the ambivalence of the "magic lantern" as the simultaneous source of light/enlightenment and magic/illusion. While its impressive official name legitimizes the lamp's status within Harihar's apparatus, it is a significant, even symbolic supplement to the latter.

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[41] 'small landlord'
[42] F, 26.

The Aladdin's lamp thus vaunts the waning prestige of a colonial import and the appeal of white magic. This depiction is consonant with Gunning's observation that "in the earliest years of exhibition the cinema itself was an attraction. Early audiences went to exhibitions to see the machines demonstrated ([…]) rather than to view films."[43] In this way, the apparatus of cinema is foregrounded. As the precursors of the film projector, "phantasmagoria lanterns, complete with sets of dissolving views, moveable slides, astronomical slide sets, and the 'lucernal microscope'"[44] continued to thrive in improvised projection contexts such as this, thus advertising the contemporaneity of the old and the new. But the old simultaneously assumes a totemic function here, while phenomenologically the lamp posits the inseparability of light and shadow. Although it burns brightly, the lamp's shoddy look advertises the gloomy state of Harihar's business. I so far the lamp literally marks Harihar's last beacon of hope.

After the tent has been perfumed with incense and rosewater for the arrival of the Thakur and his retinue, a complex ritual unfolds which lucidly reflects the ways in which the new art blended with the old arts, image with narrative and performance. Here, these are embedded in and subordinate to a feudal sociocultural practice, which does not allow women to attend while also preventing Durga and Harihar from taking ticket money for their inaugural performance.

> Once the younger Thakur was seated in his armchair, she asked Ashok to run up and offer him a tray of paan, saunf and other ritual condiments. The Thakur declined it but his retinue took liberal helpings […]. After the usual nawabi style of greeting, Durga sang a bhajan by Meera[45]. Harihar was particular about which song ought to be sung with a given film: bhajans for mythologicals […].
>
> While Durga sang, Harihar walked around the tent dimming the lanterns. Then he stood next to the single projector and slowly cranked the handle. […]. Harihar read out the titles and the subtitles, which were in four different languages. […]. This was the part that Durga never ceased to admire, for Harihar did not just read out the titles like all other readers, he concocted dialogues, mimicked sounds. […]. It was as if, next to a projector, he became not one man but many. (F, 57)

The passage affirms that silent films were not silent at all, but unique, elaborate performances which were more immediate and context-specific, if clearly not conducive to the kind of immersion sound film would eventually facilitate. Thus, early silent film screenings were deeply rooted in and institutionally affiliated with the performing arts. Moreover, early film makers also drew their subject matter from the latter.

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[43] Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde." In: Stam/Miller (eds), *Film and Theory*, 231.

[44] Mahadevan, "Traveling Showmen, Makeshift Cinemas," 35.

[45] Famous 15th century Hindu bhakta poet who composed bhajans in honour of Krishna, the god also pictured in the film that is shown.

> We know that the so-called silent period of the cinema was rich in varied experiments in the use of the three audible components of cinematic expression (in the sense used by Metz); sound effects, words and music. Less well known or too often ignored, is the absolutely basic importance of this phenomenon: it was quite exceptional, in the silent period, for a film to be projected in complete silence. One of the fundamentals of the early cinema, although it is often ignored, is that the filmic spectacle, even in those days, was nearly always an *audio*-visual one like (for example) circus or theatre. (Gaudréault 2004, 359)

Notably Harihar's instrumental inventory also includes coconut shells and brass plates which serve to emulate the sound of footsteps and clashing swords[46]. In this way the text documents the métissage of the performative and recording arts that gave rise to a synaesthetic experience. Gaudréault also notes that the "voice-over commentator, part visualized and part acousmatic ([…]), [.] directly descended from the magic lantern."[47] That the subtitles are in "four different languages"[48] documents the scarcity of films, which granted most productions nation-wide distribution. By reading in different voices ─ a practice also widespread in Europe and North America during the early 1900s[49] ─ the filmic text is altered and expanded. For Durga, Harihar's voice has a magical, animating quality and it is this, rather than the music and the instruments which endows the film with life, rendering it a *perpetuum mobile*:

> [Harihar] could change voices and convey passion; he would even use metal plates and shoes to create background noises. Suddenly, the film was not just an ancient story or something made by someone else. It was a palpable presence that joined one to the past and the future, and to those hundreds of viewers in the present. *It was a living, changing thing, like the days and nights of men and women, and different each time it was shown. You could live it, you could breathe it, you could travel with it, sleep with it*: more than one could do with lovers or husbands or wives. (F, 43)(emphasis added)

Viewed from this perspective, success depended primarily upon the dexterity and talent of the bioscope operator as a dubbing artist. The first show ─ a truly synaesthetic experience composed of sight, sound, smell and taste ─ is a success and the Thakur gifts Harihar and Durga fifty rupees. Durga is also asked to entertain the Thakur's guests with her music in the haweli, which means an extra income for the family. Notably however, it was not only the performance of the film by the operator and musicians that transformed the filmic text: Its continuous metamorphosis was also the result of the gradual degradation of the reel, which necessitated the operator's creative intervention:

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[46] Cf. F, 54.

[47] Gaudréault, André. "Showing and Telling. Image and word in early cinema." *Narrative Theory. Interdisciplinarity.* Ed. Mieke Bal. Vol.4. London: Routledge, 2004, 361.

[48] F, 57.

[49] Cf. Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction," 231.

> Anjangarh was still, and so was the haweli, though the sun was surprisingly strong and there were tiny heat waves - rippling like water - near the horizon. Ashok was sleeping, but Harihar was up, sitting cross-legged on a reed mat. A long, narrow plank of wood, with two spare stands for reels, lay in front of him. One bare foot rested on the plank, roughly in the middle - toenails cracked and grimed with dust - keeping it stable. He moved the reel slowly in the slanted sunlight of the tent opening, scanning the thin and dark pictures for the flaw he had noticed last night. A roll of transparent tissue, glue, a pair of scissors and a tin box of tools lay to one side, neatly arranged like all his possessions. Harihar's posture was that of someone spinning yarn on a handloom or playing the sitar. His face was rapt. (F, 98)

Underscoring the provisional status of film, early cinematic practice is explored here as a craft or technê in which the reels and ancillary apparatus are subject to perpetual repair and alteration[50]. However, in the process of repairing and 'recycling' dated and second rate materials, Harihar converts the film from a ready-made into his own, unique product – "a kind of film-on-demand in the craft mode of production, conflating media."[51] In exploring the bioscope as a material and cultural practice, the text implicitly also provides an analogy of its own narrative machinery since the primary narrative is also subject to continuous intervention: Not only does Batin interpret, edit and slip new frames into his 'reel' in the process of narration, the primary recipient of this 'film', i.e., the scholar is bent upon detecting the cracks, seams and fault lines in Batin's 'reels'.[52]

The reaction which the bioscope show incites in the villagers of Anjangarh diverges sharply from that of the skeptical film scholar, however:

> But most of the audience consisted of peasants who had seldom, if ever, seen a 'mythological' and they went into raptures at the sight of the Pandavas and Lord Krishna. Some of the richer ones even tossed one-paisa coins at the screen, which Ashok darted forward to collect. The climax of the film – when Bheema exacts a bloody vengeance by tearing apart Keechak limb by limb – was met with frenzied applause, even though the part had been heavily cut by the censors for excessive violence. Harihar was certain that news would travel and the show would attract sizeable crowds for the five nights that he planned to stay there. (F, 62)

Both blood-curdling spectacle and spiritual epiphany, the bioscope fulfills complementary psychological functions here: As the evil Keechak who besmirched the honor of Draupadi-Malini is slain by Bheema, both her honor and the cosmological order are thereby restored. At the same time, the audience's own suppressed aggression finds a legitimate outlet in this socially sanctioned display of violence.

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[50] It follows from the above stated that "the apparatuses of the *bioscopewallah*, however long standing, cannot lay claim even to the stability of a material archive. They serve instead, at best, as provisional mnemonic devices for historians." (Mahadevan,"Traveling Showmen, Makeshift Cinemas," 29.)

[51] Ibid.

[52] This recycling practice, its poetological implications and historic role within the discourse of modernity will be discussed in depth in the final chapter, p. 253ff.

"This is a particular kind of public: one that celluloid not only exemplifies but, in hindsight, may have fabricated," [53] Rajadhyaksha argues. In the specific framework of Indian popular film, "the twin regulatory mechanisms of *containment* and *excess*"[54] thus play salient, mutually complementary roles. The peasants' wild enthusiasm is at odds with the courteous interest previously shown by the Thakur and his entourage. For an audience familiar with the names and stories only through hearsay and cheap chromolithgraphs[55] however, such shows marked the rare opportunity of seeing the gods. And the film does more for them still as the spectators are simultaneously receiving the gods' beneficent gaze in *darśan*[56]. This is underscored by the throwing of coins as a ritual sacrifice. Evidently, the actors are not perceived as such here, but as momentary embodiments of the divinity. As spiritual-religious exchange prevails over passive perception, the fourth wall is ruptured.

It seems noteworthy in the context of discussing the social and religious implications of spectatorship that only the landlord's attendance at the inaugural show extends the license to watch it to the other villagers. It is indicative also that the projection tent is located in an interstitial space, not quite outside the haweli's shadow and thus, feudal authority, but not quite within. The Thakur's order that the tent be put up "not too close to the haweli"[57] thus reads as a clear indicator of the bioscope's disruptive potential. If "cinematic exchanges can trigger off something that can spill over into extra-textual and other social spaces"[58] as Rajadhyaksha argues, this excess needs to be contained. The emphatic restoration of social order at the end of each film and the harsh punishment of those who defied it are thus salient strategies of cinematic containment. But mythologicals are also distinctly exhibitionist in so far as they purposely give themselves to be seen as Tom Gunning points out:

> First [the cinema of attraction] is a cinema that bases itself on the quality that Léger celebrated: its ability to *show* something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema […], this is an exhibitionist cinema. An aspect of early cinema […] is emblematic of this different relationship the cinema of attractions constructs with its spectator: the recurring look at the camera by actors. This action which is later perceived as spoiling the realistic illusion of the cinema, is here undertaken with brio, establishing contact with the audience. (Gunning 2000, 230)

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[53] Rajadhyaksha, *Indian cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 7.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Cf. Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 18f.
[56] Cf. Lutgendorf, Philip. "Cinema." *Studying Hinduism. Key Concepts and Methods*. Ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby. London: Routledge, 2008, 46f.
[57] F, 26.
[58] Rajadhyaksha, Op. Cit.

Contrary to Gunning's account which regards this practice as self-serving, the exchange of the gaze fulfils a vital function in Indian popular cinema, namely that of bringing the spectator into direct, sensual contact with the film. This contact is not restricted to mythologicals. Still it is not coincidental that the mythological was "the founding genre of Indian cinema"[59] since the morally edifying content of the film directly legitimized its exposure, rendering the act of spectation an act of veneration.

It also worthwhile to discuss Harihar's first encounter with film in this context:

> I saw my first film purely by accident. We were invited to the postmaster's house for some occasion and the postmaster was an amateur photographer; he had also recently purchased a projector and some really old reels, from ten years back or more, I think he showed us something called 'Railway Train in Full Motion', I felt as if I had been run over by a train. It was a shock. Here was something that could bring the world to me and my parents were talking about it being decent or indecent, real or unreal, good or bad magic. (F, 47)

The film referenced here is apparently a copy of the Lumières' "The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station" of 1895. The shock reaction such "actuality films"[60] supposedly incited in first-time spectators is also experienced by the speaker, thus exposed as an inhabitant of Plato's cave. Notably, the decency debate also arose in Europe where moral authorities felt called upon to warn the general public of the pernicious effects of cinema after the Lumières' film had reportedly caused people to swoon during screenings. If actuality films prevailed over fiction during the first decade of the twentieth century[61], ambitious film makers like Dhundiraj Govind Phalke soon recognized the medium's narrative potential.

True to his name[62], Harihar decides to extend the pleasure of seeing films to rural audiences, thus abandoning the secure occupation of post office clerk to start his bioscope show. Initially, Harihar's cinematic passion also infects Durga whose background as a Muslim prostitute incline her towards a homely life. Having abandoned the kotha for Hari, she sheds her old identity to become Durga, defying Harihar's wish to call herself Sita[63]. But Sita, "the epitome of Indian womanhood as a totally voiceless, selfless, submissive and devoted wife,"[64] does not suit her. However, although Harihar treats Ashok as his son, he refuses to marry Durga. Although it is a secret, this fact sharply accentuates their outcaste status in a society in which respectability determines social interaction.

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[59] Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 15.
[60] Gunning,"The Cinema of Attraction," 230.
[61] Ibid.
[62] "the remover of the sorrows of the world" (Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, 149).
[63] Sita is the name of Rama's devoted wife in the Ramayana epic. She undergoes a test by fire to prove her faithfulness to her husband.
[64] Bose, Mandrakanta. *Women in the Hindu Tradition. Rules, Roles and Exceptions.* London: Routledge, 37.

> ***And the story I will tell you now, young man, is about mobility, about how people move from place to place, time to time, name to name; and it is about barbed wire, how we are entangled in the barbed wire of history and our own pasts, how we erect in our minds the barbed-wire fences that leave our bodies bleeding, and it is about violence and about love. But is it one story? To be honest, young man, I do not know, for stories are impossible to fence in either time or space, and I was told this story by three different people, from three different perspectives.'*** (F, 70f)

Apparently grappling with the intricacy of his narrative's 'weave', the primary narrator Batin countermands his interviewer's insistence upon linearity, coherence and accuracy. As the Anjangarh plot thickens however, Batin finds his story repeatedly questioned by the scholar. His penchant for digression and lengthy explanations have probably nursed the latter's ingrained skepticism. Above all, Batin's seemingly unlimited access to the characters' thoughts and emotions seems to have incurred the scholar's doubt. Accordingly, the first 'reel' ends with the scholar beginning to investigate the old man's tale. He interviews an unidentified young "lady doctor" in India. She in her turn relates her recollections of a visit to the cinema with her parents and brother. In "*The Panorama Box*"[65] which inaugurates the novel's second 'reel', readers eventually learn that Batin has died and that his death spurred the scholar's decision to research his story.

At this point the scholar increasingly assumes the function of an auxiliary construct for the narratee, anticipating her questions to Batin. In the second 'reel', the phenomenological dimension of cinematic spectation also moves into the foreground:

> ***'Don't underestimate the materiality of the mind, young man,' Batin said, in the faintly argumentative tone that would creep into his voice once in a while, and then as suddenly vanish. 'Think of the connections the mind makes. I know you are a scholar of cinema, but I will tell you a secret about motion films. They do not happen in the projector or on the screen in front of you. They are happening in your head. Your eye connects the thousands of still photographs; your eye makes them move. Your mind turns the figures the right way up. No one knows why it does so.*** […] ***You see, there is a lot in common between the magical darkness inside our skulls in which dreams fester and memories ripen, and the magical darkness of film theatres.'***[66](F, 107)

That Batin declares this well-known fact a 'secret' bespeaks not only an old man's vanity, but the intention to shift his interlocutor's attention away from the story and towards the interactive nature of cinematic spectation. On the surface his words read as an inoculation against the illusion of transparency. However, they also highlight the manner in which the act of looking is complicit in manufacturing the percept. In this regard cinema is special since "[t]he cinematic uniquely allows […] this objective insight into the subjective

[65] F, 94.
[66] The passage emulates the format of the original which is printed in bold cursive.

structure of vision, into oneself as both viewing subject and visible object."[67] If the look at the screen renders spectators aware of their complicity in the projection, Batin's extradiegetic comments aim at creating a similar effect in the narratee, in so far namely as they draw her attention to "the production of mental images […], that is, imaginative iconization, or imaginization."[68] ***"You see, there is a lot in common between the magical darkness inside our skulls in which dreams fester and memories ripen, and the magical darkness of film theatres."*** The philosophical-epistemological 'career' of the cave as a site housing the illusion of reality,[69] as well as dreams in their quality of projections[70] is thus salient to this discussion – a fact advertised by Batin's repeated references to darkness, dreams and sleep[71]. The dark and cavernous haweli plays a significant role in this context in so far as it gives rise to and simultaneously contains the Chotte Takur's cinematic aspirations. But it is also where his business partnership with Harihar begins. Its resemblance to a cave–projection hall thus appears all but coincidental.

After discovering their common aspiration to make films, Harihar and the Chotte Thakur inaugurate their professional collaboration with a small, albeit highly symbolic project – a panorama box intended as a birthday gift for Ashok. In constructing the box, the Thakur's earlier metamorphosis from sensitive artiste to brutal landlord appears at least partially reversed. With "the torrent of one desire and different talents [.] poured into the construction," the box soon takes form.

> When they finally unveiled it – to Ashok's rather uninterested gaze – it had become something else, their original plan of making a 'panorama box' having metamorphosed several times into the final reality of a picture-holder attached to a magic lantern. It was a large and heavy twin box, constructed partly by the village carpenter, with an aperture on one side and a reflector centred on a candle on the other. There were slits and slideways and two switches, a series of still pictures – depicting a woman thrashing grain – which could be arranged and exhibited sequentially with the help of the slideways, creating the fluid motion of a woman threshing grain, projected onto the screen of a bedsheet by the means of the light source and a system of lenses in the magic lantern. (F, 133f)

The contraption is remarkable in so far as it inverts the spatial order of the projection hall. Hence the light source is *behind* rather than opposite the screen here.

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[67] Sobchack, Vivian. "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic "Presence"." In: Stam/Miller (eds), *Film and Theory*, 75.

[68] Johansen, Jørgen Dines. *Literary Discourse. A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 326.

[69] Cf. Mitchell,"Showing seeing," 173.

[70] "Dream, Freud also tells us, is a projection, and, in the context in which he uses the word, projection evokes at once the analytic use of the defense mechanism which consists in referring and attributing to the exterior representations and affects which the subject refuses to acknowledge as his own, and it also evokes a distinctly cinematographic use since it involves images which, once projected, come back to the subject as a reality perceived from the outside." (Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches," 700f.)

[71] F, 120.

However, the figure of the woman threshing grain is animated through a series of still pictures that are accelerated to evoke the impression of continuous movement. As it turns out, the box is a parting present for Ashok who is henceforth to live in Anjangarh with the Maalkini or "Badi Ma"[72] who lost her own son, also named Ashok, in a tragic accident. In the context of this 'adoption', the conspicuously organic jargon in which the construction of the panorama box is depicted merits attention: "It swelled with images; it filled with darkness and light."[73] The description suggests that the box is gestating a pregnancy, while symbolically highlighting the exchange of a child for the partnership in a film studio[74]. However, the commercial nature of the exchange is concealed from Durga who is unwilling to surrender her son. Yet the wealth of the Thakurs and the prospect of an excellent education eventually convince her to agree, albeit with a heavy heart. Like the woman in the panorama box she follows the designs of others, rather than her will.

At this stage the text begins to shift between different figural perspectives and time levels, proliferating prolepses and analepses in close succession. These movements suggest that 'memory time' again prevails over linear clock-time. But even herein the text remains reconcilable to the phenomenology of cinema as outlined in the following by Sobchack:

> Thus the significant value of the "streaming forward" that informs the cinematic with its specific form of temporality ([…]) is intimately bound to a structure not of possession, loss, pastness, and nostalgia, but of accumulation, ephemerality, and anticipation – to a "presence" in the present informed by its connection to a collective past and to a future. Visually (and aurally) presenting the subjective temporality of memory, desire, and mood through flashbacks, flash forwards, freeze framing […], the cinema's visible (and audible) activity of *retension* and *protension* constructs a subjective temporality different from the irreversible direction and momentum of objective time, yet simultaneous with it. (Sobchack 2000, 77)

The analepses and prolepses, situated at ever shorter intervals thus render the push and pull of memory tangible. In the light of ever more information emerging, the reader is required to continually revise previously given information. Since the relation of narrated past and narrated future is dynamic, the putatively firm ground of the present becoming increasingly slippery as a result. And while Harihar and Durga appear to live in a state of perpetual, anxious anticipation, the Chotte Thakur and Maalkini are marked by "loss, pastness, and nostalgia."[75] Their meeting thus leads to a crossing of these trajectories, so that the plot suddenly gains momentum.

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[72] great mother
[73] F, 133.
[74] Cf. F, 136.
[75] Sobchack,"The Scene of the Screen," In: Stam/Miller (eds.), *Film and Theory*, 77.

5.2 ARRESTED MO(VE)MENTS

> ***Like the camera, barbed wire could in theory have been invented centuries earlier.* […] *It was only in 1880, young man, that the effectiveness of fencing railroads was established* […]. *The devil's rope had arrived. And from the enclosure of cows to the concentration of people would be a short step, just as it is a short step from the still photo to the motion picture, young man.'***
>
> ***So perhaps it is with the year 1880 that I should start weaving the strands of this story: the year of photography and barbed wire. Two tools perfected in 1880 to capture movement. But it is not in 1880 or in London or Texas that the story remains. For both barbed wire and the photograph travelled fast and came to the region called India almost instantaneously.*** (F, 69f)

In the above quote, Batin again indulges in one of his lengthy (media-)historic ruminations. However, the emphasis he places on these seemingly marginal facts bespeak a particular motivation for this excursus. The trauma which lurks behind such statements emerges only gradually however. Notably his account presents the new invention as the confluence and result of specific social, political and economic needs — a view now pervasively endorsed by media theoretical scholarship[76]. Indeed the phenomenal and functional parallels of photography and barbed wire are striking as both arrest movement. More even, they epitomize the ideology of 'divide and rule'[77]. Notably, both photography and film were quickly adapted to existent cultural and social parameters in India:

> Film technology thus did not arrive in a vacuum. There was a cultural, political, social field from within which some people, encountering a new technology of representation, devised ways of putting it to uses that accorded with the field. The technology did not bring with it, readymade, a set of cultural possibilities which would be automatically realized through the mere act of employing it. At the same time, the technology is not neutral, simply sliding into the role assigned to it by the cultural-political field it enters. It has its own unsettling, re-organizing effects on the field. (Prasad 1998, 2)

Media history thus occupies a vital part of the text. But Batin's excursus also stipulates that we understand history not as arbitrary but driven by the social and political agendas of (a) particular group(s). Although India had responded enthusiastically to photography by rapidly integrating its products into quotidian practice[78], the tremendous cultural impact precipitated by the import of film technology could not have been predicted. The deep resonance of popular film with the Indian psyche achieved towards the mid-twentieth century is reflected in the organic fashion in which films are deployed as inter-subjectively accessible frames of memory here. This also means that cinema needs to be studied from the viewpoint of its structural premises and socio-psychological impact.

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[76] Cf. Crary, *Techniques of the observer*, 8.

[77] This holds particularly true for the 'anthropological' photography of native subjects which sorted the latter into different ethnic groups, castes, genders etc.

[78] Cf. Pinney, Christopher, *Camera Indica*,108f.

> Cinema's form of viewership is social and collective, which makes viewing films a rather different activity than the typically private one of reading literary fiction. The very act of collective viewing entails a certain kind of democratization and blurring of boundaries—if only for the time we are in the social space of the auditorium—since it allows everyone watching simultaneous access to the fictional realm […]. In its visual and auditory address, as well, cinema as a medium works in a different register than literature, since it introduces the relationship of spectatorship to narrative.[79] (Kumar 2008, 178)

The sociopsychological dimension of cinema also covers a large part of the discursive territory of F since the novel addresses the ways in which modernity was communicated in the cinematic narrative. The following section therefore annotates the novel's references to iconic films. Moreover, it discusses the massive social, cultural and political upheaval which India underwent in the mid-twentieth century, an experience obliquely reflected in these films I will argue. In focusing upon those characters in the novel modeled on famous actors of the 1940s and 50s, I discuss their valence as modern Indian archetypes. Ultimately, the aim of this debate is to establish some of the central cinematographic motifs and icons marking this pivotal juncture in Indian social history and aesthetic sensibility.

If "Bombay crystallized as the key centre for the production of national fictions just at the moment that the new state came into existence,"[80] it is hardly surprising that the second half of F's narrative is set in Bombay in the late 1940s, the epicentre of the burgeoning Indian film industry. The look and aesthetic texture of the metropolis is evoked in a vivid flashback of Saleem Lahori, a forgotten silent film star who serves as the main reflector figure in the second half of the book. As the narrative begins in January 1948, i.e., in the midst of the turmoil of Partition, Saleem is one of the few remaining employees at a deserted studio complex near Bombay, reminiscing about a night five years earlier during which he met the owners of the small studio in which he is now stuck.

> The heavy mist from the direction of Marine Drive had seeped its way into the streets and even, it appeared, into the building Saleem Lahori was about to enter. It was thick as a blanket, so dense that he could not make out the third storey of the houses. With the buildings decapitated by mist, he could not see what caused the bird to fall down a foot from him. It was a pigeon and it appeared to be dead. […]? He picked it up tentatively with two fingers; its feathers were surprisingly dry. (F, 168)

Here, the mist conjures up a hazy image fading on the edges. The passage delineates an ontologically unstable place, an urban no-man's land communicating a sense

[79] I do not agree with the argument Kumar makes in the last sentence. Hence spectatorship is a relationship also vital to F, even if only as an implicit, virtual act.

[80] Vasudevan, Ravi, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema: The Bombay 'Social' Film of the 1940s and 50s." In: Stam/Miller (eds.), *Film and Theory*, 382.

of existential loneliness. "Often the street, the space of physical and social mobility," notes Vasudevan, "is also the space of the dissolution of social identity, or the marking out of an identity which is unstable."[81] At a time when the vast majority of Indians still lived in rural areas and rigid social and caste hierarchies, the deserted metropolitan street thus emerged the archetypal site of urbanity and modernity in popular films. In *Awāra*, perhaps the most popular Hindi film of that era, "the glistening rain-drenched streets so familiar from the American *film noir*"[82] mark the setting in which all pivotal events in the life of the hero occur. In so far, Lahori here recalls Hindi film's most famous tramp – Raj Kapoor who enacted the Indian everyman in *Awāra* and *Shree 420*.[83]

> [Kapoor] is a wanderer because he does not feel at home anywhere; his natural habitat is not naturally his own. He does not belong to any society or any particular class of society or maybe he belongs equally to all. Whether in a slum or in a palace, he is restless to leave. Perhaps he is destined to move, to orbit around; he sings, 'I am forever displaced by destiny, I am a star of the skies.' (Chatterjee 2003, 1)

The ailing bird – a telltale symbol of Lahori's fallen fortunes as an actor – which Saleem finds lying on the pavement ends up in his roomy coat pocket. When he enters the film industry party to which he has been invited by Nitin Kumar, an "up-and-coming star,"[84] he has already forgotten about the pigeon. Yet there are few stars and 'makers' at the party who are feted by a mass of tawdry hangers-on. In their midst, Saleem Lahori appears a disenchanted, forlorn misfit recalling Kapoor's tramp not only in dress and demeanor, but also in his melancholy disposition.

> As he thinks of weaving birds, the ghostly tugs that he has felt in the region of his pocket a couple of times earlier are renewed, and this time he knows what they are. He looks stricken as he puts his hand into his deep overcoat pocket. The fabric has come alive. He pulls something out. […]
>
> Saleem Lahori is standing at the bar at a party where people have decided not to see him, holding a pigeon. He does not have a proper grip on it and the bird suddenly flaps vigorously and slips out of his grasp, landing on the polished floor in a shower of feathers. It hops twice and then, with a desperate effort, it takes to wing, describing a wobbling series of circles around the closed room until it has reached the skylight near the ceiling. […]
>
> Saleem Lahori stands below, a few feathers on his coat; he is no longer invisible. (F, 180f)

Through the dynamic focalization showing both Lahori's actions and inner thoughts, the implied spectator simultaneously 'sees' Lahori as well as what he sees.

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[81] Vasudevan, Ravi. *The Melodramatic Public. Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema.* Raniket: Permanent Black, 2010, 88.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Kapoor who had immense popularity in India, but also the former Eastern Block states, continues to function as a cultural icon also recognized by Indians of a younger generation.

[84] F, 172.

As a result of the continuously changing angle of the depiction which shows Lahori conspicuously isolated from the crowd, his spatial position vis-à-vis the latter is thrown into relief. If he has been a misfit before, he now threatens to become an industry outlaw. The spectacular mise-en-scène in this context highlights the maladroit figure of Lahori, while augmenting the scene's symbolic valence. After following the circling movements of the pigeon, the focalization comes to rest on Lahori's figure, thus creating a moment of suspense. At this point one is reminded of those climactic scenes in popular Indian films, where the camera spins around the victim to study her minutest movements. Even if only latent as "a visual figure," [85] the tableau lingers underneath and inscribes Lahori's apparently hopeless position.

At this point, the tension is broken by a woman who intervenes to rescue the "old lame buffalo" from the "hyenas."[86] She opens the skylight so that the pigeon is free at last – if perhaps only to land in "the jaws of some mangy cur," [87] as Saleem surmises. Subconsciously, he seems to identify with the bird that is in a similar situation after all. The pigeon taking flight through the skylight is an image radiating hope – and also an image of prescient symbolism with regard to the novel's climax. The woman who is called Bhuvaneshwari proceeds to introduce Saleem to her circle which comprises of the director and producer Rajkunwar, his co-producer Hari Babu and herself. To put Saleem at ease, Rajkunwar narrates the story of Prince Salim, son of Emperor Akbar whose pigeons were set free by his servant Anarkali[88].

The episode is another nod to Hindi film which immortalized their tragic romance in the 1960 blockbuster "Mughal-e-Azam."[89] Moreover, the waiters servicing the party are called Amar and Akbar/Anthony and thus recall the three brothers of the 1977 hit film "Amar, Akbar, Anthony". In the novel however, Akbar is obliged to assume the name Anthony because "people prefer having their drinks prepared by Anthony rather than Akbar."[90] Here for the first time the text discreetly draws attention to the rising climate of resentment Muslim Indians then faced. That Lahori is a Muslim too seems to be of little consequence to his interlocutors, however. Notably the Salim-Anarkali story establishes a romantic link between Saleem and his 'savior' Bhuvaneshwari.

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[85] Vasudevan, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema," 388.
[86] F, 182.
[87] Ibid.
[88] F, 183.
[89] "The Emperor of Mughals", dir. Karimuddin Asif.
[90] F, 178.

With regard to their character and appearance, both recall the stellar couple of 1940s Hindi film, Raj Kapoor and Nargis whose on- and off-screen relation excited India in the 1940s. Notably three of the films depicted on the cover starred Nargis and Kapoor, namely "Barsaat,"[91] "Aag"[92] and "Pyaasa,"[93] all of which are set during or after Partition. In these films Nargis projected the ideal of the languorous, docile object of male desire:

> Nargis the glamorous "star" before *Mother India* ([…]) had the kind of personal history (and persona) upon which (male) voyeuristic desire could be readily projected: daughter of a koṭhevālī (the courtesan, actor and singer Jaddanbai), unscrupulously marketed as a star by her mother from the age of 14, lover of the debonair Raj Kapoor, and so on. (Mishra 2002, 63)

When it emerges that Bhuvaneshwari is Durga, partner of the former bioscopewallah Harihar, now Hari Babu, the parallels between the fictional and the historic figure appear more than coincidental: Also Durga is the daughter of a koṭhevālī, a courtesan trained from early childhood as an object of male desire and she also adopted a professional pseudonym. If the "interweaving of on- and offscreen narratives"[94] marks an essential feature of Bombay socials, it underscores F's staging as a semi-cinematic narrative. But also Saleem comes from a less than ordinary background: "[A] perennial bachelor pushing forty, with the reputation of a womanizer and with dubious educational and family backgrounds," whose "mother was said to have run an 'establishment,'"[95] Saleem is thus destined for a screen career.

> ***Batin paused in his narrative and peered at me,* […]. *'How much will you scribble down, my young and diligent scholar? And what? For, you see, Saleem Lahori's story is like the plot of a Bombay melodrama: it teems with characters and names, episodes and incidents, but in the end it always comes back to one core romance, a love so swathed over by other emotions and events that you can hardly discern it: it is a brilliant sari laid out in front of you, like those small-shopkeepers lay out saris, one cascading over the other, and more and more, until you only catch a glitter of the fabric you had first noticed. You will have to reach under all that fabric to pull out the sari you wanted.*** (F, 184f)

Here, Batin's comment takes the narratee by the hand to alert her to the links between this plot and the preceding. Notably, name changes are a dramatic stock device of Hindi popular films, marking their descent from popular theatric forms such as "*Nautaṅkī*[,] Tamasha and, especially Parsi theater,"[96] as well as the epics in which the (divine) protagonists assume different avatars to perform different roles.

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[91] "Rain", 1949, dir. Raj Kapoor
[92] "Fire", 1948, dir. Raj Kapoor
[93] "Thirsty", 1958, dir. Guru Dutt
[94] Vasudevan, Ravi, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema," 397.
[95] F, 172.
[96] Mishra, Vijay. *Bollywood Cinema. Temples of Desire.* New York: Routledge, 2002, 36.

