TECHNO-MATERIAL BODIES: CELLPHONES & TELEVISION IN BOMBAY CINEMA

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SHAUNAK SEN

CINEMA STUDIES
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **"Techno-Material Bodies: Cellphones & Television in Bombay Cinema"** submitted by me in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any degree of this university or any other university.

Shaunak Sen

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr.Parul Dave Mukherji
Dean

Ranjani Mazumdar
Supervisor

CONTENTS

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[1] I would never have believed two months ago that footnotes could be cause for existential crisis. Now I believe it.

My classmates have helped consistently. Kuhu, often the Mary Antoinette (of 'why can't they eat cake' fame) of our little dissertation universe, would be struggling with the 6th line of the last para of her conclusion, while I would still be dabbling with chapter topics. She has been very sweet and very helpful in constantly passing work material on, and provided a much needed calm voice of reason in moments of Ranjani-crisis. Debjani has been a good friend to share walks around C.R Park with, anxiously talking about just how badly our chapters are placed. Neel has been a manfriday par excellence, doing all the dirty running around work when I have asked him for it. Ishita, like she said, has been a 'model junior'; unquestioningly doing all the boring googling I've gone one asking her to do. Bhamati, Malay, Uday, Anirban, Rashmi, Aman, Raja have all given very productive inputs.

This dissertation has taken a lot from me. It has been a serious mythbuster, nearly all the talents I attributed to myself in the past have gotten systematically demolished. But I have come to love it now. By the third chapter my love for cool beginnings and fancy French philosophers had begun dying out. I have begun learning to get to the point. (I said begun.)

Maa and Baba. For being around. Everything is about them.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The contemporary moment has seen growing aggregates of the country's population accommodate and get entwined increasingly into 'technologized' models of experience. The proliferation of various technologies since globalization has precipitated a number of material changes, and the technological is now a seamless and integral part of the ordinary material world of the everyday. As the 'ordinary' today is peppered and constituted by humdrum technological objects like TVs, cell phones, laptops, Ipads and scores of other electronic devices, the basic infrastructural flesh of the quotidian in urban spaces begins to change (Sundaram 2009). This precipitates a foundational transformation in our sensorium – newer regimes of materiality are inaugurated as bodies get perpetually girdled by a technological object-world. The body that is habitually in contact with these technological objects also begins to transform – be it the body in front of the computer, the television spectator, or the cell phone user. This dissertation explores the sensory regimes of this new technological materiality as it unfolds across the cinematic. Focusing especially on two mundane technological objects - Television and cellular phones, I look at how recent Hindi cinema taps into and mobilizes this techno-material everyday and the new kinds of bodies (the television public and cell phone users) that inhabit it. For this I will examine three broad forcefields – the television event, the cellular network and the creation of a new technological uncanny.

Chronicles of the Technological Foretold

It is by now fairly well accepted that the 'technological' isn't restricted to the conventional 'scientific' idea of 'technology' (Higgs 2000, Stiegler 1998). Ravi Sundaram's work in particular, helps in apprehending the urban technological epiphenomenon in India in its broadest sweep - as a lived, sensed everyday experience, and as a site of various terrestrial tussles (2009). Sundaram situates this new media sensorium within a historical trajectory – one he traces right from the post

1947 Nehruvian developmental modernism (of massive state sponsored accumulation strategies like big dams and mills), through the tumultuous 1970s (by when the ebullient visionary developmental regime was in crisis and entangled with a highly centralized and repressive" dynastic state) to the moment of the 1990s where a collapse in the distinctions between technology, urban life and the burgeoning media circuit, produced a "delirious disorientation of the senses" (Ravi Sundaram 2009:7).

Once the domain of scientific debates, planning bodies and technical committees (meant to administer large projects like Dams and mills) the 'technological' sphere included civic infrastructure like transport, electricity, housing, water supply etc (Sundaram 2009:2]. But with the explosion of the media that the 1990s witnessed, various kinds of media formations now permeate the everyday lives of urban dwellers. This burgeoning media has drastically transformed the material skin of the city scape, as people living in urban and semi-urban locations now inhabit a media urbanism, a "wild ensemble of image and sensation" (Sundaram 2009:3). This however has to be seen in consonance with the larger catalogue of changes the processes of Globalization in India cascaded. Indian cities were suddenly brimming with spatial upheavals "overtaken by a frenzy of chaotic construction: flyovers, shopping malls, multiplexes, hotels and highways" (Mazumdar 2007:xxi). Alongside this was a gargantuan boom in the automobile sector as major market players like Honda, Suzuki, Toyota and Indian producers like Tata, Mahindra and Mahindra and Maruti beefed up their manufacturing volumes almost simultaneously (put citation here)[1] (ibid). Planning bodies now increasingly privileged fly-overs and highways to facilitate speedy automobile travel, while private building contractors made an influential entry into the housing sector as the emphasis shifted from social housing to commercial high-rises (Oza 2001). Mushrooming alongside all these changes was a profusion of relatively cheap kinds of media. The television sector blazed into a mammoth industry with swathes of new channels opening in quick succession the film music sector expanded frenetically, and the advertising circuit emerged as one of the largest in Asia (Mazzarella 2003). Cheap computer systems, cell phones, play-stations, and different kinds of software inundated the local markets. The idea of

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[1] See *Automobile Industry in India–Pattern Of Growth*, PD Rathi. Volume 2, Issue 1, April 2011 - sgi.ac.in

publicity itself underwent a sea change – advertising images now spanned across billboards, cell phones, wall surfaces, buses, cars etc; and the wall itself changed from being the opaque and intransigent entity made of granite, bricks and mortar into a transparent, reflexive surface made of portative material such as glass, plexi glass acetate (Jenkins 2006). All in all after globalization, "city life witnessed an accelerated flow of images at every level" (Mazumdar, 2007:xxi). As a plurality of gadgets become ubiquitous in our day to day material surroundings, the technological object itself became almost indistinguishably from other sorts of physical artifacts.

Enter the Digital

One of the earliest (and acutely far-sighted) voices to flag the perceptual changes technology introduced was Lewis Mumford. Mumford suggested that the entry of photography, the telephone and the radio reorganized and re-cultivated the experiences of the eye, the voice and the ear. The result was a transformation of the embodied, material relationship to the world (Mumford 1934:333-334). Mumford argued that:

> "face to face with these new machines and instruments, with their hard surfaces, their rigid volumes, their stark shapes, a fresh kind of perception and pleasure emerges: to interpret this media order becomes one of the new tasks of the arts" (Mumford 1934: 334).

Interestingly, Mumford doesn't just gesture towards the perceptual changes these media catalyze in their medial power, but also towards their specific tactile, physical presences as well – not only does radio change our notion of distance and sound, but it's physical presence, its shape, thick-plastic texture, sound quality, weight etc all become prominent factors exerting some sort of charge. This tendency to also consider the specific tactile quality of the particular media instrument in hand provides methodological cues to my analysis of televisions and cell phones on screen.

Marshal McLuhan in a similar stroke of astounding prescience, hinted at the sensory connections between the human body and the media as early as 1964. For him all media are different forms of extensions of the various senses of the body, and television was a "tactile medium" - an extension of our senses of 'touch' (McLuhan

1964). The television for McLuhan was a especially significant media form because it "involves maximal interplay of all the senses" (McLuhan 1964:333). Various scholars have subsequently (mostly after the digital explosion, post which McLuhan staged a resounding comeback in media theory) noted how he seems to nod towards an understanding of the sensorial experiences of vision as a specific instances of touching or tactility – 'watching the screen' for McLuhan involved a sort tactile caress.

In a different context, Paul Virilio argued that a new mode of experiencing confronting the city had emerged due to the increased presence of electronic screens. For him, the real geographic space of the urban is increasingly irrelevant, as electronic etherized phenomenon transmitted across screens everywhere, have changed or perceptual economies of space and territory. The entry to the city was no longer the material facades of gates, arches, or highways but more "*an electronic ether devoid of spatial dimensions*" (Virilio 1997:338).

Both McLuhan and Virilio provide in different ways a sort of segue into a discussion around the contemporary moment within which this dissertation is situated. This is a contemporary period that has witnessed what is called the 'digital explosion', where various forms of digital technologies suffuse through all aspects of everyday quotidian lives. Among other things, this has led to an unrelenting ubiquity of screens both within indoor (televisions, computer screens, cellphones, music players, e-tablets, microwaves, etc) and outdoor (billboards, advertisements, projections) spaces. The suffusion of digital technologies across the everyday has largely contributed to the rise of a hyper-visual culture (Tietje 2005, Gilmore 2012) characterized by, as Baudrillard describes "the obscenity of the visual, of the all-too-visual, of the more-visible-than-the-visible" (1983:131). The digital introduced an inherently mobile framelessness to the image, transforming nearly all concrete physical surfaces into potential screens. (M.B Hansen 2005). The wall itself with changes in its constitutive elements (from stone or cement to glass, plexi-glass etc), and in the constant bombardment of images projected on it, had transformed into a veritable screen (Friedberg 2006). In this inexorable saturation of images, what changes is the understanding of how our body negotiates the visual.

A long line of theorists have contended that the interaction with screens has increasingly become a corporeal process – involving not just vision but various other registers like the haptic, phatic, gustatory, and olfactory (Wegenstein, 2006, Verrips, 2001, Hansen, 2004, Synott, 1993, Taussig,1993, Schneider,1997, Buck Morss, 1993). They have argued in various different ways that the 'eye' is only a part of the whole process of visual perception, and visuality actually includes various other kinds of sense perceptions. The traditional hegemony of the eye gets destabilized in this new culture of digital technologies as the sensations of touch, smell, taste and hearing get more and more involved in the visual process. Mark B Hansen has described this in his idea of "wearable space" (Hansen 2002)[2]. In the metropolitan drenched with unending billboards and projected visual advertisements, the digital-visual becomes a continuation of the architecture. While Hansen nods towards a new form of materiality in a new paradigm of body-digital relations within the realm of the architectural, Laura U. Marks examines the haptic relation with images in a digital context. The distinctive feature of the digital image is the rapid conversion of the screen into an interface, where the image itself becomes a touchable and manipulable surface. Marks takes this idea of 'touching' inherent in the digital image to develop the idea of 'haptic visuality' – a form of visual perception in which tactility and the sensation of touch become central to how an object is perceived (Marks 2002) Looking at a range of contemporary new media digital art she calls for a sort of vision that takes into account how we sometimes inhabit a viscerally tactile relationship with images. This sort of "connective materialism" calls for an individual, affective, sensation based understanding of our experience as we interact with different forms of screen-based technologies (ibid:xi).

It is this changed context of technological materiality (and new relations of tactility between technological objects and human bodies) that informs and predicates my examination of how the television and the cellphone work in Hindi films today.

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[2] See Anirban Gupta-Nigam's discussion of Hansen's idea of 'wearable space' in 'On the Materialty of the Immaterial: Embodiment, Immersion and Crisis of Visuality' (2011). Following Deleuze's idea that human perception is the selection of images by the body from a larger spread of images in the world, Hansen suggests that it is the body that frames images in the digital era. Hansen contends that "*space* becomes *wearable* when affect becomes the operator of spacing or the production of space through bodily experience (2002:322)" (discussed in Nigam 2011).

Both objects are interrogated through films that are closely linked to the shift in perceptual regimes these objects have inaugurated in the contemporary moment.

In the field of anthropology, objects (both technological and otherwise) have been the focus of numerous interesting studies. The works of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopitoff nod towards the different temporalities and exclusive economies of time that objects have, as they move in and out of various "regimes of value" and "spheres of exchange" (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). This anthropological engagement maps the different cultural and 'extra-cultural' spheres of social exchange that objects are perennially enmeshed within. While my project is heavily indebted to the arenas of thinking foregrounded by this anthropological impetus, it is important to stay alert to, and sidestep some of their less obvious limitations, especially when applied to the terrain of cinema. While an anthropological and historico-culturalist scheme for investigating objects and things in film is exciting, it runs the risk of treating film as a straightforward ethnographic text. It relents before accessing an alternate sensual order of meaning that cinema has the potential to activate. So while it is insightful to adopt an approach mediated by social contexts, it is necessary to remember that cinema mobilizes complex layers of non-cognitive and affective meaning-making, all of which cannot be contained within an anthropological register[3].

In his recent book '*Bollywood in the age of New Media*' (2010) Anustup Basu investigates the ways in which the post liberalization film has created a new 'media ecology' of bodies, fashions, "commodities and gadgets". Three decisive developments since the 1990s form the historical context for Basu's study: economic liberalization, a resurgent Hindu nationalism, and the entry of a 'borderless', global system of 'electronic media exchanges'. These developments have profound

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[3] Critical focus on the link between cinema and affect is not original or novel by any. The major shift however, was precipitated by Gilles Deleuze's writing and its subsequent theoretical aftermaths which rapidly jettisoned the aging, decrepit concerns of psychoanalysis, carving the way for a new language of affect. In the wake of Deleuze's powerful intervention, a coterie of publications emerged which radically departed from the psychoanalytic model (Shaviro,1993; Morsch,1995). For me the use of affect theory here is not to assess the viewer's body, but to interrogate the various intersecting ineffable affective lines on the cinematic body. Globalization inaugurated rapid economies of circulation of commodities and images that initiated their own ethos of physical sensations – all of which traveled across different forms of visual culture. This dissertation while drawing on this widespread presence of the visual (photographs, advertisements, TV, internet and cinema) in the production of an affective field focuses primarily on its cinematic constitution.

implications on Indian statehood, national becoming, and the relation between the citizen/subject, sovereignty and the law. Basu's primary interest moves beyond the cinema to include political analysis of globalization. For Basu the expression geo-televisuality "pertains to the projection and reception of images, sounds, and words across global distances, across territorial, cultural, linguistic, and religious borders."[4] Basu's central argument is that 'Bollywood' is barely indicative of a uniquely Indian modernity coming into its own; rather it is symptomatic of a techno-financial modernization that does not directly correspond to a fixed singular political modernity.

Amit Rai in his 'Untimely Bollywood'(2010) diagnoses the quick staccato, multivalent qualities of the contemporary Bombay film as reflecive of the tendencies of consumption in post globalization India. His usage of the Deluezean idea of "assemblage" is to denote the idea of the complex assortment of physical, technological and historical processes structuring contemporary media practices. In Rai's scheme however, the media contagion works as a veritable mouthpiece for capitalist practices, and affect is manufactured purely within the domain of a strict high capitalist logic. My work explores the quotidian, terrestrial daily usage of technology which often includes myriad moments of resistance, subversion and re-appropriation. So while Rai's thematic concerns are of value to me, my starting impulse in this project, seems to be to mobilize it towards a different end. The study I hope to carry out can be, at least prematurely, situated within the precincts of the 'spatial turn' that Ranjani Mazumdar's 'Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City' (2007) facilitated. Mazumdar's interest in everyday terrestriality spurred my interest in the quotidian. However this project moves into the cinematic primarily through the landscape of objects, and not through a larger structuring prism of the 'city'. While borrowing from existing accounts of the period, I suggest that thinking around the affective charge of materiality in cinema, can provide newer ways of imagining and pursuing the contemporary.

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[4] Basu looks at a film like *Haqeeqat* (1995) which centers around poor, working-class characters leading a life of economic hardships and destitution. Yet through the magic of a music and dance sequence, "these downtrodden souls become transported to the streets of Switzerland, redressed and remade in new designer suits. This is the cinematic-cultural ecology the geo-televisual aesthetic" connecting it to the uneven processes of globalization transforming India in this period. (Basu 2010)

This project opens with an investigation of the ways in which the changes inaugurated in the urban sensorium by Cell Phones get processed into the cinematic. The first chapter examines a cluster of recent films to calibrate the movement of newer regimes of materiality and corporeality introduced by the technology across particular genres in cinema. Focusing especially on the aural materializing of phantasmatic bodies on the cellular network the chapter looks at how figures-on-the-phone have recently gotten implicated into varied themes of surveillance, terrorism, and new discourses of romance. In films like *Aamir (*2008) and *A Wednesday (*2008) for example, these menacing tactile phone presences can untraceably maneuver the cellular network to activate, invigilate, and pace the movement of different sets of bodies throughout the city. In a film like *Good Night Good Morning* (2012) on the other hand, the incognito presences on the phone facilitate the inauguration of an entirely novel form of 'cellphone romance'.

The second chapter explores the encounter with another mundane technological object – the television. It looks at how the television event increasingly makes itself a dominant preoccupation in recent Hindi films. It examines a set of films which offer an archeology of the TV event, and a dramaturgy of its production, outbreak and aftermath. Through this the chapter maps the configuration of a new collective – the television public that gets formed around the media event. Aziz Mirza's *Phir Bhi Dil Hai HIndustani* (2000), Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* (2005) and Anusha Rizvi's *Peepli Live (*2010) offer three distinct attitudes to the television/media event and the TV audience that forms around it. Despite being overrun by largely corrupt and malevolent presences, Mirza's film sees television as a force that can materialize a revolutionary audience that can physically take to the streets and effect radical material transformations. By the time of Mehra's *Rang De Basanti* all sense of hope restituted in television media has died down almostly completely. The television serves as the main propounder of the State's lies and myths forcing the protagonists to take violent action against the state. It is only in the end after their deaths that they manage to posthumously become the revolutionary mass figures they aspire to be. *Rang De Basanti's* reverberant afterlife serves as an interesting example of how the cinematic itself becomes a sort of media event that

then gets consecrated by television. This chapter probes not so much the sensorial relationship with the television but the larger moral and ideological forcefield the television event creates. In their critiques of the these media events some of these films endemically express a nearly utopic desire to recuperate the erstwhile 'good object' of television (as an apparatus bereft of commercial impulses till two decades ago) from the mercenary pressures putatively overrunning it currently.

As our bodies get increasingly enmeshed with technological objects everyday, different forms of distortions and mutilations occur, transforming both the body of the spectator (or 'user' in the case of cell phones) and the larger paradigm of spectatorship. The third and final chapter looks at instances where these interactions with these technological objects often become a source of morbid awe and horror. The chapter probes this new form of 'uncanny spectatorship' vis a vis television in films like Sanjay Gupta's *Zinda* (2006) and Vikram Kumar's *13B* (2011). I situate these films as projectiles where a new morbid relationship between the spectator's mutilated body and the uncanny television set gets extensively processed to evoke a new arena of 'spectatorship horror'. The chapter also examines how cell phones too become a medium through which the technological uncanny begins to articulate itself. It specifically focuses on the form and movement of the MMS and the spectral experience of the cell phone user's body in Ekta Kapoor's '*Ragini MMS*' (2011).

CHAPTER ONE

THE CINEMATIC & THE CELLULAR

This chapter is interested in chasing the various material and corporeal changes inaugurated in the urban sensorium by the cellular phone. My focus will be on the aural materializing of phantasmatic bodies on the cellular network and how these figures get processed into varied themes of surveillance, terrorism, and lastly a new discourse of romance. In films like *Aamir (*2008) and *A Wednesday (*2008) for example, these menacing tactile phone presences can untraceably maneuver the cellular network to activate, invigilate, and pace the movement of different sets of bodies throughout the city. In a film like *Good Night Good Morning* (2010) however the incognito presences on the phone tend to usher in a radical and entirely novel form of romantic interaction.

Mobile Modernities: Cellular Bodies and the Materiality of Sound

The cellphone has foundationally reconfigured our basic map of senses – inflecting in particular the relation between space and time that is endemic to the contemporary moment. Before modern telecommunications, topographical distances were largely gauged and comprehended by approximating the time it took to move from one place to another. With the advent of telecommunications, this sense of static, stable and immobile geographical distances begins to gradually melt away, as does the traditionally unimpeachable relation between speed and actual physical movement. Conventional architectonic elements begin to slowly dissipate, forming a new telecommunication map with its own laws of latitude, proximities, geological intensities and collisions. Early critical theory in the area observed that telecommunication seemed to be contributing to the death of distance, it compressed time (Harvey 1989) and thereby increased the "time-space distanciation" (Giddens

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1990: 14)[1]. Simultaneity was rapidly becoming a conceptual and cultural norm, replacing the notion of inevitable delay due to natural distances, creating a "global (instantaneous) present" (Adam 1995: 112) or what Castells has later referred to as a "*timeless time*" (2000: 14).

Cell phones increasingly undermine the "place-centeredness" in our lives (Palen 2001: 121) as the sense of inhabiting and belonging to a place gets transformed into a sense of belonging to one's "communicative network" (Geser 2004: 13). As a result, the concept of place gets increasingly overrun by 'space' in modern thought. Conventionally geographical theory has long held a distinction between the two, where places have been understood as more than just geography, they have to do with social and cultural meaning, and are comprised of "identity, character, nuance and history" (Casey 1997: 8)[2]. With the onslaught of the communication network in the recent years, "*numbers sets and codes*", as Agent Anderson from the film *The Matrix (*1999) says, have become "*our new neighbourhoods*."

Cell phones construct newer kinds of 'material' facades and edifices, newer thoroughfare passages and blockade points. Space gets entirely mitigated by the notion of 'connectivity' – connectivity to the network. The tiny 'connectivity tower' icon at the top left of every cellphone screen becomes the new arch-metaphor of this new regime of network(ed) 'space'. Architecture is now gauged in terms of strength of connectivity and not metric distances – low strength areas like subways and basements become opaque zones more 'inaccessible' than far away cities (the traditional dialectics between distance and danger, movement and unknowability begins dithering, as the 'elsewhere' becomes a more comprehensible place). Mobility itself becomes a far safer idea, as the concrete, self-enclosed idea of places ostensibly collapses into a porous, osmotic and essentially readable electromagnetic space of the cell phone network.

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[1] Ruth M. Rettie 'Presence and Embodiment in Mobile Phone Communication' Psychology Journal, 2005 Volume 3, Number 1, 16 – 34 discusses these various critical responses to changes in concept of time in the era of telecommunications

[2] R.M. Rettie suggests that while places are located in spaces, not all spaces are places. He quotes Brown and Perry, "Specifically, to call something a 'place', brings attention to its located, embodied, personal, local, human nature. And to call something 'space' is to bring attention to its abstract, objective, global, general, inhuman qualities." Space is "abstract and distributed"; place is "local and (the) contingent" (2002: 50).

The sense of inchoateness extends even to our experience of time. A new sort of *chrono-politics* comes to be as time is no longer dependent on the shifts in light - the long standing tripartite relation between day/night, sunlight and hourly marking of time begins to fold indeterminately.[3] A new end-obsessed relative-measurement of time and money called 'talk-time' becomes preponderant. The traditional notion of 'labour-time' (the duration for which the laborer's body offers service potentiality to the management/owner) gets ceaselessly extended in a culture that presumes constant 'contact'. The cell phone conquests the erstwhile divisions of life into work, sleep and free-time, by rendering the worker's body and 'bare life' constantly 'available' even beyond the confines of the workspace and work-hours (the culture of 'switching off' the cell phone at night or at home increasingly becomes outdated). '*Downtime*' (the period of time there is no connection to the cell phone and the internet in intransigent places like air-flights) becomes a new prominent factor in the daily chartering of work-lives (Scholz 2006).

It's not surprising therefore, that the better part of recent critical work on cell phones have often centered around the idea of 'liminality*'* and the creation of a new inchoate *technological space-time*(Virilio 1989) . When people are on the cell phone "there is a sense of them being in more than one space at the same time*"* – they shear their space, their temporal framework, and their attention to their immediate ecology (Case 2008). Using Victor Turner's idea of 'liminality' to think about cell phones, Amber Case points to the creation of a 'sub-zone' (a hybrid space where different spatial, temporal and psychological impetus' collide), Sadie Plant refers to this new kind of somatic fluidity as a *'by-psyche*: a new mode of presence and embodiment wholly unprecedented in human history. This sense of a miscegenated, liminal experience becomes a more trenchant and enduring condition as the cell phone (like various other major technological inceptions) also gets accorded an intensely

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[3] Virilio argues that our traditional time intervals, which were based on sunlight become increasingly redundant, as light too gets shared through telecommunications. In an evocative description of the onslaught of modernity, Baumann observes "In the modern struggle between time and space,space was the solid and stolid, unwieldy and inert side, capable of waging only a defensive, trench war - being an obstacle to the resilient advances of time. Time was the active and dynamic side in the battle, the side always on the offensive: the invading, conquering and colonizing force. Velocity of movement and access to faster means of mobility steadily rose in modern times to the position of the principal tool of power and domination" (2000:9).

anthropocentric character. It feeds on electricity, its battery "dies", it looks silly when not upgraded, abides by fashion, and largely becomes an extension of the human body (infact newer cell phone accessories are increasingly modeled to almost invisibly assimilate into the human body – the wireless Bluetooth earplug for example, aspires to become an inconspicuous part of the human ear (Case 2008). Additionally, its capacity to embody affords a complete mimesis of the human: on getting a call we say 'it's so and so', the phone within that liminal space totemically *becomes* the person calling. '*Cyborg anthropology'* a bracket of sociological study dedicated to "explore the production of humanness in machines" investigates this hybrid, compound 'cyborg' self, produced as technological objects increasingly becoming ineffable parts of our corporeal and social substance (Haraway 1985:1). The 'cell phone network' then is a conglomeration of these sorts of fluid identities (of the cell phone sets, of the humans using them and the compound that they becoming together.) Another way of thinking of a machine-human network in a non-deterministic way is offered by Bruno Latour. Latour's and Michel Callon's social theory known more popularly as the Actor Network Theory presents a systematic framework of assigning equal and continuous agency to humans and non-humans. Their work in some ways is in dialogue with Haraway's in that it paves the way for 're-assembling the social' and thinking of the world by dispelling the traditional notions of differences and hierarchies between humans and objects.

The urban sensorium as a whole undergoes heavy transformation as cell phones become an epiphenomenon. The sound scape of cities are now unmistakably inundated with ring tones, message tones, vibration sounds, apart from the distinct chatter of voices on the phone. Space gets re-categorized aurally in terms of where cell phone sounds are proscribed (movie theatres, class rooms, cinema halls etc), or where voices 'break', and where voices can be put on loudspeakers, and so on[4].