The textile metaphor with which Batin alerts the scholar to the 'layering' of his narrative has deeper resonance in a novel about memory which is after all, a layering process[97]. But Saleem Lahori is more than a love interest and double of Kapoor, he also serves as the critical prism through which the end of a cinematic era is presented. Himself a nearly-forgotten silent film star, Saleem joins Rajkunwar and Hari Babu at their small studio in Dallam, although Rajkunwar Studios has long been in decline.

> And people had been telling them how the old family studios were becoming a thing of the past. Bombay Talkies, Prabhat Film Company, Imperial Films Company, Ranjit Movietone, Minerva Movietone, all those long-established film businesses were either dead or dying. But Hari and Rajkunwar had been unwilling to listen at first. (F, 282)

Disposing of no funds to produce their next film "Aakhri Raat", which is to be the last joint effort of the trio, Hari Babu borrows money from the financier Seth Dharamchand, pledging the studio property as a surety. Dharamchand, presented in a manner reminiscent of the mafia dons prolific in Hindi gangster films, soon emerges as the story's arch-villain. When Rajkunwar turns to Dharamchand to annul the deal, he is threatened and beaten by the latter's strongman. Hari Babu's acceptance of Dharamchand's black money thus accelerates the descent of the studio and the irreversible breaking of the bonds of loyalty between Rajkunwar, Hari Babu and Bhuvaneshwari.

The novel thus exemplarily delineates the financial dilemma Indian studio owners and film makers then faced. The lack of funds and corollary inability to hire a major star inevitably resulted in fewer ticket sales. The problem of obtaining legal funding thus augmented the influx of "'black money' into the industry."[98] Notwithstanding the immense financial pressure, they manage to finish the film of which readers learn little however. In compensation, the lady doctor interviewed later by the scholar provides a remarkable account of her reception of "Aakhri Raat"[99]:

> I know the film has become popular with film historians today, but we were young and we were the first generation to move from the redeemable villainy of Bombay films to the irredeemable, unalloyed evil of the Bollywood villain, from *Shri 420* to *Sholay*: we found the film boring. I guess we were primed for Bollywood, my entire generation, waiting for the slick violence of *Deewar* and *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*. We were tired of the old family melodramas and social comedies, the love stories where the worst villain, apart from an obdurate father or a lecherous brother-in-law, was time. I guess even though we had not realized it then, the world had changed and we wanted to see a substantial villain like Gabbar Singh being bashed to pulp […]. We didn't want duets and lullabies, and that too without colour. (F, 147)

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[97] The novel's politics of memory are discussed in detail in chapter 5.4, pages 182ff.

[98] Prasad, Madhava."The economics of ideology: popular film form and mode of production." *The Bollywood Reader.* Ed. Rajinder Dudrah and Jigna Desai. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008, 52.

[99] last night

As the ways in which historic experience transpired into the cinematic text converge with the ways in which the latter shaped the personal experience and attitudes of Indian spectators in its turn, a reversible formation takes shape here. The statement thus not only buttresses the status of popular films as biographic benchmarks and reference points of collective memory, but draws attention to the fact that its spectator address is inherently dynamic. In film historic terms, the statement marks the shift from the Bombay social's dominant focus on the family and its normative relation to the nation to a perpetual battle between the individual and a corrupt state. In the case of *Sholay*[100] – the most successful Indian movie of all time – it is the angry young man, enacted by Amitabh Bachchan, who embodies resistance and invities identification[101]. The "'angry man' imaginary"[102] consequently marks both an extension of and a counterpoint to the tramp or *tapori* imaginary embodied by Raj Kapoor[103].

> As the 1970s began, mainstream entertainers still seemed far removed […] from old-style stunt films […]. All that was to change within a matter of years. Suddenly, all the other traditional ingredients of the basic formula—the crude sequences of comic relief, the measured dose of voluptuous dances […], the idyllic run-around-the-trees by the romantic lead pair, the sentimental bonds of the family—became subsidiary to a clear-cut, black-and-white confrontation between two warring sides. (Saari 2009, 113)

According to Anil Saari, the collapse of the consensual approach taken in the social film has to be viewed in conjunction with "the sudden upheaval in independent India's polity in 1969, when the Congress party split and politics broke out of its distinct state and spilt onto the streets."[104] Nonetheless, the audience of 1940s and 50s Bombay social films was not blithely unaware of the contradictions and problems facing the newly independent nation. Rather the films addressed these obliquely, while subsuming them under the melodramatic narrative paradigm. Moreover, the older films also addressed the religious and cultural 'Other' within India, i.e., Muslims. Among others, this concern took shape in the genre of the Muslim social. It is upon this 'Other' that the novel trains its focal lens, thereby implicitly drawing attention to a genre which, despite the eclipse of the sociocultural milieu it portrays, survived well into the 1980s.

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[100] "Flames", dir. Ramesh Sippy, 1975

[101] Cf. Mazumdar, Ranjani. "From Subjectification to Schizophrenia: The 'Angry Man' and the 'Psychotic' Hero of Bombay Cinema." *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema.* Ed. Ravi Vasudevan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, 238ff.

[102] Ibid., 238.

[103] Cf. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic* Public, 156.

[104] Saari/Chatterjee. *Hindi Cinema*, 116.

5.2.1 REPRISING THE MUSLIM SOCIAL

In the fourth 'reel' the text shifts to Delhi, one of the former "centres of courtly Muslim culture."[105] Here Saleem's mother Gulabo runs a kotha while his father, the Maulvi, leads the prayers in the mosque and teaches the neighbourhood children "Urdu, Farsi, Arabic, mathematics and (ancient Greek and Arabic) philosophy"[106] – free of charge. It is Gulabo who earns the money and provides for the family. This extraordinary constellation is suited to undermining the stereotype of the conservative, backward Muslim while it also stands in marked contrast to Hindu social standards. The Maulvi moreover "claimed descent from Mughal aristocracy and from the scholar al-Biruni."[107] This illustrious ancestry and unorthodox family provide a liberal intellectual environment for Saleem to grow up in, yet in the eyes of the adolescent protagonist his father appears weak and obsolescent.

The social milieu of the courtesan's house moved into the limelight here had been in sharp decline since the onset of colonial rule in India, leading to the reduction of these lively cultural institutions to the status of mere brothels. The varied nature of the courtesan's services which also included entertaining and musical instruction, emerge in the passages recounting Durga's evenings with the Chotte Thakur in Anjangarh:

> How could she tell [Harihar] that late on the second night, as she was singing a thumri, the young Thakur had stood and, without a word of warning, launched into a skilful dance? How could she tell Harihar that the Chotte Thakur had put on a pair of ghungroos[108] and danced every night after that, while she played and sang and, increasingly, instructed? ([…])
>
> How could she tell Harihar that the younger son of the Thakur family saw her more as an ustad, a teacher, that he asked her to demonstrate mudras he could not perform? How could she tell Harihar all this without making a mockery of the confidence that the Chotte Thakur had placed in her? (F, 109)

It is indicative that their innocent rapport is not communicated by Durga to dismiss Harihar's suspicions of an illicit love affair, for fear of harming the Thakur's reputation. His dancing which testifies to the fact that he has visited kothas and received instruction thus represents a dangerous transgression of the accepted gender norms. In its heyday however, "courtesan culture became a highly refined and respected institution that was

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[105] Dwyer/Patel, *Cinema India*, 69.

[106] F, 210.

[107] F, 170. Al-Biruni was the first foreign scholar to remark on the effect of the Islamic invasions of northern India, stating that it provoked widespread suspicion of Islam among Indians.(Cf. Sachau, Edward C. *Alberuni's India. An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India About A.D. 1030.* Trübner's Oriental Series 58, 1. .London: Trübner & Co., 1888.)

[108] Fabric affixed with small metal bells wound around the ankles in Kathak and other rhythmic dances.

valued […] as a place to be tutored in cultured behaviour, refined manners, and the arts of music and dance, as a place to be exposed to the company and bodies of women."[109] As the culture of the kotha had been summarily discredited by the British, cinema became the only remaining site in which spectators could experience its sensual routines:

> Perhaps because of the way in which Lucknow was razed by the British after the Revolt of 1857 and the culture of the courtesan being debased, thereafter, into mere prostitution, the Courtesan film becomes the repository of a particular historical imaginary centred on the *mujra* or the performance of the courtesan; on the *mehfil* or gathering to watch her perform; […]. (Bhaskar/Allen 2009, 44)

Cinema thus provided fertile ground for the second coming of courtesan culture, all the more so as it could draw on the large stock of skilled poets, musicians, singers, dancers and actors originating in its social milieu. Testimony to the decisive cultural influence Muslims exerted in India, the Bombay film industry paid homage to courtesan culture in the 'Muslim social'. Most films of this genre were shot in the 1950s and 60s and focused Nawabi court culture[110] and thus, a distant historic era[111]. Noted authors like Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chugtai contributed decisively to the success of the Muslim social as scriptwriters. Yet while numerous Muslims worked behind the scenes, the actors and stars of Muslim descent often worked under Hindu pseudonyms[112].[113] The heterogeneity of the Bombay film industry before Partition is also reflected in Lahori's circle of friends that comprises of two Hindus, Avik Sen and Balasubramanium, the Muslims Ashiq Painter and Sheikh Taleb Deen ('Joshilla') and Doctor Surender Singh, a Sikh.

At that time "[c]inema [.] started attracting a broad cross-section of society,"[114] including not only Muslims, but also Parsees and even foreigners. Judging from this fact, the world of Bombay films seemed to have no space for religious/ethnic apartheid. However, on the eve of Partition the amicable interaction between the friends begins to show fissures and they fall out over Balasubramanyam's train journey to Lahore to meet his mistress. When Bala is killed at the border, the former friends part ways. Like so many other victims of Partition, Bala's body returns to Bombay by train. As a result trains soon became primary symbols of the bloodshed of Partition[115].

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[109] Bhaskar, Ira and Richard Allen. *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2009, 44.
[110] Mughal rulers of India's various princely states.
[111] Bhaskar/Allen, Op. Cit.
[112] Examples include Dilip Kumar, born Muhammad Yusuf Khan, Madhubala (Mumtaz Jehan Begum Dehlavi), and the 'drama-queen' Meena Kumari, whose real name was Mahjabeen Bano.
[113] Cf. Vasudevan, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema," 394.
[114] Joshi, Lalit Mohan. "Bollywood: 100 Years." *Bollywood. Popular Indian Cinema.* Ed. Lalit M. Joshi. 2nd ed. London: Dakini Books, 2002, 18.
[115] Cf. Roy, Rituparna, *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Kushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, 33.

Before its gradual descent however, Rajkunwar studios also comprised of a colorful mix of employee – and literally so:

> They had trickled into the studios as rivulets of rain trickled into a puddle or a pond during monsoon, some invisible arrangement of the landscape leading them in that one direction. Each stained the colour of his or her trajectory, […]. Red as moraine were the two brothers from the foothills of the Himalayas, […]. Pale as sand was Singh from Rajputana, who had joined Raheeman Cha as the other guard, […]. Dark as the stones of Chotta Nagpur was the Munda gardener. There were so many of them. Rather, there had been so many of them. Before the troubles started, before the downpour of cinematic success slowly petered out to an increasing drought in the studio, while outside it started to rain blood and screams. (F, 238f)

The analogies with geology and meteorology in this context draw attention to the organic embeddedness of these peoples in the subcontinent's ethnic and cultural fabric, while simultaneously endowing the bloodshed of Partition with apocalyptic dimensions. However, in the films of the 1940s and 50s these colors do not feature – and not only because of the unavailability of polychromatic film stock. Hence what distinguishes stars like Kapoor, Kumar and Nargis from most Indians is their very light skin color. At the same time, Muslims were reduced to popular stereotypes in Hindi cinema:

> Bombay cinema has long been affirmed as one of the most enduring secularist cultural sites of contemporary India with its diverse personnel coming from various religious and regional backgrounds. Yet the anxieties surrounding the figure of the Indian Muslim in discourses of Indian nationalism are also generated in the Bombay cinema, which, after all, is a primary site for constructions of the Indian nation. Popular Hindi cinema tends to rely on a characteristic suppression of minority ethnic and religious groups either through hyper-visibility (the stereotype) or through invisibility (absence). (Kumar 2008, 179)

The tendency to either idealize the Other, or to erase her altogether therefore has to be viewed in the context of the 'purge' of Partition, the aftereffects of which can also be apprehended in the strictures evident in the narratives of popular Hindi cinema produced over the past five decades. Kumar opines that "popular Hindi cinema [.] figures the North Indian Hindu male as the representative secular-nationalist self."[116] She argues moreover that "[i]f and when Muslims find figuration in this cinema, their representation has largely been in keeping with popular Hindu perceptions about Muslims as a backward, deeply religious, and conservative community."[117] However, more recent Hindi films such as "Rang de Basanti"[118] and "Delhi-6"[119] signal a change in this pattern of representation. But the construction of the characters of Saleem and Bhuvaneshwari outside and beyond their Muslim identity is also worth discussing in this context.

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[116] Kumar, P. *Limiting Secularism,* 179.
[117] Ibid.
[118] 2006 („Colour it Saffron"), dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra.
[119] 2009, dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra.

Notably, both can be designated 'modern' in their occupation and lifestyle. On the other hand Durga-Bhuvaneshwari seems to conform to an archetype of popular Indian cinema, namely that of the mother as renouncer:

> The filmic Mother often renounces everything for the sake of her husband or son. Conversely, however, when a Mother renounces her own son (which is rare) or her husband (which is rarer still—after all a wife is called a *dharmapatnī*, the wife of dharma) the sheer emotional weight of her act is enormous. (Mishra 2002, 7)

In this regard however, Durga defies the established pattern in so far as she renounces not only her son Ashok, but eventually also Harihar. Instead of staying with him and sharing in his chosen fate, she leaves the man for whom she surrendered her son. By thus progressing to the status of independent agent, she upsets the binary plot logic of the Bombay social, according to which a woman inevitably follows her husband and family, lest she should become vulnerable and meaningless.

> The diegetic world of [the Bombay cinema] is primarily governed by the logic of kinship relations, and its plot driven by family conflict. The system of dramaturgy is a melodramatic one, displaying the characteristic ensemble of Manichaeism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological, and the deployment of coincidence. (Vasudevan 2000, 382)

Saleem left his family after a violent dispute – a fact he later regrets. Durga and Saleem thus both seek redemption in their subdued, chaste romance. In so far as they are no longer in their prime, but middle aged and also psychologically scarred, they are not typical romantic lovers. Hence they are never shown kissing or exchanging intimacies. Yet when Saleem recovers two children from a house burnt down during the riots and brings them to the studio, Durga-Bhuvaneshwari is reinstituted in her mother role. Kabir and Rosy as they christen the nameless children give both their lives new meaning[120]. In this manner the text implicitly affirms the family "as the primary trope to negotiate caste, class, community, and gender divisions, making for complex but decipherable hieroglyphics through which it configures the nation and constructs a nationalist imaginary."[121]

The total destruction of the mansion and the studio during the Partition riots thus symbolizes the collapse of peaceful coexistence and cultural syncretism on a national scale. But the great fire that consumes Rajkunwar studios invites another reading still as fires often serve the purpose of spiritual punishment and purge.[122]

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[120] The names reflect India's heterogeneous cultural tradition. Hence Kabir was a 15th century Muslim mystic and poet whose verses are still frequently recited in popular films, particularly in romantic scenes.

[121] Virdi, *The cinematic ImagiNation*, 7.

[122] Sacrificial fires play an elementary role in Hindu religious practice.

In the dyadic logic of early Hindi cinema the transgression of social and caste hierarchies, as well as of established gender roles inevitably provoked retribution. In this sense nearly all characters have transgressed, while the adoption of the illegitimate son of a Muslim ex-prostitute by the landlord's family constitutes a particularly grave transgression[123]. But Harihar too suffers from Ashok's loss and is regularly visited by nightmares, in which the magic scene of their arrival assumes a sinister dimension:

> Hari's eyelids pulse. […] He is dreaming of a bullock cart trundling up a dirt track to a mansion, a glittering mansion. He is driving the cart. He feels a shapeless dread well up in his heart. He looks back and there is a boy running after the cart. At first he is skipping and singing; then he starts running to catch the cart. Hari wants to slow down for the boy but he is afraid the mansion will disappear. For some reason he has to get there. […]. The boy is crying now, stumbling and crying, picking himself up and running again after the cart. His knees are bleeding. Harihar can see the tears on the boy's face. But he cannot stop. He cannot stop. (F, 326f)

When Durga-Bhuvaneshwari accidentally learns that Harihar gave Ashok away not to give him a better start in life, but "*in return for 'an equal share' in the film company to be set up by Rajkunwar*,"[124] she is shocked. Her angry queries therefore disturb Harihar who is desperate "*to explain away the past by weaving it into a film in which he could view events through a soft focus.*"[125] However, "Aakhri Raat" does not spell any of the drama and suffering that informed its production, presumably because of the demand for 'light' romance and the financial pressure from Seth Dharamchand. Notably, the studio's survival prospects had been volatile from the outset:

> Even so had their first film not been a retelling of the return from exile of Lord Ram and had it not been released in the same week that the Mahatma was released from prison by the British, and had the rumour not gone around that this was not a coincidence, the film might have flopped, for it was, otherwise, a largely unremarkable film, shot on loaned equipment using Orthochromatic filmstock rather than the Kodak Panchromatic film which was being preferred by the better studios. (F, 280)

As "one of the most productive genres of [.] early cinema […] which depicts tales of gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines mostly […] found in the Sanskrit *Puranas*, and […] the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*,"[126] the mythological is a conservative choice reflecting the producers' orientation towards commercial success. More importantly, the coincidence of both the film's and Gandhi's release advertises the symbolic notation applied to most of the events and characters in the novel. Where nothing is accidental, dharma inevitably determines the outcome of personal aspirations and struggle.

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[123] Of course Durga and Harihar do not inform the Thakurs of Durga's social and religious background.
[124] F, 319.
[125] F, 310.
[126] Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 15.

5.3 INDIA AT TWILIGHT

The final reel opens at the lush office of Seth Dharamchand who gives orders for Rajkunwar Studios to be burnt down. After all, it is not the prospective profits of the film he is after, but the land on which the studio is built. But his orders are not carried out by his own men. An old man reverently addressed as "Guruji" charges the volunteers of the Poona section of their organization, i.e., the Rashtriya Swayamsevakh Sangh, with the 'job'. Until its descruction, the studio compound will be guarded day and night by a sevak. After the completion of "Aakhri Raat" and the departure of nearly all studio workers, the compound and its last occupants – Rajkunwar, Hari Babu, Saleem, Bhuvaneswhari, Rosy and Kabir and the old guard Raheeman Cha – are thus left thoroughly vulnerable. They sense imminent danger. However, the arrival of the RSS squad is set in a strangely tranquil, mystical atmosphere that stands in marked contrast to the ensuing violence.

> There is a moment between day and night that can be seen only in the villages and fields of India. The villagers have a word for it: godhuli. It is not simply 'dusk'. It is the moment when cattle return to the villages, shrouding them in a thin film of dust. It is the moment of cowdust. It is a narrower strip of time between dusk and night, so narrow that it disappears in the cities, is diminished to nothing by the lights and traffic, the buildings and people. It is the time when the mist in the trees is cattledust; the fog shrouding the small headlights of a jeep jolting over the narrow rural track is cowdust. (F, 363f)

The repetitive syntactic structures draw attention to the sensual quality of the twilight, as well as to its symbolic dimension as an interstitial time, a moment of ontological uncertainty, a moment of unreality. Raheeman, the old studio guard who hurries out to confront the men getting off the jeep to deman that they leave, is clubbed to death in response. The attackers then close all of the mansion's doors and windows with barbed wire, thus shutting the occupants in. When they begin piling inflammable materials around the house, the tension mounts. When two studio hands suggest that they all escape the mansion via the upper window in the "light room,"[127] situated right underneath the large branches of an old tree, Bhuvaneshwari and Saleem are determined to escape with the children. However, Rajkunwar and Harihar cannot forsake the studio for which they sacrificed so much, hoping the police will arrive in time.

Forty-four years later, the film scholar sits in a hotel near Dallam, contemplating the "sometimes grossly embroidered" [128] official report of the conflagration, while contrasting it with the account presented by Batin during the night of their interview.

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[127] Sets such as these were used to simulate outdoor scenes.
[128] F, 382.

> One thing is certain, for it was mentioned in all the eyewitness accounts in various news reports. When the fire reached its height, when the glow from the conflagration lit up Dallam, the adjoining villages and the cold rocks, when embers shot up into the dark sky like insects moving through lamplight, when almost all villagers in the vicinity were awake and a few even running to the studio, there was a gigantic explosion, diamonds and opals and pearls erupting into the air and falling in a shower as far away as Dallam. The glass roof had exploded from the heat and the gases of the fire. For years, the neighbouring fields and the thatched roof of huts in Dallam would glisten with gems of glass on sunny days, and sometimes the soles of bare feet running or working the fields would bleed drops of red. (F, 383f)

The legacy of the fire is permanent and painful as the glass splinters continue to remind the villagers of what happened that night. For while these fragments of the past are there, they cut into and sear the 'flesh' of the present. In this way the memory of the conflagration is continually actualized. Yet the dramatic explosion also highlights the narrative's cinematic subtext[129], while aestheticizing its climax. The metaphor of broken glass, trite as it is, at once conveys the dangerous allure of dreams and the fragility of consensus. If the studio previously symbolized the peaceful coexistence of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, the latter turns out to have been a dream, a glass palace easily broken. For Hari Babu and Rajkunwar in any case, their dreams seemed real enough to die for.

Although aware that he may never find out the truth about the fire, the scholar is determined to see the ruins of the studio which nature hasreconquered. On the site of the mansion, a "large kadamba tree […] with its heart-shaped leaves, its associations with Krishna and his flute, its trunk full of hollows"[130] attracts his attention. Presumably, it is the same tree by which the two studio hands escaped the mansion. But the gnarled old tree is more than a symbol of freedom and of life in this context:

> Trees, plants and graves form recurring images in partition narratives – a peepul tree, a tulsi plant, storm-ridden gardens, images of roots, graves to be dug, to be visited, to be paid homage to, images related to the soil, to birth and death, to a line of ancestors, family trees and a future enveloping the unborn. These images transcend destruction and subvert all linear temporalities. There is a constant flow, to and fro, between the past and the present. There is no closure; the past is not over and done with, borders cannot sever ties or destroy memories, belonging is not merely a legal right. (Jain 2007, 5)

Intertwined with the trees' great roots are rusted strands of barbed wire – the same wire then used to detain the victims in the mansion. That time pointedly failed to dismantle the barbed wire whereas the stones of the mansion are nearly gone, is an evocative reminder of the fact that the crime was never cleared up and the perpetrators never punished.

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[129] Conflagrations are a central dramatic device of popular Indian films and often mark their climax.
[130] F, 387.

As the scholar wonders why the villagers did not take and reuse the wire, a young couple comes to place flowers in the tree trunk. His presence initially frightens them while he is startled by this gesture:

> ***The prait***[131] ***we have asked for a boon, the man explained. It's believed that the spirits of two lovers inhabit these ruins and the tree. It's said they come out after the hour of godhuli, the man from the direction of the highway and the woman from the depths of the tree, and enter the ruins for the night.*** (F, 390f)

Having suffered an untimely and violent death, Durga-Bhuvaneshwari and Saleem are believed by the villagers to be caught in this world. When they are heard "***singing from the ruins, singing love songs***,"[132] the spirits are back to haunt the collective memory of the villagers. In so far the flowers mark not only a sacrificial donation, but a token of atonement. In this way the killing is integrated into the life cycle rituals sustaining the collective identity of the villagers. With its mysterious aura the gnarled tree thus grants the lovers prolonged lease on the collective memory of the villagers, while the other victims of the fire appear to have been forgotten. However, the police report retrieved by Batin twenty years previously states that only two bodies were found. The other four occupants of the mansion are thus left unaccounted for. The scholar is baffled. In a dream, Batin's spirit appears to the scholar, giving him the vital clue to solve the conundrum:

> ***Why do you suppose that they could not have escaped a building like that, a building with so many doors and windows, with a tree next to it that one could reach from the upper floor and climb down? They climbed down the kadamba tree and ran to the village unseen. Why do you suppose Bhuvaneshwari and Saleem, Kabir and Rosy could not have escaped and taken on other identities? Those were disturbed times, times when people disappeared in more ways than one. How can you be certain they did not escape to live on somewhere else?*** (F, 395f)

If the previously given clues hinted at this resolution all along, it is here finally that the divergent experiential horizons of Batin the narrator and Saleem the actor collapse. Batin and his wife are none other than Saleem Lahori and Bhuvaneshwari-Durga who escaped the conflagration with Rosy and Kabir. Later they settled down in Danmark. The heterodiegetic mode of narration thus concealed an autodiegetic narration, yet the narrator's seemingly unlimited access to the thoughts of Saleem and Bhuvaneshwari provided an important hint for the scholar and by extension the narratee to pick up.

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[131] A "pret" or preit is "the spirit of a dead person (esp. before obsequial rites are performed), a ghost, an evil being" (Cf. "pret." Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Vers. 2008. 12 March 2014. URL: <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/>.)

[132] F, 391.

But the fit is not seamless: Batin-Saleem's intimacy to Hari's and Rajkunwar's thoughts and motives often exceeds that which either he or Durga could have learnt through questions. Therefore, much seems the result of conjecture, an acute grasp of human psychology and a lively narrative imagination jumping in to fill in the gaps. The novel's final coup de theatre is not unanticipated as more or less explicit clues are strewn across the text, surfacing in random remarks such as the observation that "[t]here was just a touch of the prima donna to [Batin's] gestures."[133] Just when the curtain drops, the text performs another volte-face as the narrative turns to the 'victorious' RSS squad, shown after their departure from the studio:

> A huge tragedy, comes the voice from the radio. It is lost in static. It merges with the sound of the straining engine. Then the voice is back. There are words about loss, national loss, darkness, the sun is going out, and similar metaphors – all interrupted by waves of static – which the young men take as describing what they have achieved. They are about to cheer again when suddenly, like clouds lifting from the stun, the static clears and they hear clearly the sentences: The father of the nation is no more. At 5.05, while going to his morning prayer meeting at Birla House in Delhi, Mahatma Gandhi was shot to death… (F, 393f)

As the text purposely crosses the trajectories of individual fate and national history, the former is drowned out by the overpowering echo of the latter. Set at the novel's close, this key scene not only marks the violence of historic subjectivity, it evokes an inaugural moment in the history of newly independent India. If Gandhi's assassination roughly coincided with the end of the Partition massacres, the event is shown here in a different light which reveals its impact upon the memory of the former. In monopolizing the attention of the public the event drowned out much of what had happened previously while providing symbolic closure. It is a bitter irony that while Gandhi's release from prison gave the studio its first box-office success, his death should rob the studio and those who died in it of any public attention.[134] But this is not the only erasure: In the hour of their 'triumph' the RSS men are confronted with the death of the man upon whom their hatred focuses, who embodies the idea of a secular nation. Now his death annuls the brutal deed just accomplished, the men's only claim to fame. Also for their leader Guruji who had hoped that a Muslim would kill Gandhi and thereby legitimize a mass ethnic cleansing, his assassination by an ex-RSS member[135] is a strategic defeat.

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[133] F, 94.

[134] The date of the Dallam killing seems out of tune with official accounts: According to Pandey, riots and killings were "at their worst in Bombay in early September [1946] (with over 300 reported killed]." (Pandey, *Rembering Partition. Violence, Nationalism and History in India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 23.)

[135] Nathuram Godse did not act on behalf of the RSS.

Nehru's radio address resounds with the ringing pathos that would hence immortalize Gandhi as the "Father of the Nation". In a sociopsychological perspective, Nehru's radio-address symbolically resets the clock, marking the hour zero in the consciousness of the nation. It thus authorized Gandhi's assassination as India's collective trauma. It is not altogether irrelevant in this context that the event is reported through the radio – a unilinear medium adequate to the mass dissemination of messages by one source. Against the momentous event of Gandhi's death, the Dallam conflagration thus assumes representative weight in so far as it stands for all those dispersed outbreaks of violence and massacres that remained unaccounted for because they simply defied assumption as national memory events. Yet the novel not only alerts readers to the many different faces of Partition violence, it also documents the significant tributary function of economic motives – embodied here by the figure of Seth Dharamchand – which led to violence and forceful attempts at expropriation.

The complexity and fragmentary nature of Partition are reflected also in the literary responses it elicited. If "writers were at first unable to articulate the enormous tragedy that had unfolded in front of their eyes,"[136] the event gradually saw different, local and regional articulations emerging[137]. But F not only presents the victims' perspective. Instead the text complements the account of Batin-Lahori with that of a perpetrator. The text features a third narrative strand interspersed with but independent of the primary and secondary narrative. Here the dreams and experiences of a young RSS man guarding the studio are reflected. One of his dreams also inaugurates the text. Poetologically and aesthetically, these passages are set off through the interior monologue/stream of consciousness mode in which they are conceived:

> Under the green leaves green grey wood of this tree I who never slept under a tree sleep dream wrapped in quilt dream or do I am I dreaming again of horses as I always do of a horse a thoroughbred horse am I dreaming or am I sleeping if I am awake why do I see him the Sant of Sabarmati no horse this time I see myself lying here on a charpoy under the green wood green tree a young man with the dented pair of US Army binoculars which I feel for in my sleep […]. (F, 3)

With this delirious introduction the novel strikes a deliberately oneiric and surreal chord, thereby opening the text to a psychoanalytical reading. Dated "*23rd January, 1948*" – merely a week from Gandhi's assassination – the Mahatma's appearance in the dream as Sant of Sabarmati is already haunted, foreshadowing his imminent demise.

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[136] Roy, *South Asian Partition Fiction in English*, 20.
[137] But most accounts "tilted to the Punjab side." (Cf. Roy, Op. Cit., 22).

The dream disallows a straightforward reading – a fact owing mainly to the implicit, circling movement it delineates. By expanding one sentence over three and a half pages through continually repeated syntactic inversions the text creates a sensation of movement analogous to a vortex. In this manner the text emulates the dream situation that is often experienced as a maze-like architecture in which the dreamer is inescapably caught. In using both the 'I' while simultaneously showing this I from an exterior perspective, the text oscillates between interior monologue and stream of consciousness[138]. "Rasa Terrible" is thus marked as a dream or more precisely, as a discourse mimicking the dream[139]. Notably the dreaming consciousness formulated here is not fully suspended in the dream state. Instead it appears located at an intermediary stage between dream and waking state, an experience peculiar to REM sleep and the time immediately before waking. But the architecture of the dream discourse is more complex as the waking self is in pursuit of the dreaming self, which in its turn projects a dream self. Ultimately it is only by way of the interpolation of a waking, semi-conscious self that the dream can be narrated as it unfurls.

So while the substance of the dream manifests itself as a continuous stream of images or as a morph, the waking self attempts to arrest the continuous succession and to *reflect* upon the dream's textual substance. The movement is thus an oscillating one, characterized by protension and retension, 'seeing' and contemplating. In this way, the dream which has no images and no words becomes 'speakable'[140]. Moreover, the dream is invested with a prophetic quality, reinforced by psychoanalytical theory which understands the dream to express a suppressed truth. The appearance of the "thoroughbred horse" as a symbol of the male sexual drive in this context signals an aperture for a psychoanalytical reading. The horse's disappearance coinciding with Gandhi's appearance could be interpreted as a symbolic castration. This reading is sustained by the dream self's 'impotent' voice organ shrilly uttering obscenities. Ultimately, the continuous repetitions and inversions hark back to the chain of signifiers, along which the subject is deferred on and on.

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[138] While the "[s]tream of consciousness describes the thought itself and/or the presentation of thought in the sort of third-person passage […]", [i]nterior monologue ([…]) describes the long, continuous, first-person passages or whole texts that contain uninterrupted, unmediated free direct thought […]." (Palmer, Alan. "Stream of Consciousness and Interior Monologue." In: Herman/Jahn/Ryan (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, 571.)

[139] Canovas underlines the importance of the ontological divide between dreams and literary dreams.(Cf. Canovas, Frédéric. "This is Not a Dream: Drawing the Line Between Dream and Text." Journal of Narrative Technique. 24.2 (1994), 114f.)

[140] Ibid., 115.