As a personal archive of contacts, schedules, music, pictures, videos etc, the cell phone often becomes a distinctive source of intense emotional memory. SMSs

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[4] Similarly, Richard Ling's work focus's on the various phatic and non- verbal ways that get codified to signal meaning in phone conversations – while words like "you're breaking" or "on line" become common, different sorts of sound emanations to mark beginnings and ends of phone conversations become part of common cultural knowledge pools (Ling 1998)

increasingly come to have an enduring affective register, the digital imprint of the sender creating its own sense of haptic visuality (Marks 2002). Moreover, as mail accounts, social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and so on) and instant messenger services (like BBM or *WhatsApp*) get accessed more and more via the cell phone, the phone becomes a crucial factor in thinking of contemporary individual memory. Reflecting on social media sites and contemporary telecommunications Joanne Garde-Hansen argues in *My Memories?: Personal Digital Archive Fever and Facebook* (2009) that the main allure in cell phones (and in social media sites) is that they can aggregate different kinds of memory practices into one place that the main allure in cell phones (and in social media sites) is that they can aggregate different kinds of memory practices into one place (Garde Hansen 2009) creating and maintaining photo albums, sharing videos and photographs, messaging, joining message groups, and constantly doing versions of the same on Facebook and Twitter[5]. The cell phone can be seen as an instance of what Jacques Derrida has referred to as the "*archiving archive*" where the "technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content …The archivization produces as much as it records the event*" (Derrida 1995*: 17). Our visual/spatial mode of ordering and arranging memory begins to shift according to this new geography of different mobile screen interfaces (which becomes the 'space' of our digital archive.)

The 'cellular network' also radically alters notions of mobility. As cell phones now come equipped with GPS and various touch-screen mapping devices, a culture of performative navigational cartography emerges - cell phone users now have the capacity to co-create a dynamic image layout of their navigation, while they are moving. The most distinctive aspect of the touch-screen when seen in relation to other 'screens' that we're familiar with (like TV screens, cinema screens, billboards etc) is the specific sort of haptic visuality it enables. The tactile screen now becomes, "the interface of an interactive architecture that (…) positions the user spectator in a material and spatial relationship to its surface and its imagery" (Verhoeff 2012: 24). This sort of haptic experience of the tactile screen transforms foundationally the '*notion and action of viewing itself*' (Ibid). The GPS (global positioning system)

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[5] 2011, Michael Sacasas "The Frailest Thing" available at http://thefrailestthing.com/tag/lev-manovich/ accessed 10 February 2012.

creates a new complex between viewing, navigating and action in day to day life. The traditional passive visual spectatorship of screens gets entirely transformed by the live and dynamic image of one's own navigation; in other words, what actually gets precipitated is "a temporal collapse between creating images and perceiving them." (Ibid, 25). In this the phone works like the Ipad and other Tablets with similar technology, except that newer 'smart-phones' allow cuing in of other phones into the same GPS network as one's own – the whole process of co-creating a haptic map of a space while navigating it becomes a dialogic one, in conversation with other bodies vocally and electronically.

Cellular technology thus increasingly becomes a transformative part of the practice of Everyday life. Henri Lefebvre called for an understanding of the everyday as a conceptual category, and provided an investigation of what he thought were its oppressive and alienating aspects (Lefebvre 1987). The alienation for Lefebvre stemmed from an increased rationalization of all spheres of life. He believed that beneath the new, highly-ordered structure of material reality was a manic emphasis on repetition (routines and cycles). Both work and leisure were monotonously regimented and controlled by the commodification of modern life (Ibid). If for Lefebvre the systems of everyday lives had to do with the power structures saliently embedded within it, Michel De Certeau interrogates the ways in which these routines are transformed and manipulated by individuals into sporadic acts of resistance, and as generators of meaning (De Certeau 1984)[6]. De Certeau famously looked at walkers within built urban environments as they constantly followed, subverted and invented new possibilities within the spatial rules laid out for them. The preceding observations about the sensorial and practical changes cell phones inaugurate, need to be situated within the unseemly and chaotic messiness of everyday lives and material practices. While the phone networks make individuals constantly 'available' for regimented work, they infuse enormous potentiality for playful invention and the unruly.

This regime of hybridity obviously ruptures the conventional dichotomies of public and private. What is interesting is the tandem change it precipitates for the idea

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[6] 'Notes on The Everyday', available at http://www.vlugt.co.uk/hetero05.html, accessed on 8th January 2012.

of etiquette and social behaviour. Taking a call during a conversation with someone is considered rude since it immediately entails the cleaving off the current sense of place and time by interpolating a new virtual space replete with another person and another simultaneous experience of space and time into one's current physical environment. Conversely, inserting the impression of another absent person's presence becomes a crucial gesture during other times. Erving Goffman's idea of 'civic inattention' can get interestingly mobilised here – the deliberate receding from public space by importing a phone presence (by women for example, pretending to be on the phone, in potentially unsafe areas) becomes common practice (Goffman 1972). What is fascinating in all these instances is the conscious production of decorporealized ghost-like presences as interlocutors to the physical world. The voice on the phone (as the films I will discuss in the following section suggest) can easily attain what can be called a sort of 'aural materiality' – the vocal carving its own sort of thickly corporeal, fleshy material presence that performs physical, tangible (and in some cases, potentially threatening) entity.

The Discovery of (Cellular) India

In a description of a sample of life in Indian cities in the mid-1980s Anna Greenspan recalls a time when C. M. Stephen, the communications minister of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's cabinet, could easily get offended when quizzed about the inadequacies of the telephone system in parliament, and reply that telephones were "a luxury, not a right… anybody who was not satisfied with the telephone system could return his phone" (Greenspan 2004:4)[7]. This in some ways describes the "primitive" and supine state the Indian telecom sector long wallowed under as the State maintained an unrelenting vice-grip over the allocation of radio frequencies (Jeffery and Doron 2012: 400).

In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi's government invited Sam Pitroda, an engineer and businessman based in the United States, and gave him a freehand with the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT). Pitroda's brief was to develop the blueprint for

[7] Quoted in Aditya Nigam and Nivedita Menon's 'Power and Contestation: India since 1989'(2004: 84)

the rapid expansion of local telephone exchanges across India (Ibid). Around the same time, a whole set up of public call offices (PCOs), run as small businesses, was set up in India with the motive of making 'trunk calls' more readily available to the common public (Ibid) By 1994, the first National Telecom Policy of 1994 (NTP-94) was ratified by the government, which allowed private capital to enter the field of national telephony. The 'cell phone revolution' in India was purportedly flagged off in August 1995, as the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu made the first ever cell call to Union Telecom minister Sukhram, asking him to declare the Calcutta cellular network (the first of the Indian metros) open[8]. Despite corpulent tariff ceilings initially, cell phone technology in India rapidly burgeoned to become an absolutely staggering success, its volume far surpassing even what satellite television had managed to amass over the last decade. Hoards of small capitalists as well as India's largest business outfits scampered to enter the new lucrative industry the government had opened up. By 2005 the cost of a phone call had plunged to 1 rupee per minute (SK Singh 2006). Despite its sluggish start, the ratio between landline telephones and cell phones was reversing at breakneck pace. In 2001 there were stipulated to be 36 million phone subscribers of which close to 75 percent were landline connections; by 2007 there were 206 million users out of which 75 % were now cell phones (Jeffery and Doron 2012:399). From C.M Stephan's comments about telephones being "luxuries", the country was entering into a phase where businessman Dhirubhai Ambani could confidently claim that by making "*a phone call cheaper than a postcard and you will usher in a revolutionary transformation in the lives of millions of Indians*" (Jeffery and Doron 2012: 1). From a whopping 5 million strong subscriber database in 2001, India became the second largest cell phone market in the world with a massive 881 million subscribers in 2012. [9] While major cell phone outfits like Reliance, Infocom, and Vodaphone etc constitute the largest companies in India at the moment, the cell phone advertisement sector is among the bulkiest segments in the country's advertising arena. Today cell phones promise the prospect

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[8]Aug 31 The Indian Technomist (Available at http://dxm.org/techonomist/news/cellcal.html) (Accessed on 3rd july 2012)
Also see '15 Years Ago, India Made Its First Cellular Call On This Date' - Manish C (available at http://www.pluggd.in/cellular-mobility-in-india-15-years-297/0)
[9] See- (Joy 2010)

of a complete media assemblage: they work as cameras, music players, internet portals, credit cards, design pads and a variety of other technologies.

As mobile handsets fast became ubiquitous (and cell phone companies gained massive muscle) the technology also increasingly became a part of various public events and prominent news narratives. From the Geelani trial (and numerous other 'terrorism' cases, where evidence has often been almost solely predicated on call records and calling history), to notorious celebrity fracas' (actor Vivek Oberoi displayed his cell phone history in a press conference in 2003 claiming that Salman Khan had called 41 times) to colossal telecommunication scams (the 2G spectrum scam unearthed a whole range of government officials undercharging private telecom companies for licenses to the tune of 176,645 crore) to dazzling intra-media stings (the sensational 'Radia tapes' were recorded cell phone conversations between a political lobbyist Mira Radia with senior journalists, politicians and corporate honchos) to MMS scandals (ministers caught watching porn in parliament, video clips involving school girls, actresses in sexual positions etc) to environment-related controversies around the politics of production (major cell phone companies were accused of funding wars in Africa to acquire Coltan, a necessary mineral for cell phones); cell phones have become an endemic part (and often, source) of various glaring public debates in recent years[10]. As a result, the technology appears in myriad forms in different kinds of cultural representations everyday.

Movies, especially movie scripts, are claimed to have had a largely uneasy relationship with cell phones. Most extant scriptwriters note that whole coteries of stock situations and plot-movements available for writers less than ten years ago are

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[10]2003,Report. 'Salman Threatened Me:Vivek Oberoi'. Rediff.com, January. Available at http://www.rediff.com/movies/2003/apr/01vivek.htm, accesed on 4th December 2011.
See- 2011, Dhananjay Mahapatra,' 2G loss? Govt gained over Rs 3,000cr: Trai'. Indiatimes.com, September. Available at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-09-07/india/30122800_1_spectrum-trai-2**g**, accessed 4th December 2011
See 'Coltan, Gorillas, Cellphones', Available at http://www.cellular-news.com/coltan/, accessed on 8th December 2011
See – 2010, Report, "Radia tapes featuring senior scribes create stir". The Indian Express. 20th November.

rendered untenable today given the presence of the device.[11] Nearly every Hitchcock or Wilder film would collapse altogether if the characters had the facility to communicate with each other everywhere and on the move[12]. Various familiar stock 'landline' situations in films – mixed phone lines and '*cross connections'*, sinister and untraceable '*blank calls'*, conversations surreptitiously overheard on parallel lines, phone wires maliciously cut off etc become instantly anachronistic. Cell phones, at the same time produce a new posse of narrative possibilities. Dramatic sequences aren't pegged on the links between stasis and the inability to communicate, or on the inherently 'unknowable' character of mobility in outdoor alien spaces any more. Collective negotiation with the narrative crisis gets freed from the paralytic encumbrance of space, as characters can now partake of, participate and contribute to the dramatic universe throughout different spaces within the cellular topology. It's use precipitates various changes in film editing – the split screen stages a conspicuous comeback (except now the two parts of the screen are often dynamically mobile, and fluid backgrounds, in contrast to the telephone conversation scenes), cell phone sound becomes a prominent 'hook' in a scene (it becomes the interweaving thread through which a scene follows another) and cell phones become scene structuring devices as a number of screens begin and end with people getting calls, or leaving to make calls. While cell phones increasingly get mobilized in some films as the key final revealer/arbiter of concealed villainous identities- *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* (2000), *Ghajini* (2008)- in others it functions as a quasi-mythical, fantastical technological object that easily veils itself in various different technological forms (it turns out to be a remote control to explosives in *Don* (2006), a sonar in *16th December (*2002), a detonator in *Mission Kashmir (*2000) and so on.

The cell phone also featured prominently in crime/underworld films right from the late 1990s. Figuring in Ram Gopal Varma's 'gangster trilogy'- *Satya* (1998), *Company* (2002) and '*D'* (2005) as the primary communication network through

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[11] See – 2010, Ryan Lambie,'Cinema's Uneasy Relationship with Cell Phones'. Available at http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/16383/cinema%E2%80%99s-uneasy-relationship-with-mobile-phones, accessed on 7th July 2011.
[12] Hitchcock's Rear Window (1954) would have been a considerably different film if the wheelchair-bound Jimmy Stewart could simply have BBM'd Grace Kelly on her Blackberry and told her to quickly sneak out of Raymond Burr's flat)

which the 'company' carries its local and trans-national dealings, the cell phone often served as a central catalyst for major narrative conflicts or crises. While it plays an important part in the main conflict in Varma's *Company* - the misunderstanding between the two protagonists Malik (Ajay Devgan) and Chandu (Vivek Oberoi) that leads to a bloody intra-gang war arises post a hasty cell phone call Chandu receives. In crime-spoof films like *C Kkcompany (*2008) ordinary characters parade as vicious gangsters and ask for steep extortion amounts purely by the dint of the authentic seeming demand calls they can feign. In the more recent crime films a whole new paradigm of menacing '*loudspeaker characters'* have begun to emerge. These are largely dehumanized, machine-like, hollow loudspeaker voices (often the source of fear, insecurity, and intrigue) that intervene and change the course of action in crunch dramatic sequences in their ethereal, de-corporeal form. In Abhishek Chaubey's *Ishqiya* (2010) the protagonists Babban (Arshad Warsi) and Khalujaan (Naseeruddin Shah) are small time crooks on the run from their erstwhile boss Mushtaq (Salman Shahid) who they've embezzled money from. Mushtaq, the mercenary cut throat Mafioso doggedly intent on recovering his money, however, seems to be in a slightly odd conjugal relationship. He keeps getting calls from his wife throughout the film just moments before he's about to kill people. Mushtaq's relationship with this phone-wife persona (who we never see) is suggested as a quaintly lyrical, typically old world romance replete with Urdu couplets, poetry and unending ornate praises for the wife. The ring-tone in Mushtaq's phone is '*Ae Mere Zohra Jabeen*' (an old Hindi film song about an old couple singing of undying love), they talk in a way that is distinctly reminiscent of old romantic Hindi films of a certain era (when his wife inquires about what he's doing, Mushtaq asks if there is anything he can ever do besides thinking of her), and the wife voice performs an unmistakable coquettishness in how she admonishes him. Yet the irony becomes conspicuous as it becomes clear eventually that the wife is anything but the ordinary run-of-the-mill housewife. She advocates a level of violence that clearly even Mushtaq cannot abide by. She tells him to shoot the lead duo (who she otherwise refers to as her 'brothers') in the head and later reprimands him for procrastinating in killing them; issuing all her orders about gruesome murders of people in the same half flippant, playful and coquettish demeanour.

Similarly, right at the beginning of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Othello* adaptation *Omkara (*2005) a voice on a loudspeaker stops an impending shootout and sets the base for what is to unfold through the rest of the narrative. As an enraged advocate Raghunath Mishra, is on the verge of shooting the local warlord Omkara for abducting his daughter on the day of her marriage, Omkara's aide Kesu Firangi gets a call. As Kesu puts the call on loudspeaker, a calm, motorized voice all of them reverently refer to as 'Bhai Saab' (Naseeruddin Shah) speaks into the tense air as characters stand frozen, guns pointed at each other's heads. The unruffled, congenial telephone voice placidly explains to the aggressors why it is imprudent for them to shoot each other. By the time, the voice-of-god like phantasm emanating from Kesu's hand stops speaking, all the guns are down with the aggressors already backing off, ready to retreat. In a sequence in Vishal Bhardwaj's gangster caper comedy *Kaminey* (2010), an assassin brother duo, the Lobos, are about to shoot an airplane pilot at the behest of the smuggling don Tashi (Tenzing Nima). The bawling pilot begs them for mercy, offering his loyalty to Tashi ("*main tashi ka pet dog banne ko taiyyar hun sir*"/*I'm ready to be Tashi sir's pet dog*. As the duo call Tashi and put him on loudspeaker, the whimpering pilot starts barking like a dog in front of the phone. Tashi (lying comatose on a luxury cruise near Goa with a cigar in his hand, also on loudspeaker) responds by saying "*But I only like bitches. Shoo*". One of the brothers immediately shoots the pilot dead. In stylistic terms, the loudspeaker voice becomes like the aural equivalent of the silhouette, or the slow motion or the slow tilt up within the grammar of powerful character entries in films. As a de-corporealized, god like spectral presence that can abruptly intervene and definitively change the course of action in distant places, the machine-like motorized phone voice takes on an awe-ful and terrifying dramatic persona in a number of contemporary Hindi films, especially in a spate of recent films on terrorism.

There are also get-away bildungsroman films like Ashutosh Gowarikar's *Swades* (2004) or Zoya Akhtar's *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), where cell phones are featured in interesting ways. Characters undertake momentary holiday retreats from their frenetic cosmopolitan lives that result in potentially life-changing experiences. The cell phone functions as the last ritualistic tether binding them to their

erstwhile urban everyday that they must let go off in order to invigorate and start their life afresh. In *Swades* the cell phone becomes the protagonist Mohan's (Shahrukh khan) only link to his life as a NASA scientist in America while he comes to spend time with his childhood nanny in rural India. His increasing attachment with the village (and diminishing interest in life in America) is also traced by the changing amounts of interests he puts in to try and get a 'connection' for his international calls. Similarly the cell phone becomes the only link the investment Banker and workaholic Rishi (Hrithik Roshan) has with his Japanese clients, as he and two friends hike across the bucolic Spanish countryside on a last bachelor vacation. While Rishi and his friends do maintain contact with family and friends via skype and messenger chats on their laptop, the cell phone gets specifically identified amongst friends as the only work-related hindrance in their peaceful holiday (infact, the only time a conflict arises between the three is when one of the friends Imraan (Farhan Akhtar) flings Rishi's phone out of a moving car as a joke.) Both characters in both the films need to symbolically reject/cast off their cell phones to signal the unencumbered beginning of a fresh new chapter of their lives.

Post Panoptic Missed Calls: *Seher* and the Beginnings of Cell Phone Surveillance

In all these films, cell phones intervene principally by virtue of their 'locatability' within a mobile extramural space that is understood as the cellular '*network*'. Not only can exchanges (conversations/messages/all data transactions) within this Network be pried on, ferreted and inventoried; they can also be traced, pinpointed and custodialized geographically with telling accuracy. Modern GPS systems, enabled in nearly all phones these days, make both intensive surveillance and *sousveillance*[13] (self-surveillance practices) practices culturally normative and legitimate. In this context, it might be useful to survey some dominant ideas around the concept of surveillance before discussing *Seher'*s (Kabir Kaushik 2005) portrayal of the advent of cell phone surveillance within police procedures in Lucknow of mid-1990s.

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[13] Facebook, twitter via phone, GPS.. private surveillance agencies. In climate of terrorism , surveillance is legitimized- Pakistani calls.

Michel Foucault's usage of Jeremy Bentham's idea of the Panopticon as the "archmetaphor of modern power" remains till today the most enduring and recurrent *dispositif* of surveillance (Bauman 2000: 9). In Bentham's designs, convicts in penal institutions were to be tied to a particular place (their beds, work-lines, dungeons, courtyards and so on), strictly prohibited from any significant sort of movement. The Panopticon architecture allowed the 'inspector' to observe the inmates without the latter at any point knowing when they were being watched. Bentham's intention was to lay the foundations to "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example"[14] and that too "all by a simple idea in Architecture*"*[15]. At the heart of the surveillant's domination was not only the ability to see without being seen back, but also his facility of movement. The requirement then was to somehow create the impression of a temporal rhythm entirely random, pervasively running through the personal time partitions of the prisoners without respite – complete randomness was the surest evidence of the ubiquity of power.

But in Bentham's structure, immobility for the prisoners also implied an abridged form of immobility for the inspectors. For the routine to be truly random and thereby truly effective the routinizers had to in part, partake of it and keep watch at various points in the day. The Panopticon required a specific tangible architecture, structures of surveillance practices, costs of upkeep etc (Bauman 2000). It's this solid concrete, physical nature of the surveillance model that undergoes radical change today, as power overcomes the recalcitrance of space and becomes as Zygmunt Baumann argues truly '*exterritorial'*:

> Power can move with the speed of the electronic signal - and so the time required for the movement of its essential ingredients has been reduced to instantaneity. For all practical purposes, power has become truly exterritorial, no longer bound, even slowed down, by the resistance of space (the advent of cellular telephones may well serve as a symbolic 'last blow' delivered to the dependency on space…) It does not matter any more where the giver of the command is - the difference between 'close by' and 'far away'… has been all but cancelled (Baumann, 2000: 10).

The concrete, tangible and unwieldy structures of the Panopticon give way to an infinitely more dispersed, deterritorialized, and diffused version of power

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[14] Jeremy Bentham. Panopticon. In Miran Bozovic (ed.), The Panopticon Writings, London: Verso, 1995, p.29
[15] ibid

transactions; a condition that has of late increasingly been referred to as the '*post-panoptical*'. A number of people point out this transformation. Gilles Deleuze for one suggests that most contemporary societies have in the recent years been experiencing the dissolution of institutional boundaries, and alongside it the 'delimited sites' in which panoptic technology previously found its disciplinary function, He notes, "everyone knows these institutions are in more or less terminal decline" (Deleuze 1995: 178)[16]. Deleuze's claim provoked a spate of interventions that point towards the decline of disciplinary societies and the emergence of the new "societies of control" (Deleuze 1990:1). Arguing along largely similar lines, Hardt and Negri (2001), Bauman (1998), Rose (1999), Diken and Lausten (2002) among others contend that while the basis of panoptic power was the 'immobilising' of subjects, the disintegration of physical sites into what Georgio Agamben (1998) has referred to as "zones of indistinction"– witnesses the emergence of post-panoptic forms of power (Agamben 2003: 257)[17]. These newer forms of control characterized by their mobility and nomadicity, deploy regimes of coded information to invigilate, anticipate and direct the conduct of individuals*,* seamlessly roaming across "now defunct boundaries of public and private, work and leisure, production and consumption" (Ibid). With the maturation of these newer modalities of power, the manic emphasis on the visual surveillance of actual subjects gives way to clusters of computerized information and codes gleaned from the 'continual data trail' they leave behind. In the etherized space of telecommunications, individuals implode into knots of specific technical details like numbers, codes, GPS dots etc, their lives surveilled not just (or as much) by actual visual surveillance but by calibrations of their electronic transactions and exercises.

Kabir Kaushik's *Seher* provides a dramatization of the movement from a purely physical form of surveillance to a more post Panopticon-ic regime given the abrupt proliferation of cell phones and its incorporation in criminal activities. *Sehar* is loosely based on the encounter killing of the notorious criminal Shiv Prakash Shukla

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[16]For debates around the post-panoptic see- 2003, Majid Yar 'Panoptic Power and the Pathologisation of Vision: Critical Reflections on the Foucauldian Thesis'. Available at [http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/articles1(3)/pathologisation.pdf], accessed on 8th June 2012.
[17] Ibid.

who was allegedly killed by the newly formed Special Task Force of the Uttar Pradesh Police under the DIG Arun Kumar[18]. Kumar, who formed the 'STF' with ten selected police officers, was speculated to be the first police official in India to set up a team of electronic surveillance (of the gang's mobile phones) in his attempt to penetrate the heart of organized crime in Uttar Pradesh. Kabir's film, narrated by the Prof. Tiwari (Pankaj Kapoor) relates the story of ACP Ajay Kumar (Arshad Warsi) and his Special Task Force and their longstanding battle with the notorious gangster Gajraj Singh (Sushant Singh) in Lucknow. Gajraj's crime network uses the cell phone (a technology only just introduced in Lucknow at the time) to communicate, and the police's set up seems poorly outdated to match this new modus operandi. Ajay Kumar then recruits the telecommunication teacher, Prof. Tiwari to help the local police setup a model through which they can surveil Gajraj's conversations with his unit. The story ends with a bloody shootout in a moving train between Gajraj's gang and Ajay's Special Task Force, where all members from either sides die, culminating in Prof. Tiwari himself finally shooting Gajraj. *Sehar* thus dramatizes a historical transition where police authorities in the late 1990s move towards a newer paradigm of space-time relations, mobility and dataveillance.

Sehar begins at a time when legal authorities have no option but to physically accost, overhear or straight up apprehend a person in order to extract any sort of information. In the happenstance that the subject isn't physically accessible, information is always deferred – dissected and neatly inventoried posthumously after the 'criminal event'. The central protagonist of the film infact is introduced while he's immersed in such an act of meticulous individual archiving – we first see SSP Lucknow Ajay Kumar as he's painstakingly cutting a local newspaper report of a Mafia don's murder. In the pre-digital period, scraps of physical data had to be personally identified, excerpted and catalogued to build information bases and biographies of criminals. Unlike contemporary State apparatuses which have enormous, perpetually updated caches of information on people, the Police department in 1997-98 is shown as relying on newspaper reports of crime to compile criminal records from. *Sehar's* central narrative is an unlikely technology battle – the

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[18] 2005, Rana Siddiqui, "Slanting Reality, Cine Style" , The Hindu; Aug 5 . Available at http://www.hindu.com/fr/2005/08/05/stories/2005080501950400.htm, accessed on June 4th 2012

police's continued attempts to source, elicit and mobilize information to infiltrate the organized crime circuits even as newer forms of communication technologies flood the market.

Evidence is stocked in *Sehar* in the form of newspaper reports, FIR copies, letters, complaints sheets and so on; all physical, tactile documentary artifacts that are neatly collected in files, folders and cartons. These thick clusters of files then circuit different layers of the bureaucratic order - Ajay offers his file to the ADG (who in response commends the former's work on the basis of the thickness of the file), there's one set kept handy in the SSP's drawer right next to him, the same pile travels in fragments to Ajay's house where his mother is also consulted in matters where knowledge of history and Indian political science are required. The notion of the police as an active surveilling force isn't yet normative or common knowledge. This is seen in a particular sequence where a couple of local railway contractors come to Ajay, complaining about the threats Gajraj Singh has been issuing to them. As one of them goes on repeating that Ajay should listen to them since he doesn't know the local history of the area well enough as he's new there, a piqued Ajay whips out a file from his drawer, reading out in full detail the whole list of serious misdemeanors the complainant himself has registered against him. Since the police's information-gathering technique doesn't conspicuously invade the mundane lives of the local population, it isn't seen as a surveilling agency in popular perception yet. But (to the surprise of the local railway contractor) the police do infact have a judiciously detailed and fairly well maintained record to keep track of 'criminal identities'.

The interesting thing to note here, however, is that the police maintain a chronicle only of the *criminal* biographies of the people they suspect; the other bits of the criminal's life remain a dark, unknown spot. In many ways, the kind of surveillance regime an institution has its suspects under, also formatively predicates how it understands the criminal conceptually. The 'criminal' for the police, is a subject-hood formed exclusively and purely by the dint of the individual's criminal action, his life beyond those singular acts is a space the police appear wholly insouciant towards. In contrast surveillance post the 2000s has a 'lived' quality to it – 'data' for surveilling outfits is no longer restricted to the ambit of the person's

26

criminal actions, it is constitutive of the whole of the individual's life (his movements, money exchanges, personal relationships, all phone calls/mails and so on). Acts of criminality aren't segregated and cleaved out of the individual's life, his 'life-processes' become a repository of information. Despite the hint that Gajraj poses mortal danger to the don, Ajay refuses to help, calling it a private feud, given the applicant's criminal records.

Soon what begins vexing the police is the sheer speed of the relay of information that Gajraj manages to precipitate within his gang. The flow of communication immediately before and after crimes is one that the police despite their well oiled and established circuits of landline phone monitoring, informer networks and shadowers are unable to keep pace with. In one sequence the cops inform the Commissioner that Gajraj communicates news of a murder just two minutes after the murder despite the nearest telephone being over 200 meters away. What alarms the cops is the ease with which Gajraj seems to be traversing sedentary barriers that their intricate surveillance set ups aren't able to bypass. The police imagination is largely circumscribed within an older aegis of negotiating crime across geographical distances physically; the new electronic space of travel and action seems altogether inconceivable to them. The revelation of Gajraj's usage of cell phones clearly throws the police off (the commissioner's knee-jerk response is an anxiety about getting even more incapacitated in curbing organized crime – "*Ab Isko kaise tackle karein*" /now how do we tackle this). While the voice over clearly says that "*Unki Police underworld ke is naye hathyar ke liye taiyaar nahi tha*"/ the police wasn't prepared for the latest weapon that the underworld was using.

In a desperate bid to keep up with the expedited pace of Gajendra's dubious transactions, the police scrambles to find ways to acquaint themselves with, infiltrate and bridle the cellular network. Initial efforts barely yield breakthroughs as Police agents struggle to shift from their intensely physical, hands on, brawly form of investigation to this newer style of 'confrontational listening'. Junior inspector Baidyanath Mishra is seen in one shot trepidatiously fumbling with a phone model as a call comes, nervously handing it to his colleagues to answer it. As the department arranges for telecommunication engineers to specially come in and explain the

27

innards of the technology's functioning, the general sense of confusion only exacerbates. It's then decided that the specific requirement of the unit is to get someone who can specifically filter scientistic knowledge to directly incorporate it into a criminal discourse productively. For this they decide to approach professor Tiwari to temporarily shift base to the police headquarters and try and improvise and set up a proper system of cell phone surveillance.

In the actual story of the Lucknow police department, a whole team of telecommunication analysts, engineers, and educationists was apparently employed to consolidate and enhance the police surveillance systems as cellular and internet technologies came in[19]. Kaushik however, locates the whole research and initial set-up process onto one character to give it an individual emotional axis. Surveillance's slow initiation into police procedures get personified and fictionalized in *Sehar* through Prof. Tiwari and his eventual relationship with SSP Ajay's unit. Kabir's choice of character for the personification is interesting. Instead of drawing from the dominant class exigencies the technology initially was mired in[20], Kaushik chooses to focus entirely on its functional scientific face. The slow initiation of electronic surveillance in central India gets embodied and allegorized in *Sehar* in the form of the dexterous, respectable, morally upright science professor eager to help the police out in curbing crime; and the changing vicissitudes of his relationship with the police.

Despite weeks of initial inertia and administrative fumbling (the voice over at one point mentions that the team made various mistakes in the beginning) Tiwari's nascent set up gradually starts coming into its own. Strategies, work flows and protocols begin getting stabilized and soon enough, 'results' start yielding. Slowly, a new perception of an electromagnetic network as a primary 'space' in which the police's investigative exercises can be undertaken begins to crystallize. Dynamic montages of cell phone towers, phone lines, tele-coders, and revolving spools of recording tapes replace earlier shots of newspaper cutting, informers shadowing criminals, and elaborate physical manhunt operations. A greater number of cops are

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[19] 2005, Rana Siddiqui, "Slanting Reality, Cine Style" , The Hindu; Aug 5 . Available at http://www.hindu.com/fr/2005/08/05/stories/2005080501950400.htm, accessed on June 4th 2012
[20] The cell phone was initially seen as a luxury commodity only affluent classes could afford. It was seen in films of the time mostly owned by corporate honchos or younger people from affluent families.

now seen holed up inside Tiwari's corner with headphones around their ears, instead of running extensive combing operations at neighborhoods the criminals were last seen in. 'Listening in' becomes one of the primary modes of police actions, as integral to their functioning as the intricate encounters they plan.

The conceptual category of the 'criminal' comes to be seen differently. People with criminal records aren't just understood exclusively anymore by the dint of their criminal actions, 'lives' as a whole - social activities, personal relations etc become a pervasively scrutinized site for the police to sieve through for information. As a result earlier divisions of public and private begin disintegrating, as the notion of 'information' slowly metamorphoses into a meta-narrative that condones and legitimizes any sort of investigative incursions[21]. In one particular scene, Tiwari informs Ajay that Gajendra and his troupe are hiding near a railway station. On being quizzed about the reasons for his inference, Tiwari tells them that he's heard a conversation between one of the gang members and his girlfriend, where the sound of a passing train is audible. Tiwari embarrassedly relates that the young gang member tries making a kissing sound on the phone which his girlfriend can't hear because of the commotion a train in the background makes, so the gang-member calls her again to make her hear the sound. While the bashful Tiwari looks nearly red-faced as he stutters out the tiny detail of the kiss, what seems embarrassing is merely the fact of verbalizing another's sexual moment for the queasy middle class sensibilities of the people involved. There is no acknowledgement of the moral compunctions of annexing another's private space as information serves as the sacrosanct motif that denies the criminal the privacy of independent personhood.

This graph of Tiwari's interactions with the police positions itself interestingly given the allegorical thread the film seems to be otherwise building up[22]. Surveillance

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[21] "Zyatti maamla" or 'personal matters' ceases to be the relevant category it is earlier

[22] Over time, as the freshly instated surveillance systems begin paying off ("for the first time in the history of Uttar Pradesh", as the voice over informs us, "organized crime is challenged in an organized manner") and the 'encounters' of unsuspecting gang members increases, Tiwari also starts developing emotional ties with the members of the 'Special Task Force'. While he becomes friendly with Ajay, revealing to him his most intimate fears of being around guns etc, he jokes and has conversations with Inspector Solanki about Lata Mangeshkar and his interests in music. The encounter team and the surveillance technician increasingly form intimate convivial bonds, becoming towards the end a sort of surrogate family that protects, grieves for and avenges each other.

practice is first introduced into the film's landscape as a purely acultural, non-social technology that the police happens to require. It is positioned initially only as an inherent necessity, a requisite functional asset the police needs to invest in for a better Law and order situation. The premise of an essentially honest, morally unimpeachable citizen aiding the Law through his specific technical skill set, as its primary agent imbues surveillance with a certain moral enclave to begin with. The point at which the innocuously functional spills into complex moral discourse about the perpetration of power, however, remains entirely unexamined in the narrative. The Lucknow Police force (infact the police in general, barring the SSP in Banaras who works as a mole for Gajraj) – Ajay, Solanki, Baidyanath, Irfan etc are shown as inherently honest, efficient and good people whose sole motive is the removal of organized crime from UP. Surveillance then is only a mere technical aide necessary for their otherwise necessary and just operations. The narrative provides only subtle and tangential hints to how this newfound technological power also gets mobilized for murky extra-legal ends. The number of 'encounters' – hack organized murders carried out by the police increases manifold as reams of new surveillance information is made available to them. The operations also increasingly become tougher to condone – as the special task force itself starts mirroring the kind of bestial aggression in killing people as Gajraj displays at the beginning (they fire bullets into bodies of criminals even long after they're dead almost out of a perverse pleasure, and follow a maxim of leaving no one alive just like Gajraj's gang does in the beginning).

Tiwari's growing friendship and emotional links with them is resonated in his increasing collaboration in these acts of terrible arbitrary killing. Infact he becomes central to the Special Task Force aspiring for and moving towards a political theodicy that Gajraj is shown to be an admirer of – 'varchasv', absolute power. Tiwari's findings not only aid in some of the Special Task Force's brutal operations, but also plan and perpetrate them. It is Tiwari who tells the team the location of Gajraj's key right hand man, Chaudhury in central Delhi, who the team mercilessly shoots point blank despite him not showing any signs of resistance. Yet, far from being critiqued, this gruesome killing remains ensconced within a larger emotional and affective climate of righteous vengeance and justice (as close up shots of the dead officer

Baidyanath, who had been killed by the same gang earlier, get intercut with the shots of the killing of Chaudhury, with an emotional background score playing alongside.)

The unholy complicity between surveillance and the most absolute face of dispensation of police power escalates towards the end. Almost symbolically, Ajay asks Tiwari to come with them in their final expected bloodbath with Gajraj and the remaining members of his gang in the Nizamuddin Railway station in Delhi. In the climax, a long gun battle raging in an empty train compartment leads to the one by one death of members from both teams. A fatally injured Gajraj, after killing Ajay remains the last person standing in the compartment as all the members of his gang and of the Special Task Force get shot in fire exchange. Yet right before he's about to make a final victorious escape, he suddenly gets shot repeatedly from the back. In the final rites of passage, surveillance's initiation into the violence it has perpetrated (only from afar) comes full circle in the climax, as the film's sole surveillant figure kills Gajraj. Like in the entire film, Gajraj is able to retaliate sufficiently to the fire power the State unleashes at him, even in the end emerging the lone man standing in the bloodbath; yet like always it is the figure of surveillance that does him in. He doesn't anticipate the presence of Tiwari there, only to finally get blindsighted and shot by him. Tiwari on the other hand displays the same bestiality that Gajraj (and subsequently the STF) displays – overcoming his manic fear of guns, he shoots Gajraj's body repeatedly, over and over again with different guns. The surveillant mutates into an entirely different figure in the end.

Ticking Cell Bombs: Cellular Bodies and Terror in *Aamir*

Raj Kumar Gupta's *Aamir* (2008) is set in a period where, unlike *Sehar,* cell phones are an inescapably ubiquitous feature in everyday urban life. *Aamir* (2008) revolves around a day in Dr Aamir Ali's (Rajeev Khandelwal) life, who has just returned to India after studying and practicing medicine in the United Kingdom for 4 years. It relates the story of a few hours on the day of his return as he finds himself sinking deeper and deeper into a plan by an Islamic 'terrorist' network that intends to carry out a bombing in the city. On alighting at the Mumbai airport Aamir is surprised to

see that his family isn't there to receive him. Instead two men on motor bike throw a cell phone at him which begins ringing. On answering he discovers that his family has been kidnapped and he has to follow instructions given by the voice on the phone to ensure their safety. From here on Aamir is plunged into the filthy by-lanes and nooks of the old Muslim parts of Mumbai, within which whole swathes of people seem to be helping out in the plan. The film culminates with Aamir realizing that the red briefcase he's asked to leave in a crowded bus is a bomb. In a final defiant move he runs with the briefcase to a construction site nearby, in the process sacrificing himself as the bomb goes off

It's precisely this quotidian ubiquity of the cell phone that threads the impossibly intricate extra-legal network of surveillance that Raj Kumar Gupta's film imagines. Not unlike nearly every other political and social process, terrorism too undergoes a process akin to liquefaction in recent years. It fissiparously disperses into various fragments, sundry parts that can only in sum go on to become the 'terrorism event'. The traditional figure of *the terrorist* – a set of discrete, isolated individuals malevolently machinating and lugging out a plan, recedes and disburses into an opaque network of quiet complicity. Like the Vicario community in Gabriel Marquez's novella *'Chronicle of a Death Foretold'* (1981) (that contributes collectively in innumerable tiny shards to the final murder of its deceased protagonist Santiago Nasar) the final bomb blast in *Aamir* is woven by an assembly of complicit *citizens*. Ostensibly, ordinary people in banal jobs all collude through seemingly insignificant actions to move towards the larger composite event. The amorphous communal crowd - the Muslim everyman becomes the terrorist in *Aamir,* while the titular character is the renegade refusing to get inducted into the collective. This scattered and impregnably diffused circuit maintains an extremely tight knit and expeditious information relay network, instated and navigated by a universe of hundreds of cell phones. What gets formed is a new sort of 'aural materiality' – a menacing phone presence that threatens extreme physical danger and can precipitate the movement of different material agents across the city purely by the dint of its voice. It's this phone voice and the ominous cellular network it wields that the character Aamir struggles to disambiguate and resist throughout the film. The final

gesture of resistance against this sort of a cellular antagonist then is the act of not picking up the phone, of becoming 'unreachable'.

Aamir (Rajeev Khandelwal) first gets introduced to us through an encounter he has with a customs officer at the Mumbai airport. As the customs officers asks for his bags and identity to be repeatedly checked and verified over and over again, the impression of urban India as a hostile landscape where Muslims are unabashedly profiled, stigmatized and discriminated on, gets expressly drawn. The sequence however, above everything else highlights the immutable, intransigent meanings Aamir's communal identity holds for the Hindu customs officer. As Aamir asks "*Do I look like some sort of a terrorist to you"*, the customs officer replies *"It's not written on anyone's face that they're terrorists"*. The scene ironically proves to be a sort of maxim to read the film's attitude towards Muslim identity in India – appearances of ordinary banal lives do not matter, at heart the larger lower middle class Muslim populace endemically (and almost genetically) concurs with the logic of terrorism. Everyone of the 'type' is in on it.

The moment Aamir enters the city outside the Mumbai Airport terminal, he gets inserted into the territory of the cell phone 'network'[23]. Landline telephones, in this whole spread prove to be largely ineffectual technologies – Aamir tries in vain to ring his family from the airport payphones (during which time his luggage behind him gets surreptitiously transferred to the taxi).

Two men on a bike suddenly appear and throw a cell phone at him, which immediately starts ringing. As Aamir looks around baffled, a man briskly walks by, whispering into his ear that he should "*should answer it, since it's for him*". Aamir gets completely inducted into the 'network' the minute he answers the phone - the cellphone voice informs him that his luggage has been loaded in an awaiting taxi nearby, shows him a video of his kidnapped family on the cell phone screen and makes him navigate into the heart of the squalid, bedraggled parts of old Bombay city. All this while Aamir also increasingly gets a sense that he's continuously being

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[23] Interestingly, as Aamir's's leaving the airport lounge, the light jazzy opening background score begins fading out to a visual of a man on a phone, with an Airtel 'Stay Connected' sign seen in the background which Aamir crosses.

watched and that various people in the places he's led to are fully in on the mysterious plan - the peculiar taxi driver seems to know that the outgoing's locked on his cellphone, the restaurant owner has reserved a seat for him, the road corner paan-wallah he purchases dry-dates from someone who appears to be expecting him, and even the waiter at the restaurant sternly refuses to give Aamir water on being asked for it. The sense of being continually watched gets intensely heightened when the phone-voice asks him why he isn't eating the dry-dates just at the moment he slips the packet of dates into his pocket. A flabbergasted Aamir immediately looks around frenetically, now certain that every action of his is being closely watched by the phone voice. The view he is confronted with (visualized by a point-of-view shot) is of droves of people on the phone in the busy market place, all of them prospective sinister 'eyes' that might be surveilling every action of his. This sequence, especially the sheer fear and horror the cell phone is able to invoke in Aamir can be read on various levels.

Steven Bruhm's work suggests that processes of embodied presence and absence that a cell phone conversation inevitably entails have in recent times been increasingly mobilized by films to construct atmospherics of fear and horror (Steven Bruhm 2011). Bruhm looks at two particular films from the 1970s: *When a Stranger Calls* (1979) and *Black Xmas* (1974), both slasher horror films where the killer calls his victims from landlines before murdering them; and their remakes which came out in 2006, in which the psychopaths use cell phones to communicate with future victims (Ibid)[24]. Bruhm notes that in the 1970s films, the psychopath and hero/ine (usually sorority girls or babysitters) were envisioned as singular autonomous beings locatable in stable and clearly demarcated spaces exclusive of each other. As long as the heroines were on the phone with the murderers, they were assumed to be free from their lethal clutches, the telecommunication structure itself guaranteeing the non-collapsible distance between them (the horror ofcourse came from the landline itself being located nearby, like in *When A Stranger Calls* where the murderer is calling the babysitter from the children's room next door after killing them). Cell telephony however radically alters the *phantasmatic quality of the interlocutors presence*

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[24] Bruhm refers to these new films as 'cell-phone horror', a new sub-genre of recent techno-horror films (Bruhm 2011)

(Bruhm 201: 605), since the killer can now be right behind you, and more often than not, is (Ibid). The fear around cell phones stems from the infinite possibilities of the floating voice freed from the hindrance of space: the inherent "ability to be a phantasm but at the same time to be deracinated as phantasm" (Ibid) as and when it desires. Bruhm observes that while the terrorism of fixed-line telephones rendered the domestic home of the 1970s an unsafe, potentially ominous place, contemporary cell phone based narratives enable the danger to radiate outwards – pervasively reaching everywhere *like electronic waves from a cell tower:*

> "In the archive of twenty-first-century telephone terror films, cell phones cut the domestic chord: terror spreads to cars, guesthouses, parks, hospitals, into other people's cell phones and computers, and eventually into other states and countries. Murder (or terrorism) has become viral and self-replicating, claiming as its ultimate victim the speaking—or telephoning—subject" (Ibid: 604).

Michel Chion's idea of the 'acousmatic' might be useful to explore in this context. The acousmatic is a (generally human) sound that one hears without being able to identify its origin or source (Chion 1994). Chion suggests that acousmatic sound disorients the listeners sense of space and position as the *acousmetr*e i.e. "*the phantasmatic producer of sound* often seems to emanate from both the listener's head and outside it (cited in Bruhm*:* 610). This acousmatic voice however retains its incredible power and capacity to invoke fear and awe only till the time it cannot be pegged to a body, and remains a de-corporealised, ethereal and largely spectral figure. In films like *When A Stranger Calls, Phone Booth(2002), Samay* (2003) *Joyride* (2001) the voice remains a potent threat only till the point it remains veiled as a voice, the moment de-acousement happens (the voice gets re-secured to the physical body) the quality of power starts withering, as the aural entity gets re-humanized.

In *Aamir*, however, the opposite happens. The acousmatic sound seems even more terrifying because it emerges out of what seems a panoply of extremely banal lives. It seems not just a voice that controls the crowd but a consummation of it - the exemplary will of a complex network of taxi drivers, sex workers, restaurant owners and waiters, grocery shop owners, PCO booth attendants, garment shop owners, hoteliers, businessman etc. As if underneath the visage of pedestrian lives exists a deadly pestilent cult, a clandestine life all of them collusively share in – no matter who you are, no matter how square you look and how hackneyed a life you seem to

lead, you lead a terrifying obfuscated double life in subterfuge. The only exterior and visible marker of that subterfuge network is the cell phone. The two foundational epistemic phone questions: '*who are you?*' and (more significantly, in the case of cell phones) *'where are you?'* yield paralyzing answers in *Aamir* – *everyone and everywhere* within the Muslim lower class world. Terrorism itself becomes an ultra-collaborative, dilatory space whose modus operandi is like the thread loom – hundreds of intricate threads spread with clockwork precision, working only through the final summation of myriad fragmentary shards.

The central cog of this entangled structure in *Aamir* is the cell phone. It serves not only as its primary mode of address, but also the basis of its unrelenting web of surveillance. Unlike in films like *A Wednesday* (2010) and *Mumbai Meri Jaani* (2010) there is no semblance of an elaborate maze of CCTV cameras scattered through the city, nor a dense clutter of television screens laid out in front of the mysterious voice on the phone. The city space and Aamir's errant movement through it get constantly 'visiblized' by what appears to be a thickly meshed aural regime. Instead of the State's '*panoptic eye'*, is an unrelentingly efficient system of *sonic surveillance*; a structure where "our speech, our sound, and our acts of sounding are now the object of the gaze" (Bruhm 2011: 616).

A web of cell phones constantly updates the mysterious voice on the phone, perpetually giving Aamir the sense that the furtive voice can also constantly *see* him no matter where he goes – the voice knows he tries calling his family when they don't show up at the Airport, that he is chased by a police officer, and that he throws up after visiting the Bhendi Bazaar toilet[25]. Even more eerily, just like information flows from the dispersed cell phone web to the primary voice on the phone, it also seems to flow the other way around, from the kingpin to the network units – the usher at the hotel seems to know that Aamir was thirsty back at the restaurant, the businessman who hands him the red briefcase knows Aamir has a habit of asking pesky questions. The cell phone network is a busy crossway of different forms of information and protocol - the kingpin constantly reads out information for Aamir from other cell

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[25] Ironically, the kingpin doesn't actually see Aamir during the dry-date sequence, he just guesses that Aamir doesn't eat the dates. But by this point Aamir is neurotic enough to be certain that he's being doggedly trailed by some sort of an omnipresent eye.)

phone sets he has near him (the number of the taxi that Aamir has to board, the restaurant he has to go to etc), minor characters respond to Aamir's insistence for details and clarity with a cryptic reply: '*phone ayega' / A call will come*, and its through the phone codes of numbers he's made to call that he begins to gauge just how wide the network is (he has to call an ISI official's residence in Pakistan)[26]. Interestingly the only time Aamir's life seems to slip into chaos, chance and coincidence is when he seems to be off the cell phone radar for a brief period – he gets mugged, his briefcase gets robbed, and by a lead he seems to get out of sheer coincidence from a Bangladeshi sex worker, he brawls the briefcase back. At the end however, it's suggested that even this momentary plummeting into a space of accidents and contingent chance was infact scripted and manufactured by the cell phone network. It is as if the Cell phone network becomes Fate, a supra-human agency controlling and plotting Aamir's life, and the rhetorical answer to the aphoristic question the film begins with, "*Kaun Kehta Hai Aadmi Apni Kismat Khud Likhta Hai"/who says man writes his own destiny?[27]*. It's the cellphone network, in *Aamir* that writes his destiny for the better part of the film.

The next question to ask then is - who constitutes this network? Most critical responses to the film have pointed to the blatant communal stereotypes it mobilizes and promulgates. From the very beginning, an unequivocally palpable connection is made between a particular community's putative way of life and the fostering of Terrorism. Aarti Wani, Kuhu Tanvir and Ranjani Mazumdar have pointed to the specific use of Islamic iconography to create a climate of fear, paranoia and revulsion in the film (Tanvir 2008, Mazumdar 2011, Wani 2008). Aamir is whisked from the Airport to an eating joint in an area very similar to Muslim dominated old parts of various cities across India[28] . The houses along the lanes he passes by have a predominantly Islamic architectural design, as does the hotel he goes to; the walls are adorned with conspicuous Islamic art, and nearly all characters are by default referred to as 'Bhai'. The most noticeable concatenation between terrorism and religion is seen

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[26] We can presume it is an ISI officer Aamir calls – the Pakistani man's wife offhandedly says 'main aapki koi commando nahi hun" (I'm not some commando of yours) before answering the call.
[27] The line is also the film's publicity tagline.
[28] like Chandni Chowk and the whole Old Delhi area of Delhi 6, Park Street in Kolkatta, Haji Ali in Mumbai etc

in whatever little we see of the Kingpin – he's seen folding a cloth on which he's clearly just finished reading Namaz, he's shown cutting out newspaper stories about deaths of Taliban members.[29] He advises Aamir to eat dates just like the Mughals used to before setting out for battles and admonishes him for not having read the Shahriat.[30] At one point he is seen with a toddler wearing a skull cap sitting on his lap, a nod perhaps towards a future generation of Muslims in the country getting the '*Taalim*'/education he hopes to give Aamir a sample of. These are the markers of the historical lineage adumbrated for the whole invisible population that mans the cell phone network.

The cell phone brings Aamir in touch with not only an extremist Islamic consciousness but also a whole affective landscape suggested as the 'everyday Muslim way of life'. Kuhu Tanvir and Ranjani Mazumdar point towards the grotesque use of food imagery to create a particularly abhorrent sort of aura around stock Muslim stereotypes. The cell phone voice asks Aamir to wait in a restaurant that has a particular kind of customer profile: the majority wears skull caps; have long beards, and are eating a particular kind of Mughlai cuisine[31]. It's these very dishes that the man on the phone is also shown eating, and that which is offered to Aamir later on as he's served lunch in Shalimar hotel. It's as if everybody following this particular kind of cuisine also shares willy nilly in a very specific brand of extreme political action. A conspicuous link is formed between the general populace Aamir sees around him in the restaurant and the 'terrorists' on and around the cell phone.[32]

Coming in touch with the cell phone network also abruptly yanks Aamir from the antiseptic environments within the airport and the London that he earlier inhabits, into an incredibly filthy, unhygienic set of endemically 'Muslim' spaces of chawl

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[29] hinting towards what seems an international nexus of a bloodthirsty Muslim brotherhood
[30] referring to an aggressive history of violent invasion Muslims are often associated with
[31] The cuisine comprises of different kinds of chicken and mutton gravy preparations and specific kind of haleem and roti.This specific kind of repugnance gets resonated in a later scene, as Aamir is shown walking back through a meat market with what he believes is a bomb in his hand. The evocative background song, and low angle shots of a crestfallen Aamir are edited dramatically with intercut shots of butcher's knives cutting and piercing through raw animal meat and skin. Mazumdar (2011) Tanvir (2010).
[32]This specific kind of repugnance gets resonated in a later scene, as Aamir is shown walking back through a meat market with what he believes is a bomb in his hand. The evocative background song, and low angle shots of a crestfallen Aamir are edited dramatically with intercut shots of butcher's knives cutting and piercing through raw animal meat and skin (Tanvir:2010,Mazumdar:2011)

bathrooms, meat markets, waste yards, sewers etc. Its as if the vermin-like quality of life in these spaces extends into a sort of demonic moral and political degeneration of the people breeding within it. The physical scum in the landscape for Raj Kumar Gupta, is but an echo of the scum in the human material, and we're made to respond with equal measures of revulsion to both. What we actually see in *Aamir* is not so much the threat of an Islamic culture of terror, but a modern liberal (and Hindu upper class) *terror of culture* in *Aamir*[33].