As the dream self pursues Gandhi who is evidently in turmoil, the latter mutters "terrible terrible terrible…"[141] His inability to comprehend the reasons for the carnage precipitated a momentary loss of logos simultaneously also felt by the dream self that looks on. The situation seems to refer to Gandhi's visit to a Muslim quarter in Calcutta after the first major outbreak of mass violence that occurred there in August 1946. Gandhi's fragile appearance and his soft, 'effeminate' speech moreover focus the dreaming self's own insecure masculinity that is thus projected back onto Gandhi's figure.[142]

> I curse the Sant to the fascinated and slightly scandalized villagers outside this remote studio where I am doing what what am I doing here outside my dream in my self I curse the Sant to the villagers I am not dreaming for I can think can one think in dreams I can think I know that what fills me with such bitterness that saliva explodes from my mouth when I think of the frail old Sant is this is this I see again the newspaper item I see myself read it under the green I see I read that the Sant had been visiting a section of the city previously inhabited by the minority community call them mullah I shout call them mullah I scream I shiver am I dreaming […]. (F, 5)

The dual narrative figuration and focalization which blends free direct with free indirect speech emulates the sensation of dreaming, but simultaneously accentuates the discursive character of the passage. Still, it is both disturbing and absorbing. In this hazy vision, Gandhi seems vulnerable and stranded amid the pandemonium. Here his death is already palpable, foreclosing his assassination. A postscript in the heterodiegetic mode of narration informs the reader about the dreamer's role: Stationed under a tree where he has made his camp bed the man guards a studio compound and its occupants of whom the reader only learns later. It is a peepul tree in which, according to folklore, ghosts and spirits preferably reside. Throughout, the dream is marked by an insurgent feeling of barely suppressed rage reflected in the passage's title, "Rasa Terrible". Over the course of the next six 'Rasa' sections the dreamer emerges as a "committed sevak"[143] from Bombay sent by 'Guruji' to observe this "den of perfidies"[144] and intimidate its occupants:

> It is in studios like this, he tells himself, rephrasing the powerful words of Guruji, that Bharat has been partitioned, broken off like the pieces of chicken that Hindus and Muslims probably share in such places, eating off the same plates, drinking from the same glasses, worshipping in the same room. These are stories that the Sarpanch's men have told him: how Rajkunwar ignored the request of some villager who wanted separate utensils for Hindus and Muslims; how there was a room in the studio in which Hindu gods and Muslim relics were kept together; how there was even a mosque hidden somewhere in the compound, used by the Muslim studio hands to pray and plot. (F, 158)

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[141] F, 5.

[142] Freud, Sigmund. "The Interpretation of Dreams." 1913. Trans. Abraham A. Brill. HathiTrust/EBSCO Host. 20 Dec. 2014. <http://widgets.ebscohost.com/prod/customerspecific/s2872380/p.php?url =http%3a%2f%2fsearch.ebscohost.com%2flogin.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26db%3dedshtl>.

[143] F, 158.

[144] Ibid.

And while the rumours instigated by the sevak succeed in inciting suspicion in many of the younger, male villagers, the sevak seems unaware whose interests he is actually representing. Carrying out his orders, he knows nothing of Seth Dharamchand's financial interests and his tactical alliance with Guruji. The latter however has thoroughly imbibed the European lessons of nation-making which he is now strategically enacting:

> Modern nations, Guruji knew, were not built on ideals, traditions, not even science and technology. They were built on great gushes of blood, on massacres that left no shadow, or faint manageable ones. And that is what he dreamt for his county; that it would, one day, remember the Muslims of India, sacrificed on the altar of the Indian nation. He knew what the European nations did to their minorities over centuries; that is what they were doing to the Jews now. Once the Muslims - and he almost wept for them, for he was a man sensitive to music, art, culture - once the Muslims become the sacrifice that this nation needed, they would become a faint shadow in the past. Who fears shadows? […] Have the massacres that made the European nations left more than the slightest shadow? What can a shadow do? Once the body of the nation has come into being, it will cast its own shadows. And he hoped he would be there to limn those shadows with the sunlight of, no, not lies, of words. (F, 306)

As the logic of 'divide and rule' which Partition first enacted on a territorial level is then consequentially extended to the body of the nation, i.e., the Indian people, the latter threatens to lose one of its limbs. With it, not only the Muslim people but their culture and tradition in which the Indian is also deeply rooted would be lost, as Guruji well knows. Yet in the climate of mutual suspicion and fear that has been stirring his young sevaks' bloodlust he finds an ideal outlet for the latter as the Seth asks for Rajkunwar Studio to be destroyed. That the passage employs the familiar tropes of dreams and shadows underscores the fact that Batin is speaking Guruji's thoughts here, alerting the scholar to the executive role of the RSS in the fire. Unsurprisingly his controversial claim is questioned by the skeptical scholar.

However, neither Batin nor the scholar refer to the dream monologues which thus appear isolated stretches of text. In so far as they provide eloquent illustration of the psychological mechanisms of ethnic violence and religious hatred, their purpose seems mainly didactical. The man's troubled dreams find an eerie echo in the studio's slogan: "'Rajkunwar Studio: Where dreams come alive.'"[145] Indeed each dream not only takes him closer to committing the killing, but takes him through past experiences of grief, melancholy, lust, humiliation and fury, which do not eventually provide a sense of release however. Instead, his daytime dreams challenge his resolve as he is confronted with his underlying desires and traumas, of which he seems increasingly afraid.

[145] F, 350.

Rasa theory as a "fully developed psycho-aesthetics"[146] thus serves as a coordinate system here with which to illuminate the emergence of hatred as a psychological phenomenon. Hence the sevak's violent fantasies appear the combined result of an acutely felt insecurity and impotence vis-à-vis the perceived Muslim threat and the rigorous suppression of the putatively 'weak' instincts of compassion and love. In the last two passages however, the interior monologue makes way for a heterodiegetic narration showing the sevak in old age. The dreams he had at Dallam have now come back to haunt him while one crime is replaced with another in his mind:

> But it is a dream that would return to him year after year, mixed up with what he saw the next night at the Studio and what he heard on the radio the morning after that, so that in old age he would not know what was real and what was not, and as an old man he would repeatedly escape the custody of his children and grandchildren to turn himself in at the local police station for having murdered Mahatma Gandhi with a sword. With a sword! (F, 299)

This last section titled "Rasa Furious" implies that the limitless fury he and his fellow sevaks experienced then has finally caught up with him, the terror of that night at last devouring its perpetrator.

At the same time however, F indirectly also illuminates the organizational background of the RSS: In the 1940s the organization set up its own *akhadas*[147], "militant training camps associated with Hindu nationalism"[148] which expanded upon the classical exercise regime traditionally offered by the wrestling schools by providing paramilitary training and spreading right-wing Hindu ideology. The sevak's endurance and discipline, as well as his deafness to all else but his organization's ideology clearly identify him as the product of the indoctrination and physical training of the akhadas. Gandhi's active opposition to the camps consequently inspired a growing rejection of his figure and his ideas in Hindu nationalists and RSS members alike. In so far Gandhi's centrality in the man's dreams is entirely consequential. But the historic and political text of F extends beyond the doctrine and political agenda of Hindu nationalism. Although reported as a minor incident on the sidelines of the main plot, the brutal punishment of a villager by the Chotte Thakur warrants discussion as it sheds light on the complex intersection of social and political reform movements in India during the first half of the twentieth century. Readers learn that a young villager is whipped for stealing a book of the Thakur.

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[146] Sharma, *Indian Aesthetics and Aesthetic Perspectives,* 25.

[147] Spellings vary between akhada or akhara.

[148] Bhagavan, Manu. "The Hindutva Underground: Hindu Nationalism and the Indian National Congress in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial India." *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond. Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle.* Ed. Steven E. Lindquist. London: Anthem Press, 2011, 326.

The book is "*Bandi Jiwan*"[149] (A Life of Captivity). Written by the revolutionary founder of the Hindustan Republican Army Sachindra Nath Sanyal during his imprisonment, it went on to become the bible for all Indians opposing British Rule. It is thus not so much the act of stealing, than the political nature of the book which seems to have incurred the Thakur's wrath. To a zamindar or feudal landlord, the prospect of subjects becoming politically aware persons demanding equal citizenship can only be alarming. Returning to Bimal Roy's film "Anjangarh" of 1948 which tells of the clash between a local feudal lord and the workers of a mining syndicate it becomes clear that F possesses a distinct socio-political undercurrent. However, as the latter is confined to topographic and other marginal references, it is muted. It seems pertinent in this context that the Indian National Congress not only opposed militants but also Communists like M.N. Roy, if perhaps not only for ideological reasons[150]. This political 'streamlining' of the Congress galvanized resentment, while feeding the hatred of those who believed the Mahatma to be a hypocrite.

However, the fierce rejection of Gandhi's figure by Hindu nationalists and militants' was above all the result of his continued interaction with members of the Muslim League until after Independence in 1947[151]. Read in conjunction, the characters and deeds of the sevak, Guruji and Seth Dharamchand present an unsettling history of violence – a history more influential than state historiography acknowledged as Saari argues:

> Perhaps the one premise of modern Indian history that is seriously challenged by a study of the history of Indian cinema, and the folk tradition to which it owes its roots, is the much-touted belief that Indians are a non-violent people and that the apostles of non-violence—the Buddha, Mahavir, and Mahatma Gandhi—exemplify the land and its people. But in truth a detailed study of Indian history would show that the land has witnessed incessant warfare and conflict, even before the Muslim invasions began in the medieval era. (Saari 2009, 112)

At first look it may seem paradoxical that the films of popular cinema – often summarily dismissed as vacuous and superficial – should address the violent potential of Indian society to negotiate it with the narrative of state. It may be the tendency of cinema to grant this repressed aggression narrative space which has lent it such enduring relevance and popular appeal. Melodrama which was in its heyday at the time of Partition offers a narrative template condensing social and economic conflicts into a legible form by converting complex constellations into a series of transfers and exchanges immediately comprehensible to viewers.

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[149] F, 121f.
[150] Cf. Bhagavan, Op.Cit., 329.
[151] Devji, Faisal, *The Impossible Indian. Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence*. London: Hurst & Co., 2012, 173.

Ravi Vasudevan outlines the psychology underlying this process in the following fashion:

> For Peter Brooks, as we saw, melodrama emerged in the nineteenth century as a form which spoke of a post-sacred universe in which the certainties of traditional meaning and hierarchical authority had been displaced. The melodramatic narrative constantly makes an effort to recover this lost security, but meaning comes to be increasingly founded in the personality. Characters take on an essential, psychic resonance corresponding to family identities, and work out forbidden conflicts and desires. In the process, the social dimension collapses into the familial and, indeed, the family itself becomes a microcosm of the social level. (Vasudevan 2010, 108)

A similar process of narrative condensation and reduction appears to be at work here as the complex religious, social and political faultlines that lay at the root of Partition are transposed onto the central characters in F. Notwithstanding that, Khair's novel diverges from the melodramatic pattern in one important regard, namely its (almost) happy ending which finds the lovers reconciled, if far away from home. Since Durga-Bhuvaneshwari and Saleem are socially marginal characters from the start, they enjoy a certain, limited freedom to negotiate India's rigid social code.

Viewed within the eschatological-cosmological framework of Hinduism, the fire marks a kind of purification the lovers have to pass through before being redeemed and symbolically reborn. Notably fire marks all pivotal passages in Hindu religious ritual. After death it destroys and simultaneously purifies the mortal body, allowing the spirit to be reborn into another life. This symbolic rebirth is necessarily accompanied by the adoption of new identities. If the rules of melodrama decree that karma and karmic debt are inescapable Harihar and Rajkunwar who placed their cinematic aspirations over their familial duties, are made to pay that debt and are simultaneously liberated.

Under the psychoanalytical lens the fire might furthermore be interpreted to symbolize all-consuming love. But Saleem and Bhuvaneshwari are wary, mature lovers who abstain from physical contact and appear to have attained a higher, spiritual stage of love. But their escape also signals their exit from the narrow bounds of melodramatic convention. They are no longer a tragic hero and heroine submitting to an inevitable, cruel fate, no longer actors in but directors of their lives. In this way F highlights the function of popular film to dramatize the repressed aspects of the psyche in its central conflict(s). In one of the few scenes were Saleem and Bhuvaneshwari could be said to share an intimate

moment, the mise-en-scène accentuates the investment of the 'film' by its sole spectator – the sevak who is observing the studio through his binoculars[152]:

> He watches through the lenses, focusing into the room with the open window.
>
> He sees a man sitting on a cane bucket chair inside the room. This man is tall and wears an overcoat even indoors. He looks middle-aged. His face seems vaguely familiar. […]
>
> A woman moves into the picture framed by the open window. She hands the seated man a cup of tea or coffee. It is a dainty cup, in a saucer. The man looks up at the woman. She has long lush hair. Even across the field and through the narrow apertures of binocular vision, he notices the change in the man's attitude. It is as if a statue has come to life. No, the man does not move much, but a charge of life - like electricity - passes through his body. He can see the expression on the man's face. It glows. (F, 159)

In this voyeuristic staging of the gaze, the sevak simultaneously functions as the implied focalizer *and* implied spectator of the scene. With him the text interpolates a reluctant voyeur, receptive to allusion but morally inoculated against putative 'transgression'. For all the innocence of the exchange the sevak's acute visual sensibility – trained by days of ceaseless observation – is attuned to picking up the minutest expressions, allowing him to divine the nature of their rapport.

The conspicuous visual arrangement of the scene, filtered through the binocular lenses and framed by a window bespeaks a tableau "compositionally arranged for a moment, [which] give[s], like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation."[153] As such it is noteworthy for the visual and phenomenological constraints it imposes. If the "distance from the events depicted [.] renders the act of looking safe for the spectator,"[154] the situation recalls that in the projection hall in so far as the spectatorial access defined is at once "ocular- (i.e. conditioned by optical access), transitive (one looks at something) and disembodied (the spectator maintains a safe distance)." [155] Notwithstanding the erotic innuendo, the rather chaste interaction does not bear out the man's crass reaction to it:

> The man and the woman exchange a *naked* look that makes him – their audience of one – feel ashamed […]. He feels as if he is looking through a keyhole, as if he has witnessed a lurid peepshow. […]. He feels guilty, as he used to when those noises came from the side of the room that his father shared with his mother. […]. Then disgust flows into him, thrills him with its legibility, and he feels like breaking down the studio building single-handedly, climbing on top of it with a pickaxe and hacking away at it as if it was the body of a Pakistani. (F, 159f)

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[152] As Esrock points out "readerly imaging is encouraged when fictional characters are engaged in specifically mentioned acts of visual perception" signalled by the use of "[v]erbs like s*aw, gazed* and *looked*." (Esrock, Ellen. *The Reader's Eye. Visual Imaging as Reader Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, 183.)

[153] Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 82.

[154] Elsaesser/Hagener, *Film Theory*, 14.

[155] Ibid.

Instead of being pleasurably excited by his undetected participation in the intimacy, the observer is revolted as the scene evidently reactivates suppressed childhood memories. Even the faintest allusion to sexuality suffices to explode the steam valve of a forcibly repressed sexual urge with incestuous inflections. But the latter is immediately countermanded by an equally strong impetus towards sublimation by physical (re-)action, resulting in a livid fantasy of dismemberment. Therein, the studio building is conflated with the body of the Muslim 'enemy'. The psychoanalytical rationale implicitly forwarded here which interprets the proclivity to violence as an answer to the sustained repression of the sexual urge is reiterated in the portrayal of Chotte Thakur. His perpetually implied homosexual disposition thus finds its outlet in the sadistic whipping of male peasants. It in this oblique fashion then that the the novel establishes a nexus between a society with rigid gender roles in which sexuality is subject to severe circumscription and sudden outbursts of violence.

The melodramatic template of the Bombay Social with its epic heritage and Gothic motifs condensing the 'subterranean' issues of (homo-)sexuality and parricide[156] into legible symbols thus seems ideally suited to the psychological dynamics of the events. However, the novel does not serve this conventional psychoanalytical wisdom as the ultimate explanation for all violence. And although the novel sheds a critical light on some of its more problematic aspects, it does not simply pathologize Indian sociality as such. However, the Bombay social serves not merely a narrative template for F, but also functions as a medium of cultural memory[157]. Therefore the text's 'memory politics' and its implications demand a detailed discussion. But the primary question addressed in the following is how the incidents, stories and characters presented in the novel relate to the collective memory of Partition.

As a narrative, F is born from an old man's resolve to find his story and that of those with whom his fate was intertwined finally accounted for. Sensing his imminent death, Batin grasps the opportunity presented by the scholar's request for an interview to narrate not only the story of a bygone cinematic era, but to claim his part and that of the dead in the making of this era. Having suffered the indifference of the police, the Thakur family and the film industry at large who showed no interest in resolving the deaths of two people and disappearance of another four, the narrator nonetheless feels unable to claim the 'I'. Still, underneath the eloquent heterodiegetic narrative another shines through, inviting the scholar and by extension the narratee to unearth what lies buried.

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[156] Ashok's disavowal of his biological parents marks a purposeful erasure, a symbolic parricide.
[157] Cf. Assmann, J. "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 109.

5.4 NARRATING (AND) THE ARCHIVE

Notwithstanding his efforts to reclaim his true identity and salvage a part of the world of pre-Partition cinema, Batin is well aware that (t)his story has been consigned to the void because it belongs to the archive, "the passively stored memory that preserves the past past."[158] The need to lay the violence of Partition to rest precisely because it is detrimental to the edifice of an Indian national memory and identity is thus privileged over the victim's rights. However, the "cultural relict[s]"[159] of his time – the old film reels and the ruins of the mansion – are not impotent, but await a new assignment:

> These [cultural relicts] are not unmediated, they have only lost their immediate addressees, they are de-contextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning. As part of the archive, they are open to new contexts and lend themselves to new interpretations. (Assmann 2010, 99)

However, it is only through Batin's voice that the remaining traces, including Ashok's old panorama box which is still kept by the doctor can be re-contextualized. This process of re-contextualization is set into motion by the scholar who has to put the different pieces of the puzzle back together. In this context his lack of distinctive identity markers — a name, face, character traits etc. — is worthwhile emphasizing in so far as it affirms the scholar's deployment as a function of the text, rather than as a character. I argue that in casting his canvas so broadly, Batin is not giving in to vanity or intent upon simply distracting the scholar. Instead he forces him to surrender his idea of a stable, complete and contained past to alert him to the incalculable movement of memory:

> [*Religion*] *is like memory. You might not believe this, for you are too young and still think of memory as something to be retrieved, to be recovered, as if we can delve into the box of the past and pull things out of it, as if the past was a box of chocolates. Actually, my young scholar, the world 'recovered' is not too wrong: memory is always re-covered. It is covered again and again. And religion, to the extent that is it necessary, is like that. It covers what would haunt us. […]. It distorts reality, misinterprets everything. […]. Memories can be sacred and religions are memories, and just as unreliable, just as vital, just as much a part of the present. Both are attempts to define the same borderless reality — two different names for the same elusive person.* (F, 257f)

Accordingly Batin's story does not lay claim to absolute veracity, but acknowledges the inevitable re-inscription that occurs in the process of remembering. He thus highlights the traces of the story's manufacture, so that the process of narrative forming emerges all the more clearly.

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[158] Assmann, A. "Canon and Archive." In: Erll/Nünning/Young (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies,* 98.

[159] Ibid., 99.

It is in this context too I argue, that Batin's repeated extra-diegetic references to shadows, darkness and dreams demand to be read as they delineate a liminal, shadowy zone of ontological uncertainty. Rejecting the categorical imperatives of truth or falsehood which the scholar relies and insists upon, the narrator allocates his narrative in an interstitial zone. This tactics allows all paraphernalia and 'narrative surplus' to unfold, regardless of its immediate relevance to the main narrative.

What takes shape herein might thus be called a poetics of (the) twilight:

> *'You know what was distinctive about Bombay films before your generation started talking of Bollywood? No, no, not all that academic theory* […] *what was distinctive about them was the use, the subtle and extensive use they made of flashbacks and dream sequences. It was as if even the most frivolous narrative knew that is was poised between changes, between past crimes and future possibilities, between past possibilities and future crimes. And almost all the flashbacks and dream sequences had a smoky quality, making vision uncertain but not impossible, making the world a play of shadow and solidity.'* (F, 355)

Granting that shadows, twilight and 'godhuli' are the ambience within which Batin sets his narrative, the semi-darkness of the projection hall or bioscope tent appears its natural habitat, and the melodramatic social its organic form. As a "play of shadow and solidity" this narrative world is exempt from the compulsory principle of mimesis. In so far it eludes and simultaneously militates against what may be called the 'barbed wire of absolute meaning'.

Unilinear narration is thus dismissed for the limitations it imposes for it leaves nothing suspended, instead subsuming everything under the story logic. In this context the aesthetics of Batin's narrative and particularly the function of that first magical scene in "The Magic Lantern" demands revision. I propose that the latter represents no "retrospective eulogization of village life [..] so apparent in Raj Kapoor's early films,"[160] even if this nostalgia "remains a strong feature of Indian public culture."[161] Instead, this section serves an elementary function within the phenomenological and memory-political conception of the text: As an 'establishing shot', the scene in which the bullock cart is depicted slowly approaching Anjangarh marks the first cut in the phenomenal surface, an operation dividing the visible from the invisible. Notably however, the visible is not immediately weighted with narrative significance here. It is a vision unburdened by purpose.

[160] Pinney, "Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures," 14.
[161] Ibid.

Aesthetically, F represents not merely a cinematically inflected mode of writing. Instead the text deploys film as a phenomenology by which visibility *as such* is engendered. In other words, film is written as a mode of seeing so deeply embedded in experience and memory that it passes for seeing itself. The introductory section thus establishes the basic phenomenal-aesthetic vocabulary for the following narrative. With his visual perception and narrative ability fine-tuned through his work in the film industry, the primary narrator has a keen grasp of the thin line dividing the visible from the invisible. To conceptualize the phenomenal mode of narration brought to fruition in Batin's narrative I employ the concept of 'archiving' proposed by Domietta Torlasco:

> […], I propose to consider *archiving as a mode of writing that occurs in and through perception—an operation that primarily mobilizes and thus also threatens to efface the signs of the perceptual world*. The violence of the archive is first and foremost the violence pervading the threshold between visibility and invisibility, the membrane through which colors and forms appear and disappear, withdrawing into an invisibility that most noticeably becomes erasure under certain historical conditions. (Torlasco 2013, xvi)(emphasis added)

Batin's insistence upon apparently minor details – the light, the dust raised by the bullocks, the boy's appearance – appears gratuitous, but it emphatically forges a space wherein the lived, sensual experience is given free reign and wherein "the ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the true."[162] Here, reading/seeing becomes believing and, more importantly, a way to attaining equilibrium:

> The well-known triad of truth (*Satyam*), goodness (*Shivam*), and beauty (*Sundaram*) found in many cultures is sometimes taken to be the goal of a holistic aesthetic experience. Whereas European aesthetic thinking about this triad remained more or less metaphysical and speculative, Indian theories of aesthetics suggested in their meditative literature ways and means to realize it. The ultimate aim is the realization of a state of calm or equilibrium (S*hanta Rasa*). (Mall 2010, 164)

When the wind breathes down Ashok's neck like "an invisible giant,"[163] this clearly has no immediate importance other than making the moment sensually acute and corporeal. With attention uniformly distributed among all elements in the narrative 'frame', the story remains at least momentarily subordinate to the phenomenal world thus depicted, a world previously 'untouched' by the camera's eye. It is this ostentatious gesture of presenting something as if it had not been seen before, that marks out the phenomal-aesthetic strategy of F and relates it to the underlying cinematic original:

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[162] Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Ed. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 30.

[163] F, 8.

> Few Indian films document the startling encounter between the privileged contents of profilmic space ([…] the outer frame), and the technology that guarantees their reproduction and thus generates their elevation to meaning (our inner frame), than Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955). […] Here we see in palpable form and at the service of the new state, the process by which previously unfilmed objects and events arrive before the camera; […]: the launch of a process by which the object and its attributes may be widely recognized and publicly underwritten precisely by the authority of the record and the technological impress. (Rajadhyaksha 2009, 161f)

In other words the novel purposely restages the 'discovery' of rural India by the (neo-) realist cinematographic apparatus which does not seek to penetrate and disenchant this world, but to conserve its imprint in a melancholy gesture foreclosing its eclipse. If the title of that first evocative sequence is any indication, the reference to the magic lantern as an apparatus casting shadows, is indicative. In so far as that first scene casts a long shadow over the entire text, the magic lantern is an apt metaphor which moreover sustains the implicit link to Satyajit Ray: "'*Perhaps it was the magic lantern that kindled my interest in the cinema!' writes Ray, harking back to the days of his childhood, on the particular fascination he had for the magic lantern creating the kaleidoscopic tableaux on the walls of his room.*"[164]

As a mode of narrating, archiving is manifest at several junctures in the novel, most obviously during the dramatic climax when metaphors of in-/visibility rise to the fore of the text. After escaping through the skylight, the literal and metaphorical membrane between identity and anonymity, visibility and invisibility, Bhuvaneshwari and Saleem thus become shadows: "Would [the bullocks] have bridled at the sight of two shadows, each carrying a live bundle, moving past the village fields, from tree to tree, shadow to shadow, not really hiding but not exposing themselves to sight either?"[165] The shadows of the escapees are exemplary of the manner in which the perceptual border is tacitly 'policed', allowing the survivors to be simply overlooked. As a result of this policing, something visible may not be seen and what must not be cannot be seen.

The deformed dwarf Yusuf who lived and worked in the horse stables of Rajkunwar Studios during its better days also merits discussion in this context precisely because he is also a marginal figure. Employed as the horse caretaker he is shunned by the other studio hands because of his misshapen appearance while Bhuvaneshwari alone is kind to him. When the studio is no longer able to finance the small zoo and the last mare is to be sent to the butcher, Yusuf absconds with the horse.

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[164] Banerjee, Surabhi. *Satyajit Ray. Beyond the Frame.* New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited 1996, 24.
[165] F, 397f.

For Bhuvaneshwari, "his marvellous appearance and his unexplained disappearance signal [..] a change in the story of the studio."[166] Unlike the others she cannot erase him from her memory. With his "horsy aura"[167] and a habit to sleep only on the back of his favorite mare, Yusuf appears the quintessential Other — at once highly visible and yet invisible. The fact that his physically negligible figure looms large in Batin's account suggests an intention to controvert this erasure.

> *'Yusuf, a small man, a deformed dwarf — not someone who would ever enter a history book or feature in a film about those times. And in that way, young man, not so different from Bhuvaneshwari, who, I am sure, never appears in any of those books on Bombay films that you have read. And yet, jot down the name: Yusuf, the boy-dwarf, the ghostly rider of horses. Yes, write his name in your diary* […]. *Like Bhuvaneshwari, Yusuf is not just an extra in my story, oh no, far from it, far from it.'* (F, 242)

When the scholar eventually attempts to complete Batin's account and fill its gaps, he thus takes recourse to the figure of the dwarf Yusuf whom he now casts in the unlikely role of the hero scaring off the attackers and saving the studio:

> ***When suddenly to the surprise of the youth with the pair of binoculars and facial birthmarks a horse of fire comes out of the burning studio. It is ridden by a dwarf. The youth shouts and throws himself aside. Then the horse is gone. And with it leave the vandalizers, piling into the jeep, shocked not by the prospect of flesh burning, trapped in barbed wire, but by the sight of the spectral, fiery horse and its deformed rider.*** (F, 381)

The proliferation of the marvellous and the fantastic in the narrative does not work to dismantle the account's claim to legitimacy — on the contrary, Batin's narrative aims at unearthing a hidden truth, a truth encapsulated among others in the figure of the dwarf. But also inanimate objects like the bioscope tent, the Aladdin's lamp and the barbed wire claim the narrator's attention despite their ordinariness. Items from the vast cellar of the archive, they are thus floated on the surface of the text.

> What is cast aside — which was reappropriated by film and photography — was the logic revealed by the tradition of the novel (from Balzac to Proust and Surrealism) and the reflection on the true that Marx, Freud, Benjamin, and the tradition of 'critical thought' inherited: the ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the true. And the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph, a mythological or phantasmagoric figure. (Rancière 2013, 30)

It is this assumption of the profane and quotidian as beautiful and possessed of an inherent, opaque power which characterizes F as a literary text and Ray's Apu-trilogy as a cinematic approach. The tacit recycling of "Pather Panchali" as a cinematographic-aesthetic template is also programmatic in another sense[168].

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[166] F, 242.
[167] F, 240.
[168] The meaning and implications of this 'recycling' will be explored in the final chapter, p. 254.

Evidently, the primary narrator attempts to extricate additional layers of meaning. All these details and sensations thus buttress Batin's claim to being both a demiurg and historic chronicler and in this quality also a direct transposition of the author function:

> Apparently [history and fiction] are irreconcilable but a reconciliation is effected when we consider the historical novelist not as a chronicler of facts but as one who accomplishes a vision of history more comprehensive than recorded history. He is a "maker" in the sense that Aristotle's poet is, for to give us a feel of the times which he represents, he creates a whole community of individuals who give us a better introduction into the age than do the real figures of recorded history. Besides, he visualizes and establishes connections between events which historical records never wholly reveal to us. (Mitra 2005, 17)

If Partition narratives "are teleological histories in which the past is given a 'retrospective intelligibility' and rationality,"[169] F by and large conforms to this pattern but does not pretend to give a universally valid rationale for the event. At the same time, the narrative exposes the complex workings of memory. With regard to the plot however, F clearly exhibits the formative influence of the plot patterns of the Bombay social. From a historiographic perspective, this specific genre of melodrama appears ideally suited to representing life in late colonial/early postcolonial India, in other words, life in a society on the cusp of modernity. Hence the conflicts between individual aspirations on the one hand and social constraints on the other are immediately reflected in the dyadic constellation and transformations immanent to the genre. Since the representation of the events in the primary narrative oscillates between the oral and the cinematic/visual mode of representation, Batin's narrative could be said to perpetuate a willful *mise en abyme* as reel and real narrative circle each other ad infinitum. Here, art and life, reel and real appear indissolubly intertwined.

"Judging from its prevalence and impact, 'film' seems to have become the leading medium of popular cultural memory,"[170] Erll notes with regard to the contemporary state of affairs. Indeed the novel takes readers' familiarity with the medium, its conventions and rules for granted. The novel is premised upon film as a popular expression instantaneously radiating experience across a socially and culturally heterogeneous field.

> With a view to cultural memory studies, these observations call for two methodological moves or shifts in attention: firstly, from high culture to popular culture; and secondly, from the time-bound media of storage, which allow cultural memories to travel across centuries […], to the space bound media of circulation, which can reach large audiences almost simultaneously, make cultural memories today and are forgotten tomorrow ([..]). (Erll 2010, 389f)

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[169] Bhalla, Alok. "Memory, History and Fictional Representations of the Partition." *Partition and Indian Literature. Voices of the Wounded Psyche.* Ed. Neena Arora and Rajinder Kumar Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2010, 29.

[170] Erll,"Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 395.

Well aware that the time of the Bombay social is long passé, Batin nonetheless exploits its affective power in entrusting his story to a film scholar. F documents the meaningfulness of films such as "Aag," "Barsaat" or "Awārā" as critical prisms to understand the particular historic juncture at which they were produced from a historic and more importantly, an emotive perspective. If melodrama as a narrative genre is "articulated within the frameworks established 'from above,'"[171] the lucky escape of the tragic hero and heroine controverts its rules, affirming that "such frameworks can never fully determine that articulation."[172] The Bombay social thus allows and in fact *relies* upon passion not as a private articulation but as a force deliberately allowed to circulate, a force delimiting the zone of encounter for the subjects in modernity, before it is again contained in the end. As the lives of Harihar, Durga, Saleem, Chotte Thakur/Rajkunwar and Ashok show, this experience is marked by repeated loss and disorientation. Notably this foundational sentiment of loss is also intrinsic, even quintessential to the Apu trilogy[173].

However, as an account focusing the time of Partition, if not the *event*, F is extraordinary in two regards: First of all the Dallam killing occurs at a very late point when most violence had already ended. Moreover it is a biased account in so far as it looks at an incident where Hindus commit an act of violence against Muslims and other Hindus guilty of 'miscegenation'. Indisputably the incident is also representative in this regard. Yet it is with particular regard to the contemporary moment that it assumes heightened relevance, in so far as Hindu nationalism rose to the status of state doctrine with the growing electoral power of the Bharatiya Janata Party after 1992. But the historic juncture at which the novel emerged is also worthwhile discussing from a cinema-historic perspective. Hence the time after the millennium marked a moment in which a major revision effort resulted in the comprehensive revaluation and recycling of the socials and melodramas of the 1940s and 50s:

> Armies of popular historians were commissioned to discover and – through history books, remakes, mode-retro revisitations and restorations – to put together an earlier epoch, a 'classic' period: the one following World War II and the early years of independence, the period of the big melodramas ([…]). The theory went alongside consciously retro evocations of the 'golden age' of Indian cinema, in films like *Dil Chahta Hai* ([…]) and *Kal Ho Na Ho* ([…]), and in the digitally remastered and colourised versions of *Mughal-e-Azam* in 2004 and *Naya Daur* in 2007. (Rajadhyaksha 2009, 77)

[171] Wiemann, Dirk and Lars Eckstein. "Introduction: Towards a Cultural Politics of Passion." *The Politics of Passion: Reframing Affect and Emotion in Global Modernity*. Ed. Dirk Wiemann and Lars Eckstein. Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2013, 20.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Cf. Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 161.