Recent social history would have us believe that cell phones and geo-politics of class are not entirely unrelated.[34] Nearly all post mortem analyses of recent blasts at urban centers are articulated in the language of conspiracies.[35] These are narratives inundated with intricate details, diverse back stories, intriguing testimonies all pervaded by an obsessive desire for exactitude and precision. Cell phones have proved to be an integral part of the investigation scripts in nearly all the major 'terrorist blasts'. Post blast investigations seem to abound in detailed information about mysterious labyrinthine networks unveiled by following cell phone records. A lot of these convoluted cell phone trails often reveal their final originary points in urban locations not entirely unlike the areas Aamir is made to sift through – Chandni Chowk, Batla House, Aazamgarh and so on[36]. As various 'suspects', breakthroughs and custodial arrests are increasingly being made with cellular exchange records used

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[33] Malay Firoze uses this turn of phrase pointing towards the terror of culture instead of culture of terror in The Contemporaneity of Terrorism: Assessing the stakes in culturalist readings of 9/11(2011) Available at (http://www.journalofinternationalrelationsresearch.com/Home.html) accessed on June 2012.

[34] The category of class also needs to be weighed in here. Swathes of Muslim multitudes across urban centers in the country have been relegated to economic and cultural pigeonholes far worse than they ever were in the past two decades (Sudeshna Maitra 2007). Yet conversations between Aamir and the kingpin would have us believe that Muslims choose to stay and fester in the abominable, disease riven urban cloisters they live in. Aamir the clean, globalized, rich, secular 'good' Muslim striving against the legion of unwashed, conservative, lower/lower-middle class populace. As the class that spells 'reserved' as 'rasavad' (even the Bangladeshi sex worker, who at one point seems the lone compassionate, gentle and helpful figure turns out to be part of a fabricated theatrics) remains unexceptionally malicious.

[35] Ranjani Mazumdar discusses 'conspiracy' as a form of negotiation with a past that becomes especially popular post bomb blasts in the last few years (Mazumdar: 2011).

[36] Interestingly the only two presumably Hindu characters in Aamir are also the two sole representatives of the State that we see in the entire film – the customs officer at the beginning and the police constable who gives chase after Aamir. These are also characters who act out the only moments of unambiguous communal prejudice that the film presents. Yet by the end of the film, it's as if these prejudices are not entirely misplaced. Given how all lower class Muslims collude readily to the blast scheme, the custom officer' sand police officer's paranoia get legitimized. (Tanvir: 2010)

as substantive evidence, the whole perception of the cell phone with a certain religious and class category begins to congeal. It's also significant to remember that this period (2006-07 onwards) also coincides with the time when cell phones uniformly become cheaper and therefore ubiquitous in urban India[37]. The intrigue around cell phones and the networks they scaffold therefore are also processed within the social imaginary around terrorism. A whole complex around inexpensive communication, disenfranchised communal margins seeking revenge, and the telecommunication technology begins to foment.

The protagonist's final act in *Aamir* is therefore significant. The affluent, English speaking and espousedly secular Aamir acts in a way truly befitting a leader (the true meaning of his name and identity). He remains till the end a defiantly secular '*good muslim*' refusing to give in to the 'barbaric' demands his entire community makes of him. It is not an accident that the final gesture smacks of a resounding act of rejection of the whole cellular network – for the first time he's able to not answer the cell phone, his usual sense of fear and anxiety at its ringing now replaced by a final consummate smile. This ultimate rejection of the cell phone network symbolizes his rejection of this whole sordid world he had momentarily plunged into – his final gesture symbolic of the vulnerable human body announcing its final heuristic sovereignty over the phantasmic cellular voice. It is also with this final defiance of the cellular network that we see the phone kingpin falling to his knees in defeat – the network fails to connect that final effective call to Aamir. Aamir's heroic martyrdom, then lies in being able to go out-of- range of the malevolent network.

<u>Untimely Prank Calls: Cellular Time and Terror in *A Wednesday*</u>

Neeraj Pandey's terrorism-thriller *A Wednesday* (2008) released four months after *Aamir*. Set between 2pm and 6pm on a Wednesday, the film is narrated by the about-to retire Police Commissioner Rathod (Anupam Kher) of Mumbai who relates the 'toughest case' of his professional career. He recounts the 'revenge' orchestrated by a

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[37] Mobile consumption surged ahead in the years 2006-07; available at (http://www.cellular-news.com/story/16396.php), accessed on June 4th 2012.

'common man' as he parades as an Islamic terrorist to access and kill jailed terrorists, claiming that the State takes too long to mete out legal and just retribution. Pandey's film garnered critical acclaim while also going on to become a significant commercial success. Media responses to it lauded the histrionics of the two lead thespians Naseeruddin Shah and Anupam Kher, the film's "terse" script, "slick" editing, and innovative camera work[38]. Though the film went on to pick up the 'Indira Gandhi Award for Best First Film' at the 56th National Film Awards, a number of serious responses to it displayed a discomfort with the film's aggressive brand of "Islamophobia", its "fascistic ending" and the final maxim to "blow up people who blow us up"[39].

In *A Wednesday* technologies of surveillance become the weapon wielded by the quotidian to precipitate urgent social action. For this it mobilizes the inherently apocalyptic quality that cell phones have come to assume in certain circumstances in contemporary public life; especially in the disquieting form of the modern specter of the anonymous caller. Just by his ability to remain untraceable within the cellular network, the 'common man' (Naseeruddin Shah) is able to transmutate and project himself as an object of fear and awe, easily dipping into the by now well established lexicon of the terrorist-on-the-phone. This enables him to transform the urban space into a war-zone, a quasi-minefield where fatal explosives could be concealed just about anywhere. And like most minefield situations, it is the distant, unseen cartographer of bombs who re-maps the city, maintaining strict spatial and temporal control over bodies and their actions within the space. By doing this he shoves the State into a veritable 'state' of exception, an Emergency State where all actions can be expedited, structural impediments and bureaucratic protocols can be bypassed and suspended, new temporal regimes of action can be instated (as "until the next phone call" becomes the modus operandi), and violent acts of retributive cleansing can be effected *within* the paraphernalia of the State machinery. It's in his invulnerable

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[38] See- 2008, Jerry Pinto, "The take: Games Everyman Plays". Tehelka Magazine, Vol 5, Issue 37. Sept 20. and 2012, Rajeev Masand's, 'Any Day Watch A Wednesday'. Available at http://ibnlive.in.com/news/masands-verdict-any-day-watch-a-wednesday/72967-8.html, accessed on July 10th
[39] Ranjani Mazumdar sums up the "sense of disquiet, around the film's moral vision" by providing comments from different media reviews at the time (Mazumdar, 2011: 161-162)

domination of the cell phone network vis a vis the State, and the successful inauguration of a counter-surveillance regime, that the *common man* is able to carve out his Wednesday.

Cell phones serve as a source of consternation and anxiety from the very beginning in Pandey's narrative. Albeit in a lighter tone, we are first introduced to the Police Commissioner Prakash Rathod in his professional space as he's addressing a celebrity phone harassment/extortion case. Rathod appears amused as a visibly shaken movie hero recounts alarming extortion calls he has been receiving from the 'underworld', threatening to gun him if he refuses to pay the fees they demand. Rathod's (and by extension, the police department's) sense of mastery and casual control over cellular networks in the city is suggested as his sub-inspector Jai (Aamir Bashir) cursorily laughs the case off the minute the jittery film star leaves, already knowing beforehand that it's a prank a couple of neighborhood boys have been playing. Both Rathod and Jai cavalierly joke about how intimidated and timorous the movie hero looks after "*just one phone call*". The cellular network is clearly an entirely transparent and intelligible space the Mumbai Police cannily understands, invigilates, and closely regulates. The *common man*'s phone call thus becomes a threat to this system the minute it manages to become an inscrutably 'unknown' call. Rathod begins getting alert the minute he hears that the bomb-threat call has been traced to multiple locations (South Africa , Mumbai, Dubai etc); and is therefore a potentially 'untraceable number'. It's in the vigilante's capacity to remain transparent in what was till now a visibilized and controllable circuit that legitimizes his claim of being a 'terrorist' who means business.

At this point however it might be useful in examining how the film cinematically builds up the central characters of the Commissioner and the vigilante as vestiges of different modalities of power. The film opens with a magisterial long-shot of the skyscraper peppered Mumbai sea-line on Marine drive. A lone figure stands facing the sea, as another (in all likelihood a police constable) hurriedly runs towards the standing man with a chair for him to sit on. Prakash Rathod is cinematically built up as a man clearly in control of the variety of spaces around him. The Mumbai that we see in the credit montage immediately after, one of vast

skyscraper filled longitudes, glittering malls, etc; are all spaces that Rathod clearly exercises considerable muscle over. The 'common man' (Naseeruddin Shah) in contrast is cinematically figured in significantly differently ways. Rathod's grandiose long shot gives way to a series of dynamic handheld shots (strung together with flash dissolves) as the *common man* is seen bustling through crowded local trains, railway stations, malls, road overpasses, busy roads etc; all the time being able to mix seamlessly with the crowd as a routine, mundane looking pedestrian, yet always seeming subtly distinctive owing to a uncannily watchful, quiet reserve. There remains throughout this initial section a sort of contrapuntal tension in the way he is built up. While he resembles every bit the teeming multitudes of everyday, ordinary, educated middle class men around him in his semi-formal attire, mannerisms and soft benign way of talking, he performs peculiar actions that endow an unmistakably sinister sense to him. He's seen leaving a black bag in the middle of a crowded railway platform and rushing out, hiding another with the initials J&K written on top under the sink of a police station. The association with Jammu and Kashmir (part of the usual terror-related suspects in the mainstream imagination) bequeaths an even more malevolent sense, suggesting a threatening radical political identity underneath the veneer of everydayness.[40] Yet despite an extremely suspicious economy of actions, there are constant stray markers of an alternate humdrum existence that make it difficult to pin his identity down[41]. A spectacular, panoramic view of the city is revealed when he finally reaches the top of the building he carries his plan out from. The camera gives him a messianic aura, gliding in to a view of the miniscule city through the gap between his legs with a suitably dramatic background score alongside; we overhear a phone call from (presumably) his wife asking him to buy milk and nuts on his way back, *"since the kids love kheer"*. The sublimity of unmitigated evil gets periodically punctured by sudden eruptions of a misplaced banality.

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[40] Our changed relationship with stolen objects- objects don't signify tragic loss or pain but only fear. Unclaimed objects have had a long life in our popular archive of threatening materials- unclaimed teddy bears, briefcases, kit bags etc all have been long suggested to be possible bomb holders.
[41] While climbing a ramshackled multi storey high-rise he meticulously picks up a tomato that falls of his cloth bag that, he huffs and pants after climbing a flight off stairs, and has a general sense of middle-aged pedestrian frailty about him

Its only when the arsenal of gadgetry that lays waiting on a table is revealed that the sense of awe he commands begins changing tonality. The whole corporeality of the common man – of ordinariness and physical vulnerability begin to change texture as he comes into contact with the enormous barrage of wires, computer, phone, transponders, radio TV etc. As the Bluetooth device becomes like an extension of his body, he transmogrifies into a sort of cyborg terrorist, armed with a battery of anonymous SIM cards, key phone numbers and call re-routers to wield a full-blown sonic blitzkrieg on the police. Physical/material prowess become immaterial for the telecommunications age terrorist, what becomes crucial is his capacity to maneuver the cell phone network. He becomes then an overarching, foreboding figure controlling the fate of the diminutive city beneath him, purely by the dint of his cellular onslaught.

Alarmed at the prospect of it being a genuine '*terror call*', Rathod calls for an emergency team meeting in the "*war room*". The Mumbai police's '*war room*' is not one stocked with combative weaponry, explosives or fighter-commandoes, but one that resembles closely the look and structure of a fancy Call Centre. The battle headquarters now is a large CFL lit corporate room, filled with columns of computers, large screens, different gadgetry and collared technicians. Software engineers and white collared technocrats form the war resources as urban warfare gets largely transposed on to the level of airwaves and number codes (the 01 01 streams now popular as *The Matrix* template becomes the new topology through which the terrorist manhunt is staged). The first 'offensive' that Rathod mounts is also one that deploys the clandestine cell phone networks that the Police have at their disposal – he asks one inspector to call his sources within the underworld to check whether explosives have been moved in the last two days, and another to check from Intelligence whether phone conversations involving the 4 demanded convicts have been overheard in terrorist outfits recently. It's because of their capacity to tap into underworld 'sources' that they're able to get a first lead (they find out that RDX has been moved recently) on the caller's identity and facilitate movement to get to him. The beginning of the communications war is figured cinematically by a dramatic montage of a tizzy of hands ferociously tapping away on keyboards, wires being fitted into phone sockets,

transponder dials being tuned, and incomprehensible data being downloaded on a multitude of screens. The classic pre-combat preparation montage - regular stock sequences (of swords being cleaned, guns being loaded, uniforms being worn etc) familiar right from early battle movies to contemporary war films, gets replaced by the dramatization of the opaque occult of technology.

In response, the vigilante initiates his own strategies at counter surveillance and visualization. He asks Naina Roy, a young industrious reporter to reach where Rathod and his team are stationed, with the alluring promise of giving her the biggest news scoop of her life. By doing this, the vigilante is able to mobilize another enigmatic (and powerful) phone phenomenon commonplace in the contemporary mediatized world – the figure of the anonymous news tipper/ informant. The anonymous phone lead/tip off, holds in today's brimming media market the prospect of a potentially unchartered event, the 'novel' news story. It's because of the vigilante's incisive understanding of the crisis-economy that the post 9/11 live news industry perpetually flourishes in, that he's able to ensure complete coverage of the police's action (Hoskote 2004). Just by mentioning the word 'bomb', Naina Roy and her entire live television camera ensemble become for him irrepressibly efficient, live mobile CCTV cameras, an indefatigable counter-surveillance machinery through which he visiblizes the State's actions (she becomes, as Rathod later admonishes her, "*his eyes*").

Time itself begins getting partitioned incongruously, as the cell call imposes a temporality of its own. '*Until the next call comes*' becomes the new rationale for apportioning time, as well as the new axis within which all action (investigating origins, searching locations, following RDX trails) is to be coursed. Cell phone time rapidly assumes the qualities of the '*ticking-bomb time*' – an ever-abbreviating, apocalyptic temporal arrangement inexorably moving towards its 'inevitability' unless specific actions are undertaken to cease its flow. Time (in the form of duration) is also crucial to the efficacy of the police's surveillance systems – the vigilante manages to keep his location veiled by keeping his conversations short, (always 23 seconds, or 27 seconds which the sub inspector informs is 'too short' etc), or by being timely: punctually re-routing his location every 30 seconds. Conversely it's because of being

'*out of date*' to begin with, that the Police's surveillance can't detect the vigilante's location (their models as the young college hacker informs them are *from an earlier time*).

A larger idea of the passing of Time infact is central to *A Wednesday*'s basic premise. The *common man*'s primary point of anger against the State/structure is what he thinks is a disheartningly long time the government has taken in initiating action against those convicted in orchestrating past bomb blasts. As he explains towards the end "*It takes you ten years to prove a person guilty. Do you not consider this a question mark on your ability? If you can't clean up this mess, then we will have to do something about it*". This effectively is an outburst against a bureaucratized model of time – a lugubrious, sedentary time that coagulates as decisions get transferred around through various circuitous levels of governmental procedures and protocols. This *delayed time* becomes for the *common man* demonstrative of the government's monumental inadequacy in dealing with Terror and the reason for an urgent intervention by someone like him, albeit in the form of vigilantism. The violent disruption of Time is also at the heart of the *form and syntax* the common man chooses to couch his retributive action in. The principal threat of terrorism is premised on the fact that it can strike at any time[42]; that it can erupt in the everyday when it is at its most vulnerably ordinary point (Shanahan 2005). The ordinary and the everyday as a category, is itself to a large extent a coordinate of time and calendrical schedules. An ordinary man's everyday is formed because of his regular time schedules – the ordinary day is the weekday where time is partitioned into Nine-to-Six work schedules. The trauma of the terror attack is that it becomes an event that ruptures and cleaves open this everyday- Tuesdays, Fridays, Thusdays, are violently prevented from continuing as they are meant to. Terror's true trauma lies in its tendency to incomprehensibly disrupt the banal. The *common man* (and the film's title) clearly realizes this basic foundational trauma, in the end he asserts "*they asked us this question on a Friday, repeated it on a Tuesday, I am returning the favor on a Wednesday*''. The *common man's* response thus mimics and parades as a similar disruption of a paradigm of quotidian time – even though it is this very quotidian time

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[42] And not place, what matters is not the fact of a bomb blast in a local train or a school but on the fact that it occurs during the rush hour.

that actually constitutes his identity and is foundational to his anger. (The only 'emotional history' he gives a sample of, is also a memory of disruption of timely rhythms. He hates the fact that after the blast in the 2006 local trains {one that he survived purely because he couldn't catch his routine train on time}, no one from the earlier familiar crowd was there in his usual compartment on his regular time).

The cell phone is the chief provocateur available for the vigilante to impose a new regime of temporality. *Cell phone time* (like bomb-time) becomes the force that can suspend bureaucratic rhythms, expedite actions, bypass sedentary jurisdictional blockades and move with the speed the vigilante desires. He keeps urging them to pace things up, keeps reminding them that they're "*wasting time*", "*losing minutes*", as every single call becomes an event, a signpost to the next deadline ("*I will call you in 5 minutes*" / "*You have 20 minutes till my next call* etc") within which specified actions are to be undertaken. The cell phone-time bomb analogy infact gets literalized as the cellular phone *becomes* the bomb in both the instances in the film where bombs are actually present. [43]It's the cell phone that enables the *common man* to time his actions in a way that retributive justice can be efficiently meted and the "*flaws*" of the system can be finally, corrected.

Urban spaces also begin transforming in texture as movements of different agents in it change in rhythm and speed. The Police Station, otherwise a placid, languorous place where laidback officers casually take their time with registering cases, takes on the form of a frenzied war-field when information about a hidden bomb is revealed. It then gets characterized by rapid criss-crossing patterns of Inspector Jai and his team of tense officers, bomb squad members, sniffer dogs, media vans outside etc. Mumbai itself becomes a besieged space – spaces of casual laughter, and daily work that the vigilante was seen observing at the beginning (Malls, over bridges, roads etc) become hyper vulnerable spaces now, animated with hoards of policemen with sniffer dogs evacuating and combing them through. The city horizon behind the vigilante's Panopticon-ic post becomes a minefield within his cellular network, every location in it susceptible to that one ominous phone call. His own

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[43] He warns at one point that by his next call in 20 minutes the building Rathod's team is stationed in will get blown up. Within 20 minutes he signals the location of the bomb by dialing a cell phone - which also doubles up as the detonator, kept inside the bag of explosives.

tower terrace becomes almost an invisible part of the lofty airwaves that he commands so adeptly, far out of the territorial 'range' that the Police looks through. The one phone call from the 'terrorist' triggers a series of dialogues between the central government actors, catalyzing rapid movement of parties between different spaces. The experience of accelerated movement through space is emphasized by the camera and sharp editing strategies the film deploys[44]. As Mazumdar describes:

> The four men are convicts who have not yet been through a trial. The officer's presentation however expresses no hesitancy. Rather all speculation and ambiguities are resolved by a narrative that marks each one of the four within a truth regime generated by the police. The production of details adds to the truth-telling form, the rapid movement of slides displays the hyper-real choreography of guns, freeze frames, crowd scenes, faces, ships, the sea—a random collation of eclectic images. Speculation based on information gathered through surveillance strategies is transformed into a narrative of the factually known. The officer's speech with words, like jihad, guns, the names of the terrorists, Pakistan, Lashkar, and Al Qaeda combined with the swishing sound of a powerpoint to form a sonic effect and an affective tonality of sensations. Fear is given a form, a body, and a force through audiovisual technology and contributes to the creation of an immersive atmosphere of dread.5 This modulation of affect in compressed time via a complex circuit of emotions that moves across technology, the body, still photographs, and sound design creates a vibrational force that ends up influencing as subsequent decisions. (Mazumdar 2011: 167)

The communal profiling apart, what is striking in the whole exposition is also the obsessive drive to somehow find information that will enable them to, as Rathod says "*see the whole picture*". Terrorism's chief artifice is in building an aura of opacity around it, and the strategic battle between Rathod and Shah's character is about being able to out-visualize the other. While Rathod manages to hail a visual archive of the terrorists involved (reaching even as far as being able partially visualize the vigilante) the latter is able to use television to untiringly accost and relay the actions of his adversaries. The conflict becomes resonant with Paul Virilio's influential idea of international wars now being primarily about "optical

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[44] While the terror call spurs agitated locomotion throughout different strata within the government, the State displays its own capacity of mobilizing disparate information to somehow get closer to the caller. Within a matter of minutes an impressively dramatic power-point presentation is projected on the war-room screen, laying bare whole biographies of the convicts the caller wants freed. What is interesting however is the affective climate the presentation constructs in this whole exercise of visiblizing information

confrontation" where "winning is trying to keep the enemy in constant sight[45]". As Shiv Vishwanathan argues

> Terror thrives on information and terror needs information to thrive. In turn, it must deprive the victim of access to information and become more enzymatic and indefinable as rumour. Terror must strike with appalling efficacy but always carry the rumour of more: 'where next' or 'who next' is central to the narrative of terror. Information, the availability or lack of it, is central to terror. Terror thrives on rumour, grows with gossip. Yet terror needs precise information to operate. It has to strike to extract maximum surplus. The violence of terror is strategic because it has to maximise insecurity and instability" (Vishwanathan 2008)[46].

The cell phone thus becomes the device that obfuscates information about the vigilante and creates a sense of precision around his operations. It is through this process that he is able to ensure a constant flow of information about the authorities trying to pin him down.

The cell phone network in *A Wednesday* works like a perverse inversion of the one in *Aamir*. The dense network that supposedly grants the extremist presence complete impunity and cover from the law becomes the very agent that mobilizes the ruthless destruction of its bodies. While any common Muslim man using a cell phone is a terrorist *in Aamir*, the 'innocent' (Hindu) common can mutate into the terrorist by the designed use of the same device[47]. The link between cheap telecommunication technologies, Islamophobia, and the affective quality of menacing 'bodies' on the phone in the context of urban terrorism, remains undeniable.

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[45] Discussed in Rahul Mukherhji,, "A Reply to Terrorism on a Wednesday", *Sarai Reader 2008,* (242-246).
[46] August 1st 2008, Shiv Visvanathan, "Thinking about Terror", *The Economic Times,*.
[47] If Aamir is the imagination of a squeamish upper middle class Hindu vegetarian with a fragile stomach, the last 15 minutes in A Wednesday reveals a chest thumping military Golwalkarite passion behind it. The vigilante goes into an explosive fascistic diatribe couched in the syntax of expunging the vermin of society (he literally says "if a cockroach comes to your house do you not kill it? I am also killing the cockroach in my house"). Untried terrorism suspects become pestilent presences that need to be crushed without taking recourse to constitutional Law. The terrorists the film envisions also live up to the their insectile descriptions – they fondly relate tales of childhood murders, and share a password that makes them claim pride about the worst acts of violence in recent Indian history ("I'm proud about Mumbai 1992/Gujarat 2002/Delhi 2006" etc).

<u>Aural Desire*s*: Phone(tic) Love in *Goodnight Goodmorning*</u>

Aamir and *A Wednesday* sketch instances where unknown phantasmatic phone figures maneuver the cellular network to activate, invigilate, and pace the movement of different sets of bodies throughout the city. The incognito presences on the phone morph into menacing, threatening personas, easily dipping into the throbbing terrorist narratives dominant across urban spaces today. But the phone call works with the logistics of an encounter - while it can inspire anxiety and fear; it also bears the more radical potential to catalyze affinities, desire, (and in this case) a complex discursive form of aural 'romance'. Sudhish Kamath's *Good Night Good Morning* (2011) inaugurates a new romantic companionship which not only plays out across one cell phone conversation, but where th*e* cell phone *itself* becomes a larger sort of conditional dispositif, an arch-metaphor for our brand of contemporary experience. In this section I will briefly examine how *Good Night Good Morning* traces this new social formation of the 'cellular couple', a new romantic configuration with its own principles of time, space, and (re-materialized) body relationships.

Kamath's *Good Night Good Morning* is an extraordinarily tough film to provide a synopsis for. On New Year's Eve, a young man, Turia (Manu Narayan) driving from New York to Philadelphia with a group of friends (JC, Hussain and Abhishek) decides to drunk dial a girl they'd met for a minute in a New York pub. The girl (who's in transit in a hotel room in New York with an early morning flight to Mumbai) abruptly hangs up at first. But bored and unable to sleep, she calls him back minutes later, presumably for a few minutes of facetious amusement. What commences is a night-long phone conversation between the two strangers about a whole variety of topics, which as the film's tagline claims "*almost* changes their lives*"*. Turia and Moira (Seema Rahmani) talk (with varying degrees of intensity) about sex, breasts, different kinds of food, favorite movies, religion and god, love and soulmates, science, their past relationships, jobs etc moving slowly from a comfortable anonymity to a strangely chimerical intimacy, revealing to each other in the process, their most guarded vulnerabilities, past failures and future desires. We eventually learn that Turia, is an insurance agent in Philadelphia who's yet to get over his chronically failing eight year old relationship with a girl he's "now sure never

really loved" him, while Moira (who's just submitted a PhD in New Media studies at Chicago) is traveling on New Year's precisely to get over traumas from a past relationship associated with the day. The whole conversation is graphed according to what Turia at one point himself lightheartedly designates as the eight stages of romance – "'the Icebreaker, the Honeymoon, the Reality Check, the Break-up, the Patch-up, the Confiding, the Great Friendship and the Killing Confusion". Towards the morning, with Turia's battery about to die, and Moira's approaching departure, Turia requests Moira to flush her transit SIM card into the toilet, preserving thereby the ephemeral and fortuitous charm of this chance encounter unimpeachably in their memories. The film ends with Moira inside the aircraft (revealing that she doesn't actually dispose of the SIM card earlier), and connecting a final call to Turia

The story goes that when Nischala Krishna Vittalanathan (the film's cinematographer) bought a new Sony high definition camera on the Hindu film critic Sudhish Kamath's advice, he also insisted that they shoot a film on it[48]. Clearly scarred from the experience of an earlier film he had made (That *Four Letter Word* (2006) that had a limited response in Chennai*)* Sudhish Kamath was certain that it was not possible to make a film with a camera "unless its about three people in a one house or two people talking on the phone". He observed that:

> "RGV had already done three people in a house and nobody would watch two people on the phone… Though it started as a joke, we like the challenge. What if we could write something that even we who don't usually watch talkie films wouldn't mind watching Encouraged by the success of conversation films like Before Sunrise/Before Sunset we decided that the film had to be one phone call, and through the phone call, we should explore the life cycle of relationships and the dynamic of modern day romance."[49]

Influenced by the conversation films of Billy Wilder *The Seven year Itch* 1955, *Some Like It Hot* 1959, and the style of K.Balachander and Cameron Crowe, Sudhish Kamath wrote and then self-produced *Good Night Goodmorning*[50]. While the film had a PVR *Director's Rare* release in the metros, it elicited largely enthusiastic responses from film critics. Karan Johar wrote a guest review on Rediff.com (the resident Rediff film critic Raja Sen was acting in the film) calling it a "cerebral joyride" in a genre

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[48] As discussed in the Production Notes in the Goodnight Goodmorning official homepage. (Available at http://goodnightgoodmorningthefilm.com/production-notes-2/) accessed 4th June 2012
[49] ibid
[50] ibid

that is otherwise "extremely complicated to shoot"[51]. Allen O Brien of the *Times Of India* lauded it, commenting that it proved that "you don't even need a big budget to the get the techniques of filmmaking bang on"[52]. Geetha Padmanabhan of the *The Hindu* referred to it as a "digi-gen flick… Life is lived with the phone attached to the ear, supported by information dug out by Google…(and yet) it's the lump in your throat, the loss you feel deep in the diaphragm that is *GNGM*'s greatest triumph"[53].

Considering *Good Night Good Morning's* CD cover and publicity poster might provide an interesting entry into the perceptual and thematic changes that are in question here. At the face of it, the poster seems a conventionally grandiose, archetypal image of classical romance – Turia and Moira are framed in a monochromatic, bronze-lit, frontal mid-shot, clearly moments before a kiss in an image that reminds of innumerable similar framed shots from legions of earlier romantic films. Yet closer scrutiny reveals what Roland Barthes would call 'punctum'– the small, tiny detail in an ostensibly familiar and readable image that "pierces it", going against the grain of what it seems at first (Barthes 1980: 10). The woman (eyes shut, and head thrown back) in what seems a sublime just-before-the-kiss embrace is holding up a cell phone to the man's ear. It's an odd detail, attesting not only to the fact that it's the cell phone that forges their romance but also the larger idea that the sensorial changes the cell phone initiates today fundamentally alters the very ideas of classic romance.

The cell phone conversation is simultaneously the film's core narrative cog, its overarching thematic bulwark and the primary structuring principle for its visual strategies. The first point of inquisition here then has to do with the relation between the cinematic and the cell phone conversation – in what way does the image position itself in what is predominantly an aural transaction? The film's most conspicuous strategy in addressing the divergent spatial locations of its protagonists is the use of

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[51] 2012, 'Karan Johar reviews Raja Sen', January 20th, Available at http://www.rediff.com/movies/report/karan-johar-reviews-raja-sen/20120120.htm, accessed on June 2nd 2012.
[52] 2012, Allen O Brian, "Good Night God Morning", The Times of India, Jan 21. Available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/movie-reviews/english/Good-Night-Good-Morning/movie-review/11579735.cms, accessed on June 4th 2012
[53] 2012, Geeta Padnamabhan, "A Phone Call Says It All", The Hindu, January 21. Available at http://www.thehindu.com/arts/cinema/article2820283.ece, accessed on June 4th 2012.

the split screen. The majority of the film is presented in a split screen divided between Turia and Moira during their phone conversation, lapsing into a single full screen only at rare points. It might be useful here, to interrogate first the semiotics of the split-screen in cinema and then think through how it gets mobilized as the fundamental visual signature of a contemporary moment that is inundated by increasingly sophisticated forms of visual digital communication.

The earliest usage of the split screen in western cinema, as Jim Bizzocchi points out, has been found in telephone conversation sequences (Bizzocchi 2009: 4) [54]. It was through films like *Unseen Enemy* (1912) that the split-screen tradition got codified around the visualization of a telephone exchange. The simultaneous action of two parties in different space (and possibly time) zones that a phone conversation entails, therefore, from the very beginning has been signified through a cleaving of the screen. Bizzocchi contends that after waning for a few decades, the split screen stages a resurgence around the 1960s with a slew of films like *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) *The Boston Strangler* (1968), *The Andromeda Strain* (1969), *The Longest Yard* (1974) and so on[55]. The significant change in the dynamic of the split screen however comes around the early 1990s, with what is described as the 'digital explosion'. This has to be understood in conjunction with overall changing relations in the production, distribution and reception of the moving image experienced around the period. The moment marked the dramatic influx of the personal computer, the burgeoning growth of 'ambient' public television (McCarthy 2008), video games, and similar technologies. The last decade witnessed an even greater preponderance of screen technologies which work with exponentially more manipulable interfaces. The rise of MTV, particular sport programmes, product commercials (also very influenced by the MTV ethic of quick montages, heavily colorful multi-screen montages), the use of comic books and graphic novels in films, the introduction of DVDs and DVD

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[54] Among first popular uses of the split-screen was in Abel Gance's cult film 'Napoleon' (1927) and its famous triple screen ending (Bizzocchi 2009:4). The rare triptych arrangement in the end, with the two side screens providing commentary and enlarged images from the dominant central screen has been seen as a sort of pioneering moment in the usage of the trope

[55] He attributes this to the threats the entry of the medium of television posed to it and the enormous influence of popular music record design traditions of the time. Bizzocchi argues that pitted against the new technology of television, cinema had to distinguish itself by creating a spectacle of a size television couldn't imagine (Bozzocchi 2009)

players increasingly foster a viewership paradigm much more acclimatized to the many windowed visual screen (Bizzocchi 2009). Recent haptic visual technologies like Touch phones, I-pads, Kindles, I-pods, or multi-console video games etc contribute to the creation of an audience endemically accustomed to rapidly switching between multiple screens on different graphic User Interfaces, and generally having a complicated intermeshed panoply of frames at disposal on different kinds of screen-oriented devices (Verhoeff 2012, Friedberg 2006). The control+tab option of switching between different screens and never really inhabiting one screen becomes a common and everyday experience[56].

The new media theorist Lev Manovich provocatively claims that the twentieth century moving image significantly devalued what he calls the "spatial montage" tradition of cinema till its resounding return post the advent of the digital imperative (Manovich 2002: 2) Grounding his analysis in Sergei Eisenstein's "montage within the frame", he suggests that the new digital technologies support a form of "spatial montage", and that "montage in time [editing] is no longer privileged over montage [in space]"(Ibid: 2)[57]. This in some senses is a major destabilizing of the conventional understanding of how a succession of images come together to constitute what we have traditionally understood as 'cinema' – image following image *in time*. Staking claim for a cinematic "spatial montage*"* is in that sense a fairly major break from what is still taught as a foundational idea in most cinema courses across the world. Making a similar claim, L. Spielman suggests that the digital moving image has from its advent (and will increasingly continue to) privilege the *"spatial, the morph and the collage"* (Spielman 1999: 131).

The full unfragmented and unabbreviated screen ethic then fast becomes a conceptual anachronism, as the plurally framed screen is increasingly integral to our basic urban visual experience[58]. This provides a segue into thinking of how the cell

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[56] This is also around a time therefore that the split screen aesthetic stages a comeback in cinema – significantly prominent in a huge number of Hollywood films (*Timecode, Run Lola Run, Rules of Attraction, The Hulk, Requiem for a Dream, Ocean's Twelve* and Phone Booth to name a few) as well as Hindi films (Salaam-E-Ishq (2007), Life in a Metro (2007).
[57] Cited in (Bizzocchi 2009)
[58] But the link between cell phones and split screen image has to be specifically understood in another aspect. The split screen around the landline telephone conversation involved the visualization of two

phone works almost as an exemplifying metaphor for the experiential condition Turia and Moira inhabit at a larger level. The cell phone, as I have argued earlier, fundamentally administers a zone of liminality: where the space, temporality and attention of callers gets schismed. It creates an inchoate space of its own, a spatial and temporal 'sub-zone' where the original space and time experience of the users collapse into a new amorphous, networked electronic space-time, and the callers themselves figure as semi-virtual 'absent presences'. This sense of a transient in-between-ness that the cell call espouses seems to be a pervasive feature in Turia and Moira's life, and the larger philosophical provocation of the film.

Moira is in transit, and her hotel room which is a temporary sojourn before her flight to Mumbai serves almost as an architectural approximation of the phone call – a temporarary 'space' to inhabit and play different roles out before her regular life goes on. Turia is in even more of a flux, on road traveling from New York to Philadelphia in a car as he passes a whole series of inter-mediate non-places (Auge 1995) like Petrol pumps, Shopping malls and small cross points. The plot itself is premised on the possibility of a brief ephemeral inchoate space where both individuals can momentarily shed their regular identities and play out fictitious ones till Turia's journey ends and Moira's flight arrives. Turia can temporarily conceal his geek-ish emotional self and play the 'sleek stud' like his friends in the car, while Moira can be the sultry Nona who can confidently discuss the shape of her breasts with a stranger. The piling intimacy between the two is also predicated on the fact that they are in psychologically '*betwixt*' places – the defining feature of their characters is an inability to let go of the past relationships and move ahead. They inhabit a fundamentally skewed temporal setup – where they're always in, as Turia himself sums up: "*the grey area of the past, in a constant post mortem of the last*

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concrete, stably exclusive coordinates of space within which the characters were located. With the cell phone the emphasis in the split screen shifts from the specific spaces in the two halves of the screen to the divisory border in the middle. It is the split itself that becomes important, not the specific areas that have gotten split. As the cell phone introduces vigorously mobile characters constantly navigating and relocating through space, the particularity of space gets dissolved into a readily passing fluidity (like the car window behind Turia with dark blurry landscapes whizzing past). As the phone conversant becomes a steadily mobile figure, and space itself lapses into an inexclusive porosity (in contrast to its immutable concrete presence in landline split screens) the key idea becomes the difference – the border in the middle of the frame and not the specificity of the two halves. The logic of distinguishing, instead if what gets distinguished become primary.

relationship" not the present. Turia just can't let go of the eight year long relationship he was in, insisting over and over that he still loves her, while Moira travels on New Year's Eve only because she can't get over the baggage associated with the day from her last relationship. Infact the possibility of their brief phone encounter gets facilitated by what is a ritualistic public celebration of a temporal liminality – they meet on a New Year's bash, and talk on the phone as the old year passes and the new one begins. The title itself – *Good Night Good Morning* is pegged on the concept of the twilight zone – the passing of an older time and the slow bleeding in of a newer one. Moira's final "*Good Morning"* in response to Turia's "*Good Night"* is an acknowledgement of the cusp they mutually inhabited for the 3 hours, where they could momentarily shed old 'baggages' and re-invent new selves.

Besides functioning as the thematic provocateur of the relationship (and the film), the cell phone also gives the structure and shape to the conversation. 'Connectivity', for example, becomes a central issue – while the call gets disconnected at key points, at others it serves as an excuse to lie about the conversation (when Moira gets miffed at Turia in the middle and abruptly hangs up, Turia tells his friends in the car that they "*lost connection*", acting as if he's not keen to re-kindle the conversation even once the phone enters a connectivity zone). The phone battery similarly exerts pressure on various instances. Turia's phone dies and he has to request all his friends one by one to use their phones. In the end the conversation has to end not only because of Moira's impending flight, but more pressingly because of Hussain's battery (his third borrowed phone) is also almost out of charge. The battery like the unavailable SIM card-recharge becomes one of the material markers of the transience of the relationship, one that is always inexorably moving towards an inevitable and irrevocable end. The cell phone is also the most heavily laden inventory of emotional exchanges of the past - Turia reveals that he hasn't deleted his last girlfriend's messages despite it being over three years since they broke up. Moira in response recommends that the only possible path towards a therapeutic release can be their immediate erasure from his memory bank, and to thereby start '*with a clean slate'*. Phone messages come to have a certain emotional materiality and an affective charge – they substitute erstwhile material fossils of

longing like the letter, the ring/locket, the photo frame and so on, as the artifact where physical, tangible imprints of another person get restituted. [59]

The cell phone then, isn't just the communication platform and the master metaphor that best defines the protagonists' condition; it also begins physically standing in for the people themselves. Just like his ex-girlfriend's messages are like spectral presences still haunting his (phone) memory, soon the phone's body itself as a material object begins to also serve as an actual corporeal extension of the person on the other end. At one point Turia kisses the mobile phone in performing an imagined kiss with Moira (which he also observes is "weird"), at another he gently caresses the phone after the conversation in a way that almost seems to imbue it with a sentient, emotional cognitive agency. The SIM card similarly, serves as the only marker of temporary identity, the only evidentiary material artifact of the conversation, and the only endurable archive of the short-lived relationship. When Turia playfully asks "*So who is this 'Nona' I am speaking to*?" Moira replies "*This is Nona – no past , no future, and valid up to 8.30 in the morning. Haha*". Moira's transit SIM card that gets invalidated at the time her plane takes off is her only identity, infact it's actually the SIM card's pithy impermanence that authors *"Nona"*- the inevitability of its transience giving Moira the license to perform such a character. It's no surprise then that in a final bid to preserve the charm of this surreal encounter Turia requests Moira to destroy the SIM card, erasing thereby any chance for either of them ever being able to trace each other across different countries. The final climactic redemptive moment in the film therefore, has to be when it is revealed that Moira actually didn't flush the SIM card like Turia asks her to – it's preservation being the final salutary optimistic gesture of faith in human relationship that the film joyously signposts at the end.

The cell phone, ironically also serves as a necessary item for navigation in the car – Hussain uses the GPS in his phone to accurately route directions to Philadelphia. The two mobile sets in the car thus inhabit almost oppositional purposes. Husain's GPS provides neatly measured, calibrated coordinates through which space (and their own movements across it) can be constantly monitored, comprehended and

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[59] The message is almost seen to have a sort of digital imprint of the person from the past, intertwining it with individual memory in such a way that it becomes the "slate" to be scraped clean in order to adventure a 'fresh start'.

controlled. Space itself is understood as a cartographic optic distance through a scopic regime that aerially looks down at an entirely ordered and essentially flat field. Turia's cell phone on the other hand plunges him deeper and deeper into the ineffable - an unmappable, coordinate-less mental space that defies a rationalistic, scientistic logic to systematize. This is a close-range space that cannot be navigated by the abstraction of compasses, but by different forms of haptic negotiation - brushes, tactile nudges and perceptual leaps of faith. It is this sort of a messily intimate 'aural-haptic' that characterizes the zone Turia's phone functions in, in complete opposition to Hussain's. Deluze and Guattari present the idea of the 'Smooth space' and 'Striated space'. *Smooth space* as Laura Marks explains it in her discussion of haptic screens, is one "that must be moved through by constant reference to the immediate environment, as when navigating an expanse of snow or sand" (Marks 2002:xii) and therefore has to be experienced sensorially (or as Marks argues – through the haptic).[60] 'Striated Space' on the other hand is a more eye-oriented, optic space negotiated through a vertical, top-down perspective formal geographical maps, like Hussain's phone. What comes to be formed is an 'aural-haptic' – the whole sense of the acute tactile presence of another person's body being materialized in relation to one's own purely by the dint of an aural negotiation. Turia and Moira seem to re-materialize each other's body during their phone conversation, the pauses, tones, pitches of their voice creating almost an intimately 'touchable' sense of each other. The quiver in one's voice seems to cause a bodily response in another's, towards the end both of them smiling or getting teary eyed almost simultaneously, without having to 'say' anything[61].

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[60] Laura Marks infact originally sources the word 'Haptic' from Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'smooth space' (2002: xii).

[61] It is no surprise then, that the image universe constantly takes cues and follows the aural in Good Night Good Morning. Turia repeatedly says at various points "I just imagined you doing this" in response to Moira's descriptions of things she's currently doing (or things she wants to do). He says he's can't help 'visualizing it' when Moira talks about being hungry enough to drown in a dallop of blueberry ice-cream and chocolate syrup, or when she talks about the shape and size of her breasts, or when she puts him on hold to change the top she's wearing. A large part of Turia's initial attraction towards her appears based on how her body gets visualized and figured within the conversation. While the audience for the most part has a privileged omniscient perspective witnessing both the characters simultaneously through the split screen, there are times where the audience perspective merges and lapses into Turia's imagination. At one point Moira tells Turia that she's changing her top, to which Turia responds by saying she shouldn't tell him this since he can't help but try and imagine how she looks. This strategically is also the point where Moira leaves her part of the screen, walking back into it

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What the film revamps foundationally is the very idea of classical romance. It suggests that classical old worldly romance demands an inherently slow leisurely rhythm and pace that is rare in today's frenetic urban experience. The onus of romance therefore has to be shifted to an altogetherly new site. In his production notes for the film, director Sudhish Kamath writes:

> We live in a world of clutter. There are always so many things happening around us that our attention span has become smaller and smaller. The mobile phone has become the extension of all things we want to keep track of. There's always a mobile ringing somewhere around you. In a movie hall, in the middle of a date or meeting. When was the last time you sat to have an uninterrupted conversation without being interrupted? Ironically, that would have been over the phone. Young people are getting to know each other through phones. The way relationships are forged may have changed but romance has always been the same. So we decided to keep the film in black and white to capture the old world charm of the talkie and romance but set it in today's mobile, technology-driven world that's finding it hard to let go of baggage. Almost everyone today is the product of a failed relationship. And many don't realize the importance of letting go of the old to embrace the new. After night comes morning. Always.[62]

The film's final message then is a resolutely optimistic one. It claims that the cell phone provides the sole refuge for an old-world like romance to brew in today's constantly hustling, apathetic world. This new paradigm of romance however flags newer perceptual experiences, new sorts of bilateral bodies of desire, and an entirely new set of hindrances in its final consummation. It's not surprising then, that the final signal the film gives us of a positive revival of the relationship in the future is of a lone, reverberant ringing tone of a phone. The film's proverbial 'happy ending' it seems is in the missed call that is.

The modern technological world, as the cliché goes is one of perpetual compression and contraction.[63] There is compression between hitherto dispersed, self-enclosed spaces, disparate time-zones, between the human and the technological, the private and the non-private and so on. The cellular network becomes the harbinger of

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only when she's worn the top. This is the only point in the film where a screen section is left vacant, causing an overlap between the audience's and Turia's imagination – both are given the aural signal that her body is uncovered, without the image to supplement it.

[62] In a separate page headed 'Production Notes' on the film's official home page. Available at http://goodnightgoodmorningthefilm.com/production-notes-2/. Accessed on 7th July 2012.

[63] Zygmunt Baumann propounds the idea of a 'liquid modernity' in his book Liquid Modernity (2009); Similarly Castells observes that "our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols"(1996: 412)

this new amorphous liminal space. It becomes the zone of newer encounters, intimacies, collisions and skirmishes in our everyday lives. Replete with the potential of both the fear of the unknown and the romance of the unknown, the cell phone network's inherent ambiguity has gotten processed in various forms in recent cinema. With the link between cell phone networks and terror becoming an increasingly conspicuous theory in the aftermath of bomb blasts and 'terrorist attacks', the ominous side of cellular networks permeates into the bloodline of popular imagination. *Aamir* and *A Wednesday* are probably the first of various city films that deal with systems of surveillance and the workings of subterranean cellular networks. Similarly, as the amount of time we spend talking on phone also goes on increasing by the day, the phone call also becomes a major space where romantic relations may ferment. However, with our bodies hemmed in almost indistinguishably by these technological objects, our interaction with them slowly begins to assume new kinds of affective guises: some of which can be summarily understood as a new form of technological uncanny which I will address in the last chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

EVENT(UAL) PUBLICS: THE MEDIA EVENT AND THE TELEVISION PUBLIC

At the heart of the "veritable explosion of the media" that the 1990s witnessed, was the dramatic entry of Satellite television in India (Nigam and Menon 2004:88). Among the earliest to capitalize on the economic freefall was the Hong Kong based company STAR (Satelite Television Asia Region)[1]. Buoyed by the larger paradigm shift the country seemed to be inaugurating, the company offered a nifty package of 'international programming' (comprising of channels like BBC, MTV, CNN and so on) to target 5% of the educated, wealthy, professional, and English-speaking consumer base of the country (Chan 1994:114). Long exhausted by the arid, inexclusive and pedestrian content available on Doordarshan, a certain affluent cross section of the population responded ardently to the prospect of a chic exclusive 'western' programming. Rupal Oza notes that by 1992, cable homes had risen by 211 percent, from a paltry 412 thousand to 1.2 million homes in urban India; by 1996 the figure grew to 14.2 million homes (Oza 2006:55). What was being witnessed was a sort of media maelstrom in the subcontinent – within a few years nearly every one in four satellite television watchers in Asia was an Indian (ibid).

As a panoply of television screens densely engulfed the city space (and swathes of news channels began setting shop) a new landscape of 'media events' began to emerge for the first time in India. The previous chapter probed the newer regimes of materiality inaugurated by cellular technology, focusing especially on the aural materializing of phantasmatic phone bodies that get processed into themes of surveillance, terrorism, and new forms of romance. This chapter is interested in tracking the various moral and ideological frameworks within which the television

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[1] The timing of Singh's move was opportune, as nearly all of Asia seemed to be bracing up for the satellite turn with AsiaSat, a telecommunication satellite beginning to get used exclusively for television. In what was regarded as a suicidal business move at the time, Hong Kong's 'superman' entrepreneur Li Ka Shing's company Hutchinson Wampoa opened a unit called Satellite Television Asia Region (STAR) that would use AsiaSat to beam free of cost programmes that could be received anywhere by an inexpensive device called the *'dish antennae'*

event has unfolded in recent Hindi cinema. It looks at a set of films that offer an archeology of the event, the mis en scene of its interior life, and the dramaturgy of its afterlife. Through this it maps the materialization of a new collective – the television public that gets formed around the media event, and the myriad ways the potentialities offered by this new collective get played within the cinematic. An increasingly more salient and enduring social formation, this televisual public is an invisible, deterritorialized but perpetually assumed audience of the 24 hour live news channel (Roy 2006). This chapter attempts to chase the complex ways in which this constantly-mutating televisual public is ~~has~~ presented ~~itself~~ in Hindi films in the recent years. The 'television event' and this televisual public ~~make~~ themselves increasingly become more prominent as a conceptual preoccupation in Hindi film narratives ~~every day~~. A spate of recent films like *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*(2001)*, Noone Killed Jessica*(2011), *Rang De Basanti (2006),* Lage Raho Munnabhai *(2006), Rann (2011), Peepli Live (2011) Mumbai Se Aaya Mera Dost* share some uncannily distinctive narrative similarities. Nearly all these films revolve around conflicts about the struggle for power over the 'live-event circuit'. Many of these films tend to climax with a familiar scene of the protagonist forcefully taking over the live-telecast space briefly to deliver a charged, impassioned and morally reverberant speech; and thereby stirring hoards of formerly passive, abstracted and ineffectual TV viewers to descend on to the streets and effect radical revolutionary change[2]. In a way these films thus articulate a nostalgic desire to recuperate the erstwhile "good object' that television ostensibly was while under State tutelage in the pre-liberalization era. It is this change in the character of the televisual public visa vis the TV event from a film like *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* to Pee*pli (Live)* that this chapter is intent on chasing.

The Arrival of Cable and the Media Event

In 1993 the Australian media mogul, Rupert Murdoch purchased 63 % of Hutch Vision[3]. The significantly lower rates that Murdoch's STAR now began to offer for satellite services ensured that satellite television blitzed through most urban centers,

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[2] Here I build on Abhijit Roy's (2006) argument of 'liveliness', especially in my reading of *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* and its mobilizing of the event-audience.

[3] See Aug 1st 2011*History of Indian Television (*http://www.indianetzone.com/42/history_indian_television.htm) (Accessed on 28th july 2012)

as middle and upper middle classes rapidly embraced the new 'glamorous' content on offer. Even though Doorsarshan continued to have the maximum constituency of viewers, its hitherto unchallenged supremacy was beginning to rapidly wither. Soon television shows like *The Bold and The Beautiful*, *Santa Barbara* and *Baywatch* were becoming major cultural products in a television culture that had been dominated primarily by soaps like *Hum Log* (1984-85) and *Buniyad* (1986-87), or mythologicals like *Ramayana* (1987-88) and *Mahabharat* (1988-90). [4] Alongside this was the sudden onslaught launched by Subhash Chandra's Zee TV which offered a newer roster of shows like *Tara, Hum Paanch* (1995-2006), *Hasratein* (1995-99) and was thereby laying serious stakes on the existing Hindi serial audience segment [5].