If the 1990s marked India's entry into and rapid absorption by the global market, this sudden surge of cinematic nostalgia could be reasoned with this experience as another fundamental social and political rupture, echoing the earlier one: "The chaotic years 1945-51 when Bollywood, by most accounts ([…]), retrospectively declared its birth, was a controversial period in Hindi film history,"[174] marked by new finance modalities and new production technology. At the same time, the twin experiences of Independence and Partition loomed large in popular consciousness. With the next major political and sociocultural rupture, 'old Bombay' suddenly came back to life, along with its conflicted history and battle over legitimacy as Rajadhyaksha points out:

> The golden age of the (Hindi) cinema, […], was also the heyday of the 'problem of the cinema'. If you do not understand that earlier battle, its cinema declares […], you cannot understand Bollywood. *That* battle, and therefore *this* narrative, has involved a delegitimized capital, a decadent culture, a migrant community and the many consequences of partition, all of which fundamentally implicated the history of Bombay's Hindi cinema. And it is Hindi cinema's eventual triumph in that battle of legitimacy that Bollywood's narrative abductions unceasingly celebrate. (Rajadhyaksha 2009, 38)

Khair's novel also engages with *that* battle, most obviously so when the text addresses the moral prejudice faced by the protagonists and the problem of obtaining legal funding for films. It is this problem after all which leads them to Seth Dharamchand and thus to their doom. Figures such as the Munshi at Anjangarh and the village sarpanch[175] who also actively colludes in Dharamchand's scheme as he regards the studio a place of moral corruption, embody the pervasive conservative bias of Indian society. But the climate of suspicion and hate eventually reaches into the film industry itself:

> Muslims had been leaving Bombay. Only the other day, he had been told that Manto had left, leaving his beloved city to join his family in Lahore. Manto, he had felt like crying out, what will you do there? But he knew Manto knew; he knew Manto [sic!] had chosen the easier death — not the death of all he had known and believed in, not the death of friends whose faces disappeared or were turned to an icy mask, but his own death. The death of just one person. One witness. One writer. (F, 354f)

Saadat Hasan Manto whose short story "Toba Tekh Singh" marks one of the most powerful monuments to Partition, also plays a brief role in the text. Hence the 'intermission' is followed by an interior monologue captioned "Night of 16th January, 1955."[176] In the latter the fictional Manto addresses an anonymous friend:

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[174] Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 81.
[175] village chief
[176] F, 199-203

> What a story you could tell, my friend, if you decided to. But I know you have pledged not to do so. It is part of your choice of life: what you write will only be fiction. But the facts of your life, you living ghost, what about the facts of your life that are stranger than any fiction? Will you, the writer and the showman in you be able to resist and take them to the grave? Or will you leave some clues behind, cryptic like those literary quotes with which you could pepper a late-night drinking round in Bombay? (F, 202)

In so far as it (cor-) responds directly to the primary narrator's project, Manto's address urges the narratee to interpret his monologue as an appeal aimed at Saleem-Batin to narrate and publish his life's story. And since the latter's life is indeed "stranger than any fiction", films furnish the adequate narrative 'dressing' for such a life. As noted earlier however, F is not only concerned with the religious and political background of Partition, but with the social faultlines cutting across Indian society. It is worthwhile noting in this context that Saleem is involved in the Bombay millworker strikes after his arrival in the city in 1922. A new mill owner has increased the working hours without increasing wages – an example other mill owners might follow as the workers fear. Yet the new owner is none other than Seth Dharamchand, still not engaged in film financing at the time. His figure consequently marks a red thread; "*from Dharamchand to Seth Dharamchand to Dharamchand and Sons to…who knows what it might be today.*"[177]

With his figure – widely respected by Bombay society as an influential, successful businessman – the novel gives a wry reminder of the exploitation upon which the fortunes of the entrepreneurial elites that rose to prominence at the beginning of the twentieth century were largely based and upon the questionable admirability of its representatives. In this too the text slyly marks its contemporaneity, after all the growing inequality in India strenuously obliterated by the marketers of India Shining has its roots here. Ultimately, the historic juncture traced in Khair's novel finds its paradigmatic icon in the bioscope projector travelling on the bullock cart, spelling the arrival of the modern on the back of the archaic. This evocative metaphor epitomizes not only popular Hindi cinema in its negotiation of traditional social conventions and individual aspirations, but it encapsulates the Indian experience of modernity as such.

If the novel tenders a 'guided' reading experience in so far as all perspectives ultimately converge, it also communicates ontological insecurity.

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[177] F, 221.

Here cinema becomes the critical filter through which India's formative antilogies – a heterogeneous cultural tradition versus a grafted[178] modernity and the attendant clash between identities defined by familial, caste and communal affiliations on the one hand and the idea of equal citizenship on the other – assume legibility and palpable sensual acuity. Memory is not after all about reliability, but about its negotiation with the present as Bandana Chakrabarty clarifies:

> Meenakshi Mukherjee believes that the pressure of the question 'Do you remember?' generates the form of the novel. The 'Do you remember?' refrain tries to establish reliability. We, as readers, are sent into an endless oscillation between faith and disbelief and we must accept the relativity of these past events. (Chakrabarty 2007, 176)

If classical Hindi cinema as a popular cultural product emerges here as a lucid prism to study the evolution of social and political subjectivities in India[179], F reflects a wider trend in this regard. Hence the novel is both rooted in and reflexive of the growing scholarly interest in popular Indian cinema and particularly Hindi cinema, which characterized the past two decades. Yet the text *never* surrenders to nostalgic myopia, but instead signposts the continuity of the past.

> We, in India, seem increasingly to be living in an age of nostalgia. The pace of technological advancement effecting swift changes in society necessitates on the rebound, misty-eyed visions of the past. Regurgitation of the trauma of the Partition seems to be a continuing trend in Indian English fiction. One wonders what the reason for this spate of "Partition" novels is—is it a cathartic exercise or is it a necessary exorcising of the ghosts that refuse to be ignored? […] With the battle lines fast being re-drawn, with the communal tensions rising in a crescendo, the exercise of writing novels of the Partition is being cheered and welcomed. (Mitra 2005, 12)

Published precisely six decades after Partition and one and a half decades after the demolishing of the Babri Masjid, the novel inscribes a crucial historic juncture at which the events of Partition again assume topicality. F marks the attempt to flag the political and social fault-lines that emerged then and continue to erode the fragile political consensus of contemporary India.

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[178] "Since twentieth-century industrialization in a society like India's is not the result of a self-propelling industrial (or technological) revolution but a process of change by grafting […], no clear demarcations between social mores, cultural values and lifestyle can be made." (Saari, *Hindi Cinema*, 5.)

[179] The texts of Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Ashis Nandy, Madhava Prasad, Rachel Dwyer and others frequently cited in this study, are exemplary of this tendency.

APPENDIX

"The eight (rethorical and aesthetic) Sentiments recognised in drama and dramatic representation are as follows: Rasa Erotic, Rasa Comic, Rasa Pathetic, Rasa Furious, Rasa Heroic, Rasa Terrible, Rasa Odious and Rasa Marvellous." ─ Bharatamuni

"If the quantity of shadow increases because of the extension of the object's limits in such a manner that sight is lost in it, this shadow is called darkness, like the situation at night. Then the name of shadow vanishes, just as the ability to perceive its limits also vanishes."
─ Ahmad al-Biruni

"Of the thing now gone silent, named Past, which was once Prsent, and loud enough, how much do we know? Our 'Letter of Introductions' comes to us in the saddest state; falsified, blotted out, torn, lost, and but a shred of it in existence; this too is so difficult to read, or spell."─ Thomas Carlyle

Dé di hamain azaadi bin khadag bin dhaal
Sabarmati ké sant tu né kar diya kamaal
(You gave us freedom wihtout shield and sword,
Oh Sant of Sabarmati you have worked wonders)
─Song from the film *Jagriti*

"Hé Ram!"
─ *Mahatma Gandhi's last words*

6. THE BIOSCOPE MAN

The Bioscope Man (2008), a novel by journalist and author Indrajit Hazra narrates the rise and fall of the autodiegetic narrator Abani Chatterjee in late colonial Calcutta. The author's third novel after *The Burnt Forehead of Max Saul* (2000) and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (2003), TBM negotiates its poetological path between private memoir, confessional, erudite cinematographic commentary and cultural history. Focusing the years between 1906 and 1927, the novel gives insight into the social and cultural milieu in which the bioscope emerged. Originally born from the stage, it gradually came into its own as a distinct art form and new popular medium. At the same time the novel provides a sociographic portrait of Calcutta's society, particularly the Bengali bhadralok[1] or "cultured manfolk."[2] Being an alienated member of this group who does not share in its conservative mindset and clerical aspirations enables the narrator to deliver a concise, cynical study of the Bengali bourgeoisie in a time of intense political upheaval and cultural transition.

"[B]orn in the same year as the movies,"[3] Abani Chatterjee graduates from a young truant and avid bioscope spectator to silent film starlet. By nature a wayward drifter, Abani stumbles into the marvelous new world of bioscopes by sheer coincidence and is later ejected from it as suddenly. In this regard the protagonist's fortunes mirror those of the city Kalkutta which declines from a position of subcontinental preeminence to insignificance. Hence TBM illustrates the existential angst confronted by the local elites after Calcutta's demotion from the capital of the Raj to a regional centre in 1911. It is this experience which shapes the narrators' life and that of his family and companions lastingly. With his knack for being in the right place at the right time and supreme sense of detachment, the narrator ─ a picaro and flâneur ─ appears ideally suited to report on colonial society at its dawn, particularly so as the Chatterjees' innate propensity to mishaps exposes the bigotry of ethnic apartheid.

Two tragicomic misadventures affecting the narrator's parents, the arrival of Abani's enterprising young uncle Shombhunath and the transfer of the capital ─ events related in quick succession on the first forty-five pages ─ combine to create a situation that effectively frees the narrator from familial surveillance and social control.

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[1] According to Partha Chatterjee, "respectable folk" marks the Bengali middle class intelligentsia self-given name. (Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 35.)

[2] Chatterji, Bankimcandra. *Ānandamaṭh, or The Sacred Brotherhood.* Trans. Julius J. Lipner. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 4.

[3] TBM, 47. Presumably, the narrator is referring to the Lumières' first film screening in Paris in 1895. (Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 7.)

In this way Abani can join his uncle who is a projectionist at the Elphinstone Picture Palace[4]. After relating the key events of his adolescence in fast forward mode, the narrator is at leisure to present a minute portrayal of colonial society and an evolving popular culture, as the cynosure of which the bioscope was soon to emerge. Notably however, TBM relies relies on a literary classic for its central dramatic motifs. Hence the two pivotal incidents determining the narrator's life are inspired by a quintessential text on the colonial encounter between India and Britain – Edward Morgan Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Yet Hazra's postcolonial take on the text which includes 'recycling' two of Forster's protagonists does away with the original's tendency towards allusion and innuendo. Instead the body is shown staging its resistance to the requirements of modern urban life, thus emerging as the 'culprit' for Tarini and Abani Chatterjee's downfall. But if the arrogance and uptightness of the colonial rulers are good game for the satirical pen of the postcolonial writer, so are the affectations of the Bengali elite and its emerging nationalist elements, here presented through the critical prism of the bioscope.

The English-educated scion of a Bengali middle class family whose father is employed as a clerical worker with the East Indian Raiilway Company, the protagonist seems an unlikely candidate for bioscope stardom. Yet his pale complexion, large, protruding eyes and keen thespian ability predispose him towards a career as silent film actor. Attracted by the distraction and diversion provided by the bioscope, the protagonist soon becomes a canvasser, prompter, projection assistant and eventually, the lead actor. By way of this apprenticeship, the narrator develops an acute understanding of the medium's requirements and potential. Once cast into the maelstrom of the burgeoning new industry, Abani therefore quickly gravitates towards its center. However, in the end he is made to experience the volatility of fate and the momentary nature of success in a medium in continuous transformation.

Set in the first two decades of the twentieth century, a time from which few bioscope reels survive[5], the text features the key sequences of four fictional bioscopes in which the narrator starred as the male lead[6]. In the latter the reel finds its most immediate textual expression as these are inscribed by a cognitive-aesthetic protocol, in which linguistic expression and aesthetic effect are commensurate.

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[4] The Elphinstone Picture Palace was the first permanent cinema in India, founded in the year 1907 by J.F. Madan.

[5] Nitrate film stock, used during most of the silent era is highly flammable and therefore prone to self-ignition. The "single extant Bengali silent film" is "*Jamai Babu* (1931)." (Gooptu, Sharmistha. *Bengali Cinema: 'An Other Nation.'* Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series. 34. London: Routledge, 2011, 27.)

[6] However, the protagonist stars in many more films, some of which he mentions in passing.

Referencing the cinematography of an early stage in film history that was marked by an apparatus with severe technical constraints, it remains to be seen how the passages reflect the latter. But TBM comprises not only of these aesthetically conspicuous formations. The text's narrative discourse is concerned with the gradual emergence of the bioscope and the rapid awakening of politics and business to its enormous potential. As a result, the following chapters necessarily also address the cultural, socio-psychological and political dimensions of the bioscope. Like the preceding two novels, TBM also purposely muddles its fictional status by introducing a number of historic figures, originating in both 'real life' and 'reel life': Among the historic figures crossing the narrator's path one stands out – the German director Fritz Lang alias "the Monocle." As the text invents a new biography for the figurehead of early (silent) film, his most radical cinematic venture, one of his most famous works is also presented in a new light[7].

Other historic figures include Jamshedji Framji Madan, the doyen of Bengali silent film, the director Hiralal Sen and the actors Direndranath Ganguly and Patience Cooper, alias Faith Cooper. Political figures featured in cameo roles include Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhas Chandra Bose and Annie Besant. Since TBM also reads as a phenomenological engagement with the embodied experience of urban life at the beginning of the twentieth century, its recurrent motifs as displayed in the text are discussed as symptoms of a determinate structure of feeling and historic sensibility. In this context the study will discuss the epistemological potential of the concepts of 'modernity' and 'nation' to describe this historic sensibility. Eventually, the extent to which narration is determined by and intervenes in processes of memory has to be addressed, all the more so in an autodiegetic narrative. In preparation for this discussion, the events leading to the narrator's entrance into the world of films merit a summary discussion.

> On an especially humid afternoon in the summer of 1906, Tarini Chatterjee committed an act that would mark a violent turning in his family's history.
>
> The occasion was the inauguration of the spanking new Haora Station building—red brick and iron, very neat and English. Being responsible for the morning and evening schedules of trains plying the Chord Line via Patna, Tarini was one of the seventy-odd dignitaries and senior employees of the East Indian Railway gathered in an area where, till the other day, there had only been a gaggle of tin sheds, narrow platforms and makeshift households of seventeen nondescript families. (TBM, 1)

Thus begins the series of misadventures that mark the central nodes in the plot of TBM. With Haora Station, a Calcutta landmark, the text mobilizes a quintessential topos of the discourse of colonial modernity, i.e., the railway.

[7] Cf. chapter 6.3 Of demons, dames and divines eyes, p. 228ff.

The auspicious occasion of the inauguration of the new station by the East Indian Railway Company, is marked by the triumphal departure of a train with the dignitaries and some of the company's employees, including Tarini. However, the journey is preceded by speeches and a buffet. Abani's father profits duly from the latter by eating vast quantities of spiced and oily snacks before boarding the departing train at the last minute. Too late he realizes that he is not in the wagon designated for Indians and is forced to stay on until the first stop. With its shiny wood and lace curtains, the compartment has the look of a "miniature stage."[8] When a young British girl in a white dress enters and takes her seat opposite a bemused Tarini, thus ignoring the seating apartheid, disaster looms large. When Adela is suddenly called by her father, Tarini's boss Mr. Quested, it becomes clear where the narrative train is headed.

In marked contrast to the hidden, psychological nature[9] of the encounter of Forster's Adela Quested with Doctor Aziz at Marabar Caves, TBM presents a send-up in which the inside is turned out, rather than the outside being turned in. Keen to make a good impression Tarini has prepared an elaborate speech praising progress and the British but before he can conclude it, his stomach overtakes him:

> And that dip in 'Great'—so full of irony, so full of cleverness—undid all the good work of his life in one rushing, rising stream that was so strong that, even though he was sitting against the flow of the train, the gush reached its destination in one low, tight parabolic trajectory.
>
> Miss Adela Quested, of course, had had no inkling of what the man in front of her had been going through. (TBM, 7)

In this arch postcolonial reprise the offender's guilt is thus marked by an indelible stain on Miss Quested's pristine white dress – at once the symbol of sexual purity and racial whiteness. A subdued irony pervades the psychologically acute observation, clearly inspired by the original text. The narrator also seems to share in the negative judgment of the potential of communication across the racial divide. Ambitious, educated but endearingly naïve, Tarini thus epitomizes the predicament of the Bengali babu[10]:

> The middle-class Bengali male […] had little option but to seek advancement in the British orbit in clerical and other jobs in the civil service […]. In the process he was "Westernised": not only did he learn English more or less well, he also learned the language of committee-speak and how to function bureaucratically, and to assimilate in one way or another such emblematic conceptions as "liberty", "nation", "patriotism", "science" and "progress". In this sense, the *bhadralok* were agents of collaboration with British rule, […]. (Lipner 2005, 4f)

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[8] TBM, 3

[9] Parry argues that Forster's novel explores the "far horizons of experience." (Parry, Benita. *Delusions and Discoveries. Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880-1930.* London: Allen Lane, 1972, 261.)

[10] "[A]n urban, westernized, English-educated person." (Khair, Tabish. *Babu-Fictions. Alienation in Contemporary Indian English novels.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, 9f.)

Notably it is not despite but because of his desire to assimilate and please his British superiors that Tarini falters as he deemed it offensive to leave the compartment after Adela's entry. Moreover, the incident is not only the result of his overeating. It also implies that his body's natural inertia has been upset by the train, *the* symbolic vehicle of colonial modernity. If in *A Passage to India*, "man's social destiny is challenged by his unconscious mind,"[11] here the body challenges Tarini's compatibility with the colonial concept of modernity. At this point the narration is interrupted for Miss Quested's musings on Roman *vomitoria* and Tarini's memories of his father's ritual purges. These furnish two culture-historical asides characteristic of the à propos manner in which such commentaries are presented here. Mr. Quested is outraged at his daughter's 'defilement' but with nationalist sentiment being rife after the British Partition of Bengal in 1905, he refrains from discharging Tarini in order not to give further cause for disruption. However, the day after the incident Tarini is demoted to the misplaced baggage department – his new position spelling his new social status.

> But all this did signal the end of the rise of Tarinicharan Chatterjee. It also marked the moment in which Tarini, my father, turned into an unhappy man. From Bholanath to Tarini, from Tarini to Abani, it has been *a broken chain*. But there must have been points, unknown to all three of us, living apart in our own designated bodies and times, where the links locked, briefly, but long enough to pass on a tic, an impairment, a delusion. As I prepare to tell you about myself, it is imperative that I get that fateful afternoon out of the way.
>
> Unknown to me, that afternoon signalled the moment when the hidden chains and pulleys of my life cranked into place to make me the motion picture actor that I would ultimately become. (TBM, 13f) (emphasis added)

Only here the narrator eventually reveals his identity and narrative purpose. In situating his own story amidst that of his forebears, he seeks the missing link that will explain not only his father's failure, but also his own, still looming in the background. The story of Abani's incidental initiation into the world of the bioscope furnishes another tragicomic scene: "When you're sixteen and you're grabbed by the shoulders after having just slapped a showcard on a wall that you have no proprietorial rights over, there are two things you can do: run like the wind or start sniffling your way towards adolescent tears."[12] Abani opts for the latter and – thanks to his innate thespian talents and "a trickle of tears"[13] – is able to escape the looming threat of imprisonment, albeit under the condition that his uncle Shombunath, at that time chief projectionist at the Elphinstone Theatre, joins the Alochhaya Theatre Company.

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[11] Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, 261.
[12] TBM, 15.
[13] TBM, 71.

> And through such a turn of events, I officially entered the world of entertainment and the moving pictures. […] I was also becoming more and more acquainted with the colourful and entertaining adulterated version of Abani Chatterjee.
>
> Within the next few years, not only did I become the assistant to the projectionist at Alochhaya—my job involved carrying reels, loading and unloading them, lighting the lime, perforating film stock, and occasionally even cranking the projector handle—but I also started to understand bioscope as twentieth-century medium of dreams, messages, and power. (TBM, 72f)

Through his work behind the scenes, the narrator expands his grasp of the potential of the new medium while discovering his own "adulterated version" which he enacts for the benefit of his familial audience for the time being. After Tarini's demotion however, life at home has undergone a radical transformation. Due to the Chatterjees' now precarious economic situation, two servants and the bathroom cleaner are dismissed[14]. This precipitates another, literal downfall as Abani's mother Shabitri slips on the moss-covered ground of the perpetually humid, cavernous bathroom[15]. This second cataclysm leaves Shabitri, heretofore the pillar of the Chatterjee household, permanently paralyzed. Nonetheless the narrator cannot help being excited at the upheaval her fall creates: "I was wide awake, bursting with an energy that made me feel as if I was sitting watching a theatre performance being staged just for me."[16]

> I buttoned my pant front and rushed downstairs, peering through the railings of the staircase. Even at that moment on the stairs, I was seeing myself as I would appear to a viewer. I was playing the role of a young boy who was about to discover that his mother had slipped in the bathroom and died. (TBM, 34)

The narrator's acute self-awareness proves crucial to his bioscope fame, yet his detachment and apparent lack of empathy also alienate Abani Chatterjee from the surrounding world. When he discovers that his mother is not "as the script had had it, dead,"[17] Abani betrays no sense of relief. Instead, his mother's pitiful state provides him with the opportunity to train his thespian skills on her:

> So […], I went into my room and in front of the mirror attached to the almirah practiced the look I should have when I visited my vegetable mother. My eyes, bulbous, just short of being goitrous, need to glisten and look the part. The eyes are, after all, the windows to the soul, the veranda of the heart, the courtyard of the spleen, the attic of the bile, the collapsible gate of dreams. As Valentino knew best, the eyes have it. (TBM, 44)

In contrast to the more dirigible expression of the face and body, the eyes are credited with conveying the state of their owner's psyche — of this Abani is well aware.

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[14] TBM, 35.
[15] TBM, 32.
[16] TBM, 34.
[17] TBM, 35.

As a result, he focuses his thespian efforts on the most prominent part of his physique – and rightly so for he soon gains fame as the boy with the large, mesmerizing eyes. The collapse of family life on the other hand does not upset the protagonist too much as he suddenly finds himself free of social constraints:

> So what, you might ask—conditioned to reading those modern European novels that are so popular these days—did I feel seeing my mother now forever confined to her bed? […]? I could tell you that my life snapped into two. Or that I was thrown into the rough sea of chop-chop misery. […]. (TBM, 39)
>
> But why should I want to con you into believing that? In any case, that would be too arm-flailing, too throat-quaking for me. The truth is that I was liberated. It was as if the very pure relationship that I had with myself, all this while confined to the four melting walls of the cavernous bathroom, was now about to extend itself limitlessly, gobbling up everything in its path. (TBM, 39)

While the protagonist embraces his new situation as the opportunity to liberate his closeted ego, he simultaneously addresses a narratee not altogether different from himself, i.e., of Indian or Bengali descent, English-educated and with exposure to popular novels. The fact is worthwhile emphasizing for in these exceedingly dramatic and schmaltzy texts, the westernized Indian elites encountered the European post-Enlightenment mindset. Yet the lives led by 19th century English fiction characters as rendered by "popular Victorian novelists like Wilkie Collins, Marie Corelli, Benjamin Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton and, […] G.W.M. Reynolds"[18] were largely at odds with those of their Indian readers:

> Not all these British novelists used the realist mode, but for the nineteenth-century Indian it was not very easy to distinguish precisely between fictional modes when the life depicted was so unfamiliar. Colourful, expansive, free—the characters […] seemed to lead lives of infinite possibilities, while the life of the nineteenth-century Indian—politically servile, economically deprived and socially circumscribed—seemed to them limited in comparison. (Mukherjee 2012, 6f)

Viewed from this perspective, the misfortune that has befallen the Chatterjee family indeed merits greeting, rather than lamenting. Whereas Tarini – firmly shaped by the notions of duty and honor impressed upon him through his education – cannot envisage a new start after his unceremonial demotion, Abani slips into the role of actor as easily as into a new set of clothes. The irreconcilability of the values inherent in the 19th century popular European novel with Indian social conventions thus finds confirmation in the protagonist's embrace of individualism as the result of happy circumstance. But Abani also derides romantic self-absorption and sentimentality, whether in European novels or popular Bengali theatre. However, as a Bengali Abani remains unfree, a colonial subject. In the end the purported violation of that subject status ends Abani's career prematurely.

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[18] Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Realism and Reality. The Novel and Society in India.* 7th ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, 6.

Two years after his mother's grave accident, the narrator wakes up one night to find her walking about the house. Shabitri confesses that this exercise in self-denial was motivated by the keen desire to exist without wifely or motherly duties. Weighed down by domestic drama and no opportunity to legitimately indulge her own desires, Shabitri saw no other chance but to exit the world of the living – at least physically. Having previously considered his mother's needs only when they suited his own, Abani is astonished by her determination and self-discipline. Notwithstanding regular abuse by the family doctor – a fact of which her son was well aware – Shabitri carried through with her act. However, two weeks after her husband's death, Shabitri follows him, leaving the protagonist orphaned. His parents' death creates a total vacuum that legitimizes the hero to take fate in his own hands – an extraordinary situation as Mukherjee clarifies:

> The picaresque tradition in the European novel had achieved one main purpose—it had liberated the protagonist from the rigidity of a static society into being a free agent […]. […]. The Indian novelist had to operate in a tradition-bound society where neither a man's profession nor his marriage was his personal affair. His life was mapped out by his family or his community or his caste. (Mukherjee 2012, 7)

As Swarupa Gupta notes, "an individual could rise in the social hierarchy by amassing wealth, acquiring education and taking up professions"[19] in early twentieth century Bengal. But while Abani succeeds in the latter and partly also in the first, his education is not formal, but simply the result of learning by doing. However, TBM would not be a *postcolonial* Bildungsroman if it were not for the intervention of historic circumstance. When the King Emperor announces the relocation of the capital to New Delhi, he casts Calcutta's Bengali elite into a prolonged psychological and economic depression. At a time when social mobility was still very limited as enterprising individuals like J.F. Madan began tapping the profits of the entertainment industry, a clerical career now no longer represented a viable option for aspiring Bengalis. As a result many found themselves cast into permanent redundancy.

As an emergent field in which talent and merit, rather than social status or descent were the basis of success, the entertainment industry opens a hopeful career avenue to the protagonist. He thus joins his uncle Shombhunath Lahiri at the Alochhaya theatre as an advertiser and errand boy. But Shombhu is all but happy here. Yet if the Alochhaya initially appears to be artistically and financially stagnating, this changes so as the business-minded boss of the company, Lalji Hemraj Haridas has recognized the profitability of recording his stage productions on film.

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[19] Gupta, Swarupa. *Notions of Nationhood in Bengal: Perspectives on Samaj, c. 1867-1905*. Leiden: Brill, 2009, 53.

6.1 THE MAGIC LANTERN, AGAIN

> As a pujo gift that year, [Shombhu] gave me an absolutely fabulous miniature magic lantern, complete with wicker in the middle and the story of the death of Kangsha fluttering all around. To see King Kangsha's decapitated head flying in a calm, straight horizontal line through space was my first real introduction to moving pictures. (TBM, 20)

Again pre-cinematic optical illusion is referenced by a magic lantern, the contraption encapsulating "the environment into which the cinema was born, the *milieu* which nursed [cinema] through its extended period of invention to about 1903."[20] Here however, the lantern depicts the spectacular decapitation of the demon king Kangsha, a popular Puranic story. The same episode sees a second staging some thirty pages later when the narrator has his cinematic epiphany:

> Even a crusty, middle-aged, hydrocele-afected ogre like Nirmal-babu next door couldn't help but change into something quite un-Nirmal-Babu-like […] after seeing a decapitation, followed by the severed head floating mid-air, supported simply by the sheer, slow gush of a dark gas coming out of the neck. The dark gas was bioscope blood.
>
> He had gone to the Athena three days in a row, watching the same scene […]. I was there sitting between his two sons the second time Nirmal-babu watched the climactic scene of *The Death of Kangsha.* The flying disc that sped across the scene was wobbling. But the levitating head was the most precise, steady movement I had seen in the world. It was far more remarkable than the scene of Kangsha losing his head in the magic lantern that Shombhu-mama had gifted me not long before this. (TBM, 48)

Against the big screen version, the lantern's representation necessarily pales as its apparatus lacks both the narrative and visual scope of the film. But the film has a cinema-historic subtext, too. As the narrator points out, "*[t]he Death of Kangsha* is not considered to be the first feature made in this country simply because it was made by a German along with Indians trained in art direction, stage production and motion picture science in Berlin."[21] If the expertise for producing films initially came from Europe and the US, this was to change soon. Notably the narrator performs several roles simultaneously at this juncture, that of first-hand witness, seasoned film critic and cultural historian. In the latter function Abani also explores Calcutta's theatrical tradition and the different ways in which it prepared the stage for the bioscope – and literally so.

> In places like Alochhaya, Trilochan and the Bengal Theatre House, people thronged to see mostly mythologicals—rotund men in gleaming costumes, their make-up runny with sweat, thundering at women with open hair wailing to everybody's pleasure. The music was loud and when the shahnais broke into their sonorous, dolorous multiple-sound, the heightened emotions were for all to feel inside the hall. The Carlton, on the other hand, was a place strictly for 'English plays'. […] (TBM, 16f)

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[20] Rossell, Deac. "Double Think. The cinema and magic lantern culture." *Encylcopedia of Early Cinema.* Ed. Richard Abel. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, 107.

[21] TBM, 48.

> Vaudeville filled the gaps between the acts and, quite frequently, the performances were peppered with full-fledged dance routines. A few local favourites such as John Bonham and Jiminy Staid and Henrietta Price had, in fact, made their way into 'proper theatre' through their very successful side-acts. […]. The actors were all Anglo-Indian and to all of them Drury Lane and not Barretto's Lane[22] was the place where they would move to once their preparatory work was done. Only occasionally would there be someone visiting from Home, dropping by for a performance before returning to England. (TBM, 17)

If the fact that the theatre is bifurcated along racial lines appears consequential, it is also noteworthy that *both* these traditions filtered into and found expression in popular Indian cinema. In fact, side-acts such as song and dance sequences and comic acts went on to become hallmarks of popular Indian cinema. Yet in the imperial hierarchy, Calcutta is merely a provincial venue, a step on the ladder to the center, towards which all aspiring actors gravitate. But the narrator is dismissive of both the Bengali and the Anglo actors, judging the acting skills of the popular Faith Cooper – the fictional alter ego of Patience Cooper – "apocryphal."[23] Hence her appeal is entirely defined by her "'alabaster skin' and 'charcoal eyes,'"[24] traits also shared by Abani's Anglo film partner and secret love Felicia Miller alias Durga Devi. With his previous exposure restricted to the performing arts, the narrator experiences the (r)evolution of cinema from mere visual documentation to visual illusions inscribed in reel, rather than real space as profoundly compelling.

> But in a way that I still find hard to explain, the bioscope started to turn into something new, something that was becoming more and more young as it got older. It was so different from everything else that was there. I knew that the public pretended very successfully that theater and jatra[25] transported them to a heightened world, where people spoke in a ridiculous way and shouted when they had to speak, shrieked when they had to shout. This was considered to be absolutely normal, the abnormality of it all.
>
> As the years rolled by, the bioscope started becoming something more than just a sophisticated version of picture shows in travelling tents. It went beyond watching the black-and-white moving images of places where one would never go, of occasions that one would never witness. Beyond the goggle of it all was something else that the 'Living Photographic Wonder' provided for me: enactments that couldn't be real were it not for the fact that we were actually seeing these impossible actions. And, above, all, as we became more familiar with the bioscope, the bioscope became more and more *modern.* (TBM, 47f)

Whereas "the perceptions [theatre and opera] offer to the eye and the ear are inscribed in a true space (not a photographed one)"[26] and are consequently limited to that which can be evoked through decoration and props, the bioscope opened up spaces far beyond the reach of most of its spectators.

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[22] A Kolkata street housing most of the city's theatres during the late colonial era.
[23] TBM, 18 .
[24] Ibid.
[25] Popular form of musical folk theatre in Bengal.
[26] Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, 43.