The satellite television was burgeoning into a behemothic media industry at breakneck speed. Soon sections of the urban population that had hitherto been unable to access the new television content started devising illicit ways to find ingress into it. Soon the local neighborhood non-State cable operators made an entry.[6] What had

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[4] What these developments precipitated was a foundational change in the basic idea of territoriality and the National (Oza 2006). The very concept of satellite television militated against the traditionally impermeable geographical boundaries on which notions of National territory and exclusionary citizenship were predicated. The new satellite television content was a frenetic confluence of various mishmashed cultural strains, and it was increasingly difficult to pinpoint any one single nation that could be held responsible for the sudden blitzkrieg - Zee TV was funded by a set of Non Resident Indians, Hong Kong based STAR was owned by an Australian magnate, Sony Entertainment was a Japanese franchise, while BBC was an autonomous body with sister outfits across the world. Predictably, the inherent cosmopolitanism the technology implied was met with rabid, often aggressive forms of indigenism. The scuffle for the TV viewer-market was largely couched in the syntax of an 'invasion' - where an essential *'us'* (Doordarshan here) had to be belligerently fortified against the deluge unleashed by an amorphous western 'them'. Given its genealogy as a space solely prescribed for the 'development' of the masses, the entire debate around the 'threats' to Doordarshan very easily assumed heavy-handed moral inflections. Never before having had to compulsively delineate its 'Indian' identity like this, for the first time Doordarshan faced the pressure of producing the ontologically pure 'Indian image' with this encounter. What ensued was a series of debates around the mercenary, 'immoral' (and often vulgar) predominantly 'un-Indian' content that television seemed to be increasingly getting inundated with. (Citation)

[5] As Oza notes, in a special cover issue on the dramatic changes Doordarshan was undergoing, *India Today* argued that "the platform for the fare it had so far considered "elitist" and "fivestarish *" for a "public service"* network … the upshot is that it's now a routine thing for DD viewers to see skimpily-clad models sashaying down the catwalk … [therefore] what's important is that DD has consulted the market. (Aggarwal 1994)"

The Lok Sabha in1993 reported a number of angry debates about the influence of satellite television on Indian culture, culminating in then Information and Broadcasting minister K.P Deo famously quipping *"apprehensions … on this account had come to the government's notice … [thus] a number of changes in the programming of Doordarshan's satellite channels have been carried out to provide a* **wholesome fare of programming that is predominantly Indian** (emphasis mine). (Oza, 58)"

[6] Anna Greenspan notes that "In no time, countless entrepreneurs sensed the opportunity and began an anarchic race to wire their local communities" and despite the fact that private local non-state

started as a miniscule, dawdling sector had suddenly hurtled into a 2000 million rupees, largely unorganized, mammoth industry with more than 60000 operators labour and outlets of various sizes[7]. This was a complex terrain of constant tussles with the government, an extremely competent market with an emerging cable mafia, violent turf wars, and dynamic sub-legal intra-industry norms and 'laws'. The industry and its history provide a rich juncture of technology, culture and the changing norms of television spectatorship in urban life in India[8].

TV screens across urban and non-urban spaces drew in a new kind of Television viewer. This was a new television viewership paradigm – of kids consuming the same Cartoon Network programmes relayed across several countries, watching WWF on pay-per-view shows at the same time that it was aired in America, of large sections of the audience watching *The Bold and Beautiful* or *Baywatch* (or in a few years time other daily soaps like *Different Strokes*, *Small Wonder*, *Bewitched*, *Happy Days* etc). This was also the first TV viewer group in India that began to get used to the hyperstimuli of commercials on television (and the rapid maturation of a whole advertisement economy that was preeminent on TV). MTV became a dominant ethic of fashion, language, style and visual/editing strategies.

The definitive overarching feature of Indian Television in the last few years of the previous century however has been the expeditious growth of the gargantuan news-channel industry in India. After four decades of an inflexible state monopoly, the first 24 hour dedicated news-channel was up and running only by 1998 (Mehta 2008:32). By 2007 there were more than 300 satellite stations broadcasting into the

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broadcasting was illegal, "scores of smalltime cable operators – or cable wallahs – found ways to bypass this obstacle, producing videos in India … and sending them to other destinations in Asia such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where they could be transmitted by satellite[6]." She refers to an article in *The Economist* magazine which observed that "the land of the 'license raj' somehow forgot to regulate cable (Greenspan 2004:5) (cited in Nigam & Menon 2004:88)

[7] 'How the Indian cable TV industry is structured' – Indiancabltetv.net (Available at http://www.indiancabletv.net/catvstructure.htm) (Accessed on 14th June 2012)

[8] Cable TV was part of a larger system of myriad parallel circuits, subterraneous networks and para-legal bypass solutions through which subaltern populations in cities accessed the technological infrastructure they couldn't otherwise afford in their day to day lives (Sundaram 2010). Cable TV formed an integral part of the irregularities, informal stratagems, ingenious solutions and '*jugaad*' networks that constitute what Ravi Sundaram has referred to as '*pirate modernity*'(ibid). The intermixing of urban existence and technology, according to Sundaram was an 'enabling moment' for the city's various subaltern populations in their bid to access different media, as

metros, of which a staggering 106 were broadcasting news (in 14 languages), and as many as 54 were 24-hour news channels (ibid). Within a few years news channels had crystallized into *the* most definitive cultural coliseum (and archive) for the staging of civic discussions and dialogues and emerged as the throbbing nerve centre of unceasing struggles, with innumerable parties engaged tussles to control and administer its flow. The mushrooming of the 24 hour news channels also gradually initiated a culture of national media events. For the first time different events began to get tracked by news channels in a consolidated way, each channel trying to outdo the other in representing it. As certain events caught on and came to be followed across different channels and media avenues, they began to change in texture, creating a popular affective register that far outreached that of other events around the same time.

The uncustomary moments of media communication triggering significant cultural impact, was noticed as early as the 1940s as different studies probed the enormous levels of mass panic caused by Orson Welles' play "*The Invasion From Mars*" (Cantril 1940).[9] While various voices over the years gestured towards the growing mediality of urban life, the definitive theoretical intervention of the field came from Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) and their work around "media events". For Katz and Dayan media events were "genres of mass communication" that could be defined on syntactical, semantic and pragmatic levels (Dayan and Katz 1992:9) On the syntactical level media events were thought to be "interruptions of routines" monopolizing media communication throughout different channels that are usually "broadcast live, pre-planned and organized outside media" (Cauldry and Hepp 2010:2). On the semantic tier media events are historic occasions with ceremonial reverence and a template of social reconciliation. On the pragmatic level, these phenomenon enthrall huge audiences who "view them in a festive style" (ibid)[10]. For Katz and Dayan the 'media event' was a celebratory shared ritual, an integrative

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[9] Cited in *Media Events in a Global Age,* ed. Nick Cauldry and Andreas Hepp (2010)
[10] These definitions are summarized by Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp in *Media Events in a Global Age* (2010)

process of social gathering important in what was an otherwise dispersed atomized society (Dayan and Katz 2010) [11].

With the further proliferation of media technologies and the maturation of global-translocal media industries in the next few years the whole landscape of media events and their consumption mutated altogether. Some of Katz and Dayan's ideas seemed anachronistic in their assertion that media events "always have positive, hegemonic effects" and that they were generally pre-planned (Couldry and Hepp 2003:63). Different layers of description were added to the original conception of the 'media event' like the media scandals (Lull1997), "conflicted Media events" (Fiske 1994), "mediatized public crisis" (Alexander and Jacobs 1988). Katz and Liebes (2007) later reworked their older typology of to now include two brackets of media events: integrative and disruptive. While contests, coronations and conquests are integrative, they suggested disaster, terror and war were disruptive events. They suggest that in the new landscape riven by terrorism and media covered wars while integrative events have lost much of their original aura, disruptive events "resolutely move to center-stage and give no sign of abandoning it" (Katz and Liebes 2007:160-161).

The notion of the media event as an ephemeral, instantaneous and live phenomenon is to a great degree influenced by a large body of work that questioned television's ability to produce "a lasting sense of history" (Anderson 2001:1). One of the earliest proponents of this perspective, Raymond Williams famously spoke about the 'flow' of televisuality (wherein contents simply rushed by like answers on board

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[11] Dayan and Katz proposed three sorts of event 'scripts': *Contests, Coronations* and *Conquests*. Contests included major sports events like the World Cup and Olympic Games, or political contests, like presidential public debates; in most instances, teams or individuals compete in accordance to formal rules. Contests cement the social order by promoting a message that "rules are more important than the will or status of the opponents" (Dayan and Katz 1992, 36). Coronations refer to ceremonial rites of passage, like inaugurations, funerals, award festivities and royal traditions. These ritualized events usually have a sort of revitalizing effect on social customs by inviting audiences to reiterate and celebrate existing traditions and norms. Conquests are "rare events, both in occurrence and in effectiveness" (Dayan and Katz 1992, 26). They include significant political or diplomatic initiatives that instate a paradigm change. The narrative form that conquests take is familiar, with the media invoking the story of a hero against virtually insurmountable odds.
(summarized by Christopher J Finely Finlay, C.J. Media Events. International Collaborative Dictionary of Communications (accessed 26th July 2012). R.K. Nielsen et al (Eds.),
(http://mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/icdc-content-folder/media-events/)

of the gameshow *Jeopardy!* without context or opportunity for retention) (Williams 1975)[12]. Stephen Heath proposed that television "produces forgetfulness, not memory, flow, not history. If there is history, it is congealed, already past and distant and forgotten other than as television archive material, images that can be repeated to be forgotten again" (Heath 1990:279)[13]Other theorists like Herbert Zettl argue that "the essence of television is a temporal, ephemeral experience whose only record is memory," that television's foundational technological basis—the production of image via electronic scanning beams suggests that "Each television frame is always in a state of becoming," making television "[exist] live as a process" (Zettl 1978:3)[14]. The event according to this line of thought is an endemic part of television, both culturally and technologically, and TV in that sense is a flow of various such events without any sizeable material fallouts.

One of the major arguments around this idea of television as 'time', made out of a succession of live events has been made by Mary Anne Doane. Time, for Doane was "television's basis, its principle of structuration, as well as its persistent reference" (Doane 2006:252). Doane suggests that if photography (as Roland Barthes suggested) is about death, about the "pastness" of the photographed object (or about a "that-has-been"), television is about a celebration of the instantaneous, an "insistent present-ness" that refers to the "this-is-going-on" (ibid). Television's conceptualization of the event according to Doane is heavily dependent on a particular

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[12] Both Raymond Williams and Stephen Heath are discussed in Steve Anderson's *History TV and Popular Memory (*2001). Originally printed as Originally printed in Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age, Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

[13] Both Raymond Williams and Stephen Heath are discussed in Steve Anderson's *History TV and Popular Memory (*2001). Originally printed as Originally printed in Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age, Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

[14] Among the more popular debunking of the myth of liveness is Jane Feuer's "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," published in 1983. While television might be perceived as being more "live" than film, Feur argues that that this perception of liveness as television's essence, are ideological constructs, "exploited in order to overcome the contradiction between flow and fragmentation in television practice." (Feuer 1983:16)
(Discussed in Elana Levine's *Live! Defining Television Quality at the Turn of the 21st Century,* 2000:unpaginated) (Available on http://web.mit.edu/cms/mit3/papers/elana_levine.pdf) (Accessed on 3rd July).

organization of temporality which produces three different "modes of apprehending the event—information, crisis, and catastrophe"[15]

The other (more recent) approach in television studies has however argued for a shift in the main frames of conceptualizing media events and the medium at large. This paradigm deflects attention from the focus on 'time', 'liveliness', or instantaneity or ahistoricity; on to the realm of the everyday – materiality, space, individual and cultural memory (Sturken 1997; McCarthy 2001). The idea of the media event also simultaneously changes, as it isn't just a transient form of a larger, ever mutating live 'flow', but a phenomenon that endures, in memory matrices and leaves specific material imprints.[16] Marita Sturken calls for a moving away from the notion of television that is based on amnesia and ahistoricism and points to the 'entangledness' of television and the creation and movement of everyday cultural memory in a society (Sturken 1997:3). A major voice in shifting the discourse of TV from time to space (site) and materiality is Anna McCarthy in her investigation of the "material culture of television" (2001)[17]. Transferring emphasis from studying the metaphorical television in general to 'a particular television' McCarthy argues that "the language of placelessness" (a term often used to describe television) "makes us forget that television is an object and, like all objects, it shapes its immediate space through its material form" and is therefore an inadequate description of the range of ways in which we encounter television within spaces of "everyday life, from the living room to the departure lounge to the department store" (McCarthy 2001:96)[18]. This involves for McCarthy looking not only at the medium's "very spectacular reorganizations of space and time"—the live broadcast of the media event, but also the rather quotidian

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[15] In a post-script to her essay in 2003, Doane argued that in the post 9-11 world, the category of crisis very easily slips into that of catastrophe, as a political act would easily transform into "something with the proportions of a monumental natural disaster (or a grandiose battle between an abstractly defined good and evil), at the expense of any more nuanced attempt at historical explication" (Doane 2003:273).

[16] Mimi White for example calls for a re-thinking of liveness or immediacy as the primary principle of TV and put forward instead notions of banality, "attractions" and history as equally significant paradigms for the study of history (White 1999).

[17] She argues that "TV's value for philosophical inquiry into ongoing transformations in the relation between materiality and technics hinges on the dialectical movement between "global" generality and "local" specificity that the medium embodies"

[18] She suggests that a television theory therefore needs to be developed that doesn't restrict itself to the immateriality of the image on screen but "the very material thingness" of TV technology.

materiality of the specific TV set itself, at its barely noticeable physical form (ibid:96,97). This whole paradigm of thought affords a different perspective towards the (television) media event – it is now seen in the complex and dispersed ways in which it permeates through cultural and personal memory, and in the specific, tactile ways *a* material event leaves its charges in the specific site of exhibition. This approach holds that its impossible to say *what* a television event is, since its "heterogeneous materiality requires that we accept its operation on the subject as site specific" (99:ibid). Mccarthy and Anne Doane thus stand for two opposing approaches to the event (similar to Deleuze's ideas about the two 'ways' events can be negotiated) while one treats television as an amnesiac succession of decontextualized grand events, the other in a way is a critique of the large media event from the perspective of the everyday.

This detailed terrain of media event theory is a result, of a robust media culture that has furbished a densely populated landscape of events over the last two decades[19]. Varied events like the O.J Simpson car chase and trial (1995), the Princess of Wales, Lady Diana's funeral (1997); the Gulf War (1991), the Rodney King beatings and riots (1991), the Columbia space shuttle crash (2003) were all globally followed televised events resonating across television primetime in scores of countries. In India however the history of media events over the last few decades suggests an entirely different story. Since the country's independence in 1947, the nationalist regime looked at the mass media, especially radio and television as primarily "pedagogic institutions" to help inculcate and bolster a citizenship ethic and a consolidated 'national' imaginary (Sundaram 2009:8). Given the clear diktats of the Chanda Committee in 1966 television and radio were firmly straitjacketed within a largely developmentalist model, and were not permitted to produce any content outside of the Information and Broadcasting ministry's pre-set mandate. The densely textured, sensational and unpredictable media events watched live by millions globally were therefore up until the 1990s, a fairly rare phenomenon for an Indian television setup with a single channel that was staunchly controlled by a State meticulously checking all content aired. The last few years of the 1990s however (as I

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[19] Namely in America and European countries.

have described above) ushered in a veritable tidal wave of electronic media. As newer 24 hour news channels proliferated with dizzying velocity within a space of months, a string of 'television events' also began to surface on the national media platform.

Among the first television based phenomenon that raged through different media sites in India was the famous 'monkey-man' incidents of 2001. An urban legend about a monster that was haunting the eastern outskirts of Delhi, the 'Monkey-man' lore gripped all forms of national media, especially the television media. In May 2001, reports started appearing of a strange monkey-like creature that was attacking (scratching, gashing) people sleeping on open terraces in working class neighborhoods of Ghaziabad. Eyewitness accounts were mostly inconsistent and often conflicting, while some described it as a four feet something monkey covered in black hair, others allegedly saw a 5 and half feet tall robot like creatures with a metal helmet, metal claws, red eyes and buttons on it chest[20]. An obsessive television media covered the areas non-stop for different versions from people who alleged to have seen the creature, and broadcast theories on the mystery that ranged from it being a hybrid avatar of the Hindu God Hanuman, to a ferocious rogue robot, to being the handiwork of the Pakistani spy agency ISI (the Shiv Sena claimed that "131 monkeys came from across the border to create terror") (Nigam: 2002). The event also permeated into the cinematic as Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra used the myth as a backdrop in his film 'Delhi 6'.

One of the most popular forms of the 'television event' in the early years was the 'sting operation'. A string of 'sting operations' raged through the early years of the 2000s with concealed spy camera footage concerning cricketers, ministers, actors, businessmen etc in what were pitched as legal, moral and emotional 'outrages' meant to shock the country's populace. The major sting operation to become popular at the

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[20] See Theatre of The Absurd: The strange Case of the Monkey Man : Aditya Nigam (2002) (http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/02-the-cities-of-everyday-life/05theatre_urban.pdf) Accessed on 28th July.
Also see, Sunday 10 June 2001 Ashok Vardhan Shetty - "Imagination on the prowl" *The Hindu Magazine*
See May 18th 2001; 'Monkey Man keeps Delhi Awake again' (Available on http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/may/18mon.htm) (Accessed on 28th july)
Also see 26th June 2010 Desi Fables: Times Crest http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-06-26/india/28272977_1_drinking-milk-delhi-temple-obs Accessed on 29th July.

time was the news website Tehelka.com's investigation of nefarious arms supply deals within the high ranks of the Indian army, called *Operation Westend*[21]. The expose soon garnered international attention as the then BJP president Bangaru Laxman, Samata tarty president Jaya Jaitley, and a slew of senior army officers caught grubbing for illegitimate payoff (ultimately culminating in the resignation of the Defense Minister at the time).

In similar high voltage live terrorism drama as 9/11, Mumbai was ravaged with 11 planned shooting and bombing attacks on 26th November 2008(often referred to as 26/11). Various locations across Mumbai like the Chhatrapati Shivaji terminus, 5-star hotels like the Taj Mahal Palace, Oberoi Trident, Leopold Café, the Nariman House Jewish Community Centre etc were among the well known sites where firing and blasts took place[22]. A raging hostage situation was telecast non-stop for close to 72 hours as the attackers held a number of people hostage in one wing of Taj Hotel right uptill the morning of 29th November. The hostage crisis and the ensuing action of the National Security Guard (NSG) took on (like 9/11) a sort of cinematic quality as television channels telecast the action live for the entire period.

The last decade witnessed a new sort of mis en scene rapidly congealing around the media, as the sheer magnitude of the media events increasingly ranged from different sorts of media assemblages to blogs, advertisements, cartoons, songs, theatre, cinema social networking sites and so on. At the heart of this epiphenomenon was the television news-network, which distributed the repeated images and audio of the media event in disparate public 'ambiences' across the city. The media is today the principle means of what we know of the world around us and how we have continue to make sense of it. It is the premiere narrative genre for the "emplotment" of the urban experience – it creates its own sensorium, creating its own coterie of emotions, affective regimes, and modes of articulation (White 2001). The last few years especially have been something like a roulette hurtling from one crisis to

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[21] See *(*March 13 2004) Tarun Tejpal *'*Sleaze, senseless greed and dirty heroes'
*(*http://www.tehelka.com/home/20041009/operationwe/tarun.htm) Accessed on 27th July.
Also see Tarun Khanna: Billions of Entrepreneurs: How China and India Are Reshaping Their Futures (2007)
[22] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/27/mumbai-terror-attacks-india8

another (sarai reader editorial 2002). Crisis becomes the predicative text that our epoch converses in. Fear, paranoia, conspiracy, subterfuge, and subsequent exhilaration or collective grief constructed through different brands of TV events, become signposts of urban experience.

As the material regime of the television event expands by the day, the post-liberalization Bombay film increasingly becomes more and more concerned with the various possibilities the television event and the television public has to offer. Cinema thus becomes one of the prominent modes of archeology of the media event. The films traverse the innards of the media event, processing its dramaturgy into different kinds of fictional articulations. They fictionally excavate the event's pre-natal origins, its machination, production, impact, coverage and afterlives. There is a dramatization of the pressures of liveness, the production of the effect of instantaneity, of its perpetually transient flow of events, and from within these currents arises the new television public.

Event Interrupted: Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani and the resurgent TV audience

Aziz Mirza, Shahrukh Khan Khan and Juhi Chawla came together in 1999 to form 'Dreamz Unlimited' a production company espousedly committed to producing "nice, clean and entertaining cinema", in line with the work the trio had produced earlier[23]. The trio had together produced two commercially successful (and critically lauded) films '*Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*' (1992) and '*Yes Boss'*(1997) – both films narrate the journey of an endearing young lower middle-class protagonist (essayed by Shahrukh Khan) who gets momentarily seduced by the charms of corporate money, power and profit, only to finally opt for his original low-brow roots in the end, thereby refusing to sacrifice his deep seated principles and integrity for success in what is revealed as an inherently amoral cesspool. But this time, the trio wanted to do

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[23] See 16th Dec, 1999 'We want to make nice films' – Juhi Chawla interview with Sukanya Verma; Rediff.com (Available at **http://www.rediff.com/entertai/1999/dec/16juhi.htm**) (Accessed on 1st feb 2012)
13th Jan, 2000 Also See *'I want to retain what I have, recapture what I've lost'* – ShahRukh Khan's interview with Komal Nahta; Rediff.com
(Available at http://www.rediff.com/entertai/2000/jan/13srk.htm) (Accessed on 1st feb 2012)

something different. The intent was to draw a story on a far bigger scale and to somehow tap into the enormous fan base Khan had begun mustering in countries like America, UK, Germany and so on. Mirza was keen to do some kind of a "satire" on the booming news media industry, a sector he believed had the power to "truly bring about change" in the country[24]. The result was *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*. While the film only just about managed to recover money in the domestic market it did fairly good business in America.[25] Nearly all reviews recognized that the newsroom setting was a novel and topically important site for some sort of critical enquiry or satire. Anupama Chopra observed in 'Out Of Focus' that

> "PBDHH is a statement on media manipulation, consumerism and an increasingly materialistic post-reform society in which everything is a marketing opportunity, including a man's hanging (recall Kargil). An important topic, it is occasionally insightful and funny—Rawal's to-be-telecast-live hanging attracts crores in sponsorship money and even the hangman has his 15 minutes of fame[26]".

Similarly Sapna Mitter at Rediff.com noted that "The world of reporting, or television reporting at least, has never looked more attractive. I mean, where else could young men and women get such a perfect work atmosphere -- funky offices, trendy designer clothes, fun-loving bosses?" but also added it "makes a dig at sponsorships and how television has been taken over by multi-crore companies"[27]. Ajay Chaturvedi noted the "rare setting" and that the film "focuses on the media war being fought in the TV newsrooms, an unexplored zone"[28].

The film is about two young, uppity successful TV journalists Ajay Bakshi (Shahrukh Khan) and Ria Bannerjee (Juhi Chawla) who work for competing television news channels K-TV and Galaxy TV. As rabidly 'professional' journalists,

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[24] Feb 25th 2009 Rishi Majumdar (Available at http://rishimajumder.blogspot.in/2009/02/aziz-mirza-interview.html) (Accessed on 1st july 2012)
[25] One international trade reviewer reported "*Arctic winds and a cold winter blast could not dampen the enthusiasm of* desi *moviegoers in North America for director Aziz Mirza's musical comedy with a patriotic twist* . See 27th January Aseem Chabra 'You See, Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani'; Rediff.com, (Available at http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jan/27us.htm) (Accessed on 1st july 2012)
[26] Anupama Chopra *Dreamz Unlimited stakes new ground with its debutproduction—and nearly manages to pull it off'*-; Out Of Focus *(*Available at
http/www.anupamachopra.com/media/pdf/Review_of_Phir_Bhi_Dil_Hain_Hindustani.pdf)
[27] 21st Jan, 2000; Sapna Mitter: I Love My Car… And My Country ; Rediff.com. (Available at http://www.rediff.com/entertai/2000/jan/21hind.htm) (Accessed on 1st july 2012)
[28] Ajay Chaturvedi 'trivializing a good storyline' in apunkachoice.com
(http://www.apunkachoice.com/titles/phi/phir-bhi-dil-hai-hindustani/mid_41/reviews-editor/)
(Accessed on 23feb 2012)

they're shown easily resorting to disingenuous, unscrupulous means to concoct 'saleable' stories in desperate bids to outdo each other. The film traces their transformation as they happen to encounter the absconding convict Mohan Joshi and hear of his story of terrible injustice. Joshi is a fleeing 'terrorist', convicted of killing a powerful businessman-politician, who is set to be hanged on a due date. Ria and Ajay however soon discover the true story behind the murder – Joshi is actually an 'ordinary' man whose daughter was raped and pushed to suicide by the deceased businessman. On getting absolutely no assistance from the State machinery, Joshi decides to avenge her by killing the businessman. Having captured Joshi's true story on tape, an emotionally moved Ria and Ajay are eager to get the true version of events telecast live as soon as possible in order to get Joshi (with whom they develop intimate filial relationships) unconditionally exonerated. What follows however is a circuitous web of corporate machinations, political intrigue and subterfuge, as the two channel bosses the duo work for buckle under politicians' demand to squash the tape in exchange for various benefits for their respective channels (the chief enticement being an offer to host Joshi's execution live as a grandiose television programme). The film ends with Ajay, Ria and their gangster friend Pappu Junior (Johny Lever) sneaking into the K-Tv control room moments before the big execution to play the tape containing Joshi's version of things. A tearful Ajay then exhorts the viewers to come with him to the execution jail and somehow stop the unfair hanging. Intercepted in the middle by the police, Ajay and Rea suddenly see an entire army of enraged citizens marching through the roads in their support. In the end, the swelling crowd of TV watchers is led by Ajay, forcefully breaking their way into the prison and freeing Joshi.

The 'event' is not only the thematic main-frame the film rests on, but also a basic syntactic building unit for the narrative. Both main characters are introduced while they're in the process of concocting and manufacturing news 'events'. Ajay is introduced as he makes a daredevil entry into a tense bomb diffusion scene, a site no other journalist has been able to reach. His attempt to 'interview' the bomb-diffusion expert during the diffusion distracts the latter causing the bomb to explode, thereby jeopardizing lives of people around but garnering for Ajay the only valid laurels in his

field of work – a staggering TRP. Ria similarly, is first seen reporting a 'breaking' story from what seems a flood-stricken remote village in rural India. As the (film) camera zooms out, the 'village' that we initially see is revealed to be an artificial stage set in a news studio with paid actors, and the whole story a hack slapdash set up put together by Ria.[29] With an irrefutable talent for producing televisable 'events' both Ajay and Ria are introduced to us as cut-throat, mercenary professionals enjoying a certain sort of success and wherewithal given their capacity to entrepreneurially create and contribute to the robust television event-economy they are a part of. The event economy in return also handsomely rewards their skills, giving them incentives that the film clearly otherwise identifies as markers of western capitalist onslaught in India (fancy hoodless cars, sunglasses, champagne, women in western attires etc). The event-economy thus enables Ajay and Ria to access a global brand of consummation.

The film in a way also chronicles the rise of the newly emergent figure of the 'star-reporter'. With the proliferation of satellite television and 24 hour news channels, arose a string of celebrity faces that largely pivoted our knowledge and memory of public visual events. If our 'memory museums', as Susan Sontag has observed, are indeed largely visual, the celebrity TV reporter becomes the principle archivist of our everyday – a prominent factor in the figuration of a legitimate media 'event'[30] (Sontag 2004). Ajay Bakshi is the ultimate threat for the live telecast

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[29] A kind of double speak is made evident in Ria's character right from the beginning. In her introduction scene the minute the cameras go off, Ria takes off the salwar kameez she was wearing during the report to reveal (much like the women in the title track) a 'western attire'. She's takes off the Bindi on her forehead at what seems a significant gestural point – right at the moment she tells the director – "*If you think I'll leave your channel for more money and fame… you're absolutely right*". The dresses that Ria wears through the film seems to resonate with her character's relationship with a larger good conscience the film couches as Nationalism. Interestingly, Ria wears what can be conventionally termed 'western attires' only in the beginning portions of the film, when she's shown to be profiteering, unethical, and largely unscrupulous journalist. As she and Ajay start revolting against the nexus between corrupt bureaucracy and TV channel ownership, she's seen only in salwar kameez's and Sari's (in sharp contrast to the clothes she dons in the song in which the whole television machinery celebrates her achievements.)
[30] Infact the film starts off by nearly satirizing the newscaster-star figure. As the bomb goes off at the top of a multi-storey building, a stranded Ajay jumps into a large fluffy cloth spread to cushion his fall at the ground. The entire public and media squadrons gathered there flock towards him, cheering and clapping with fan-like adulation as he lands safely and manages to (inadvertently and unwillingly as is earlier established) also save a cat. cheering, clapping and interviewing him. It's a bit of a meta moment, as the news caster doesn't merely legitimize the event with his presence and reportage but becomes almost a larger spectacle than the event he's covering- nearly all questions asked to him after are about his personal life ("do you love animals", "were you nervous") and none discussing the bomb blast.

machinery - the rogue archivist, the mutinying news insider who forcibly usurps and reverses the flow of the 'story'

A first point of argument begins to take shape here – of a link between the 'live event', a post liberalization middle class youth as the viewing public, and a changing arena of popular transformational politics. But first a quick detour. In *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*, the changing hues of the effects of globalization are still a prominent preoccupation. The opening credit sequence provides serious cues about the film's primary thematic concerns. The visualization of the title song '*Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*' nicely sets up its stance on Globalization, an attitude that clearly runs through the movie. Shahrukh Khans's body inhabits and gets hemmed in by a range of sharply contrapuntal and contrasting currents that seem to embody the schizoid experience of globalization in India. The sequence opens with Shahrukh in a suave suit and glasses, only to reveal what appear to be Indian underpants underneath the suit. Women dancing in ghungtas next to him reveal western attires underneath; cocktails are rejected for coconut water, ice cream is thrown away in hope of chuski, vada-pavs are preferred to burgers and a bike he seems to be riding turns out to be a bullock cart. Similarly elderly fisher women are seen talking on mobile phones, traditional North Indian akhaada wrestlers are seen wearing MP3 music players and beggars are shown donning formal chest napkins before commencing meals.

All in all India is cast as a country of unseemly yet congenial contradictions, where the traditional almost joyously (as the smiling faces suggest) embraces the modern-technological, and despite the glossy veneer there is an irrepressible and endearing rustic Indian-ness present everywhere. The collision with newer currents doesn't lead to hostile socio-political struggles but a partly comic and clumsy coterie of lifestyle options. These effects of global flows are only inscribed via changes in food and clothing, and never refer to the larger economic struggles as a result of the large scale change in consumption practices. In all of this Shahrukh Khan gets synthesized as the upwardly mobile, corporate, cosmopolitan, middle class guy who remains endearing as he genially embraces the sordid contradictions of modernity - he joyfully dances with bare bodied street kids in the rain, and napkins up a slum dweller before his meal while slipping smoothly into a comfortable two piece corporate suit.

The opening seems to hint that despite the surface shimmer, Ajay maintains an irremovable Indian core inside him that enables a deep empathy and connection with the indigenous and the local, while at the same time firmly dipping into a global way of living. It is, as the film eventually suggests, the intractable fabric of his father inside him – of the quintessential honest, simple and ethical Indian middle class man. In one of the early sections Ajay visits his parents to show them his new acquisition – a fancy, hoodless new car he's been given as 'reward' by his K-TV boss for the successful exclusive 'coverage' of the bomb diffusion. What clearly rankles and bothers an otherwise carefree Ajay is his father's calm refusal to sit in the car (and celebrate what he thinks are the fruits of his son's integrity-less professional escapades). It's this niggling need for validation that becomes a sort of overpowering good angel that brings about Ajay's awakening of conscience in the latter part of the film.

Abhijit Roy points to a clear link that seems to get forged between the middle class hero and television viewership, in the context of the 24 hour news channel in India (Roy 2006). Globalization provided the Indian middle class with a sort of free playfield where different modes of aspirational mobility and movement were suddenly rendered possible (Scrase 2009, Nigam and Menon 2004). While subaltern groups had to partake of its fallout through informal networks of subterfuge and semi-legal improvised actions, the middle class accessed global consumption patterns with a far greater sense of entitlement. It was easier now to dip into global circuits of commodities, fashion and behavior. Roy observes that in the moral universe of the Bombay film, it was this mobile figure of the middle class-male who became the chosen national figure to chastise its unholy excesses, conveniently kindling his core-Indianness to rally against the malevolent influences of the West. In films like *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam*, 1998) Nayak, Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindusthani and Lakshya (*Farhan Akhtar, 2005*) Rang De Basanti (*2006) the middle class hero's body is almost like a moral body-politic, that has to get morally purged before it galvanizes the bodies of thousands of nameless TV viewers. This throws up in extension, urgent questions about the changing idea of viewership. As Abhijit Roy argues:

"The middle-class emerges as … perhaps the only class that is narrativizable in the manner of figuring a trajectory towards the Global nation, as the only body that mutates and makes possible the story of a transition. One needs to thoroughly examine how the homogenization of the middle class across the nation by consumerist television is connected to the emergence of a neo-nationalist sphere of deterritorialized/televisual public, and how that forces a rethinking of the cinematic public both on and off screen." (Roy 2009:21)

Ajay and Ria's eventual disillusionment and hostile break with their former TV channel bosses comes about, at the first instance because of a sort of miscalculation. In keeping with the rabid pragmatics of the event market economy, they expect their respective channels to immediately lap up and telecast the tape containing Manohar Joshi's scintillating 'true story' of injustice. What they don't foresee is the turncoat nexus between the rival political parties and media houses in the face of such insurmountable evidence, and in their refusal to comply with the change of events they are stigmatized and made outcasts. While it ostensibly appears as if their moral arousal occurs only when they're arm-twisted into discarding their last shred of ethical empathy, there seems more to it. At various points before this both Ajay and Ria encounter instances of torture, rape, murder and grave injustice (Ajay's on the verge of staging a fully pupeteered interview with the chief minister, while Ria does a sting on an MLA in jail accused of murder more out of professional competitiveness rather than righteousness).Yet on all these occasions both remain unquestioningly partisan, and toe the official line without once voicing any problems.

The primary reason they can't abandon Joshi, and instead turn ferociously on the very people they tried to emulate earlier is because of a certain filial bond that develops between them and him. 'Baba' as they fondly call him, is one of them – he hails from their class, dresses, speaks, thinks, and holds the same values and principles Ajay's own father also holds. Infact he becomes something of a paternal figure, instrumental both in Ajay and Ria's realization of love for each other, and in their decision to marry in the climax. As the archetypal middle class 'common man', his fate reveals to them not merely the fragile 'space of exception' (Agamben 2005) their own class inhabits but also how easily the televisual machinery can self-cannibalize, turning an unjust death of one like their own into a grandiose, hyper-financed, spectacular event. The revolutionary, angry crowds that throng the streets in the climax get propelled by what can, for the moment be simplistically called a

middle class anger – a magisterially arousing emotion that comes from what's been meted out to one of their own.

The dizzying gala extravaganza that the channels put together for the live spectacle that is to be Joshi's hanging also physically refashions the execution space. Art Director Sharmishta Roy adorned the walls with posters that were visually modeled on product commercials of the time with a changed tagline linked to death. The media event precipitates a major material overhaul as jail walls get inundated with posters, standees, and cut outs with scores of product advertisements themed around the idea of hanging – hair dye posters *("maut jaisa kaala rang")*, camera ads ("Khachaak moments"), cold drink, digestive-pills and various others. The execution courtyard increasingly comes to resemble the interior spaces of the television studios belonging to K-TV and Galaxy TV (even the hangman becomes a tidbit testimonial to be consumed in the market where screen time equals money). The execution courtyard trans-mutates into a modern day mall, a theatre of consumption. The condemned man's body itself gets re-materialized into something of a mobile billboard. In a sense, anti-nationalism (and 'terrorism') becomes the crime that makes the citizen a variant of the historical figure of the 'homo-sacer', the 'set-apart man'.[31] Consumption and screen time move into cover the vacuous *bare body* as the law seems to clear space and recede. Even though the act of hanging is a legal diktat, the state seems to momentarily give up the body of the prisoner and the space of execution to the market. All pre-execution rituals are abdicated as the prisoner gets re-materialized into a quintessential mobile billboard – a clean slate purely for serving the purpose of advertising different sorts of brands. Death by asphyxiation itself becomes a larger image-commodity to be seen through a distracted fleeting gaze in a larger clutter of advertisements.

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[31] The *Homo sacer* ("the sacred man" or "the accursed man") is a historical figure with Roman law. The homo sacer's identity is distinguished in a society as he who is banned, is allowed to be killed by anybody, but is not allowed to be sacrificed in a religious ritual. The homo sacer is expunged from the domain of civil and constitutional rights, and can be killed in legal terms without the killer being regarded a murderer. Georgio Agamben uses the figure of the homo sacer as a sort of conditional metaphor for modern jurisprudence (1998). The 'state of exception' that the Homo sacer suddenly gets plunged into, is according to Agamben enshrined within the annals of various legal frameworks. Joshi's body seems to plunged into that sort of a liminal extra-constitutional zone. The basic civic freedom of a sovereign subject recedes entirely as his body now becomes a blank screen to be filled in by the financial forces bolstering the whole hanging event.

The drastic re-materialization of the execution space in the wake of the television event enables a sort of flash visiblizing of that which has hitherto been a secretive, concealed and 'absent' space in the State's visible public life. The exceptional violence of the state (via death or maiming) has largely figured as something of a governmental uncanny – a dark obfuscated zone long veiled under subterfuge and taboo. This space now gets penetrated, boiling as it were, with the immanence of the hyper financed spectacle to be lapped up by innumerable live witnesses. The anvil the media and the ministers use to validate this public spectacle (and annex both the convict's body and the hanging space) is a rabid, hyper-aggressive and jingoistic nationalism. They use the familiar myth of the cardboard monolithic terrorist figure- unrelentingly evil and abominable who needs to be violently expunged from society like a cancerous tissue, albeit, in this case, in as showy a way as possible[32].

The entire film is a battle for ownership over the 'event-circuit' that clearly controls the minds of the teeming multitudes of viewers cued in all the time. The revolutionary change in the end then can only be catalyzed once the flow of the event circuit in its current form gets entirely disrupted. The nerve-centre of the televisual regime - the production control room, gets besieged as Ajay momentarily takes over, ruptures the flow, and telecasts live a radically different narrative. In a number of other films (like *Rang De Basanti* (2005), Mani Ratnam's *Nayak* (2001) etc), the middle class protagonist has to go through a kind of passage of rites and purge himself morally before he can take over the broadcast studio and communicate 'the truth' to a larger network of people. The live telecast space is shown to be a monumentally persuasive space, stimulating the hitherto invisible (and largely ineffectual) TV viewers to into ground shatteringly concrete steps.

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[32] While the film does implicitly critique the convenient use of the hollow signifier of a terrorist to unfairly indict and punish 'innocent' people, it doesn't at any point destabilize or puncture the larger category of 'the terrorist'. The wrongly convicted man is a Hindu, Marathi, middle class and presumably upper-caste Mr.Joshi, and not crucially, a Muslim or a North Eastern (or from any of the fringe identity groups that form our usual suspects as agents of terror).Time and again, all the clarifying voices throughout the film emphatically reiterate the fact that he's '*not*' a terrorist, reaffirming each time that there is a terrorist somewhere who happens to be everything that this man is alleged to be (the first proper thing we hear Joshi say is a desperate yell exclaiming "*Main Terrorist nahin hun*". Similarly Ajay's entire live emotional outpour in the end is about Joshi being a 'common man' 'just like us', warning them that "ye *jo mohan joshi ke saath ho raha hai, wo kal aap logo ke saath bhi ho sakta hai*").

What's interesting though is that Ajay (much like other media-person protagonists in the some other films) brings about the radical change in the minds of the millions watching in the 4 minutes that he has, without really ever giving factual or concrete evidence. Abhijit Roy points out that the protagonists of a number of these TV event films, convince the watching public in much the same way the state does: through pure, free flowing rhetoric and emotional address - no thorough rigorous argument, no historical precision or accuracy, but just as Ajay himself says, only "through the heart" (Roy 2006). In so doing Ajay's pre-climactic speech becomes like *Karan's (*Siddharth) final radio address in *Rang De Basanti* (2006), ACP Anant Kumar's (Amitabh Bacchan) outburst against the angry crowd in *Khakee* (2004), *Meera's (*Rani Mukherjee) emotionally charged news pitches in in *Noone Killed Jessica* (2008), or Shivaji Rao's (Anil Kapoor) final diatribe against corruption in *Nayak (*2001).

When Justice P.B Sawant of the Supreme Court declared in 1995 that airwaves were public property, he also paved the path for a new imaginary of a public to crystallize (Roy 2009). This was a mysterious but enduring faceless populace that consumed the airwaves and in many ways took on its characteristic qualities. The TV public – an entirely dispersed, faceless, abstracted and largely de-territorialized entity calibrated only by the arithmetic language of TRP's, area codes, and zero-ins became an increasingly conspicuous category. This was an unseen but ever-present collective, always cued in but largely de-corporealized, body-less, dealing only in sms's or phone-ins, not people but a whole army of dish antennae that never seemed to leave material after-traces of their actions.

This new TV viewer-public seems to unquestioningly follow and believe the integrity of the television-events it watches. This is the same public (literally, with the same set of actors as the earlier sections) that hungrily consumes Ajay's hack 'breaking news' stories right at the beginning of the film, that unquestioningly hates and hurls abuses at Joshi despite the flimsy evidence supplanted by the State, and is tizzy with excitement about tuning in to the 'hanging event' on the day of Joshi's execution. Yet when the everyday flow of liveness goes momentarily awry, and an alternate meaning of the event is provided by Ajay, an innate, latent Indian-ness

seems to get provoked and incensed; eager to effect immediate change. The film couches the terms of this change largely in the syntax of 'nationalism'. The tidal wave like moral upsurge in the end is not against the structural barbarism that seems to be endemically vested in the State machinery, but against the usurpation of Indian values in all of us by a mercenary Western imperative towards profit and narrow self-interest. Despite the process of globalization and its shiny changes, there remains, according to the film an essential, almost a priori Indian core that gets galvanized in the times of gross injustice. The material layout of western mercenary ethos – the hanging-event needs to get disrupted and replaced by a new event Ajay scripts. Ajay's address stirs the digitized, de-materialized, ephemeral collective hitherto consigned to being only TRP digits. Soon enough, shots of empty streets get replaced by hoards of people jostling cheek by jowl, braving armed forces and barriers to storm the city jail. This legion breaks down gates, incapacitates police officers, physically harangues the corrupt politicians and magnates, and re-materializes the over-run prison architecture by adorning the walls with Indian flags. Ajay too, dons the garb of a revolutionary leader only when he sheds his former mercenary self and reconciles with the true 'Hindustani' part of his identity – that of his father's. The sacral order of the film's melodramatic universe can get re-stored only when the ''*Nation awakes*" and takes immediate action. The 'action' of this national populace in turn, comes about through a process of re-embodiment and re-materialization, as a digitized, TRP-ed TV abstraction breaks into hundreds of extremely forceful and charged up people.

Mirza's film thus represents a new brand of television public – an invisible collective perpetually and unquestioningly consuming televisual events every minute. The opinions and ideas of this public seem to be completely chiseled by what it is shown on TV, and thereby often subject to misappropriation by corrupt corporate interests. Yet, Mirza's film finally restitutes political faith in this very social formation – suggesting that in times of urgent upheaval (like during a television event) this public sheds its usual disembodied form and territorializes itself into a new plane of transformative revolutionary possibilities.

Rang De Basanti: Cinema Event and Virus Publics

Despite its nominal presence, Television occupies a fairly complex position in *Rang De Basanti* (2006). Rakeysh Mehra's ten million rupee grossing film's denouement also comes about with a mass broadcast space being coercively overrun by the protagonists in the hope of stirring up a radical TV public. But unlike *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* television gets completely abdicated as a space where any sort of subversive gesture against the State can be staged. In the following section I will argue that the old, malfunctioning, 'defective' TV set in the Delhi University canteen that the protagonists watch regularly, is in many ways symptomatic of a deeper, more systemic malady that the television machinery seems to be afflicted by. The faulty TV set's technical recalcitrance (it changes channels on its own, doesn't abide by the remote's instructions) can be seen as a larger 'fault-line', which the film subliminally builds up as it progresses. I will suggest that tracing television's various appearances in *Rang De Basanti* might reveal to us an insightful narrative of its own, one that can enrich our understanding of a new form of 'virus public' that the film seems to ultimately repose hope in. The conceptual category of the 'virus public' will be addressed through a scrutiny of the 'media event' the film went on to become post its release.

Rang De Basanti begins with an episode that flags the first of the many small 'displacements' that television seems to facilitate throughout the story. Sue, a British film maker, working in what seems a BBC like television production house/channel in London is obsessively bent on making a film on the revolutionary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh and his compatriots. The film begins with what appears a final meeting between Sue and her channel producers who abruptly inform her that the organization has decided to withdraw its promised funding for her project at the last minute owing to a financial crunch. While willing to back more 'lucrative' and prominent subject-areas like '*Gandhi or Jinnah'*, the channel refuses to invest in the 'lesser known' insurrectionary figures of Bhagat Singh and his band of radical subversives. Given how the story eventually pans out, this initial episode marks the beginning of a pattern - it hints at television as a largely majoritarian, statist, and aggressively exclusionary site treading strictly by popular caveats. In the logic of the narrative overall,

Television is right at the onset set up as a space that muscles out the smaller incendiary radical voices. In a reactive move away from this television paradigm, Sue comes to India to make her own independent self-funded film about the Indian revolutionaries.

The first time a television set makes an appearance in India is in the form of the musty ramshackled, defective set at the Delhi University canteen that the gang of characters usually den in. Its idiosyncratic functioning (it has to be tapped on the head repeatedly to change channels and adjust signal etc) is for the group of students an endemic part of the whole environment of cigarettes, unending cups of tea, patties, and singing and generally goofing around that characterizes the hangout. A quick detour must be made here. In a number of interviews around and after the release of the film, the makers of the film (primarily Rensil D'Souza and Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra) as well as a number of reviews/responses to it often refer to the '*generation that awakens*' in the film as the '*MTV generation*'[33]. For the vapid, disaffected and hedonistic younger generation in *Rang De Basanti*, Music Television (MTV) becomes a motif and an overarching way of life (just like it did for large sections of urban young people in India since its advent in 1996). Quick, jagged, beat editing, gliding hand-held camera angles, rock/progressive hip hop used as background music, and a whole universe of spray-can graffiti, binge drinking vaults into step-wells, late night blind-sighted bike races etc inform the stylistic parapet of the way the young students are shown in Mehra's film. Rakeysh Mehra instated rigorous research analysis teams during the production of the film to get a sense of the predominant cultural threads in the lives of younger people at the time[34]. A whole lexicon of clothes, fashion, music,

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[33]Some of these reviews/essays/blogs include – March 2006 The generation Awakens
http://www.nripulse.com/Archives/kulchurMar1606.htm
http://www.nripulse.com/Archives/kulchurMar1606.htm (Accessed on 2nd march)
and June 2010; Vidhu Aggarwal The Anti-Colonial Revolutionary in Contemporary Bollywood*;*
Volume 12 Issue 2 Article 5
http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1595&context=clcweb
(Accessed 2nd march)
[34] Mehra himself worked with MTV for a period in the early 90's, a period which he professes has had an important influence on him. {Jan 2011 Akaansha Gupta http://www.chalkandslate.blogspot.in/
(Accessed on 2nd march 2012)}

lingo, spray fonts, MTV shows like Roadies, Bakra etc are self-consciously quoted in the film.[35]

In stark contrast with this style is the traditionally grandiose 'cinematic' figuration of the radical past involving the freedom fighters. Sue's filmic imaginary of Bhagat Singh and his troupe is rendered via typically magisterial long shots, epic music scores, grand slow motion chase sequences etc; all with a clear inflection that marks itself as distinct from the stylistic treatment of the 'present'. The two visual treatments (MTV and the 'epic cinematic') are set up almost contrapuntally against one another for the better part of the film, only to be resolved and synthesized (as will be argued eventually) towards the end of the film.

The very first time the television set actually appears in the film is an interesting moment. After instinctively deciding on Karan, Dj, Aslam ,and Sukhi as Bhagat Singh, Azad, Ashfaqullah Khan and Rajguru for her film, Sue designates a time and place for the first line-reading and rehearsal. After no one besides Karan turns up for hours, they go to the canteen and find the rest of the group there watching a Fashion Show on the canteen television set, giving scores to the models appearing on the ramp. This otherwise little moment becomes insightful when seen in consonance with the larger schema television appears to fit into through the rest of the film. It is the television set that stalls and delays their turning up for the film's practice, and thereby accessing a past where they can don revolutionary avatars. Only the past offers education in revolutionary praxis in *Rang De Basanti*, and that past can only be accessed by the characters via the cinematic enclave Sue provides them with. Herein begins a tussle of sorts, between the cinematic past revolutionary self, and the present self.

The broader argument that begins to take shape here is about the relationship between cinema, television and history. The (cinematic) past overbearingly nudges and stakes claim in the present in *Rang De Basanti*, both structurally in the visual economy of the film, and thematically. The past increasingly ruptures, permeates and

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[35] A clear auxiliary working alongside such a stylistic template is the purported life-attitude of this generation – that of being a rabidly 'apolitical', 'excessively consumerist', and largely sybaritic group. A perception that Mehra clearly consciously deploys to peg his story.

85

coalesces with the present as the narrative progresses, culminating in the climax where the two almost mimetically 'fold' into one another. Time itself works like the cross-talk of a spooled tape, as the past is perspectivized via the present and vice versa, dialogically- each activating the other to take on novel forms and meanings.

There is a deliberate opacity about the relation of the past and the present at the beginning of the movie (the very first line that we hear before visuals come is a piece of radical poetry about the youth and boiling blood. It is impossible to ascertain if it is voiced by DJ or Chandrasekhar Azad). Infact in the initial half of the film, the sporadic vignettes about the freedom fighters seem like a contrasting parallel tale otherwise diegetically unrelated to the primary story of the Delhi University students. Interestingly, it is Sue, the mutinous expatriate filmmaker having recently abdicated the TV circuit, who's able to envision the disjunctive past in the present, and attempt a weaving of the two seemingly incongruous times. It is in her imagination that the boisterous camaraderie between the otherwise apathetic DU friends can be visually likened to the fiery bonhomie shared by the freedom fighters that inhabit her grandfather's diary. And thereon begins a slow transformation that leads to what is intended as a complete mimesis towards the end[36].

Halfway into the middle the intermittent historical flashes are revealed as actually part of Sue's film. The cinematic provides space for visualizing a radical history and a radical 'self' for the protagonists. This moment, when the protagonists actually 'see' their bodies activated with renegade potential, (and the hitherto schismed images of the 'actors' get coupled into one diegetic self-enclosed matrix for the actual audiences of Mehra's film) becomes something of a thematic dam-burst. It marks the beginning of a spillage between pasts and presents, between political and non-political selves; and the slow fracturing of the MTV ethic towards the formation of a new hybrid self that ultimately (as will be argued shortly), has no space on TV.

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[36] One particular scene (deleted subsequently form the theatre version but available on Youtube as well as the Rang De Basanti DVD) shows the youngsters in an impassioned script reading session. In the middle of delivering his lines passionately, DJ suddenly refers to the word 'maa' (mother) in the script as '*mitro*', his name for his mother. The voice over by Sue (that immediately says "*it had started*") directly points towards the process of slow mimesis that the film very carefully builds up.

It is through the canteen television that one day the gang hears the abrupt and shocking news story about Ajay's death while flying a defective MIG-21. From here on the role of television in the film changes tenor pronouncedly – it becomes an opaque, sinister, officious space desultorily browbeaten by the State. Interestingly, post Ajay's inscrutable demise, at no point is any character shown actually physically searching for details of the circumstances around the accident. There's no jostling through bureaucratic corridors to extract information about the accident, no investigation about the specific plane model in question or attempt to unearth the particulars of the crash. The sole promulgator of information for the better part of *Rang De Basanti* remains the Television.

Days after the bereavement (on the date Ajay's remains, uniform and belongings are to be delivered) the group watch an NDTV chat show discussing the MIG 21 crashes and Ajay's mysterious death. While the show prods and raises questions about the defective MIG 21 models imported from Russia as a result of corrupt high tier-deals, the matter gets by and large eclipsed by the Defense Minister's statement that derogatorily deflects the whole issue onto the realm of incompetent and irresponsible piloting. While other voices on the show (one of a retired colonel who had trained Ajay himself) try to counter the minister's claim, the final resounding and enduring judgment that prevails in the show is the minister's seemingly unequivocal stance of it being a case of individual culpability and no systemic graft[37]. Television transmogrifies into a space of obfuscation and subterfuge, raising at best feeble questions that get squashed by State narratives in the end.