If "the movie theater was originally called 'The Bioscope,' because of its visual presentation of the actual movements of the forms of life (from Greek *bios,* way of life),"[27] it is not the representation of this world that the narrator finds most compelling, but the world of fantasy. To an audience all too familiar with the 'real world' and its constraints, the bioscope provided brief escape. Given its illusory scope, the cinema was thus set to outperform theatre. The fantastic thus emerged as the default mode of popular film. On the other hand however, the new art form relied on the established narratives and style of popular drama which it adopted for the most part. In so far as the first films were filmed plays, this seems entirely consequential, but this use incited the objection of more ambitious visionaries who had recognized its immense potential:

> However, within the many-walled theatre-cum-picture palace and beyond the hubbub of the 'public', there were occasions when theatre and bioscope would meet and mingle. These occasions were prompted by a theatre production drawing in more spectators than usual and the management […] deciding to capture the whole production on camera. Shombhu-mama was dead against bioscoping theatre productions. […] A bioscope is about showing things that can't be seen. Making a bioscope out of a play is neither a play nor a bioscope. It's just making a stupid copy!' (TBM, 74f)

As deployed here, the reel marks a mere extension of the photographic prodcedure in temporal extension. Having grasped the bioscope's immense narrative-visual scope, the narrator's uncle protests this "'artistic mongrelization,'" [28] yet the resulting 'cross-pollination' opened up a wealth of materials and forms of expression for the emergent form. Given the bioscope's intrinsic potential for 'magic' and the deeply religious attitude of most spectators, it is hardly surprising that the 'mythological' – a genre rich in divinities, demons and all manner of magical transformations – emerged as the most popular genre with early film makers like Dhundiraj Govind ('Dadasaheb') Phalke[29] and J.F. Madan. India's oldest and most popular theatrical genre thus found a second life in the bioscopes, where it unlocked a world not previously accessible to the eye

> In 1905 film production was linked with exhibition. J.F. Madan, who had gained a wide reputation in the theatre world of Calcutta, went on to establish the Elphinstone Bioscope Company. In the years that followed, the Madan Theatre began to exercise great influence both inside India and outside. […]. Not only did [Madan] build a vast production empire on the lines of Hollywood but he also imported foreign actresses (Ermline, Patience Cooper and others) to act in Indian mythologicals and folk tales, as Indian females were hesitant to expose themselves to the gaze of the film camera (Vasudev, 1995). For a time, the Elphinstone Company dominated film production in India. (Gokulsing/Dissanayake 2003, 12)

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[27] McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man.* 1964. Ed. William Terrence Gordon. Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2003, 383.

[28] TBM, 75.

[29] Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra" of 1913 is mostly billed as "the first entirely Indian film." (Dwyer/Patel, *Cinema India,* 13.) Since very few other bioscopes have survived, this may be disputed.

As moral stakeholders of the family and community, women were not only barred from 'public exposure' from participating in the new world of the bioscope as actresses, but also as spectators. That women and girls are largely absent from the projection halls and entertainment places frequented by the narrator is not a fact he seems to notice, rather taking it for granted. In response to this, the Alochhaya director later devises a film formula for family audiences[30]. As cinematic 'curiosity shops', early bioscope shows presented a jumble of spectacular incidents, actuality films or newsreels, exhausting the stock of visual experimentation to the audience's delight and sometimes, horror:

> 'You think that all this is what really happens when we have bad dreams?' Bikash had once asked after we returned from an afternoon show. In the feature, a disturbed sleeper in front of a bedroom mirror splits into four women—one, her prone body lying blissfully as if she was dead; two, the reflection of her prone body in the mirror, tossing and turning as if she was possessed; three, a translucent twin above the resting figure floating and swaying like some white seaweed in sea; four, the reflection of this floating phantom looking straight at the audience, leaving my blood frozen in my veins. (TBM, 51)

Features such as the above described exploited the popular fascination with dreams and the human psyche. At the beginning of the twentieth century, *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud gained wide popularity, but the need to make the effects of dreaming *visible* occasioned an inevitably spectacular representation far removed from the actual experience[31]. The narrator's shock at being 'seen' by the screen phantom testifies to his identification with the seen as the premise to the cinematic illusion[32]. The return of the gaze thus acknowledges the spectator and engages her phenomenally as she is tied into a reciprocal gaze that endows the film with aura:

> But looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met ([…]), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent. […] Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. […]. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. (Benjamin/Arendt 1969, 188)

But the moment in which the film attains aura also signals the end of the dream as which projection was previously perceived. The nexus between dream and projection, "a parallelism often noticed by the dreamer when, about to describe his dream, he is compelled to say 'It was like in a movie…'"[33] is thus implicitly addressed here.

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[30] Cf. pages 210 ff.

[31] The novel features another bioscope dream scene, discussed on pages 218f.

[32] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 42ff.

[33] Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings.* Ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 308.

As "a physically real dream that didn't fill itself up with silly day-to-day details,"[34] the bioscope offers a welcome escape from quotidian life for the narrator:

> For me were the raucous Babylonian orgies ([…]); the 'informative movie pictures' depicting the various stages of drunkenness […]; the bioscopes about bandits and demon kings, and, of course, shorts depicting the various ways in which a body can behave outside the realm of the real world (a favourite: a girl looking straight at us and inviting us to follow her on her trek along the walls and ceiling of a room). (TBM, 50)

But again it is the gaze returned and directed at the spectator that pleases and excites Abani most. This self-conscious gesture is not experienced as a disturbance of the illusion here, but as a boon. With this gesture the film implicitly recreates the intimacy of the stage in popular theatre, wherein actors directly faced the audience. At the same time the return of the gaze annotates the spiritual-religious origin of this act as "the eye in *darshan* is best thought of as an organ of tactility, an organ that connects with others,"[35] according to Pinney. Here, the bioscope thus presents itself as an extension of the fairground, circus and variety show, replete with mirror cabinets and acrobats, exposing the spectator to a succession of pleasantly titillating shocks. And while the modality of the experience is still communal, spectators are now isolated from each other through the darkness.

As relayed by the protagonist, the bioscope show resembles a museum of modern life[36], granting all 'exhibits' fleeting attention. However, the hodgepodge manner of presentation provided an opportunity for slipping in unauthorized content:

> As we aged with the bioscope, both Rona and Bikash saw quite a few of those longer features depicting the lives of nationalist criminals, mythological brawlers and the heroes of our time, Khudiram Bose, Prafulla Chaki and the rest of them. These bioscopes were, of course, never mentioned in the programme lists lest the censors make an appearance. Instead, they were tucked in between Fatty Arbuckle, Mack Sennett, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin shorts; or after a bioscope about a train ride through a tunnel ([…]); or right at the end of moving pictures depicting the 'adventures' of far-flung lands like Egypt, Russia and Greenland. But after the few times of seeing them, these clandestine features turned out to be thoroughly boring. (TBM, 50)

As the bioscope show increasingly becomes a public forum, historic events turn into attractions and historic figures into mere actors. Notably, viewing these features to a certain extent rendered the spectators complicit in the crime of screening. The political background of these features in any case merits attention.

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[34] TBM, 50.

[35] Pinney, Christopher. *'Photos of the Gods'. The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India.* London: Reaktion, 2004, 193.

[36] Cf. Charney, Leo. "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity." *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 279ff.

The names of Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki who attempted to assassinate the former Calcutta Presidency judge Kingsford in Muzaffarpur (Bihar) in 1908, invoke the violent and chaotic early phase of the Indian independence struggle[37]. As a result of their highly fail-prone methods, Bose and Chaki did not enjoy undivided support among Bengalis[38]. Consequently their legacy does not lie in their immediate political impact, as Partha Chatterjee points out:

> The problem lies in trying to measure the linear impact of the so-called terrorist movement, defined by a distinct ideology and strategy, in comparison with other competing movements. Instead, if one looks for the horizontal spread achieved by certain events in facilitating the imagination of a political community called the nation, one might better appreciate the historical effects and significance of the early revolutionary movement in Bengal. (Chatterjee 2012, 286)

Yet the narrator's political exposure is not confined to bioscope spectatorship. Hence his first, accidental encounter with the movement for Home Rule deserves consideration in the context of this discussion.

> It wasn't just one showcard. There were scores of the same poster slapped around all over the area […]. *The Demand for Home Rule,* it read. But what caught our eye was the darkened-to-toast lithographic picture of a lady who stood there in the centre of the showcard, […]. […].
>
> Her eyes looked away from the viewer. […]. Instead, she seemed to be lost looking at an idea, her eyes taking on that slightly unbalanced look of a Lakkhi Owl, a bored but arrogant look that said nothing about what she was seeing. She looked as if she was *over*looking rather than looking. But most peculiarly, her left hand ([…]) was raised up to her right breast, a bit higher actually. And that was what made her look so other-worldly and, dare I say, desirable to a sixteen-year-old boy with no real knowledge of the fluttering, flapping inflammatory world of women. (TBM, 60)

As the protagonist is standing in the office of the Alochhaya theatre company after being captured slapping showcards of a rival theatre on its walls, Abani reminiscences about this first visit, fuelled by his desire to discover the secret of this woman. But when the 'star' of "*The Demand for Home Rule*"[39] turns out not to be a young actress or dancer, but the elderly British theosophist Annie Besant who has come to advocate Indian self-rule, the boys are crestfallen[40]. Allured by her image, the narrator and his friends had expected "a foreign dance drama" and are suitably sobered by the rally speech that the exclusively male audience is made to witness. On this occasion, the narrator also has his first encounter with a species he soon despises:

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[37] Chaki and Bose killed two women with the bomb intended for Kingsford. Prafulla later shot himself to avoid capture, while Chaki was tried and hanged shortly after.

[38] Cf. p. 209.

[39] TBM, 61.

[40] Besant lived in India since 1893 and made Home Rule her main cause in 1913. Presumably it is around that time that the appearance is set.

> Today's crowd was different. It seemed to be formed of the louts and the gentlemen as well as a third type: men who were walking with reserve as if the future of Man was tucked inside their inner pockets. These people, who formed the bulk of the crowd that was entering, walked as if they were more comfortable marching. This made them appear like gentlemen who were trying to hide the fact that they had soiled their undershorts that lay below their astoundingly white dhutis. (TBM, 62)

Although he derides the men's ridiculous deportment, the narrator seems dimly aware of the power they will wield in the future. As the first speaker Kakuza Okakuro[41] comes on, it becomes clear what has drawn these men to the rally. Unfamiliar with this "scholar-ideologue and art expert of international repute,"[42] Abani finds Okakura "one patronizing Oriental."[43] His figure is exemplary of the particular political and cultural climate prevailing in Bengal during the first two decades of the twentieth century – a moment that marked the confluence of nationalism, pan-Asianism and art[44]. Keen to establish the credentials of a genuinely pan-Asian art superior to Western art, Okakura represents a "powerful proselytising ideology." [45] However, his oratory powers are ineffective with Abani. When an elderly lady takes to the lectern, the narrator is initially unable to relate the woman in white to the image of the young woman on the poster:

> She was wearing a white sari, but she was wearing it strangely. […]. But as the hand fluttered, I noticed that another face was forming on the puffy face. There was a faint shimmering, her whole face blurring as if it was travelling inwards at great speed. And then I saw that it was her. She was the woman on the poster. (TBM, 67)

> It was her, the silly, old woman with nothing but age in her eyes, hair and outfit. On the poster, she had seemed divine, what we used to call 'American'. It turned out that the woman in the poster had become the sea-elephant who was now lecturing us about how rotten everything and everyone had become. (TBM, 68)[46]

The contrast between this moment and the earlier moment mirrors the narrator's stark disappointment, which turns into pure revulsion as Besant proclaims that "'Indian men do not deserve to be free politically until they give freedom socially to Indian women.'"[47] Bred into a culture in which women and girls are confined to the house, the narrator takes the fact that women are virtually absent from the public sphere for granted. Measured against the narrator's standard of femininity as defined by youth, beauty and

[41] The text spells his name as Okakuro, rather than Okakura.
[42] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *The Making of a New'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 167.
[43] TBM, 66.
[44] Cf. Guha-Thakurta Op. Cit.
[45] Ibid., 169.
[46] Perhaps not accidentally, the comparison of Besant to a sea-elephant recalls Lewis Carroll's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter", where the Walrus' self-important speech lures the intrepid oysters into his mouth.
[47] TBM, 68.

docility, the outspoken Besant necessarily fails. In response to her accusation, Abani who is still unaware of her public fame demands to know: "'And who are you, Madam, that so longingly undertakes to set *our* house in order?'"[48] After this outburst, Abani and his friends leave forthwith, trailed by the angry cries of the Alochhaya theatre's gatekeeper. Soon the rest of the audience takes up the battle cry and derides Besant's patronizing attitude, thus bringing the ideological clash between Western liberalism and Indian nationalism with its conservative, patriarchical underpinnings to a head. If the protagonist rejects foreign appropriation of the Indian national cause, he is no more favorably disposed towards those seeking to achieve independence through terrorist acts.

The fifth chapter of the novel compiles a brief chronology of Bengali nationalism from underground movements haphazardly conducting largely ineffective 'Direct Actions' against the partition of Bengal[49] in 1905, into increasingly organized and efficient guerilla groups causing fear and public disruption in 1917:

> This time round, it wasn't the old 'anarchists' [...] that were creating a ruckus. It was the turn of unnamed groups to conduct 'action'. The shadowy members of these shadowier organizations had decided to take Direct Action against people who traded in European goods and services. […]. But unlike with the old boys with their toys, this time there was no hormonally charged wake-up call, just a blowpipe shower of poisoned darts.
>
> The city was becoming home to an increasing number of gangs and private armies. And if one looked through all the noise and smoke of 'Bande Mataram' and the country-as-Goddess nonsense, they were just armies of hooligans going about their jobs the way bioscopewalas and moneylenders and doctors went about theirs. (TBM, 136f)

Fitting into the political history sketched here, the text briefly mentions another future freedom fighter – Subhas Chandra Bose. Outraged by the article of an English author contrasting the 'natural' virtue of the Celtic race with the innate brutality of the Teutonic race, Bose compiles a letter to the editor in which he points to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 as proof to the contrary[50]. Although marginal to the narrative of TBM, the presence of Bose's figure marks both the historic ineluctability of his persona in discussing the political freedom movement and Bengal's specific sociocultural sediment, which gave rise to both freedom fighters and politicians, as well as writers and artists of international renown. Proof of the text's sublime sense of irony, the politically disaffected narrator soon emerges as a nationalist bioscope icon.

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[48] TBM, 68.

[49] The first partition of Bengal was perpetuated along territorial lines. However, since it privileged the Muslim population in the eyes of many Hindu Bengalis, it was revoked in 1911. The second partition in 1947 led to the creation of a largely Hindu West Bengal and a predominantly Muslim East Bengal that was part of Pakistan.

[50] TBM, 177.

Abani's disregard for the nationalists is not so much the result of prejudice or arrogance however, than of having understood the thoroughly mundane, egoistic motives driving many of its representatives:

> These oddballs were mostly oily-haired students who suddenly found themselves charged with an energy that came from nowhere and settled inside them like sediment gunk. They changed their attire, spewed slogans and catchphrases ([…]) and made noises about changing the world. At the bottom of this pile was the bhadralok loafer criminal class, breeding young people who were more terrified of becoming middle-aged and then old than living out their lives under an English administration. Infiltrating into this pile of flotsam were the pure and simple thugs, thieves and criminals. For them, 'nationalism' was an opportunity for expanding their business [...]. 'Movement' clearly suggests motion. But the 'Independence Movement' was a stagnant mosquito-breeding pool that suddenly formed when many gutters coalesced. (TBM, 171)

In contrast to the martyr figures Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose, the elements of this "bhadralok loafer criminal class" are content to be recognized as rebels, rather than acting as such. According to the narrator's sobering diagnosis, the movement is thus the combined result of bourgeois ennui, faddism and sheer greed. With this rather graphic deconstruction, the narrator simultaneously debases nationalist nostalgia and mythology – tendencies which characterized Indian politics after 1992.

Calcutta's bioscope entrepreneurs including the Alochhaya director Lalji Hemraj Haridas are quick to jump on the bandwagon to exploit audiences' nationalist sympathies for their own purposes. Lalji's erudite production strategy based on the "'Geometry of Taste'" [51] thus furnishes a superb illustration of his business acumen and profound grasp of Indian social conventions. Diagnosing a need for rousing, albeit morally impeccable films, the director has decided to wedge the company's future bioscope ventures between "immorally effective" and "morally irreproachable entertainment." The rationale on which this business plan is hinged, is as simple as appealing:

> If virtue is always rewarded and sin always punished, if good always triumphs over evil, and if the bad man is always punished miserably at the end of the bioscope, everyone's satisfied—the authorities, the family, the individuals. […] Vice will be the main theme of most of our features, but in every one of them virtue will triumph. (TBM, 147)

The combination of this principle with popular historic and/or literary plots that indirectly cater to anti-British sentiment, inaugurates the Alochhaya Company's phenomenal success in the bioscope business. But the geometry of taste as presented here also marks a wry critical-scholarly comment on the particular cultural climate and financial interest out of which popular Indian cinema emerged and which remained its most resilient constraint to innovation.

[51] Cf. Appendix, figure 1, p. 247.

In its adherence to established moral conventions realized primarily through the punishment of deviant behavior, the popular film follows a formula consistent with Indian social sensibility. As such, it ensures a large audience and profit maximization — a fact unambiguously reflected in the "mammoth gold-plated statue of a reclining Ganesh"[52] that presides over Lalji's office. Like Saleem Lahori, Abani Chatterjee is also acutely aware and wary of profiteers taking advantage of the freedom movement. One such individual is the businessman Balendranath Sarkar:

> The word out on the street was that Bolu had made quite a lot of money by 'converting' Manchester cotton into homespun cloth. Who could have been behind all those tiny production plants remaking dhutis, saris and all other 'made-from-Indian-cotton' items? Why hadn't the authorities shut these plants, or been so quiet about Gandhi's latest call to boycott English goods? One will never know. There were dhutis at the Bagbazaar shops with the name 'Khudiram Bose' woven along the border. (TBM, 207)

A symbol of his loyalty to profit, rather than the national cause, Sarkar's contraband dhotis remain, while their inventor receives his punishment and is swallowed whole by the text[53].

6.2 BLACK HOLES AND CAVES—IN MODERNITY'S CRADLE

While familiarizing readers with the Chatterjee house, the narrator explores two rather uncommon locales — the garbage heap in the courtyard and the large, humid bathroom. Prima facie his purpose seems to be that of highlighting the decrepit state of the Chatterjee house, the only flush toilet having been installed in the room of Abani's uncle Shombhu. Until his mother's fall, this is the only place allowing the narrator's imagination to expand and his subjectivity to become fluid.

> Each time I entered the huge wet room that ricocheted darkness, I was no longer in a world inhabited by family, friends, nose gunk, theatre, or the bioscope. This was a dark temple dedicated to the individual, a place where I stopped being anyone else but myself—that is, the chap who orders my thumb to wiggle […] and it complies. I, in that bathroom of ours, had no father, mother or name. It was one stop away from being everyone else but myself. (TBM, 29)

This dark, humid space exudes an aura uncharacteristic of bathrooms in so far as it lacks the bright light which commonly alerts the subject to its physical body and its deficiencies. Being moist and warm, this place conspicuously resembles a womb or a cave. And like Plato's Cave, it is peopled by shadows:

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[52] TBM, 145.
[53] The incident is discussed on pages 215f.

> The other place one had to see was our bathroom. It was a cavern on the first floor, a massive room that lost any sense of being held together by a ceiling and walls the moment it was illuminated. And it was illuminated, during day as well as night, by a single kerosene lantern that threw shadows across the walls, shadows like living things made of expanding and contracting gas. […] The walls that seemed to be lost in the distance had no distinct colour. But in the unflickering light of the lantern, they did take on a hue, and one hue only: the dark, viscous shade that colours the inside walls of old people's veins. (TBM, 29)

The kerosene lantern that casts fluctuating shadows renders this a very private projection hall where "the spectator *identifies with himself* […] as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness),"[54] However, there is no image available for the spectator to identify with. As a consequence of this peculiar ambiance and the scarce illumination, the room invites an exploration of the psyche – introspection, rather than spectation. Hence, the subject turns in upon himself, projecting his own images which convert the place in into a human organ and by extension, the house into a living organism. If the bathroom marks the house's primary excretion organ, it also grants access to the 'underworld':

> With two dirty red bricks as pedestals, this was where one unburdened oneself. Looking into the orifice as one crouched, one would have guessed that it led to the centre of the earth. But more than connecting our surface world to a subterranean lava-spewing landscape, The Hole [sic] was a short cut to a dark, noisy underworld. As I hung on my haunches suspended between the state of being Abani and me, I would ponder about how the denizens of that underworld were already acquainted with bits that emanated from my body—forgetting, of course, that other members of the Chatterjee household also visited the bathroom. (TBM, 30)

If the narrator's fascination with excreta implies a resilient anal fixation, his fantasy of this underworld has a real, social dimension that is thrown into sharp relief some two hundred pages later when another hole to the underworld opens, out of which a boy covered in muck clambers. As the abyss suddenly opens in the other direction, not receiving but ejecting something, the narrator's loo meditations find a sinister echo as the inside is once again briefly turned out[55]. In its womb-like aspect however, the bathroom holds only one terror, namely the possibility of being ejected through the aperture. In so far the bathroom symbolizes a transitional space, a site of emergence in which identity is not permanent, but provisional.

> Myself, Abani Chatterjee, could give way to any other person—anyone I chose to be. Without a mirror in the room, it was actually easier to become Warren Hastings with a nasal voice, Lord Krishna with supple wrists, Tipu Sultan with a mechanical neck—why, even Tarini Chatterjee—than to remain myself. In that bathroom, I was other people. (TBM, 29f)

[54] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 49.
[55] Cf. p. 216f.

In terms of its being a transformational site galvanizing subconscious feelings and fears, the bathroom observes a function analogous to that of the caves in *A Passage To India*. Assuming that the cave is "the symbolic centre [,] organically related to the whole"[56] of Forster's text, here it also pervades the text as a leitmotif. TBM features several metaphorical caves including not only bathrooms and sewer holes, but a prison cell and a temple. The incident in which the narrator takes the director Fritz Lang to see Calcutta's famous Kalighat Temple is worthwhile analyzing in this context. Notably, the narrator's lively evocation of the place is heightened considerably in its sensual effect by the liberal dose of cocaine which he consumed on the way at Lang's instigation. Dark, humid and seething with devotees, the temple resembles the digestive tract:

> One feature common to the interiors of all temples is their wetness. Even the driest of structures hold on to a moisture that makes them glisten in the dark. The frog's back appearance adds only mould to the piling congregation—crowds entering the snake's gullet and coming out with an invisible slick coated all over their bodies and their minds. […]. In the right frame of mind, one realized that one was in the belly of a beast that was sweating out it special secretions. (TBM, 259)

Again the ambiance gives the narrating subject the feeling of being inside an organism, namely the belly of an amphibian creature. In this way religious devotion becomes a test of faith comprised essentially of an act of submergence. The 'invisible slick' has an altogether unsalutory appeal, a noisome effusion preventing clear vision, sensually as well as mentally. Notably however, the body is essential to this experience of divine communion. If the narrator is ill at ease in the subterranean ambiance of the temple, Calcutta's modern amenities seem to agree better with his temperament:

> A tram, unlike a train, with which the Chatterjee family was more familiar, was a benevolent vehicle. It travelled at a luxurious speed and did so without making its passengers feel that they were not part of the immediate surroundings. Its pace was like Shombhu-mama drawling 'One one thousand, two one thousand' aloud as he rotated the camera's handle, cranking things down to 14 or 16 frames a second in an even, exact speed—unless he needed to slow things down for a comic sequence. (TBM, 129)

Since both tram and cinema frame the passenger-spectator's perspective, a moderate speed in accordance with embodied vision allows a pleasurable reception of the surroundings. For Benjamin, "[t]hat which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film."[57] Apparently, the narrator is agreed with him, after all a tram is but a conveyor belt for humans.

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[56] Stone, Wilfred. "The Caves of *A Passage to India.*" *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation.* Ed. John Beer. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985, 16.

[57] Benjamin Walter. *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968, 175.

And while the tram affords the opportunity to observe urban life, the car which the narrator buys after his first major hits, provides a means to both see and to *be seen* in return. The protagonist likes to sit in his chauffeur driven Ford Model T, while feigning immersion in a book, thus giving pedestrians the opportunity of seeing the bioscope star and dandy Abani Chatterjee. But the Alochhaya films enjoy great popularity not only among Bengalis. Hence the Company director and his star are invited to a party on the lawns of an exclusive British club. And while the Indian invitees are not allowed inside the club's premises, its members are keen to meet the famous actor while Lalji's new business partner named Ronny Heaslop monopolizes the conversation. To the protagonist's horror, his film partner "'Durga Devi has left the country.'"[58] Disconsolate, he begins to get very drunk. When Heaslop introduces Abani to Mr. Quested who confesses that his daughter Adela is a great fan, the pawns are positioned for another major debacle looming on the narrative horizon.

Apparently unaware of the narrator's relation to Tarini Chatterjee, Adela hails Abani as ""India's Valentino.""[59] In his state of advanced ebriety the latter is simply desperate to refresh himself and thus ventures into forbidden territory, trailing Miss Quested straight into the Ladies' bathroom. Just as Abani washes his face, she reappears and begins to scream, precipitating a comic tumble worthy of a slapstick comedy:

> I panicked. Instead of turning the tap off and proceeding to explain matters, I tried to move away from and towards her at the same time. In the process, one of my legs caught the other and I fell on her like a lizard that had just lost its grip on the ceiling. As I lay on her, my head foaming with smashed-to-smithereens thoughts of self-preservation, her scream continued, this time directly into my ears. I don't know how long it took for everyone to rush into the Club's north wing L-A-D-I-E-S Cloakroom, but by the time Ronny Heaslop's fiancée, that is Edward Quested's daughter, Adela Quested, was extricated from under my weight, the deed had been done. (TBM, 196)

Culminating the series of Chatterjee mishaps, this third and last downfall causes Abani considerable suffering and abruptly ends his career. That it involves the same 'victim' as the first incident, namely Miss Adela Quested, now engaged to the effusive Ronny Heaslop is crucial in this context as it implies that the protagonist cannot escape his destiny. In contrast to the train compartment, the ladies' bathroom marks a far more severe breach of conduct as it transgresses both race and gender boundaries. With its impressive size, elegant furniture and bright lighting this bathroom is more reminiscent of a salon and thus stands in stark contrast to the cavernous Chatterjee bathroom. As a result, the befuddled protagonist is unable to discern its private designation until it is too late.

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[58] TBM, 185.
[59] TBM, 188.

The club members immediately recognize the incident as a native's assault on the virginity of a British compatriot, their bias vis-à-vis Indians preventing them from realizing the innocuous nature of the encounter. But unlike his Forsterian predecessor Dr. Aziz Abani is not tried in court and consequently unable to prove his innocence. After having run afoul of the British, the protagonist also finds himself exiled from Bengali society.

> But what really lay there was my future in tatters. My one single tumble was much more real than the one that my mother had concocted. And what made it more real was that it turned me overnight from bioscope's top talent and draw into an industry leper, a member of the bhadralok loafer-criminal class. It was as if I had been transported to the edge of the world. It was like being shipped to Australia. (TBM, 197)

The analogy is doubly significant since Australia was not only a British penal colony but is also the exile of Felicia Miller alias Durga Devi, forcibly deported by her father to prevent her from continuing to act in the bioscopes. Now stamped as a "hormone-reeking sleazeball who gave the people of this genteel town a bad name,"[60] Abani is unable to secure any good roles and remains idle for the following five years. To add insult to injury, a bioscope based upon the incident is produced under the title "*Mr. Banik, Master Actor*" and becomes a box office hit. When offered the chance to act in a major European production titled "*The Indian Tomb*", the narrator is understandably exhilarated. The good news comes to Abani via an agent, namely the former entrepreneur Balendranath Sarkar, now gone into the film business. However, the role is a minor one and not that of the romantic hero as Abani had expected. After Sarkar's speedy departure, precipitated by Abani's disinterest, the protagonist steps out onto the street to a great commotion:

> As I reached very close to the epicentre, I noticed a young man, not older than a boy, really, generously covered in muck clamber out of a hole. The sinewy figure, with only its eyes and teeth blinking white, could have been one of those underworld demons I would worry about as a boy at the Chatterjee household.
>
> So there I was confronting another Hole. This one was far from being the most private gateway to hell. It was a perfectly round circular disk of emptiness and depth in the middle of the road near the centre of a city that only ten years ago had been the capital of the country. The boy had stepped out and was standing with a rope tied around his waist and covered with something dark and noxious […]. (TBM, 218)

As the boy reports that he found no one down below, it becomes clear that someone must have fallen through the manhole and that this someone is none other than Sarkar. With him, Abani's last hope of reestablishing himself as an actor has vanished in Calcutta's underworld, fulfilling the narrator's earlier premonitions. But the incident symbolizes not only the narrator's irreversible social descent, but also that of the city, Calcutta.

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[60] TBM, 201.

At this point, the modern surface of bourgeois Calcutta presents itself as porous while the gaping hole threatens to absorb the entire city like a drainpipe. Dangerous urban topographies are thus a paramount theme of the novels: While NGIS also sinks one of its characters in a sewer, TLJEL explores the composition of the contents of Calcutta's sewers. In the latter novel also, the task of deposing of bodily wastes after water has become too noxious for bodily contact is performed by air blasts. However, only the rich have access to such sanitation, leaving the poor exposed to the impact of the poisonous water. Like the sewer boy, Abani too appears irremediably stained after the bathroom incident – contaminated and untouchable for the rest of society. Yet before his abrupt descent into cinematic oblivion, he stars in a number of successful bioscopes, four of which are 'projected' in/by the text. Notably, these are conveyed in two different modalities; as making-of accounts integrated with narrative discourse and as spectator accounts, relayed in passages typographically set off from the rest of the text.

> ***Long shot of a room. At the far end, we see a young boy tossing and turning in bed. On the other side stands a giant cupboard with a mirror and a carving of a stag's head. It is night and the only light comes from the moon that can be seen through a vast window.***
>
> ***Medium shot of the boy tossing and turning in the moonlight.***
>
> ***Close-up of the boy's face. It is crunched up with tension* […].**
>
> ***The title card reads: 'The young Prince Prahlad is having a bad night. Like every night, he is wracked with uneasy dreams.'***
>
> ***Medium shot of Prahlad's mouth opening and a white, translucent ether seeping out of it. The prince is still tossing in his bed and is completely unaware of the mist-like emissions from his mouth travelling across the room and taking shape near the cupboard.* […].**
>
> ***Medium shot of the mirror which now shows a full-formed human body still swirling into complete shape. But instead of a human face, the head solidifies into that of a lion.*** (TBM, 81)

The atmospherically dense 'screening' which the above passage perpetuates is noteworthy not only for its conspicuous filmscript jargon, but also for the structural decomposition of the filmic text reflected in it. And also focalization and its impact merit evaluation. Apart from the plural pronoun in the second sentence, there is no indicator of the narratee's presence. And while the shot directions imply a camera perspective and thus a familiar "visual narrative instance,"[61] the camera is not granted visual sovereignty here as the second sentence clearly implies viewership. In so far as the text is premised upon the presence of an audience, it can be said to 'project' onto a virtual screen.

[61] Kuhn, Markus. "Film Narratology: Who Tells? Who Shows? Who Focalizes? Narrative Mediation in Self-Reflexive Fiction Films." *Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization. Modeling Mediation in Narrative*. Ed. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, 262.

It is noteworthy that in this mode of textual projection, each shot at once comprises a basic visuo-spatial entity and a meaningful unit in the syntax of the filmic text. So while focalization appears phenomenally uncoupled from the existence of an anthropomorphic narrating agency, the act of 'translation' is textually marked. For the recipient, the shot directions are salient in this context as they activate the cognitive frame 'film'. Simultaneously however, the shot directions imply a particular spatiotemporal relation of 'spectator' and seen. In other words, the shot directions stand in for an act of focalization while the narratee is configured primarily as an implied spectator thereof. In this way, the apparatus/dispositif as that entity which *includes* the subject of projection[62] is textually enacted. In other words, the mode of presentation implies and relies on the identification of the narratee with the subject of projection. In this way the narratee is at once projector and spectator – a reciprocal formation which Metz describes thus:

> When I say that 'I see' the film, I mean thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium […]. Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet which records. (Metz 1982, 51)

The 'reel passage' then does not only signpost the agency of the narratee, it simultaneously alerts us to the active, projective nature of cinematic vision. By the same token this mode of writing advertises its intrinsic diegetic limits, namely the lack of ulterior, diegetic information. Without any 'telling' to complement the 'showing', the projection cannot be integrated with the main narrative. The subsequent section, conceived in the heterodiegetic mode of narration is thus devoted to a summary of the film's central events. Herein, the protagonist of the previous 'shots' serves as reflector figure:

> The most recent occasion when Prahlad had disappointed his father was when he had fainted at the sight of blood. The encounter had been postponed for as long as things like that can be postponed. To make matters especially humiliating, it wasn't even human blood that was spilled. At the annual festival, twelve buffaloes were sacrificed at the altar of Lord Maheshwar. It was the usual thing. But unusual for Prahlad, […]. (TBM, 83)

It seems consequential that the text, after submitting Prahlad's figure to the implied spectator's scrutiny from all angles, presents him from the interior perspective now. With the scenic mode of representation that prevails in this section, the text engenders both a sense of immediacy and psychological acuity.

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[62] "In a general way, we distinguish the *basic cinematographic apparatus [l'appareil de base]*, which concerns the ensemble of the equipment and operations necessary to the production of a film and its projection, from the apparatus [*le dispositif*] […], which solely concerns projection and which includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed." (Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings.* Ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 693.)

But the projection mode is not only abandoned for convenience's sake as perpetual repetition can flatten the cinema-aesthetic effect into tedium. This section which stars Abani as Prince Prahlad in his debut film could also be regarded to present a psychological role profile of the prince, the distance between role and actor being marked here by the third person. The film narrates a notorious episode from the *Vishnu Purana*, the story of the good prince, a pious devotee of Vishnu, who is held captive by the demon king Hiranyakashipu. With the help of Lord Narasimha, an avatar of Vishnu with the body of a man and the head of a lion, the prince is able to defy his father Hiranyakashipu. Despite the mythological subject matter however, the story is not out of touch with the lived reality of colonial Calcutta. Tales of oppression and heroic defiance were not coincidentally extremely popular at the time as Wadia argues:

> The British regime in India did not bother to interfere in film-making so long as there was no overt attack on the Imperial rule. [...] There were umpteen number of films set against the background of a tyrannical *rajah* or *thakur* or *nawab* oppressing the people who would ultimately overthrow the tyrant with the help of the hero or heroine acting as *deus ex machina*. In the finale, a new ruler would be installed generally, the son of the tyrant, depicted as an ideal ruler of benevolent nature. Where the ruler was a good soul, it was his minister, who was the villain of the piece. (Wadia 1985, 21)

Rulership was thus hinged upon character, but remained tied to an authoritarian and feudal notion of governance."Using accounts of resistance to Mughal incursion, these works provided striking allegories for the struggle for political autonomy under British colonial rule."[63] In view of the state of affairs it is hardly surprising that the story of Prahlad was filmed several times. "Bakhta Prahlada" which presents the earliest cinematic version of the story also marked the first sound film in Telugu[64]. However, the version presented here is worthwhile discussing also because it presents another cinematic dream scene manifesting as the 'visitation' of a divine spirit – if also a benevolent one, conjured up by the sheer power of Prahlad's faith:

> ***Long shot of the room with the lion-man apparition hovering at one end and Prahlad still in his bed. The reclining figure lifts his hands up to his chest to form a pranam.***
>
> ***The lion-man lifts one of its legs, brings it up and across its waist, even as it keeps standing.***
>
> ***Close-up of Prahlad. He opens his eyes with a start.***
>
> ***Title: 'Prabhu! Save me!'***
>
> ***Long shot. Prahlad is sitting up. The moon is shining. There is no one but the boy in the room. Iris-in on the moon.*** (TBM, 82)

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[63] Morey, Peter and Alex Tickell, "Introduction: Indias of the Mind: History, Culture, Literature and Communalism." *Alternative Indias. Writing, Nation and Communalism.* Ed. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell.. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, xiii.

[64] Cf. Willemen/Rajadhyaksha, *Encyclopedia of the Indian Cinema*, 235.

With the setting "*bathed in a light that seems to be moonlight reflected off and refracted from the white mist*"[65], the mystical atmosphere is suited to evoking the ontological insecurity of the dream. In so far as haunted dream sequences and devices such as the iris shot of the moon mark staples of early silent film, the above sequence represents a typical example of the latter, and even a specific cinematography, namely the expressionist. Since the heavy, static camera imposed severe constraints on the visual effects that could be evoked, immediate legibility was guaranteed by the mise-en-scène that tacitly declared each element in the image a clue or hint. With regard to its audience address, the film could be regarded to answer to an emergent desire among the Bengali spectators for self assurance and historic continuity:

> Quite a large number of silent films till 1933 were mythologicals. They created a new interest in India's ancient heritage. There were also devotionals [...]. These films gave a psychological satisfaction to the people who were and still are steeped in religion.
>
> Historicals presented many a glorious chapter in Indian history from the days of Ashoka and Chandragupta to Harsha of Thaneshwar to the great Moghul Emperors and Rajput princes and right up to Shivaji Maharaj and the Peshwas. (Wadia 1985, 22)

The celebration of virtue, devotion and suffering also characterizes the second bioscope in which Abani stars, a cinematic adaptation of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's[66] 1882 novel *Anandamath*. This section again comprises of a 'shot-by-shot account' and a heterodiegetic summary recounting the plot alternately in the scenic and panoramic mode of presentation. Here the text may have been inspired by J.F. Madan who had acquired the rights to Bankim's oeuvre which encapsulates the ideas of the 'Bengal Renaissance'[67].[68] As a result of its problematic political content however, *Anandamath* was not filmed until 1952. With this production TBM consequently addresses the conflicted historic juncture at which it is situated – a moment which saw the mass mediation and popularization of Bengal's literary and cultural heritage. Set at the time of the Sannyasi Rebellion in Bengal, *Anandamath* presents a tale of heroic resistance and struggle against oppression. In so far the plot exploits the anti-British sentiment then increasingly felt by Bengalis.

The rebellion is set against the background of the Bengal Famine of 1770 which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of peasants. It was precipitated by the land tax and grain exports enforced by the East India Company.

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[65] TBM, 81.

[66] A 19th century Bengali writer, poet and journalist (1838-1894). His name is variously spelled as Chatterjee/Chatterji or Chattopadhyay/a to Cattopadhyay (Cf. Lipner, *Ānandamaṭh, or The Sacred Brotherhood*, 10; Cf. Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire*, 30.)

[67] Cf. Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*, 16.

[68] Bankim's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) also marked the first English novel by an Indian author. (Cf. Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Perishable Empire*, 30).

As *Anandamath* countered the image of benevolent rule which the British sought to project, it was forbidden until independence. To avoid a ban, the Alochhaya production consequently focuses another enemy, the Nawab ruler of Bengal Alivardi Khan[69].

> **Mussalman tyranny was far from over. In fact, apart from a few raids that had made the enemy realize that there was one force with one cause behind the attacks, the land was still firmly under the foreign yoke. A famine had led Jibananda and many other young men to recognize what had been staring at them all the while: effortless subjugation.** (TBM, 111)

Most important from the commercial perspective of the Alochhaya director, Bankim's story is melodramatic and rich in romantic and Gothic motifs and thus resonates with a specific aesthetic sensibility shaped in the 19th century. As Priya Joshi points out, "[t]he affinity for melodrama, gothic, romance, and sensation that defined Indian consumption in the nineteenth century gave rise to a powerful form of historical narrative that found a successful and highly influential exemplar in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee."[70] Of course a similar disposition towards melodramatic and sensational productions could be discerned among European and American audiences at the time. However, the religious and cultural underpinnings which are reflected both in the narratives, as well as in the style and iconography of the Indian films, clearly differ.

In the introductory sequence, the rebel monk and protagonist Jibananda pays a clandestine visit to his wife and family:

> ***Long shot of a dirt trail with scrub and small trees on either side. A figure is walking briskly with something in his hands. He slows until he stops completely. He looks straight ahead for one moment and then continues to walk briskly again.***
>
> ***Close-up of the man's face. He is agitated, even worried.***
>
> ***Medium-shot of the man moving along the path which turns right to disappear from view. The dirt trail with its scrub and small trees is left behind.*** (TBM, 109)

In this comparatively short projection sequence, the man's brief repose provides the pretext for the camera to scan his face by way of an introduction. The audience is thus introduced to the film's protagonist and his situation. With the camera remaining stationary, drama and action are conveyed solely through the man's movement. Notably, Jibananda's brief reunion with his wife marks the climax of the following account, again presented by a heterodiegetic narrating agency in the scenic mode of representation. Here the rebel monk Jibananda sees his wife again after a long time – a meeting that precipitates an epiphany:

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[69] 1740-1756.

[70] Joshi, Priya. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 137.

> **Instead, he was completely occupied by the sight of the white-sari-clad woman emerging from the faraway hut. […]. She was wearing [her sari] in a manner that suited a proper woman, with the right stretches and folds.**
>
> **The house, the two trees, the hut and the courtyard tilted under the sun. Shanti looked older, quieter, but her dark eyes, now at the closest of quarters, gave the game away.**
>
> **'Bande Mataram,' Jibananda uttered to cover his rush of breath.** (TBM, 114)

The official tone of address[71] and Shanti's grave appearance charge this intimate reunion with a political echo. This echo resounds in Bankim's poem *Vande Mataram* as an integral part of his novel. Set to music by Rabindranath Tagore, it went on to become the favorite song of Congress members and independence fighters and was consequently forbidden by the British. In this way the historic struggle represented in the film anticipates the contemporary conflict that could not be directly addressed. Hence, the suffering mother in her white sari recalls the 'Mother India' icons of nationalist chromolithography[72]. She thus appears the centerpiece of the religious-political conflation effected in the novel:

> For writers and political leaders in Bengal at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, anxious to represent their 'national' past as the basis for a viable political re-imagining, colonial histories of the Rajput states and the sixteenth-century Maratha confederacy afforded a particularly important resource. […]. Even in nationalist works set in Bengal, such as Bankim's landmark novel *Anandamath*, both Muslims and the British are staged as the aggressors in a proto-national, *sanyassi* uprising. While writers and spiritual leaders contributed to the formulation of new and highly gendered configurations of nationhood, oriented around a symbolic Hindu motherland and her virile sons, the foundations of popular communalism were being laid by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak. (Morey/Tickell 2005,xiif)

The pincer movement of nationalistically configured representations on the one hand and political canvassing on the other which emerged then continues in the medially enlarged public sphere of today[73]. Yet the narrator is critical of this politics of representative embodiment: "How going on and on about a figure wrapped in a sari that was supposed to represent the country in fetters could be helpful in *any* manner eluded the rest of us."[74] However, for Abani's and Felicia's bioscope careers "Anandamath" signals the take-off. Popular enthusiasm builds into a storm when the company director decides to produce the infamous story of the Black Hole of Calcutta[75].

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[71] "I revere the Mother!" Cf. Lipner, *Ānandamaṭh*, 3.

[72] Cf. Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, 114; 128; 136.

[73] The discussion of contemporary Hindu nationalism, its ideological and medial configuration is continued in the final chapter, p. 257ff.

[74] TBM, 170f.

[75] During the siege of Fort William on 20th June 1756, the small British bastion was defeated by the forces of the Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah. The remaining roughly 146 Europeans, commanded by John Zepheniah Holwell, were detained in a cell of the fort by the Nawab's guards. During their detainment, all but twenty-three of the prisoners died due to suffocation according to Holwell's account, written upon his return to England. (Cf. Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, 15-25.)

More than the previous two films, its action fits into Lalji's 'theory of compensating values' according to which nothing could possibly be as rousing as the spectacle of over one hundred semi-naked Europeans crammed into "a cell measuring 18 feet by 14 feet 10 inches."[76] In as far as the story of the Black Hole carries the imprint of British imperial logic and manufacture[77], its adaptation in this context is elementary to the novel's (meta-) historiographic discourse – a discourse clearly inflected by its postcolonial vantage point. The significance of the film for both the protagonist's career and the novel's historic and political subtext is reflected in the length of the passage projecting "*The Black Hole of Calcutta, or The Survival of the Fittest*":

> ***Long shot of a room with one gate. The gate is a row of stripes through which one can see a slow but constant movement.* […]. *The movement is a slow churning of pale matter made extra visible in the surrounding darkness. That the room has a high ceiling can be made out by the fact that the moving pale matter inside is a high heap* […].**
>
> ***A medium shot of three guards sitting on a stone platform and nodding.* […]. *This passage is lit up by a lamp placed in a niche midway between the ground and the ceiling.***
>
> […]
>
> ***Close-up of the padlock hanging from the gate. The lock is big. Behind the barred gate, one notices a shuffling form. It is actually many forms. One can focus a hand. That soon turns into a hairless chest.* […] *Which soon turns into a hand. And so on.*** (TBM, 162)

As in the previous example, the narrative content of the sequence is minimal, both because of the amount of text required to render each shot and the static nature of the scene presented. The amount of spatial and visual data by contrast is immense, but evenly distributed across shots, each of which comprises one distinct spatial unit. The individual shots combine into a zoom in which establishes the narrative subject of the film in as dramatic a fashion as possible. The implicit camera movement towards the latter thus marks the gradual discovery of a gruesome sight, an effect much exploited in early silent film. Here, the dramatic use of chiaroscuro effects accentuates the sinister atmosphere, characteristic of the expressionist style as shown in "The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari."[78] More overtly than the preceding projection sequences, this one panders to voyeurism as the attention of spectators is held for some time before the eye is actually presented with something to 'feed on'. The manner in which the camera is manipulated furthermore gives the film a phenomenal *corporeality* exceeding that of the previous two by far.

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[76] TBM, 153.

[77] The Black Hole incident shaped and reflected British-Indian relations for the following two-hundred years of colonial rule. (Cf. Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, xii.)

[78] Notably, the tenth chapter is entitled "the cabinet of kalibari".

At this juncture, the projection assumes a palpable body with a determinate volume, texture and even smell. In other words, it possesses synaesthetic concreteness. The heap of humans on the other hand appears devoid of individuality as it is reduced to mere form. The deconstruction of the human body into its component parts is suggestive of the anatomical theatre – an institution symbolic of the scientific curiosity and epistemological sovereignty of the colonial rulers. But while this curiosity was generally reserved for the subjects of British colonial rule, here it is white Europeans who are being submitted to this dehumanization:

> ***The walls are black and shiny. It could be slime. The mass of bodies is white and shining. It could also be mould. […] The huddle and the heap do not look Asiatic at all. […]***
>
> ***On the other side, next to the gate, a body comes into view. It presses out from the inside of the giant white dough, pressing itself on to the bars of the gate. It belongs to a large man. His white shirt is unbuttoned and is translucent with sweat. His thinning hair and drooping moustache are drenched and pasted to his skin as if he has been baptized and pulled out of the water only a moment ago.*** (TBM, 163)

The racial and colonial innuendo seems inescapable as the whiteness of the captives is repeatedly referenced and visually accentuated by the black walls. With the large white man a narrative trajectory finally materializes. Like a martyr, Captain John Zepheniah Holwell rises from the inferno – an idea underscored by the analogy with a baptism. With the camera pasted to this abhorrent sight, the voyeuristic valence of the film is thrown into sharp relief here. But the reception of the film also answers to and exploits the stereotype of the sensualist 'Oriental':

> The Europeans and Anglos lapped up the account of the survival of John Zepheniah Holwell and Mary Carey. The rest cut straight through the chase and stared at the more elemental side of the story as depicted by the giant, visual, more-real-than-real activities of two bodies thrown together in a cauldron seething with humanity. This was Oriental reality played out in a story about Europeans. With *The Black Hole*, the bioscope had discovered senses beyond just the visual. (TBM, 168)

With the audience of "*The Black Hole of Calcutta*" divided along ethnic lines, this reception is an indicator of the changing political climate at the time. The fact that the "rest", i.e., the Indians and Bengalis enjoy the carnal aspect of the film – so much so that the projection hall smells not only of sweat but also "something intangible"[79] – bespeaks the novelty of seeing bodies that were not only nearly naked, but white. In so far, the film breaks with two taboos while problematizing the racial aspect of the film.

[79] TBM, 170.

It is salient in this context that the Alochhaya film is *not* based on Holwell's own account as recorded in his "A Genuine Narrative", but on that of British historian J.H. Little, a historic figure. With the impending Rowlatt Act and the threat of British censorship, the Alochhaya director secures Little's seal of approval with a generous fee. When the fictional Little learns that a woman is to be included among the Black Hole's prisoners this deviation from his account nearly precipitates his withdrawal, prevented only by the significant raise of his fee. As Partha Chatterjee describes it however, Little's account of The Black Hole was motivated by British imperial aspirations and emerged from a specific historic situation authorizing this revision, namely the First World War:

> Little was not seeking to argue on behalf of an Indian nationalist cause; he was trying to remedy the self-seeking Holwell's condescending description of the Black Hole prisoners as a bunch of thoughtless creatures incapable of superior moral behavior. Realigning imperial history with the repository of archived facts, he was trying to reclaim the fall of Calcutta in 1756 as a tale of British heroism in the face of military adversity. Needless to say, it is significant that his attempt at historical revision was launched in the middle of the greatest imperialist war in history. (Chatterjee 2012, 314)

But the production also draws on a cinematic antecedent, namely "*The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*," a 1913 American film ostentatiously denouncing the evils of prostitution. The other inspiration is the legal case of a property owner trying to prove that his tenants are not suffocated in any way comparable to the Europeans in the Black Hole. To prove this, he fences in an area of "18 feet by 15 feet"[80] into which he manages to fit only forty-four Bengalis. Although he is eventually defeated by his tenant, the public takes the experiment as proof that the Black Hole was a lie. As a result of these circumstances the film is a runaway success, proving Lalji's combination of bare flesh and pathetic heroism an effective mix. However, the extras enacting the prisoners are all but suited to the task as the narrator observes:

> Fair and sturdy Bengalis were found and the make-up artists applied just the right amount of foundation, talcum and finely grained lacto calamine (for the palish pink hue) for them to look like shahebs—which they did only remotely even in black and white. (The silly trick of applying just foundation and topping their heads with blond wigs would not do if standards were to be set.) More than a few of them looked rather odd, like photographic negatives walking about. (TBM, 159)

Problematically, the monochromatic film stock does not dissimulate the natural skin color of the extras, but rather augments it. As a postcolonial reprise the scene thus ironically inverts the blackface-act to highlight the mimicry of British genteel culture that many of the novel's Bengali characters – including the narrator himself – indulge in.

[80] TBM, 152.

By the same token the derisive attitude with which the narrator looks down upon his fellow Bengalis originates not only in an innate skepticism, but an ingrained self-disregard. As a literal enactment of *Dark Skin, White Masks*, the echo of this moment consequently radiates far beyond "The Black Hole of Calcutta," rendering it an icon of the vain struggle for achieving whiteness. In the 'Black Hole' the protagonists John Holwell and Mary Carey, the Bengali Abani and the Anglo Felicia, are thrown about on the backs of the moving bodies like Francesca and Paolo in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, providing their audience with titillating eroticism while implicitly perpetuating a mingling of color. But the film is also rife with Gothic motifs:

> **At one point, [John Holwell] found himself next to a man who was propped up by his own body on one side and someone else's on the other. The man's fingers held a tricorn cap up to the level of his chest. In the inadequate light it looked as if the man's heart, bone and tissue had been scooped out of his chest, leaving a neat, quiet hole. But it was, John saw after a long spell of disorientation, only the man's blue hat, turned black in the darkness, against his spectral white shirt. John only realized that the man with the hat had either passed out or was dead when the figure dropped away from his vision like a set of old clothes […].** (TBM, 165)

The image is haunting — and haunted by other, similar images. Equally echoing the martyred saints of Christian iconography and Indian chromolithographs showing the heroes of independence, their ripped, bleeding chests filled with symbols of religious or patriotic devotion[81], this moment opens up an interesting reading: As the Black Hole is literally projected onto the white body the outside is turned in to symbolize a void. The hole thus becomes the *heart of darkness* at the core of the colonial project.

While the bioscope attracts a sizeable audience, the (co-)incidence of the film's run with another major historic event suddenly realigns its reception:

> It was slightly odd that the papers reported the upsetting incident that actually pushed things off the precipice more than a month and a half after it had taken place. ([…]). It was in the last week of May 1919 that we learnt that a large gathering of people had been fired upon in Amritsar on April 13. Children and women were among the dead. Why the authorities had decided to open fire on the crowd was not mentioned in any of the reports. I had even picked up *Jugantar*[82] for details. None were provided. (TBM, 172)

The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar of April 13 1919 marked the turning point in India's struggle for freedom, notwithstanding British attempts to prevent press coverage and thus a surge of anti-British aggression. And while quotidian life in Calcutta continues unchanged on the surface, the events' reverberations are clearly felt in the projection hall as the atmosphere turns increasingly aggressive.

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[81] Cf. illustration 102 in Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, 136.

[82] The Bengali weekly served as "a platform where the intellectual leaders of the Extremist movement […] came together with revolutionary activists." (Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire*, 283.)

After the watershed, "the usual catcalls and suction sounds mimicking kisses during the climactic prison scene had been replaced by raucous shouts of 'son of a pig,'"[83] while the scene in which the Nawab's troops shoot the European soldiers is even "greeted with enthusiastic whistles and showers of coins."[84] The Nawab – none other than the grandson of the man fought by the rebel monks in "Anandamath" – thus becomes the vicarious agent avenging the bloodlust of the Bengali spectators. The irony of this seems lost on the narrator, however. Nonetheless, the political instrumentalization of the bioscope has not eluded him. If the text highlights and critiques film's openness to political instrumentalization, it simultaneously exposes its deescalating function as a 'steam valve'. Rather than being incited to acts of revenge, the audience of "The Black Hole of Calcutta" leaves the projection hall content. Nonetheless, the bioscope is shaping the public and political agenda more and more, while influencing Indian political sensibility.

It is indicative in this context that Muslim rulers play the pivotal role in both films. While in "Anandamath" Alivardi Khan served to displace and absorb anti-British sentiment, in "The Black Hole" the Nawab assumes the role of avenger. In this way both films provide an implicit critique of the cinematic (ab-) use of the Muslim as a pawn to be appropriated and demonized at will.

After Bolendranath Sarkar's unceremonial demise in Calcutta's sewers and another four years of idleness, Abani is again offered a minor role in an international production directed by Fritz Lang. This film – Abani's last at the point of narration – diverges from the pattern of the previously discussed productions in so far as "*The Scholar of Calcutta*"[85] narrates the sojourn of the eighteenth-century British Indologist Sir William Jones in India. But with all lead roles "played by consonant-munching Germans"[86] and his role a blatantly Orientalist misrepresentation contrived by the scriptwriter Thea von Harbou, the narrator is frustrated. When an anonymous source leaks a photograph to the protagonist which suggests that Lang is actually an impostor, he believes himself in a position to pressurize Lang. Indeed the latter complies and changes the script, making Jones' teacher – Pandit Ramlochan alias Abani – the protagonist of the film. The remarkable 'establishing shot' of "The Pandit & The Englishman" is again rendered as a projection, albeit with a significant difference:

[83] TBM, 173.
[84] Ibid.
[85] The film has no direct historic antecedent. However, in so far as the film revolves around the subject of religion, it might be inspired by Franz Osten's *Prem Sanyas/The Light of Asia* (1925).
[86] TBM, 240.

***The words 'The Pandit & the Englishman', in white, elongated, appear on a black screen,* […]. […]**

From the illuminated rectangle of blackness a room shapes out. It's a wall in the room; a plain wall, pockmarked in certain areas, with a framed picture hanging on it. Next to the picture is a rack on which there are a few piles of paper curled up into rolls. The room, the wall, is lit up by a light whose source isn't visible immediately. A few seconds later, the light is seen to be an ironed-out flicker coming from a nearby oil lamp set on the floor.

The wall comes closer. The pockmarks reveal a smoothness of their own. The framed picture is no longer an indistinct rectangle. It is a standard picture of Kali, tongue out with a smile and a garland of mini-heads bearing moustaches. She is marching on an oblivious but wide awake Shiv. The picture of Kali remains in view for a few seconds longer. The first title comes on. (TBM, 273)

As in mitosis, an initially undifferentiated object begins to take form and assumes increasingly detailed features under the 'microscope' of the camera's zoom in. As in the 'establishing shot' of F, this sequence too recapitulates the basic visual vocabulary of light and shadow, amorphousness and form, thereby rendering the act of showing conspicuous. In stylistic terms however, the last projection interval marks a departure from the preceding three in so far as there are no shot directions, only minute observations of the projected reel in its transformations as observed by a spectator in the projection hall. Here I therefore focus the phenomenal-aesthetic nature of the objects in the frame, to establish their narrative and symbolic value. With a plane wall and no human subject in view, the zoom-in on the picture of Kali assumes narrative and symbolic relevance, bespeaking the residents' religious orientation. The quotidian objects revealed by the camera likewise provide information about the economic and educational status of the latter.

I argue that the images "suggest an iconographic process wherein morphology—a dynamic principle of formal aesthetics—takes on the gravity of the symbolic to thus ground itself in a given tradition."[87] Eventually however, the camera introduces two human subjects to the frame who are locked in an exchange of looks:

He gazes at her with great intensity. This gaze turns into a brief second of muted terror when she turns to return to her assigned spot next to him. Ramlochan resumes his calm posture. But his chest is still rising and falling too fast.

***The lizard now fills the screen. It slowly clambers away from the picture of Kali and flatfoots its way towards the rack.* […].**

***The girl suddenly looks up at Ramlochan with a concerned face. Her face is oval and angelic. The lamp is flickering harder than before. The turbulence of the flame is reflected on the girl's face,* […].**

[…]

'Kuli, you didn't forgot* [sic!] *the oil in the lamp again, did you?'

Ramlochan frowns. It is an exaggerated and therefore false frown. The girl looks ready to break into tears, when the lamp light splutters on their faces. Everything turns black. (TBM, 275)

[87] Kapur, Geeta. *When was Modernism*: *Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India.* New Delhi: Tulika, 2000, 236.

The dialogic situation in which the Pandit and the girl are presented, suggests a shot and reverse shot formation that establishes the emerging dilemma, namely the Pandit's fatal attraction to his young student, slyly exposed by the camera here. In line with the film's conception as narrating the story of a religious scholar, the image of a goddess is foregrounded in the establishing shot. However, both Kali's role as the goddess of death and destruction and the lizard obstructing her effigy bode ill.

The final, dramatic fade to black is suggestive of something unspeakable and unshowable, an illicit act consumed in the darkness. Hence the Pandit soon stands accused of having raped the angelic Kuli. In contrast to the heroic stories of Prince Prahlad, the monk Jibananda or John Holwell, the story of Pandit Ramlochan evinces clear parallels with that of the actor Abani Chatterjee. In both cases, the mere accusation of rape renders the accused outcastes. A nearly forgotten historic figure, Pandit Ramlochan thus marks the role of his life for Abani. But the fading lamp light in that last shot clinches the dilemma of the narrator's existence, of a life lived as shadow and concluded in the shadows.

6.3 OF DEMONS, DAMES AND DIVINE EYES

> I had never seen a monocle on a man before. […]. It was the first thing I noticed about Fritz Lang. A concentrated pool of light bouncing off his face, which, on closer inspection, turned out to be the sun perched on his right eye. As he sat in the terrace of the Great Eastern like a bird, his fingers stitched into a bony knit, I noticed his large, rectangular face that was crowned by hair that looked like hot tar. His eyes were dark and large, almost without the white parts. Even as he was speaking to people milling around him, his eyelids hung heavily in the sunlight, emitting a slight red glow that confirmed their thinness. (TBM, 222)

The introduction which the novel's most prominent historic figure is given here, suggests a dubious character whose real thoughts and motives are obscured by both his heavy lids and the blinding reflection of his monocle. But the eye glass is also an object of visual dominance allowing the wearer to scrutinize others while preventing them from doing the same in return. At this point already, the narrator implicitly casts doubt on the identity of "[t]he Monocle". The volte face follows in "the cabinet of kalibari" wherein the power relations determining the encounter between the famous European director and Abani, fallen star and colonial subaltern, are suddenly inverted. Now it is Lang who has to ensure Abani's cooperation to keep his secret. But the monocle and his scriptwriter suffer acute Orientalism:

> [Thea] told me when she first wanted to make an India feature quite some years ago that India is an animal, not a country. And that the English try to tame it, largely unsuccessfully—I'm not talking about political domestication, but aesthetically. What do you think, Herr Ray? Will there be shadows we can manufacture and capture in this heat and later let loose in cooler climates?
> […]. 'It's an animal. Have you been to Europe, Herr Ray? Vienna? No? Well, Europe could have been Asiatic. It's just that we domesticated the animal long ago.' (TBM, 227)

The blatant dehumanization of India as a wild animal corresponds to colonial logic in as far as the necessity to capture and kill that animal is already implicit. But if India is a royal Bengal Tiger – Lang's discourse recalls Blake's poem – the latter can also be captured on film. Conferring the suppressed desires of the 'civilized' onto the colonized, the speech omits the aggression and violence just committed by the putatively "domesticated" animal, about to mangle the world in its jaws yet again[88]. As a metaphor of the hunt, the tiger also legitimizes the director's and cameraman's scopophilia, realized here by culling the animal to display its stuffed hide – the reel. And while the narrator is wary of Lang, his reaction to Thea is quite different. Notwithstanding her exoticist-orientalist inclination, the narrator is taken with "this golden-haired woman"[89] who epitomizes his idealized notion of European beauty and charm.[90]

> I couldn't say anything. I was transfixed by her pose. She looked like one of those divinities whose picture comes attached to a wall calendar that marks not only the days of the week, but also the special days of the year. The mem, however, was prettier, warmer, more approachable than any calendar goddess, and this despite the fact that each and every calendar woman flashes a coquettish smile. (TBM, 60)

In the eyes of the narrator, Harbou emanates warmth and desirability – an impression also bespeaking Abani's lack of exposure to women other than his mother and film partner Durga. The aesthetic protocols of late nineteenth century portraiture may also be to blame, as the narrator's perception of Harbou distinctly recalls Ravi Varma's epic heroines in their romanticized and yet carnal look. And as with Varma's ethereal women that invite only remote adoration, Abani is content to venerate von Harbou from a distance, thus living out his romantic adoration as pure scopophilia. Like TLJEL, TBM features a number of depictions of women, both profane and divine. Among these, the Kali effigy in the Kalighat temple stands out.

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[88] The episode is set in the 1930s, between the First and the Second World War.
[89] TBM, 229.
[90] Abani's adoration of Harbou provides an interesting twist on Harbou's remarkable biography. After her separation from Lang, Harbou lived with a young Indian doctoral student, Ayi Tendulkar, in Germany. Both had been married in a Hindu ceremony before Tendulkar returned to India. (Cf. Kagelmann, Andre. "Eine große Liebe." Thea von Harbou-Weblog. 12 Juli 2007. 23 April 2014. <http://thea-von-harbou.blogspot.de/2007/07/eine-groe-liebe_12.html>.)

On the way to the temple, Lang also admits that the original impulse for his Indian venture came from a female, many-armed figure encountered in a very different temple:

> And there for the first time I saw a girl, with two others hidden behind her, with only a slither of a garment covering her nether region and her eyes shot with kohl. She twirled her arms, and those borrowed from the girls behind her, like a puppet who was also the puppet-master. I was mesmerized, Herr Chatterjee, completely mesmerized.'
>
> I could actually imagine the yet-to-be Monocle Monocle gazing with a religious fervor at this white Kali/Nataraja, dancing like a snake to some Negro tune.
>
> Kalighat, one hoped, was miles away from Berlin. (TBM, 256)

Confronted with Lang's utter ignorance of Indian religion and his erotic exoticism, the narrator is not surprised, but acutely aware that he is now in the position of the native informer, able to provide an experience far more stimulating and mesmerizing than any nightclub debauchery. But Kalighat indeed proves a long way from Berlin and the effigy which the two discover is fear-inspiring, rather than erotic:

> And then, only a few wet steps later Lang saw *it*, as if its sole purpose was to surprise. Inside the cage-like cubicle in front was the geometrical figure almost hunchbacked by the weight of garlands and cloth.
>
> 'There she is.' A hump like a hill. A conch shell sounded melodramatically at that very moment.
>
> Lang's jaw […] had creaked open. Glistening in a flickering pool of oil lamps, the solid river of gold that was the tongue bisected the figure that was before us. At the core lay the noseless black face pocked with three eyes with three red corneas staring back at us like a partially blinded spider. Three of four hands were just about visible, one of them clutching the cutter as if it was a broom. (TBM, 260)

Sculpted at the beginning of the 19th century, this figuration of Kali diverges sharply from the idealist code of representation in which most effigies of Hindu divinities are conceived. In its geometrically abstracted and fragmented look, the statue thus embodies a quintessentially modernist aesthetics. But the statue is veiled, except for her most important part, the face with its poignant red eyes and golden tongue. And while the former seem vaguely threatening, her excessively long tongue has a determinedly erotic quality as it resembles a vagina. Despite her tongue and hands being the only gold-plated parts of her physique, she appears "like a machine, all metal,'"[91] to the bemused Lang who apparently expected something more earthy in this locale. The goddess of destruction thus comes to provide the inspiration for film history's first cyborg – the metal woman Maria in "Metropolis." Indeed both appear cold and hostile to the observer and possess a powerful and more than vaguely threatening sexuality. With the Kali icon, the womb of the archaic which the dark, humid temple represents thus birthes a modern(ist) icon that is at once genuinely Indian/Bengali.

[91] TBM, 261.

When Abani confronts Lang with the knowledge of his real identity as Frederick Ernest Langford, former landscape painter, this spurs Lang's decision to abandon "*The Pandit & The Englishman*" to return to Berlin and shoot "Metropolis" instead. As "a work divided against itself,"[92] this film would eventually emerge as one of the most influential productions of the silent era, foreclosing many motifs of postmodern film. At the time however, it was apparently too avantgarde for many viewers and critics. In the characteristically light-handed tone of TBM, the Kalighat episode thus implies nothing less than the inversion of the received narrative of modernity as a genuinely Western creation.

Assuming that "Metropolis" presents modern technology as ontologically grounded in magic[93], Kali's statue with its magnetic aura which roots both Lang and the narrator to the spot, is apt to prove that "machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert,"[94] as Donna Haraway argues. After stumbling away from the three-eyed goddess, the narrator is so bewitched that he picks up a shrunken toe – the very relic upon which the temple rests, thereby desecrating it. At the same time the space of devotion is gradually extended into and conflated with the space of projection:

> By the time I acted in *Parasuram Avatar and Chhatrapat Shivaji*, this would become something of a norm at the pictures palaces this side of town. People would leave their shoes outside, shower the screen with flowers, rice and loose change at the right moments. And depending on which divinity or hero I was playing they would cry out my name—not Abani Chatterjee, of course, but that of the character I was playing. It was no longer just a spectacular circus; it was forty-five-odd minutes of epiphany, congregation and a meeting of the faithful as well. (TBM, 105f)

Here the spectators do not merely shower the screen with coins, but they reenact a ritual sacrifice or puja. That the projection hall assumes the function of a modern temple is further thrown into relief by the fact that the spectators leave their shoes outside. The ease and naturalness with which religious practice is thus expanded into this new space suggests the absence of a static, impermeable border between sacred and public space – an assumption continuous with Rachel Dwyer's observations:

> Yet before these new media existed, traditional media (drama, poetry, music, dance and painting) were used for Indian religious practices. They continue to be deployed with complex interactions between these various media as they share and mediate symbols and practices in different forms. All these media affect religion itself, and their study is important to show how religion is represented (mediated) in various myths, rituals and symbols in the media themselves. (Dwyer 2006, 2)

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[92] Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang. Allegories of Vision and Modernity.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 53.

[93] Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, 64f.

[94] Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991, 152.

The tendency to blend the old and the new as it manifests itself here marks Indian culture at large, in so far as new technologies are integrated into the fabric of quotidian life and cultural as well as religious practice in an organic fashion. Within such a public culture, there are no rigid boundary lines between religious, cultural and technological/media practice, instead these are in continuous circulation and transformation[95]. And while Abani is a first-hand witness of these transformations, he himself is no longer a part of them:

> So why am I here? Why have I been left unsurrounded, unentertained, unnamed all these years? The answer to that is very simple. […] Because *The Pandit & The Englishman* didn't see the light of the bioscope. (TBM, 304)
> Is my present condition the result of lapsing into Abani Chatterjee? I don't think so. No one's interested in the character I've been playing for the last thirty years. […]. The people just don't care for it any more now. Which is why I have to be careful even now. This city, which has been baring its teeth for far too long, will chew me up if I give in now to vulgar demand. In a way, my only companion in this totally unglamorous, non-nutritious, gnawing-away hole of obscurity is Ramlochan. Two figures in the footnotes. Two feetnote, hah! But I will not clamber out to be eaten by this city. (TBM, 306)

On the final four pages which conclude the narrative of a stranded existence, the narrator embarks on a 'dialogue' with his anonymous interlocutor – an unnamed film scholar in California. Only here readers learn that "The Pandit & the Englishman" was never screened and that Lang was never unmasked. Looking back upon his life in the bioscopes, the narrator finds it compressed to a mere footnote. In addressing his tragicomic story to the anonymous film scholar however, Abani apparently hopes to change this. However, even at this stage the narrator is still offered small roles which he rejects. Eventually, his hubris forfeits his last great chance to reenter the film business:

> Which is why last September, after reading two letters that Sumitra had brought with my lunch, I tore up one and decided to act on the other. The first was from someone who introduced himself as an admirer. He was a young commercial artist […]. He wrote that he had plans of making a movie based on a story by Bhuthibhushan Bandopadhyay. I had read a bit of the story, *Pather Panchali*, when it first came out […]. It was a melodramatic story and I hadn't cared much for it […]. He thought that I would be perfect for the role of a village grocer-teacher in the story. […]. After years of avoiding bit roles, I saw no sense in giving in now. So I never replied to the man. (TBM, 307)

That the man is none other than Satyajit Ray, then still an unknown artist about to embark on the first, momentous film project of his career, is the last bitter irony of the novel — an irony the narrator is yet to discover (and suffer). To make matters worse, the anonymous scholar to whom he addresses his memoirs had inquired after "Sabu 'The Elephant Boy'" and not Abani Chatterjee.

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[95] Cf. Pinney, *Pleasure and the Nation*, 9f.

It is not certain then whether Abani's story will be favorably received, if it is received at all. The protagonist's reduction to a footnote thus reflects his phenomenal reduction to a mere, voiceless shadow – an experience consonant with Maxim Gorky's perception of the silent film. Notably, a part of Gorky's account of the "Kingdom of Shadows" is cited in the first introductory quote of the novel:

> Last night, I was in the Kingdom of Shadows…
>
> Without noise, the foliage, grey as cinder, is agitated by the wind and the grey silhouettes—of people condemned to a perpetual silence, cruelly punished by the privation of all the colours of life—these silhouettes glide in silence over the grey ground. Their movements are full of vital energy and so rapid that you scarcely see them, but their smiles have no life in them. You see their facial muscles contract but their laugh cannot be heard. A life is born before you, a life deprived of sound and the spectre of colour—a grey and noiseless life—a wan and cut-rate life.

Underlying this judgement is the tacit expectation that film should proffer a copy of life in its phenomenal fullness. Perhaps it is this evolutionary impetus of film the narrator sought to express when noting that "the bioscope became more and more *modern.*"[96] Due to its intrinsic technical constraints however, silent film was still a long way from offering a copy of life. From the narrator's vantage point in the mid-twentieth century,[97] the first three decades assume a clear outline, yet the intensity and confusion of the moment experienced by the historic subject remain palpable. It is interesting to observe at this point how the development of the narrator as a spectator and recipient of the bioscopes maps out onto the text. The passages in which he recalls his first brushes with the bioscope structurally resemble the shows attended by the narrator in so far namely as they present an eclectic, dazzling melee of images and genres. Reflected in this experience of the narrator which is roughly coextensive with the second and third chapters, is "the perceptual climate of overstimulation, distraction and sensation"[98] germane to modernity.

In offering fleeting glimpses of landmark events in Indian colonial history such as the division of Bengal in 1905 or the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, the novel furthermore compiles a kind of historic panopticon or nickelodeon. Within the latter, each event occupies readers' attention only briefly, before another scene or event comes into view.

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[96] TBM, 48.

[97] "Pather Panchali" was shot in 1955 so the narrator is roughly sixty years old at that time.

[98] Cf. Charney, Leo. "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity." *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life.* Ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 279.

As a result, history presents itself as a series of moments, contiguous and yet detached. At the same time the novel maps the maturation of the narrator from exhilerated reveler to discerning spectator, critically engaging with the new medium[99]. The interval sections on the other hand bespeak a good grasp of the medium, its visual means and their phenomenal effect. Therefore the passages have an aesthetically and mnemonically enduring echo, although they comprise a mere one sixth of the entire text[100]. As images, they radiate beyond their textual confines. As for their filmic nature however, the single shots appear primarily spatial and their mode of presentation static. In their appeal as 'slices of time' they have more in common with photographs, than with film reels. The almost static and haptic appeal of the reel sections also inscribes the technical constraints of the apparatus, most notably the use of heavy, static cameras and monochromatic nitrate and acetate film stock that could not display fine nuances, but only stark black and white contrasts.

As a result, the single shot was longer and conceived as inherently meaningful – a circumstance also rendering it amenable to textual translation. By way of this specific manner of textualization, the single shot as "micro-narrative"[101] is foregrounded vis-à-vis the macro-narrative – a significant distinction in this context.

> There are two types of narrative in the cinema: the micro-narrative (the shot), a first level on which is generated the second narrative level; this second level more properly constitutes a filmic narrative in the generally accepted sense. There are two types of narrative, therefore; also two levels. The first level, which is not always easy to identify, probably corresponds to what Metz is referring to when he says, 'One can always "tell a story" merely by means of iconic analogy.' (Gaudréault 2004, 353f)

But what aesthetic effect does this micro-narrative conception have? In describing a film by Sergej Eisenstein, Barthes notes that it possesses an "anthological"[102] quality, "holding out to the fetishist […] the piece for him to cut out and take away to enjoy."[103] An analogous effect is discernible here as the projection sequences render each shot a self-contained unit, a ready-made amenable to consumption and retention. In this way each micro-narrative becomes a collector's item, a "pick-torial"[104] preservation.

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[99] Cf. TBM, 50; 56.

[100] Counting both the visual-cinematographic description and the narrative sections.

[101] Cf. Gaudreault, André. "Film, narrative, narration: The cinema of the Lumière brothers." *Narrative Theory. Interdisciplinarity.* Ed. Mieke Bal. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. 4. London: Routledge, 2004, 353.

[102] Barthes, *Image - Music - Text*, 72.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Cf. Petit, Laurence. "On Pickles, Pictures, and Words: Pick-torial Preservation and Verbal Self-Regeneration in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children." *Word & Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*. Ed. Michael Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, 205-218.

If these sections could be said to 'dissect' the fictional reels, the novel also assumes the function of a 'post mortem' here, in so far namely as it lays open the phenomenological and psychological conception of early films. Here, it matters little whether the reels are 'real' or fictional. Many of the specific features of silent film as evinced here would be phased out in subsequent decades with the arrival of sound and eventually, color. Aware that the productions he starred in will never enjoy the status and critical appreciation of "Metropolis" or "Raja Harishchandra" because no footage survives, the narrator nonetheless hopes that his films will find their way into the official record – if only as footnotes. The 'pick-torial' preserves thus aim at the archive. Conceived as a personal communication, Abani Chatterjee's narrative might either be read as a successful intervention or as a message in a bottle that never reached its addressee and now circulates freely. From a media historic and culture anthropological perspective however, this highlights the inalienability of written accounts of an era of which little visual material survived. In this case, the word prevails over the transience of the reel image.

In one salient regard TBM is very similar to both TLJEL and F, in so far namely as it freely combines its generic set pieces – private memoirs, (film) historic account and culture anthropology – without the liabilities of scientific accuracy. For the scholarly reader or film buff however, the fictional films it presents invite questions regarding their sources and film historic antecedents. The Indian Cinematograph Committee, set up in 1927 by the British to investigate film production and exhibition produced a sizeable written inventory "of the world of these lost films, albeit one that is refracted through elite perceptions and prejudices."[105] To a certain extent these prejudices are also reflected in the text as the narrator is clearly bored by schmaltz and pathos, but recognizes their audience appeal. At the same time the text vividly evokes the sense of novelty that the first bioscope shows incited in viewers:

> To see moving images—of men and women, of elephants and horses, cities and landscapes, of breaking waves and creeping fires, of made-up objects and creatures—projected on a flat, white screen or wall (which disappears the moment it's put to use) is a confusion of the senses. The bioscope pictures arrived as a miracle that took place on a regular basis at some improvised space near us. (TBM, 55)

This miraculous quality is subtracted in the projection sequences since these obtrusively invite an active, imaginative performance.

[105] Dass, Manishita. "The Crowd outside the Lettered City: Imagining the Mass Audience in 1920s India." Cinema Journal. 48.4 (2009): 77–98. JSTOR 1 Apr. 2014. <http://jstor.org/stable/25619729>.

In mobilizing the cinematic *dispositif*, the imaginative act of identification, i.e., of the viewer with the projection is foregrounded[106]. From a visual cultural and culture-anthropological viewpoint it is furthermore interesting to note how the film's sets and and mise-en-scène recall the stage. The interval sections thus signpost the bioscope's 'ancestry' in popular folk theatre (*jatra*) and Parsi theatre as Jha outlines it in the following:

> The Bengali Cinema was still to explore its own idioms which could have freed it from the influence of the stage and lent artistic perspective to its form or aesthetic appeal to its content. However, the formative years of Bengali Cinema during the silent era proved very much significant inasmuch as it provided useful training to promising talents, who, in future years, came to play a very dominant part in shaping its course and developing its form and content. (Jha 1985, 74)

So while early bioscope productions appeared tied as if by an umbilical cord to the theatre in terms of their narrative sujet, mise-en-scène and acting, this changed as the bioscope came into its own, a process obliquely reflected in TBM. As a result of this cutting of the cord and the growing differentiation of film and theatre as distinct art forms, the bioscope expanded its scope and with it, also its audience.

> With theatre in this city becoming increasingly unfit for family consumption, more and more entrepreneurs started to look towards the moving pictures as a substitute rather than a supplement to theatre. The initial razzle-dazzle and mindless hurrahs never vanished, of course. But slowly and surely, the bioscope became less of a carnival and more of a gummy mixture of vaudeville and art. (TBM, 57)

The conflicting claims of scopophilia and social legitimacy discerned here by the narrator resulted in the growing aptitude of film makers at finding ever new solutions to their reconciliation. At junctures such as the above, TBM thus offers insight into the psychological and sociological framework of cinema. As social conventions and conservative sensibilities became a dominant factor in bioscope production, gaudy spectacle was gradually replaced with films focusing social life:

> Bengal's first feature-length productions were filmed versions of popular plays, and they drew heavily upon what Kaushik Bhaumik call the 'multi-generic performative world of the Parsi theatre'. Between 1919 and 1922, Madan Theatres produced mostly mythologicals and costume dramas of the Arabian Nights kind, but starting with Bankim Chandra Chattopdhyay's *Bisha Briksha* (1922) they quickly established a trend of adapting Bengali literary classics as 'socials'. (Gooptu 2011, 26f)

[106] Cf. Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," 693.

In view of the above statement, TBM could be said to occupy an interstitial space where fact and fiction blur.[107] When Ray argues that "[t]he sharpest revelations of the truth in cinema come from the details perceived through the eyes of artists"[108] which ultimately make a film "real" [109], this highlights the formalist impetus vis-à-vis the mimetic conception of art. I argue that the reels projected here are marked by their formalist conception, rather than the desire to provide a copy[110]. However, to the (neo-)realist Ray this formalism and the reliance upon a theatrical mise-en-scène are features symptomatic, or rather pathological of (popular) Bengali film:

> Needless to say, these formulas do not work every time, but they are the ones that have had the longest and the most lucrative existence. They have evolved out of the producer's deliberate and sustained playing down to a vast body of unsophisticated audience brought up on the simple tradition of the *Jatra*, a form of rural drama whose broad gestures, loud rhetoric and simple emotional patterns have been retained in the films to a degree unimaginable to those not familiar with this unique form of film making. (Ray 2010, 40)

Ray concludes that "[e]xcept in some superficial technical aspects, our films have made no progress since the first silent picture was produced […], which means that there is time to learn anew and begin from the beginning."[111] It is only consequential then that Ray should call on Abani Chatterjee – the former bioscope star with whom Bengali cinema began – in order to start all over again.

6.4 AN-OTHER MODERNITY?

To the cinephile, early silent film remains an enduring fascination because it succeeded in evoking something previously unattainable: From the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, the illusion of movement could only be evoked in an imperfect fashion. Hence the movements shown by the phenakistiscope[112] and stereoscope were flickering rather than fluid. When Max Skladanowsky introduced the 'Bioskop' projector on November 1st 1895, i.e., merely two months before the Lumière Brothers presented the Cinématographe, this was to change. And although it was the Lumières' technique that was ultimately adopted by most filmmakers in 1896, the designation 'bioscope' stuck.

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[107] Cf. Jha, B. "Patriarchs of Indian Cinema: J.F. Madan and B.N. Sircar." *70 Years of Indian Cinema, 1913-1983*. Ed. T.M. Ramachandran and S. Rukmini. Bombay: CINEMA India-International, 1985, 71ff.; Cf. Wadia, W.B.H., "The Indian Silent Film." In: Ramachandran/Rukmini (eds), *70 Years of Indian Cinema, 1913-1983*, 21f; 25f.

[108] Ray, Satyajit and Dhritiman Chatterjee. *Deep Focus: Reflections on Cinema*. Ed. Sandip Ray. New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2011, 38.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Cf. Elsaesser/Hagener, *Film Theory*, 3.

[111] Ray, Op. Cit., 8.

[112] Cf. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 16.

While previous contraptions such as the Kinetoscope had permitted only one viewer at a time, the projection of images onto a large screen now facilitated communal viewing – the base of the cinematic experience. When the British inventor of the Kinemacolor[113] Charles Urban visits India to meet with interested film makers but drops Calcutta from his itinerary, depriving Abani's uncle Shombhu of a chance to learn about the new technique, his decision reflects the city's new status as a place of the past with little potential for innovation. But while the loss of political significance combined with the violent eruption of nationalist strife proves advantageous to Abani's career, it has an adverse effect upon Shombhu's. The rhetorical monopolization of 'national identity' by the nationalists irks the former and has incited a profound distrust of the freedom movement in him.

However, in allowing audiences to turn him into the foil onto which they project their dreams of vengeance and victory, Abani cleverly exploits the prevailing anti-British sentiment and the latent sense of impotence experienced by the *bhadralok.* In this regard he seems a prime example of this species, "[f]or while they were constrained […] to implement the guiding principles of [British] rule, they also learned […] to bend them to their advantage."[114] The protagonist's nonchalant negotiation of political mores and private aspirations thus encapsulates the dilemma of the educated Bengali elite at the beginning of the twentieth century, a dilemma framed by their colonial subaltern status on the one hand and their elite status among the native population on the other. This effectively prevented the *bhadralok* from claiming any proprietorial rights over an emerging modernity they were nonetheless actively shaping – a paradox which Partha Chatterjee describes in the following terms:

> We must remember that in the world arena of modernity, we are outcastes, untouchables. Modernity for us is like a supermarket of foreign goods, displayed on the shelves: pay up and take away what you like. No one there believes that we could be producers of modernity. The bitter truth about our present is our subjection, our inability to be subjects in our own right. And yet, it is because we want to be modern that our desire to be independent and creative is transposed on to our past. It is superfluous to call this an imagined past, because pasts are always imagined. […]. 'Those days' for us is not a historical past; we construct it only to mark the difference posed by the present. (Chatterjee 2012, 151)

This impetus to turn back towards the past is closely reflected in the trajectory of the bioscope as narrated in TBM in so far as the films produced by the Alochhaya Bioscope Company manifest a throwback onto an idealized past.

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[113] The Kinemacolor used a red-green filter by which films could be recorded and projected in color.
[114] Lipner, *Ānandamaṭh, or The Sacred Brotherhood*, 4f.

Hence the latter is presented as a time of unity, faith and struggle against the invader. This version of the past is necessarily selective and draws on the mythical past, as much as on the recent past. However, to the narrator the ideas offered by the nationalist ideologues and a backward-looking intelligentsia intent upon claiming civilizational primogeniture over Europe and the British Empire are far less appealing than the 'supermarket goods' of technological modernity. Abani and Shombhu who have recognized the narrative and visual scope of the bisoscope consequently find the conventional uses to which the new medium is put dreary and frustrating.

While the protagonist and his uncle are unconcerned with the past, they are also unable to claim the future from which their city and their social ambit have been forcibly excluded. As a complex of quotidian situations and sensations, modernity is palpable, even ubiquitous in TBM although or rather *because* it is never discussed. In Abani's experience of modernity as that of a colonial subaltern, the bioscope assumes the function of sociocultural hotbed galvanizing tastes and ideas. But the bioscopes exert not only a centrifugal force as the following remark documents:

> The pictures were targeted more at families, what one would call these days 'households'. They would talk and prattle and pass comments over the din made by the orchestra. In other words, they weren't the ruffian, lumpen-class that formed the bulk of the theatre crowd. On a good night, one could actually see the two tiers of the city's society brush past each other—one walking out, the other marching in, like two animals once vaguely related but having evolved into different species long ago. (TBM, 74)

For while the Alochhaya productions appeal to and mobilize a *national* viewership the films cannot obliterate the growing social polarities entirely. In the search for the smallest common denominator, the director Lalji thus opts for reduction. Whereas the texts of "Prahlad Parameshwar" and "Anandamath" relied on more or less complex, literary antecedents, "The Black Hole" dispenses with narrative complications, instead focusing the spectacular aspect of the film.

> However, even as it expanded the space of the nation beyond the public spheres of the colonial elite, cinema introduced a new set of powerful cultural distinctions and a context of consumption that were not particularly conducive to imagining this space as unified and homogeneous or to picturing the audience as "a fraternity of equals" and a "horizontal comradeship". Spectatorship emerged in colonial India as a site not just of imagining community but also of asserting class difference and social hierarchies. (Dass 2009, 79)

It is noteworthy in this context that film is consumed as a social experience and not as a passive enjoyment by the family audience. Here, the silence of the bioscope is an advantage as it provides opportunity for social interaction.

In the theatre by contrast, this kind of audience interaction is not possible and, in view of the titillating sensuality of the staged show also unnecessary. Indirectly, the narrator's observations thus reflect the growing importance of class and the corollary differentiation in lifestyles and consumption attitudes. As a result of the industrialized mode of production, a mobile and mainly male workforce emerged in the cities and metropolitan areas, which not only created a new outlet market for films but also represented a vast reservoir for political mobilization – a fact unambiguously documented in TBM as Abani and particularly Shombhu run afoul of the "'bhadralok loafer criminal class.'"[115]

If the projection hall increasingly emerged as a place of encounter with the imagined community of the nation as the Alochhaya productions clearly document, the other sites of communion presented in the text that merit discussing here, too. If the temple can be understood to represent a site of communion with the divine, the Chatterjee bathroom marks a space of psychological self-exploration. Among the sibling sites of the projection hall is also the 'Black Hole' – a lucid metaphor of the forced immobility and the 'hallucinations' characterizing the cinematic experience. However it must be emphasized that neither of these three offers refuge or escape from modernity. The constant flux and transformation to which the individual in modernity is subject, continues unabated here.

The narrator's psychological bathroom permutations and his visit to the Kalighat temple clearly testify to this fact. All of these locations are thus depicted as negative spaces or voids in so far as they all symbolize darkness, a throwback onto pure, bodily existence and a loss of control – qualities formulated in antithesis to the enlightenment paradigm. Among the thousand natural shocks the modern subject's flesh is heir to, the descent into the abyss, being literally devoured by the underworld like Bholanath Sarkar, appears at once the most frightening and fascinating. If "[c]inema, as it gained currency among a critical public, was lodged in terms of a register of science and scientific practice and, ultimately, the larger vision of Indian modernity"[116] as Gooptu argues, the experience of the reel as presented in TBM produces all manner of archaic, sinister links and interferences. I argue that this is consonant with Probal Dasgupta's argument that popular cinema in India "provides a unique artistic representation of the twilight today."[117]

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[115] TBM, 133.

[116] Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema. 'An Other Nation*,' 25.

[117] Dasgupta, Probal. "Popular Cinema, India, and Fantasy." *Fingerprinting Popular Culture. The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*. Ed. Vinay Lal and Ashis Nandy. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, 10.

In his view popular Indian cinema at once promotes conceiving of "technology as magic,"[118] and "the magical as the technological."[119] But how is the twilight borne out aesthetically in TBM? If "[c]onventional attractions, such as the faces of stars and postcard sceneries […] are invitations to take a position from which such charges look attractive,"[120] "Prahlad Parameshwar", "Anandamath", as well as "The Black Hole of Calutta" and "The Pandit & The Englishman" capitalize on these attractions in as far as the projection sequences suggest. More importantly, they mobilize secret desires and fantasies, albeit in an overtly staged, self-conscious manner:

> The high degree of stylization and illusion-making puts the spectator in a position of constant awareness of the constructed and performed nature of the spectacle; you know that you are not seeing reality, and the way your complicity is elicited ensures that you know that the spectacle appeals to you by bringing your fantasies and desires directly into play. As you are co-constructing the spectacle while watching it, you knowingly let the pieces of fantasy presented to you play on your own desires in a stylized fashion, and thus get an opportunity to re-explore them. (Dasgupta 2007, 13)

The writhing, sweating bodies in "The Black Hole" clearly mark an explicit invitation to the (implied) spectator to reenact her own fantasies. The semi-nakedness of the bodies shown here allows forming sexual associations, albeit in an ostentatiously desexualized context. Similarly, the dream scene of "Prahlad Parameshwar" proposes that dreams grant the faithful individual direct access to the divine realm. If popular cinema is thus marked by "the capacity to directly appropriate magic from the image itself,"[121] this is not a quality unique to popular cinema as Hindu iconography and religious practice rely on the same mechanism. The image that facilitates *darśan* therefore marks the epistemological link between the temple and the projection hall as a 'temple of desire.'[122] In so far the appropriation of the projection hall as an extension of the temple is consequential, but its implications are wider.

As noted earlier, the popular practice of conducting puja in a mythological film as described by the narrator[123] indicates the subordination of technology under cultural and religious practice, rather than vice versa. The technical apparatus is thus adapted in order to animate the cultural and religious imaginary, providing confirmation of Crary's argument that "technology is always a concomitant or subordinate part of other forces,"[124] rather than

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[118] Ibid., 9.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 13.
[121] Dasgupta, "Popular Cinema, India, and Fantasy," 21.
[122] The title borrows from Vijay Mishra's *Bollywood Cinema. Temples of Desire.* (New York: Routledge, 2002)
[123] Cf. page 232, TBM 105f.
[124] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 8.

a superimposition. Along the same lines the widespread practice of recycling film reels deployed by small bioscopewallahs as well as by theatre owners[125], bespeaks a pragmatic attitude towards the film as a base material, rather than a closed text. In so far TBM underwrites the challenge of a linear modernity forwarded in F and TLJEL. Ashcroft consequently treats Bollywood as symbolic of another modernity:

> Bollywood demonstrates a form of transformation that has so exceeded its Western origins that it offers a stunning example of the possibilities of transformation. Such transformation explains no less than the nature of contemporary modernity: rather than a linear historical and universal process, extending the taproot of Western modernity, this modernity is multiple, rhizomic, and vibrant, erupting in different places, in different ways. (Ashcroft 2012, 2)

Yet in the context of the Bengali bioscope, this rhizomic modernity continually refers back to its substantial literary and cultural tradition. This tradition wholly informs Satyajit Ray's "Pather Panchali", which, according to Rajadhyaksha, can be understood to represent the Indian experience of modernity in its core[126]. The film moreover showcases Bengal's purchase on the Indian national imaginary and more precisely, the imaginary of modernity.

As presented here, Calcutta's bioscope industry at the beginning of the twentieth century was riddled with contradiction.With the lure of high profits on the one hand and a conservative cultural climate and the threat of censorship on the other, film producers and exhibitors were negotiating a difficult path. And while the artistic ambitions and ideas of the narrator and his uncle are circumscribed by the director of the Alochhaya Bioscope Company, the secure working conditions and the "perfect *camaraderie*"[127] among the company's employees represent a great advantage. The unity of production and exhibition disintegrated soon, however while the working conditions for actors and cameramen changed drastically with "the chaotic 'free lance system' as it prevails in Indian Cinema today."[128] This transformation is closely reflected in Shombhu's fate: Forced by two blackmailers whom Abani and Shombhu suppose to be members of the infamous "'Char Murthi'" gang to leave Calcutta[129], Shombhu ends up struggling as an obscure camera man in Bombay's burgeoning film industry.

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[125] Cf. Mahadevan, "Traveling Showmen, Makeshift Cinemas," 28.
[126] Cf. Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*, 161ff.
[127] Wadia, "The Indian Silent Film," 20.
[128] Ibid.
[129] TBM, 137-143.

> As real as Shombhu-mama was in my life *and* in the world of bioscopes [sic!]. And yet, I admit that it is odd, odd to the point of worry, how I don't have a single picture of his. I do recall seeing his face, gaunt and moustached, in group photographs. But where are those pictures? If I didn't know better, I would excuse you for thinking he didn't even exist. But as I said, […] Shombhu-Mama was there at the beginning. It's the end and—and any real signs of his presence—that's missing. Who knows, maybe you'll come up with something and let me know. (TBM, 49)(emphasis added)

From the security of the combined production-exhibition company to Bombay's freelance system, Shombhu's career trajectory mirrors the institutional evolution of the Indian film industry. With Abani, TBM simultaneously traces the psychological impact of modernity upon the colonial subject. In his essentially malleable character that marks him as the product of colonial conditioning, Abani is a *Man without Qualities* and in so far, a quintessential modern. If he vaguely senses the lack early on, the sense of dissolution becomes acute only in the moment of his cinematic 'baptism':

> Twenty-odd minutes later I walked onto the stage. Everything below me—those bobbing heads, those eyes, those faces, […] the stagelight bouncing off those faces—disappeared. If I did see anything at all outside the stage it was a partially illuminated figure […], who seemed to be hiding behind a camera. There was a corrugated strip of smoke curling up and breaking, […] behind the inhaling camera. With Durga and I sharing the stage and Shombhu's sturdy 1913 Éclair-Gillon Grand in front I felt the glare of the shadows and light. I was speaking through the pupils of my eyes, darkened double-fold by the paleness of my face. I was no longer standing on the stageboards. I was being sucked in and faithfully etched on to nitrate to be replayed from the distance. I was underwater and Prahlad. The lines didn't matter. (TBM, 80)

Here the protagonist finds himself reduced to his face and his eyes even, muted and momentarily sealed off from the world. It is thus by placing him in a vacuum that Abani is prepared for his 'assumption'. This experience of reduction and fragmentation echoes throughout the novel and rises to the fore at moments such as the following which occurs during Abani's and Lang's return from the temple:

> Instead, as we walked with increasingly brisker steps, there were more figures emerging. Some of them swayed like the upstairs girl; some had only their faces visible, hatched with grilled windows. These were bodies, parts of bodies, parts of parts of bodies that were flashing and floating in the evening Kalighat air. (TBM, 268)

The amorphous, floating appearance of these body parts immediately harks back to the Kali statue whose arms and face give the impression of being detached from the rest of her body. Analogously, the introductory shots of "The Black Hole" present the prisoners as reduced to mere body parts. Yet here the parts no longer stand in for the whole, i.e., the individual. Like the prostitutes observed in the above quote, the detainees of "The Black Hole" are reduced to bits. The violence of the gaze thus effects a fragmentation from which the protagonist himself is not exempt.

The recurrent motif of the fragmented body can consequently be interpreted as an idea presented in the form of an image, a "hypericon."[130] Here however it is not a "theoretical picture[.],"[131] but an "aesthetic 'assemblage[.].'"[132] If urban modernity is defined by the concurrent experiences of crowding and self-dissolution, actors epitomize the latter in so far as they allow spectators to appropriate and discard their screen alter egos. Yet in so far as not only the protagonist but many of the novel's characters purposely stage their exits and entrances, keenly aware of the effect, the entire narrative world of TBM appears a stage. The ability to act then emerges as a key strategy elementary to survival – all the the more so in a colonial context. At the crucial junctures however, the ability to (re-) act fails the narrator and his father.

Supremely detached, ahead of his times and existentially alone, Abani Chatterjee marks an ideal narrator, but a lost existence. At the end of his narrative, the protagonist is unable to reclaim a suitable identity for Abani Chatterjee. Hence the subject remains wrapped and trapped in the mnemonic reels that conserve his manifold screen selves. Ultimately, Abani appears an alter ego of Peter Sellers who is quoted at the beginning of the novel: "There is no me. I do not exist. There used to be a me, but I had it surgically removed."

[130] Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology: Image, text, ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 6.
[131] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 49.
[132] Ibid.

APPENDIX

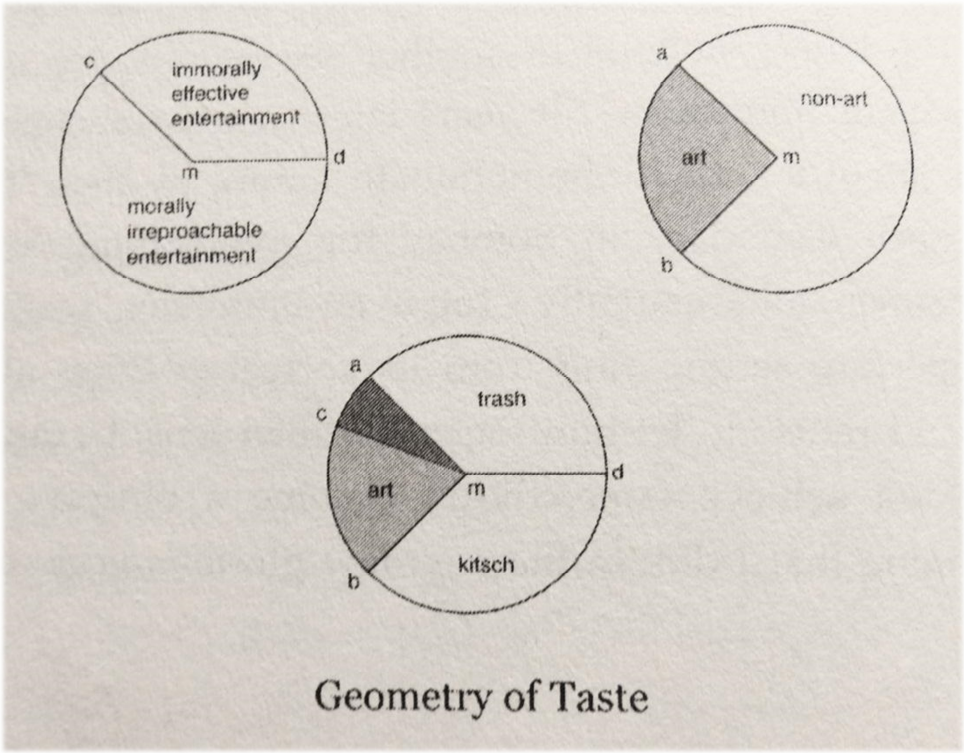

Fig. 1. Geometry of Taste, graphic from Indrajit Hazra, *The Bioscope Man*; p. 144.

7. FROM REAL TO REEL—THE CONTEMPORARY MATRIX

> This involves attention to the way in which images (and ideas) double themselves: the way we depict the act of picturing, imagine the activity of imagination, figure the practice of figuration. These doubled pictures, images, and figures ([…]) are strategies for both giving into and resisting the temptation to see ideas as images. (Mitchell 1985, 5f)

Doubled images, pictures of picturing and figurations of the practice of figuration abound in NGIS, TLJEL, F and TBM. Consequently I argue that it is not so much (the) image or visuality that are at issue here, than the power they wield over us, their use and abuse, their media and their memory. These instances can thus be understood to mark the epistemological, psychological and mnemonic predisposition towards the image/visuality. When the text depicts the act of picturing, not every image thus conveys an idea. And even of the more expressive and symbolic images presented in the corpus texts, something ultimately remains opaque. Perhaps precisely because of that their frames continue to reverberate after reading.

That there can be no translation — no matter how detailed — to arrest their meaning is a fact obliquely reflected in the previous analyses, marked by a perpetual oscillation between form and content. Here the scholar has to act as the text's "agent in submitting to its logic and conceding its otherness prior to subjective interpretation."[1] Following this stipulation the conclusive discussion traces the psychological effect of those opaque or ostentatiously vacuous visual frames narratively or symbolically not or not fully integrated into the textual economy. Arguing furthermore that the specific visual (media) practices in the texts possess both cultural and poetological significance, these are explored as strategies of resistance within the framework of the postcolonial modernity debate.

If the 19th century saw the sudden expansion of the public field in India[2], the contemporary moment as presented in NGIS and TLJEL suggests that the massive mobilization and circulation of media and images has reached the point of entropy. In this pervasive simultaneity, the binaries of new and old, modern and traditional seem increasingly obsolete. The novels' (re-) turn to the image and its primary media thus reads less as a symptom of the postmodern "deluge of pictures,"[3] than as the attempt of a poetic reckoning with the visual (medial) inventories of the modern and the national.

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[1] Bahri, *Native Intelligence,* 108.

[2] Cf. Sinha, Gayatri. "Introduction." *Art and Visual Culture in India, 1857-2007*. Ed. Gayatri Sinha. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009, 8.

[3] Rippl, Gabriele, "English Literature and its Other: Towards a Poetics of Intermediality." In Emden, Christian J. (ed), *ImageScapes*, 39.

As the previous analyses illustrated, these inventories are inextricably intertwined in the Indian context[4]. Assuming that the post-1990 "revolution [...] on the air waves and in televisual space"[5] resulted in a "moment of flux"[6] as Virdi diagnosed it in 2003, popular media and culture now evince a dominant thrust and it is through the twentieth century media history and culture anthropology compiled here that the trajectory of this thrust is at once made palpable and intelligible:

> In the mid-19th century, the first encounter with instruments of mechanical reproduction spawned a revolution that stimulated the creation of mass culture. The dissemination of photography and print media allowed the visual field to expand, bridging fissures of caste and community, and created an alternative base for the interplay of mythology, capital goods, and the nationalist message. […]. The mass circulation of cheap images in the 19th century, and *the integration of the real with the fictive, the material with the mythic, have a continuing resonance in the visual field of contemporary India.* (Sinha 2009, 8f)(emphasis added)

This resonance is clearly audible in the corpus novels, as their figurations mobilize not only images, but hint at a genealogy of image in which the sacred is linked with the profane and the political with the commercial. When the visual is engineered as a frontal, self-conscious display of the 'outsourcing' of individual and collective memory to media and visual arts,[7] while the texts depict and also forge aesthetic interventions, their effect and poetological purpose demand addressing. In the following I will argue that the visual-textual units previously discussed do not function as a "figure[.] of the [d]ifference,"[8] but as a figure of interrelation. It is at these points, conceived as fixtures that the visual-aesthetic and subject psychological conception of the texts crystallizes. Above all, these portions are exemplary of a narrative poetics and politics reliant upon assembling disjunct pieces, copies and lost fragments to access the popular imaginary and thereby forge new conjunctures.

Acknowledging that the contemporary urban landscape in India was invaded by 'the pirate kingdom' in the 1980s[9], the latter represents a cultural environment conducive to the practice of anti-hegemonial techniques of appropriation and dissipation, be it in the digital sphere or in literature.

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[4] Cf. Kapur, *When Was Modernism?* 288.
[5] Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation*, 4.
[66] Ibid.
[7] Cf. Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 389.
[8] Cf. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 47.
[9] Cf. Sundaram, Ravi."Revisiting the Pirate Kingdom." *Postcolonial Piracy. Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South.* Ed. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 39.

Consequently the corpus texts can be discussed and made poetologically fruitful within the conceptual framework of postcolonial piracy, understood as "any culture of the copy in print, analogue or digital mediascapes."[10] In so doing however, the argumentation takes a somewhat circuitous route. First of all the fact merits emphasis that the multifarious signs under which photography and cinema film were explored here can only be conceptualized by the *dispositif*[11] since the latter comprehends the various aesthetic, technical, institutional and social dimensions in which they are represented and/or implied in the texts. The use of photography and film as dispositif made here inscribes a synthetic view in which the integration of these dimensions is understood to be so seamless, that they dissolve in impact. The term furthermore comprehends the diverse roles played by these media as communicative interfaces; cultural and iconographic repertories and modes of interpellation[12].

Designating "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions […]"[13] driven by the simultaneous processes of "*functional overdetermination* [and] *strategic elaboration*,"[14] the Foucauldian concept of dispositif appears suited to conceptualizing the systemic manner in which photography and cinema are implicated in the texts under scrutiny.[15] Here namely they appear located at the interstices of social and political forces that give the medium a determinate form and historic trajectory, while the media in their turn intervene in and shape social and political processes. This reciprocal formation is closely reflected in TBM and F, but also in TLJEL. Hence cinema and photography emerge as constrained by existent artistic traditions and cultural sensibilities, while simultaneously and almost routinely establishing new patterns of social interaction and political communication[16].

In Baudry's theory by contrast, the dispositif designates the process and subject of projection[17], while the basic (cinematographic) apparatus comprehends the camera, projector, screen and auxiliary technology.

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[10] Eckstein, Lars and Anja Schwarz. "Introduction: Towards a Postcolonial Critique of Modern Piracy." *Postcolonial Piracy. Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South.* Ed. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 5.

[11] I prefer the orginal term over the translation 'apparatus' which implies a material, technical object.

[12] The term is not primarily used here in the political-ideological sense in which Althusser devised it, but in the wider psychological sense.

[13] Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977.* Trans. Colin Gordon. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, 194f.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Cf. Tinsobin, Eva. *Das Kino als Apparat. Medientheorie und Medientechnik im Spiegel der Apparatusdebatte.* Boizenburg: Hülsbusch, 2008, 16ff.

[16] This holds true for popular cinema film to a much higher degree than for photography.

[17] Cf. Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," 693.

If seeing a film marks the seamless coordination and integration of the above, the textual simulation of cinematic vision requires the replication of the cinematic apparatus and the interpolation of a subject of projection. Here, imaginative projection is thus the result of an interaction between the text-implicit apparatus and reader cognition. The aesthetic textures evoked in TBM consequently underscore the performative, dynamic aspect of vision[18] not in spite of but *because* they are textual. The oscillation between micro- and macro-narrative perpetuated in these passages is thus marked by two complementary processes, those of deconstruction and reconstruction – or using the 'reel' analogy – of splitting and splicing. In this way the elements of the dispositif and technical apparatus are at once separate and interconnected, effecting a subtle detachment.

But to understand the texts' aesthetic economy fully it is inevitable to discuss how they address the implied spectator at these specific junctures. It is interesting to note in this context that the film sequences of TBM and F, and particularly the photo textures of TLJEL evince a *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive* designation. If description as "a textual feature which used to be one of the strongest incentives to reading, is steadily becoming less elaborate as today's media-educated readerships are less dependent on verbal descriptions,"[19] this may seem paradoxical at first. However, I propose that the passages in question are neither nostalgic kitsch, nor exhibitions of an outdated scopic regime. Instead, they hold appeal for the reading subject. In fact they hold out a promise – the promise of a singular, static subjectivity. This occurs on the level of communication marked by the narratee, more precisely the narratee in her role of implied spectator. In the methodological chapter I advanced the idea that the visual text(ures) in the corpus novels suppose an implied focalizer, which invokes and prefigures an implied spectator. The latter is thus 'positioned' in the evocation of the image(s) as a deictic act.

The photo textures of TLJEL and the film(ic) sequences of TBM and F all imply a static spectator position and *linear* perspective. In other words, they tacitly place the implied spectator opposite the frame, thereby granting her epistemological sovereignty[20]. But while realism posited the gaze of an inquisitive subject as the natural interlocutor of the text[21], the corpus novels do not presuppose a static, exterior reality.

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[18] Cf. Stemmler, "Wider die Unmittelbarkeit des Visuellen," 49.

[19] Brosch, Renate. "Migrating Images and Communal Experience." *Semiotic Encounters: Text, Image and Trans-nation*. Ed. Sarah Säckel, Walter Göbel and Noha Hamdy. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, 59.

[20] Cf. Belsey, *Culture and the Real,* 108f.

[21] Ibid.

We are not to learn how the world really is or was. Instead, the narratee as spectator is primarily engaged for the sake of visual-imaginative enjoyment, i.e., as a zoon opticon or "seeing animal"[22]:

> The next one she liked to show was a colour print. Suman Bhatt on a horse in Simla, her husband Mahadev Bhatt standing next to the horse, holding the reins. A young couple on a holiday, June 1959. It is, for India, an early colour print, strange shiny brittle paper, a thin white border around colours that had already faded by the time I saw it — sickly magentas, light pinks, the trees in the background an odd purpleish blue, the horse an odd brown, my parents' faces almost sepia.
>
> My mother wears a Kulu cap and underneath it her face has a proud look, […]. She is proud, but she is not smiling and neither is my father. (TLJEL, 46)

Within the text's semiotic economy, the passage seems vacuous as the depicted scene is generic. The faded colours recall the familiar ritual of glancing through an old family album. Its neon colours notwithstanding, the image has a reassuring quality and nostalgic appeal. But apart from complementing textual information, the image seems to observe no function. By contrast, the following scene elucidates a practice foundational to Indian cinema. Nonetheless, the elaborate visual representation of this practice appears purely ornamental:

> Anjangarh was still, and so was the haweli, though the sun was surprisingly strong and there were tiny heat waves - rippling like water - near the horizon. Ashok was sleeping, but Harihar was up, sitting cross-legged on a reed mat. A long, narrow plank of wood, with two spare stands for reels, lay in front of him. One bare foot rested on the plank, roughly in the middle - toenails cracked and grimed with dust - keeping it stable. He moved the reel slowly in the slanted sunlight of the tent opening, scanning the thin and dark pictures for the flaw he had noticed last night. A roll of transparent tissue, glue, a pair of scissors and a tin box of tools lay to one side, neatly arranged like all his possessions. (F, 98)

As the text proceeds from background to foreground in sketching this bucolic scenery, one is reminded of a landscape painting. Again the foreground is dominated by an anthropomorphic figure facing the implied spectator from behind the reel stands. In a reception aesthetic perspective, both passages invite the reader to 'attend' the image's evocation as a visual event. But the passage does more than giving the visual imagination something to 'feed' on. In view of the dynamic nature of reception, images such as the above cited mark static, self-contained units arresting the flux of semiosis. In other words, they mark fixtures, points at which the narratee is withdrawn from the flux of text. Their familiar frames moreover connect them to perceptual experience, so that they evoke a reassuring sense of familiarity.

[22] Mitchell, "Showing Seeing," 171.

But their psychological effect exceeds pure affect. As the narratee assumes the position framed by the image, the psychological subject simultaneously experiences a sensation of preliminary (ar)rest. In this way the reading subject is given leave of absence whiele a static, solid subjectivity is interpolated in her stead – if only for the duration of the passage. At the same time these images advertise their pastness and evoke a discreet sense of nostalgia. They simulate immanence in the moment, allowing readers to relish the act of imagi(ni)ng. As such, these passages are implicitly aimed at a subject conceived as unstable, fragmented and desirous to (re-)cover its loss. Such images then remind the subject in her role of media consumer of the impossibility of immediate experience and by extension, the loss of the real. After being granted free reign for a brief moment, transparency and linear perspective are again abandoned as their obsolescence is implicitly affirmed.

A different epistemological regime – a regime that denies transparency and promotes polysemy – prevails in the rest of the corpus texts. Yet even as the novels acknowledge the unknowability of the real, they concede the freedom of the imagination and the need of the subject for recognition. It is this ambiguity also that is seminal to the artwork as Bahri points out:

> The alchemic transformation of the particularities of the real through the workings of the artistic alembic effects the first of these removals from life as we know it, making meaning at once more simple and more complex. The proliferation of possibilities unleashed through this transformative process return us to a revaluation of the real through a useful ambiguity that frees the imagination for the contemplation of another purpose. The desire to be free of dominative rationality is betrayed through the logic of aesthetic form and through the unique modes of ambiguity enfolded into the artwork's internal regime. (Bahri 2003, 112)

As manifest points of attraction, the quoted passages effect a very overt removal in so far as they distance the implied spectator, alerting her to the artificiality and irreality of the image. By simultaneously engaging the narratee to "produce the text, open it out, *set it going*,"[23] the novels offer a simple pleasure. For Barthes this stands in marked contrast to the "'boredom' experienced by many in the face of the modern ('unreadable') text."[24] However, even in their quality of polyphonic, heterogeneous texts, NGIS, F, TBM and TLJEL are eminently readable. Hence this is no question of pleasure versus jouissance[25].

[23] Barthes,"From Work to Text." In: Barthes/Heath, *Image-Music-Text*, 163.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Cf. Heath, "Translator's Note." In: Barthes/Heath, *Image-Music-Text*, 9.

Instead I propose that the quoted passages mark the poetological attempt of arresting an elusive real. In fact, they function as deliberately flawed, insufficient stand-ins for the real, reminding us of a *there and then* lost in the pervasive, all encompassing *here and now*. At this point the discussion sidesteps to discuss the concept of body and subjectivity forwarded in the novels, before taking the previous thread up again later. I argue that the bodies formulated in the texts are reflections of fluctuating forces and as such accommodate a historic experience marked by compression and restriction. It is also the latter which is reflected in the novels' seemingly aleatory aesthetic. Abani Chatterjee's filmic 'baptism' and Borun's portrait of Paresh in TLJEL show bodies open to and pierced by light, a light penetrating not only the eyes but consciousness. The psychological states of the texts' characters and protagonists are often immediately reflected in their physical or material states, which alternate between light and clarity (*sattva*[26]), and shadow or darkness (*tamas*) – states that are actual as much as symbolic.

For Paresh Bhatt, Abani Chatterjee and Saleem Lahori, as well as for the beggar and numerous other figures in NGIS, physical body (*prakrti*) and consciousness (*puruṣa*) are indissolubly intertwined. In so far, the concept of body and its relation to consciousness informing the corpus novels is consonant with that of Sāṃkhya philosophy[27]:

> Because the body matter also includes theoretical and mental processes, the body is not, according to the Sāṃkhya System and common opinion, a monad that is determined by its physical body limits. In India the body is thought of as a porous structure and concerns not only the individual, but also the social group. The body becomes a *social body*. […]. Individuality becomes a dividuality ([…]); the individual body becomes a social body. (Michaels/Wulf 2009, 13)

> Marriott and Ron Inden (1977) argued furthermore that many Hindus understand themselves not as "individuals" in the post-Enlightenment European sense of bounded, integral, and atomistic wholes but rather as "dividuals," that is, as divisible persons made up of particulate [sic!] substances that can flow across boundaries and thus be shared, exchanged, and transferred. (Mines 2008, 148)

In so far as the concept of exchange is elementary to Sāṃkhya philosophy, the latter is reconcilable with Deleuze's concept of the dividual as elaborated in the context of his theory of the "society of control"[28]. I argue that the conception of the subject as fluid is reflected in most characters, but above all in the protagonists and/or narrators.

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[26] One of three substance-states set out by Samkhya philosophy which includes „*sattva* (goodness and light), *rajas* (action), and *tamas* (darkness or inertia)." (Mines, Diane P., "Exchange." In: Mittal/Thursby (eds), *Studying Hinduism*, 148.

[27] According to Berger, the "first philosophically systematic depiction of how the mind was structured." (Berger, Douglas L. "Intellect." In: Mittal/Thursby (eds), *Studying Hinduism*, 195.)

[28] Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." October. 59 (1992 Winter), 5. JSTOR 5 Jan. 2015. < http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828>.

Abani Chatterjee, Saleem Lahori, Paresh Bhatt and the characters in NGIS thus conspicuously subvert the notion of a rigid, singular identity, instead exhibiting a fluid, metamorphic subjectivity that absorbs the looks, substances and moods of the surrounding world. Yet if the dividual is a historic corollary of the society of control that marks the contemporary mode of production according to Deleuze[29], Sāṃkhya philosophy posits the dividual as an a priori of human existence. In this context the repeated depiction of darśanic exchanges also demands address: ""Darśanic" contact" as Lutgendorf points out, "invites the exchange of substance through the eyes, which are not simply "windows of the soul" but portals to a self that is conceived as relatively less autonomous and bounded and more psychically permeable than in Western understandings ([…])."[30] Darśan then marks the most obtrusive and immediate manifestation of the concept of the dividual *in visual practice*.

In TLJEL, visual exchange finds its most acute reflection in the novels' female characters, Para, Suman and Anna. Hence Para actively courts the idea of being an avatar of Durga-Mahishasuramardani, but soon finds herself reduced to a killing machine and prospective martyr. Similarly, Shanti[31] is turned into an ideal of the virtuous wife and mother (of the nation) by her husband's reifying gaze. The detrimental effect of such looks – looks that create *and* kill – thus becomes apparent here.

> Woman's deification as mother was another dimension of womanhood occupying a powerful position in the national imaginary. By the end of the nineteenth century, in the early phase of nationalism, popular literature, song, drama, and painting—in fact the entire gamut of art and culture—was concerned with the problem of expressing "national identity," and used the mother icon to personify the nation. Images of the mother as a victim—a figure inspiring a strong sense of duty, an intense, almost filial, relationship to the nation—abound in the nineteenth century. (Virdi 2003, 66)

But the novels not only formulate a trenchant critique of the restrictive, destructive role models available to women, f.e. through Anna's ironic Durga pastiche[32]. Notably, this image slyly uses pastiche to abduct and subvert the icon's original meaning. It copies but simultaneously adds something, thus declaring the resultant photograph an object of cultural/artistic piracy. This act has wider relevance however, namely in so far as the Durga-Mahishasuramardani and Kali figurations of TLJEL and TBM respectively signpost a nation caught in the vicious circle of victimhood, paranoia, scaremongering and aggression.

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[29] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4ff.
[30] Lutgendorf, "Cinema." In: Mittal/Thursby (eds), *Studying Hinduism*, 46.
[31] The wife of the protagonist Jibananda in the film "Anandamath".
[32] Cf. p. 127.

In the novels, Durga and Bharat Mata thus mark a confluence, namely of the emergence of modern mass media on the one hand and that of a ubiquitous imaginary staking its claim to national validity on the other[33].

> The cultural imaginary peculiar to a region and period is made up of a fund of images with strong appeal and visibility from its history. As cultural production continues, new images become participants in this collective imaginary constantly feeding into already established images and icons of communal identity as well as modifying or undercutting these, so that a continuous shape-shifting of visual identity-construction is taking place. (Brosch 2009, 57)

This "continuous shape-shifting of visual identity-construction" I argue, is repeatedly signposted in the novels and it is also implicitly or explicitly discussed by the narrators and protagonists. Since the texts are concerned also with that dimension of the medium as dispositif that marks the galvanizing of artistic/representative traditions, aesthetic sensibilities and cultural mores, the evolution of specific media practices and their significance within the poetics of the text are worthwhile considering. Hence, in TBM the reelaboration of the artistic vocabularies of folk (*jatra/tamasha*) and Parsee theatre in the bioscope are sharply accentuated in both the projection sequences' mise-en-scène and narratorial discourse.

The passage of photography from analogue craft/technê to the subsumption under the digital economy signals a media-historic evolution worthwhile tracing in so far namely as it provides an explanation for the shaping of a specific cultural and historic subjectivity. As an integral part of the novels' literary mandate, media archeology grants access to the aesthetic dimension of the politics of memory. But while the corpus texts are open to a media historic and culture anthropological exploration, the latter necessarily remains partial and punctiform, not least because the texts reference a specifically Hindu and North-Indian cultural imaginary.

First of all it is interesting to note that although the novels were written after the millennium and thus after the onset of India's new media boom, only NGIS and TLJEL reflect and contemplate the impact of the latter, while Joshi's novel is more concerned with the resilience and updating of the old in the new – an observation affirmed in F and TBM. Perhaps this validates Mitchell's argument that the pictorial/iconic turn has been too narrowly theorized as a Western, postmodern, new media phenomenon[34] which is consequently of limited jurisdiction in the present context.

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[33] Cf. Pinney, "Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures." In: Dwyer/Pinney (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation*, 18f.

[34] Mitchell, "Showing Seeing," 172.

The "discontinuous temporalities and complex aesthetic forms that challenge routine ways of relating the history of media [.] to conventional historic processes"[35] are manifest in a phenomenon just depicted in the quote from F, which shows Harihar the bioscopewallah working on his reels. Cutting out the faulty frames from his dated, decrepit reels he destroys the filmic text to create a new one, thus "adapting available instruments to unforeseen operations"[36] in an act of bricolage. And while this is occasioned by economic necessity rather creative impetus, it marks a significant intervention, not least with regard to the poetics of the novel. This kind of "'[r]ecycling' is not a process of more of the same (i.e. simple replication), but works as a complex difference engine – each copy is different from its predecessor, through variation and recombination."[37] In so far as this kind of recycling is sanctioned as the distributors are aware of the practice, the act represents no legal transgression. Nonetheless, it grants those excluded from the circuits of urban consumption access to the new medium and in so far constitutes a kind of gleaning, of recovering and repairing as a cultural technique[38].

If the novels are understood to represent historic moments and experiences that are subject to erasure, I argue that this marks an act of symbolic value. In this context, I would like to return to the first section of Batin's narrative set in Anjangarh as it stands representative of an experience obliterated and eventually negated by 'India shining'. If "Pather Panchali" as the cinematographic subtext of the section encapsulates a hopeful vision, the adoption of its aesthetic marks an act of programmatic recycling, namely a recycling validating the political claim intrinsic to the original. Adopting the setting, style and figures of the original, that original is nowhere stated however. Instead it is acknowledged for its intrinsic culture-psychological value because it "served to provide a gloss on the civilizational trauma caused by progress [and] sublimated (and displaced) the threat of modernization into a dream of autonomy."[39]

But the copy subverts the original in a central respect: Here Apu-Ashok marks the pawn traded in for the dream of wealth and success – a dream which monopolized the Indian collective imaginary in the second half of the twentieth century, obliterating the

[35] Rajagopal, "Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture," 11.
[36] Poduval, Satish. "Hacking and Difference: Reflections on Authorship in the Postcolonial Pirate Domain." *Postcolonial Piracy. Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South.* Ed. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, 274.
[37] Sundaram,"Revisiting the Pirate Kingdom," 35.
[38] Ibid., 4.
[39] Kapur, *When Was Modernism*, 205.

erstwhile ideals of equality and cultural autonomy[40]. A discussion of aesthetic techniques that realign historic temporalities sends us back to another moment in NGIS: Here, the evocative, if sensually confusing landscape of Yasin Baag observed by the flâneur is marked by the conspicuous contemporaneity of pre-industrial and late capitalist modes of production, archaic rituals and new media regimes[41].

> Here memory comes into being as a folding of dimensions that cannot be simplified or translated into one another without residue: the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the sensible and the intelligible, the future and the past—it is such an excess or openness with respect to its own constitution that the heretical archive displays and affirms against the violence of definition and the inevitability of forgetting. (Torlasco 2013, xvii)

In the context of my discussion of F, I adopted Torlasco's concept of the "heretical archive" as a description of how the text deliberately focuses and exhibits invisible items and marginal figures. But the heretical archive has wider appeal in so far as it offers a trope to conceive of the way in which aesthetic elements of the text are used for the purpose of recovery or rhetorical antithesis. The "fold" – a concept Torlasco adopts from Merleau-Ponty – assumes an elementary role in this context in so far as it designates a "chiasm of perception, the intertwining of seeing and being seen, touching and being touched—the cipher of a reversibility, a coiling or doubling back that is in principle asymmetrical and always unfinished."[42]

Although Torlasco explicitly allocates her theory in a new media context[43], its application in this context is legitimate in so far as the corpus texts effect this "chiasm of perception" through references to another medium. Moreover, the concepts of piracy and the heretical archive are not incompatible for if heresy implies orthodoxy, the heretical archive can be understood to challenge established historic narratives and ideas and in so far has a destabilizing function akin to that of piracy. More importantly both occupy the margins of the established and accepted. Perhaps the base mechanism of 'folding' is best understood when viewed in (the) (con-)text – a purpose to which Tyrewala's text appears ideally suited in so far as it does not so much narrate, as compile an inventory, a huge pool of different histories and experiences, some submerged, some hypervisible.

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[40] Pinney makes a similar point when he observes that "the innocent aspirations of *Mother India* have been transformed into the moral anomie and despair of *Sadak* (1991)," a film which "pits a heroic urban citizen against an utterly decayed post-colonial state and compromised civil society in which every successive source of salvation is revealed to be more corrupt than the last." (Pinney, "Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures." In: Dwyer/Pinney (eds), *Pleasure and the Nation,* 28.)

[41] Cf. page 63 (NGIS 129f).

[42] Torlasco, *The Heretical Archive,* xvii.

[43] Ibid.

The text then delves into this pool to retrieve (seemingly) random 'samples'. As the discussion of suture as an ordering principle in NGIS shows, the text relies substantially on the idea of reversibility in so far as it alternates "seeing and being seen, touching and being touched." The archive compiled here thus marks a living, breathing complex which stands in marked contrast to the inanimate inventories of photographs and reels presented in the other novels. This is not to suggest that the latter cannot perpetuate similar 'folds'. In TLJEL, 'Contact Sheet'[44] thus montages a past and a future war in a fashion that foregrounds its invisible victims. If history keeps repeating continuously, the text assumes an interventionist function at this point. Significantly however, the victims are not depicted, but merely invoked as absences by the two narrative images. This purposeful absence thus tacitly refutes and critiques the anaesthesizing voyeurism of war images.

Similarly, the album compiled in TLJEL or the reels of F and TBM are not only monuments of personal success or failure. Their images encapsulate a historic moment and experience threatened by amnesia. Here the narrators and protagonists thus assume the role of "gleaners,"[45] an act based on the intention to not focus only upon the immediately pertinent, i.e. the 'flesh' of the story, but to retrieve the minor bits and leftovers.

This intention is particularly apparent in Batin's narration which proceeds despite the scholar's insistence upon linearity and coherence. TLJEL too compiles numerous 'leftover' images and stories. And while Abani Chatterjee presents a fairly straightforward story, he too indulges in collecting random incidents and scenes. Within the logic of TBM, the 'projection sequences' mark a personal act of retrieval, of archiving. Within a poetological and media theoretical perspective however, they can be interpreted to comprise the heretical archive of Bengali silent film. It is not altogether irrelevant in this context that these acts of gleaning are perpetuated by stranded (F, TLJEL) and forgotten figures (TBM). With the latter the novels also formulate a specifically postcolonial identity, if not in the sense of social subalternity, than in the sense of a historic subalternity, namely a subalternity to a *nationalist modernity* with increasingly exclusivist and authoritarian traits.

Significantly, a narrative universe thus conceived does not warrant the unambiguous identification of victims or villains. And although there may be 'villains' in F and TBM, there is no effective opposing them as contingency disallows heroic resistance, instead inviting the melancholy gesture of (re-)collection.

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[44] Cf. p. 103f.
[45] Torlasco, *The Heretical Archive*, 29.

> Beyond the scheme of the obviously good and evil, from some unexpected conjunction of events in the past and present, in the confusion and aporia produced by conditions of totality, is a possibility that may lie in waiting for discovery. The work of the artist remains the exercise of memory and recollection, of an imagination albeit tethered to and limited by the reality principle and the willingness to engage in a thoughtful, patient sort of arbitrage. (Bahri 2003, 119)

Ultimately, the novels are so remarkable also because they are formidably suited as lenses through which to view contemporary India. The latter is never wholly absent, even in F and TBM. It is the historic momentum implicit in them, namely the anticipation and hope of future change which ties them to the present. The early to mid-twentieth century still held, however vaguely, the promise of progress and equality. At the contemporary moment the raison d'état may still be questioned but appears so consolidated that questioning seems perfunctory. The heretical archive and its techniques of folding and gleaning are suited to illustrating, thus tread a different path.

But the texts not only respond to a pervasive need to return to the past, they also document the impossibility of retrieving anything but disjunct pieces — re-coveries that have little to do with the original. Catching the drift of an affect-driven public politics, the novelists reflect a profound understanding of the motives driving Indian politics today. The latter are also lucidly outlined by Pankaj Mishra in an article published on the occasion of the BJP landslide victory of 2014:

> With their prerogative to rule and interpret India pilfered by the "unwashed" and the "gullible", the anglophones have been struggling to grasp the eruption of mass politics in India, its new centrifugal thrust, […]. It is easy for them to denounce India's evidently uncouth retailers of caste and religious identity as embodiments of, in Salman Rushdie's words, "Caligulan barbarity"; […]. Those pied-pipering the young into Modi-mania nevertheless possess the occult power to fulfil the deeper needs of their needy followers. They can compile vivid ideological collages – made of fragments of modernity, glimpses of utopia and renovated pieces of a forgotten past. It is in the "mythological thrillers" and positive-thinking fictions – the most popular literary genres in India today – that a post-1991 generation that doesn't even know it is lost fleetingly but thrillingly recognises itself. (Mishra 2014)[46]

Notably, the corpus novels do not simply denounce the uneducated, bewildered or gullible like the RSS sevak in F, the aspiring terrorist Sohail Tambawala 14 or even Para Bhatt in TLJEL. Instead they acknowledge the undeniable appeal and potential of familiar icons and narratives to provide a sense of identification for the subject.

[46] Mishra, Pankaj, "Narendra Modi and the new face of India." The Guardian. 16 May 2014. 5 Jan. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/16/what-next-india-pankaj-mishra>.

In the face of the defunct narratives of anti-colonial struggle and Nehruvian brand-progress[47], identification has to be sought elsewhere. And here lies the ingenuity of the corpus texts for instead of tendering sanitized or "renovated pieces" of the past or attempting to lecture the reader on the dangers of the latter, the novels compile different, even contrasting memories and experiences that sketch a more complex image. In this way "'a past which has never been present'"[48] is effectively exposed, thereby forestalling nostalgia. But Mishra's "vivid ideological collages" simultaneously call attention to a subject practice premised upon the default mode of piracy: By reshuffling the "fragments of modernity, glimpses of utopia and renovated pieces of a forgotten past" – fragments also circulated in the novels' images and aesthetic textures – the texts actively participate in this economy and simultaneously expose it to literary scrutiny.

While for Mishra, the turn to an idealized past harbors mainly dangers, in the eyes of Partha Chatterjee[49] it is to the past that the modern Indian subject must and should turn because it is this "attachment to the past which gives birth to the feeling that the present needs to be changed, that it is our task to change it." However, when he avers that "modernity for us is like a supermarket of foreign goods," this claim is clearly consonant with Mishra's observations. Nonetheless, according to the latter this 'supermarket' has a more than eager clientele in India. For Chatterjee this copy-and-paste approach may carry the undeniable imprimatur of a lesser, derivative modernity, in Mishra's image of India however, the latter has already taken shape – if not an altogether pleasant one from a critical left-wing perspective.

If the contemporary, accelerated technological development induces "an accentuated state of disorientation in the *Zeitgeist*,"[50] the circulation of images and visual intensities between text and recipient affirms their centrifugal force through which subjectivity is at once dissolved and constituted. In this process, the genres of the past are continually revised and reconstituted as media of the present. There is no real in sight, but it is in sight, that the real is still sought. And so we continue along the reel's unending moebius strip.

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[47] Cf. Kaviraj, Sudipta, *The Imaginary Institution of India. Politics and Ideas.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 23ff.

[48] Torlasco, *The Heretical Archive*, xvii.

[49] Chatterjee, Partha. "Our Modernity." 1994. *Empire & Nation: Essential Writings 1985-2005*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012, 151.

[50] Müller, Jürgen E. "Media Encounters—An Introduction." *Media Encounters and Media Theories*. Ed. Jürgen E. Müller. Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2008, 8.

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SELBSTÄNDIGKEITSERKLÄRUNG

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich die von mir vorgelegte Dissertation selbständig angefertigt und keine anderen als die von mir angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe, sowie jede wörtlich oder inhaltlich übernommene Stelle kenntlich gemacht habe.

Potsdam, den 26.01.15

Anna Maria Reimer