Incensed by the besmirching of Ajay's name, and the general lack of answers, the young group along with a number of other people (presumably friends and families of the other deceased pilots) starts protesting in front of India Gate in significant numbers. As the call for answers becomes slightly clamorous, enough to attract a semblance of attention from the TV media, the State decides to take a cannily brutal step. Armed forces are sent to India Gate with the mandate to forcibly remove and evict the congregated protestors, using violent means if necessary. Batons are

[37] Even semiotically this is highlighted, the visual of the show ends with a full screen face shot of minister issuing his clarification on the matter, and the audio of his final words" as they sieve through Ajay's belongings.

used to forcefully incapacitate the few who resist moving, leading to severe injuries to many among the friends and a critical blow to the head of Ajay's mother. Despite the presence of teeming television cameras during the gruesome crackdown, there is (largely owing to the machinations of Karan's father and the leader of the Hindu right wing outfit played by K K Raina) no evidence of there being any widespread public outcry or demand for redressal in its aftermath. The television machinery is shown as being completely ineffectual, inadequate in even broadcasting the image, let alone form any comprehensive critique of the State's brutal dispensation of exceptional violence (like Sukhi says soon after " *sab ke saamne itna kuch ho gaya, koi kuch kar kyun nahi raha?"*)[38].

Wrung in desperation as Ajay's mother lapses into coma (and no redressal or public acknowledgment of the event seems in the offing), the group impulsively decides to assassinate the defense minister. This assassination becomes the first major instance of mimesis in the concluding section of the film, as characters here on increasingly begin to mimic the imaginary embodiments of (past) lives they had acted out in Sue's film. This happens at the level of editing (match cuts), dialogues, gestures, background score and actions. The hitherto tussling temporalities coalesce completely, as the killing of the Defense minister, gesture by gesture (and almost shot

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[38] The grand-cinematic vision of Sue's film on the other hand has a particularly evocative imaging power. A fairly textured meta-referential scene was included in *Rang De Basanti's* DVD and television premiere cut – Bhagat and his group are shown to be in hiding from the police without having eaten any food for days on end. Seeing the spirits of his famished comrades waning, Bhagat decides to play an imagination game. Announcing that "*hunger is only in the mind*", he acts as if he sees a variety of sumptuous food in front of him, and calls out to his friends to taste it. As he starts mimicking the eating of a full meal, others join and soon the whole group is seen sharing an invisible wholesome meal. At this point Chandrashekhar Azad walks in, informing them that he has at last managed some money for them to buy food from. As they stand outsides an eateries shop waiting desperately for their first meal in days, Bhagat notices a cinema hall on the other side of the road. All of a sudden without warning, he makes a sprint for the hall with the entire money in his hand, with the others following him in desperation. In the next shot, all of them are revealed sitting in the movie hall, having spent their precious amount on cinema tickets without eating. But all of them are clearly very emotionally moved by what they see on screen (Azad infact, as Bhagat notices, is moved to tears by what's playing on the screen)[38]. Bhagat's preference for the evocative and stimulating power of cinema for sustenance/nourishment over basic food is a meta-cinematic moment that gives a clue to the treatment of cinema in the film. It's Sue's film that has the depth of imagination to visualize politically vigorous roles for this otherwise apathetic group, and that infuses specters of a radical past into lives of these characters (and for the audiences of Mehra's film). It is this cinematic imaginary that catches up full swoop towards the end in a complete overhaul, as it gets almost mimetically reproduced in the present. TV in contrast is a staid, bleak space too closely van guarded by the State, incapable of any such radical imaginary potential and figuration.

by shot) mirrors the killing of Colonel Saunders. Homi Bhabha's work on mimesis provides interesting bases to theoretically ground this idea on. For Bhabha "*Mimicry is [...] a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power.[...] It is also the sign of the inappropriate [as it] poses an immanent threat to both normalized knowledges and disciplinary powers*" (Bhabha 1994: 86)[39]. Mimicry in *Rang De Basanti* is not a mime of the coloniser (the context in which Bhabha talks of it) but of the resistant acts of the colonized. It is instead mimicry of socio-historical conditions and processes, totems of the past seen to be irrelevant in the present. Cinema becomes the primary platform that can enable such mimesis, both for the characters (the viewers of Sue's film) and for the actual audiences of Rakeysh Mehra's film.

It is the television narrative again that in its misrepresentation renders their act entirely redundant, and infact counterproductive. Toeing the state line of it being a terrorist attack, television becomes the chief provocateur in eulogizing and reifying an exalted martyr figure out of the minister. It begins a process of immortalizing him, hailing him as a *"great leader and patriot"*, thereby validating his decree on the MIG 21 cases and Ajay, and effectively canceling out the impact of the first instance of cinematic-mimesis. It is to counteract this TV narrative that a plan to forcibly overrun a broadcast space to get the real story across to the 'masses' is fomented.

Ever since Ajay's death, television figures as an arena closely controlled by the State, the primary mouthpiece of the very narratives the group wants to counteract and reclaim, and a largely ineffectual broadcasting space that does not provide any public redressal for the subsequent injustices meted out to them. Alienated immensely from this face of television built through the film, the youngsters turn towards a smaller, quainter, and more accessible broadcasting medium: radio. (Close reading would suggest that perhaps it is no accident that the last actual film the group watches in a movie theatre with Ajay is *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006) – a film where a radio audience is mobilized as the primary form of confrontation against the villain).

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[39] These ideas of mimicry are used by Kshama Kumar, in her work on melancholy in' BHAGAT SINGH TOPLESS, WAVING IN JEANS'
http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/60/86

Bhagat Singh and his comrades deliberately threw largely harmless soft bombs at vacant spaces in the parliament in order to get arrested. The arrest would lead to a widely publicized court trial and prominent space in the national media, thus providing them with a platform to disseminate their political ideas to a wider constituency of people. The primary idea was to somehow manufacture a print 'event' about themselves. Driven by a similar impulse, Karan, DJ, Sukhi and Aslam too wager an attempt to seize a mass communication platform. While a contentious public trial ensured media coverage in erstwhile pre-independence India (via newspapers, magazines, pamphlets etc), technologies of liveness with their constant, ever-present, de-territorialized audiences provide the easiest way of similar mass-connect in the contemporary period. Not unlike their 'cinematic-historical' counterparts, the group also intends and anticipates a long drawn case in the public eye before their final indictment; during which they hope to make clear their ideology (their reasons for assassinating the minister), their pedagogy (Ajay's advice and aspiration for the younger generation) and register an apology (for the murder which they want to unequivocally denounce as reckless and unmeditated). The besieging of the radio station is meant only as the first cog of a longer political process- of a widely followed criminal case, prisoner-ship and various media interactions through which they hope to cement a more enduring legacy of Ajay's beliefs (the radio takeover isn't at all meant as a suicidal exercise, as the group clearly envisions an arduous political future – Sukhi talks of "*food in the jail*", "*giving interviews to hot journalists*" etc.) Television is a space that they want to, in this prospective future political journey, reach eventually.

The State's treatment of DJ and his coterie are however drastically different from the way the Colonial government's dealt with Bhagat Singh and company. The colonial state accords the latter all the vestiges of political captivity – they're given a public (albeit biased) trial, jail-time, and a proper execution. The contemporary political establishment however views DJ and his friends as a variant of the pestilent figure of the 'terrorist'. Unlike the colonial logic of the slow disintegration of the body of the political prisoner to extract information (through torture et al), the modern response to a 'terroristic' threat is swift, expeditious and immediate extermination.

The body of the terrorist is a cancerous, virulent pestilence that has to be expunged rapidly by Special Forces designed and equipped specifically to do so, not to be kept captive. The sovereign State is thus far harsher and unforgiving than the imperial one. Interestingly it's only after the news of the group's action spreads virus-like through all the news channels, that an amorphous voice from the government commands the special action team chief to kill everyone ("*no one should survive*").

The film ends with disparate television images of youngsters from all over the country (college students from Kolkatta, Jammu, Bangalore, Chennai and various other cities) seen across a plethora of television screens pledging impassioned spirited support for the group and expressing anger at the treatment meted out to them. DJ, Karan, Sukhi, Aslam and Laxman can become a full fledged, valid television event only posthumously. Unlike Ajay Bakshi from *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*, and Shivaji Rao from S.Shankar's *Nayak* (2001) DJ and friends can galvanize and rouse the hitherto silent abstract television 'network audiences' to register violent resistance against the establishment only after (and through) their deaths. The five characters can feature in the old canteen television only through the sum zero of an unyielding form of necropolitics.

Bernard Steigler's conception of 'telecracy' as the new form of democracy, and Nestor Garcia Canclini's ideas around the links between contemporary 'citizenship and consumption' might help locate the final moments of the film better (Steigler 2006; Canclini 2001). Stiegler's broad argument (in his book *'Telecracy against Democracy'* {2006}) is that public opinion gets increasingly replaced by abstract television audiences. A 'telecracy' (a new formation governed primarily by talk shows and by the rules, perceptions and boundaries set by dominant television formats) "short-circuits the normal mechanism of politics and destroys the very foundations of citizenship". As a result television and the wider range of televisual industries are fast becoming the simulacra of the core political sphere in urban centres. Similarly, Garcia Canclini notes that in the last half-century, as the urban experience gets increasingly flagged by a pervasive sort of social atomization and fragmentariness, newer kinds of somatic collectives get fostered. Citizenship according to him has to be always understood in conjunction with everyday acts of

consumption - consumption of commodities, services, and mostly, the media and its whole litany of images and sounds. For Canclini we need to

> "approach citizenship without disassociating it from those activities through which we establish our social belonging, our social networks and which in this globalized era are steeped in consumption"… As populations get increasingly "disillusioned with state, party, and union bureaucracies, the publics turn to radio and television to receive what citizen institutions could not deliver: services, justice, reparations, or just attention" (Canclini, 2001 pp.20)[40]

The constituency of a political party increasingly becomes the constituency of a programme. The collective of the TV becomes the most enduring one – becoming as a result the primary space for moral crises and melodramatic cleansing (like in films like PBDHH). The television studio and the production control room (or in extension any kind of live broadcast space) becomes therefore among the more sacred and fiercely protected architectural spaces in modern political formations. DJ and group's appearance as absent images on TV post their radio hijack poses the most foundational threat to the heart of that political order, forcing it to retaliate in its most brutal form to foreclose all further communication. The penultimate scene in the film is therefore one of moral and social victory, as the group is able to effect immediate tangible alterations in the telecratic scene – a legion of TV screens abound with resounding images of students from different states across India filling in the space that DJ and company couldn't. The film therefore, ends with a kind of dreamscape where the constant tensions between past and present established throughout dissolves completely, as the group lucidly walks into an 'untimely' future. It is a future unencumbered by the partitions of time, as the friends stride into a shiny horizon, blessing a 'contemporary' Bhagat Singh as its last gesture.[41] The film then comes a full circle, ending with the same kind of contemporaneous blur that it began with (where it's impossible to tell if the first lines are spoken by DJ or Azad.)

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[40] Meghna Dilip cites this in her discussion around consumption and public sphere in Rang De Basanti: Consumption Citizenship and Public Sphere (Dilip 2008).

[41] I use the word contemporary in the way Agamben conceptualizes 'contamporaneity' it in his essay '*What Is the Contemporary'(2009):* not as temporal simultaneity but as thematic and perceptual concurrence. In his discussion around the 'untimely', Agamben (in the line of Nietzsche) argues that the task of a philosopher is to be 'untimely' – to have a sort of conceptual distance with the predominant ideas of his time,in order to raise questions against them. In Agamben's schema one becomes contemporaries of individuals in the sense of a vision of the world and relation to things around him/her. DJ and group's struggle is to forge a sort of contamporaneity with the freedom fighters in Sue's film.

Rang De Basanti became a sort of harbinger that ostensibly influenced a new ethic of civic citizenship, codified a new young, political demography, and offered a template for political emotion and civil action in various parts of India. The emboldened, self-conscious 'RDB generation' made its presence felt across television, magazines, blogs, newspapers, advertisements and so on as it increasingly exercised a new lexicon of collective civil action – mass sms'es, candle light vigils, protest walks, internet forums etc. Mehra's film had become a sort of meta-event that reverberated across different media and public pulpits, becoming a larger discursive context which a variety of currents partook of. The film proved to be something of a watershed moment in the history of Indian blogging. Hosting portals like *Blog Bharati* and *The Blogger* reveal not only a preponderance of tags associated with 'RDB', but also a quantum increase in the total registered users itself. Collectives like 'RDB Gen' actively mobilized discussions around the film and in extension, other issues "*that need(ed) to be tackled with the RDB spirit''*. Certain issues and cases surged and swelled in the public eye in the wake of the *RDB* epiphany[42]

Less than a month into the release of the film, a hapless seeming Delhi High Court acquitted all nine accused in the high profile Jessica Lall murder case. Seven years ago, on 29th April 1999, model Jessica Lall was killed by Manu Sharma in an extremely posh and exclusive social get together in New Delhi in the presence of nearly 300 people. Media investigations revealed a tale of utter dereliction – flimsily botched up investigations, slapdash police records, scores of hostile witnesses clearly bought over or threatened, all governed over by a terribly torpid judiciary[43]. A wry

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[42] See *Rang De Blog- As revolutionary as Rang De Basanti* (http://blog.rangde.org/2010/01/rang-de-as-revolutionary-as-rang-de-basanti/)
Also see 7th 2010 Ian A. :*A Nation of Passion* (Available at http://yamuna-writings.blogspot.in/2010/01/rang-de-basanti-afterthoughts.html) (accessed on 3rd march 2012)
Also see march 20, 2006 Makds: '*What can you do,what can we do?'*
http://makds.blogspot.in/2006/03/what-can-you-do-what-can-we do.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+blogspot/yNzYx+(Just+ some+random+thoughts) (accessed on 3rd march 2012)
Also see Churmuri:*Why this Kolaveri di why Not Rang De Basanti:* (accessed on 3rd march 2012)
(https://churumuri.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/why-this-kolaveri-di-to-why-not-rang-de-basanti/)
Also see forums at http://m.indiarailinfo.com/blog/user/69261
[43]Jan 13, 2007; Shoma Chaudhury Is This The Only Protest Theatre in *Tehelka*.
Also see (20 December 2006)"Manu Sharma gets life term". Mumbai: DNA Singh, Sanghita Retrieved 2006-12-27.
Also see . 19 April 2010. '*Supreme Court confirms life term to Manu Sharma*". *The Hindu*

headliner in *The Times of India* that said *No one Killed Jessica*: marked the beginning of a larger outrage - the rinsing through of certain 'techno-urban' (largely class-based) phenomenon. Large sections of college students across North India organized street demonstrations, launched text message campaigns, started email petitions, walks and protested at various places in Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai etc. Various celebrities and public figures joined in, holding candle-light vigils in front of India Gate. A specific vocabulary of protest very clearly stemming from the cinematic was proliferating through sections of civil society. Another high profile case that this sort of enkindled activism helped re-open, was the Priyadarshini Mattoo case. In early 1996, Priyadarshini, a law scholar in Delhi, had been repeatedly stalked, raped and then murdered by one Santosh Kumar Singh, son of a very high ranking IPS officer.[44] In 1999 an Additional Sessions Judge acquitted Singh with the bone-chilling adjunctive remark - "Though I know he is the man who committed the crime, I acquit him giving him the benefit of doubt"[45]. Both cases that swelled up in this sort of a political climate seemed to reach favorable and 'just' solutions – Manu Sharma and Santosh Kumar Singh were both found guilty and convicted by the court once the cases were reopened. These two cases and various others that caught the public eye at the time bore unmistakably conspicuous imprints of *Rang De Basanti*.

Rang De Basanti was the larger emotional syntax and jargon of resistance to manifest it; and blogs, magazines, newspapers etc very self consciously bore its heritage in their identification with the moment. One of the registers most marked by this epiphenomenon were the TV news channels – title tracks of news programmes around these events used songs from Mehra's movie (the song '*Khoon Chalaa'* was used for anti-reservation coverage, other songs like *Roobaroo* were frequent favourites). Just like magazine and newspaper covers, still shots from the film (like that of the group of shirtless boys jumping up towards an overhead plane etc) were used as show templates, students giving sound-bites at these events often included quotes and lyrics of the film, and so on, Summing up this whole theatre of protest, Shoma Chaudhury wrote in an editorial piece in Tehelka:

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[44] July 23, 2006 Mattoo birthday: *Memories, march for justice-Delhi The Times Of India*
[45] July 22, 2006 Lalit Kaul – 'Be there. Be there for a Safer India' *rediff.com*
http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/jul/22guest.htm

> "at one level, the public outcry against the miscarriage of justice in the Jessica and Priyadarshini cases has truly been a spontaneous act of citizenship from people normally not given to acts of citizenship...But a curious theatricality under-ran the entire evening. People were acting in unconscious facsimile. Several people who took the mike that day referred to Rang De Basanti: at times it seemed more than the injustice itself, the film was their inspiration. It had not just intuited a latent public mood; in a curious twist, it had become the mood itself. One of the most interesting things in RDB is the absence of a political framework within which the new generation acts. Director Rakeysh Mehra shows that they're inspired by the patriots, they approximate their passion, but they don't understand them. Their catalysts are purely personal: their friend's honour is besmirched by the Defence Minister, they decide to shoot him. There's also a make believe quality to their heroism: they kill the minister and storm a radio station, but only when they are surrounded by commandoes does it sink in: this is for real. Unfortunately, this absence of the "political" has informed most civil society responses this year." (Chaudhary 2007)

The dominant motif of resurgence and re-awakening wasn't used merely to describe political fervour but was also appropriated to sum the robust economic growth and accretion that the finance/corporate sector was going through at the time. *Business & Economy* magazine, *Tehelka* and other magazines, various television news shows and radio programmes ran content around the film with taglines such as '*lose control', "a country awakens*" and so on to describe a period of sturdy financial progress. These constant signatures to the film's visuals, lyrics and 'spirit' kept *Rang De Basanti* alive in public discourse in various mutated hybrid forms. Mehra's film had become around the period a sort of larger sensory regime, as fragments of the film's audio and video circulated through the annals of various media assemblages creating a lingering affective imprint long after the film had been taken off the theatres. To talk about it was to refer to a certain emotion, spirit, language, visual, music and politics.

Rang De Basanti also reverberated prolifically through the commercial arena of advertisements, especially the erstwhile market of television commercials. Post the watershed summer of 2001, when film production in the subcontinent was finally accorded the legally enfranchised status of an 'industry', marketing for films underwent a drastic and expeditious facelift. Film marketing now involved processes and transactions far beyond movie trailers, posters and cinema halls, as a burgeoning culture of aggressive cross-productions rapidly came into being.[46] Sundry partnerships

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[46] June 22nd 'Film Factory Output Slips 7%' 2004 *Economic Times*
http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2004-06-22/news/27385184_1_film-production-film-industry-hindi (Accessed on 4th march 2012)

were now established with a whole cross-section of products and mediums all of which would now compositely promote the film across a variety of platforms. Films were now advertised from within mobile phone commercials to clothes line advertisements, across a whole plethora of avenues like radio spots, TV commercials, publicity events, product shows. *Rang De Basanti* however took practices of cross-hatched advertising to an altogether new level, especially within the television arena.

Much before its release *Rang De Basanti* entered into a massive collaboration with Coca Cola India (a partnership that some have argued might have even been instrumental in the casting and structuring of the film right from its inception)[47]. The collaboration worked on various levels. Prasoon Joshi, the lyricist and dialogue writer of the film was also then the Creative Head of McCann Erikson, an international advertisement company that had Coca Cola as its client (Dilip 2008). Its interesting to note that Prasoon Joshi was also the person specifically handling the Coca Cola account for the company at the point, fresh from an enormously successful campaign for the company that he had scripted and won accolades for (the 'thanda matlab Coca Cola' series that also won the Golden Lion at Cannes in 2002). Now (as Joshi closely oversaw the brand collaboration), instead of lines specifically written for a commercial, Joshi used tailor-made lines from the film for Coke commercials. The other significant factor in the partnership was clearly Aamir Khan. To probe the context of this partnership however, one needs to briefly look at Coke's history in India.

Like most other multinational brands Coke had a tumultuous first few years in India – after being asked to leave in 1973 by an Indian government adamant on a mass multinational-company exodus(ibid)[48]. Coke returned in 1992-93 as Manmohan Singh re-opened the country's markets. Unlike a number of its competitors however,

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Also see June 28th 2004 Bollywood Gets Most of IDBI Funding' *; Economic Times* http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2004-06-28/news/27419254_1_film-financing-idbi-film-industry (Accessed on 4th march 2012)

[47] Meghna Dilip discusses the link with Coke in 'CONSUMPTION, CITIZENSHIP AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE in RDB (2008:60). Most details about advertisements have been sourced from her thesis.
other sources –Coca Cola Home History available at http://www.coca-colaindia.com/presscenter/Coke_diwali.html ;

[48] Coca Cola history as suggested in http://groovyganges.org/2007/07/history-of-coca-cola-in-india/ ; also discussed in Dilip. (2008:60)

Comment [a3]: citation

Comment [a4]: Who is Dilip? Separate the para about coke history

Coke's post liberalization history has also been marred by a series of glaring public controversies – its factories were accused by various groups for depleting groundwater levels, causing damage to the environment etc. In a major controversy in 2001, the soft drink giant was attacked by the Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment for containing alarmingly high levels of pesticides known to be extremely harmful for humans. In the wake of all of this, the company spent colossal amounts in advertising strategies to mend and reform its somewhat tarnished public image. Part of this large-scale attempt was also the featuring of Aamir Khan as the brand ambassador (who had appeared earlier for them in the hugely successful '*paanch rupaiya*' campaign, again scripted by Joshi. (With a public persona of being a conscientious, socially aware star, Aamir was roped in to corroborate Coke's claim of being an entirely safe family drink. Aamir was a primary cog in the larger overhaul to harvest a new image of socially responsible and conscientious brand. *Rang De Basanti* offered Coke an opportunity to couch itself in this larger 'Indian' rubric of nationalism/youth-patriotism that the film was aiming to muster up that too with a face that had earlier been the main ambassador for the brand[49]. Fittingly Coke launched (for the first time in its corporate history) a special edition of 'RDB bottles' during the launch of the film. These bottles had covers with the basic art of the film, and photos of the 5 friends with one prominent specially designed tag-line – '*Piyo Sar Uthaake*' (ibid). Coke also co-branded the film's music CDs, launched movie collectibles and heralded contests to meet Aamir Khan, 'star, patriot and coke aficionado'. With a spree of advertisement slots being bought by Coke, television breaks were now inundated by this marketing nexus of the film, the star narrative and a particular corporate identity. The cinematic had morphed into a full blown commercial event rapidly percolating through Indian television.

The producers UTV also partnered with the international electronic goods company LG who were launching their new mobile set called LXG across Asian

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[49] See Ajay Mehta; May 29, 2006 '*Adding Fizz to Rang De Coca Cola; DNA*' (available at http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report_adding-fizz-to-rang-de-coca-cola_1032063)
Also see Nov 15, 2006 Rupali Mukherjee '*Now, Bollywood scripts advertising blockbuster*' :, TNN http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2006-11-15/news/27430669_1_clutter-brand-managers-dhoom-ii
Dilip argues that Coke was at the time, also associating itself with projects of "a nationalist/patriotic nature so as to be viewed in a positive light by the Indian public".(64,Dilip)

markets at the time[50]. The new model contained wall papers, ringtones, MP3 songs from the film and a specially designed mobile videogame which had five young friends defeating corrupt politicians in violent battles. LG's marketing strategy was to situate its product within the whole rubric of neo-patriotism that had gripped popular media at the time, abetting consumers to buy the mobile as a natural extension of their national duty (its TV commercial's tagline was "*awaken to this new entertainer*").[51] Television channels also ran exclusively dedicated shows around the film. NDTV aired an initiative called 'Rang De Pathshala' in alliance with Airtel, a talk-show with a tagline "*Express yourself*", wherein the film's cast traveled across different colleges and schools in India talking to students about different issues that affected them. The show started with audio-visual montages from the film, as the actors spoke to young students about politics , corruption, patriotism and other issues that the film also addressed, all within a larger motif of '*awakening the next generation*'. Similarly *Rang De Basanti* range of merchandise was launched in association with the international apparel brand *Provogue*, which was inaugurated by a hugely popularized fashion show where actors and singers from Mehra's film walked the ramp showcasing the new product range[52]. The fashion show, telecast live during primetime on Zee Television was also imbued with an underlying 'patriotic' theme, as the apparel line was modeled on "*the tone, look and message of RDB*" *(*Dilip 2008:65).With various similar tie-ups with corporate entities like 'Club HP', Berger Paints etc *Rang De Basanti*, the cinematic event, emphatically resonated across different television registers like news, advertisements, family channels etc.

A useful template to conceptualize *Rang De Basanti's* movement across its various layers of audiences can be derived from the idea of the 'contagion'. The proliferative, non-linear, rhizomatic movements among large collectives of people both within the film and outside it, has an inherent 'ontogenetic virality' about it – it resembles closely, the movement of a virus (Amit Rai 2011). This movement-quality

[50] 20th feb 2006'*The 'Rang De Basanti' Marketing Revolution'* at indiantelevision.com (http://www.indiantelevision.com/release/y2k6/feb/febrel37.htm)
[51] *The 'Rang De Basanti' Marketing Revolution'* at indiantelevision.com (http://www.indiantelevision.com/release/y2k6/feb/febrel37.htm)
[52] 20th feb, 2006 *The 'Rang De Basanti' Marketing Revolution'* at indiantelevision.com (http://www.indiantelevision.com/release/y2k6/feb/febrel37.htm)

definitively characterizes the audiences galvanized after the death of Sukhi and his friends, the self conscious 'RDB generation' that emanated post the film, and the advertisement-promotion strategies the film innovatively deployed. The rapidly dispersing meme becomes not only the structural pattern but a thematic block that pushes us to think of the film and the idea of the contemporary collective in a slightly different way. The 'wave' that DJ and his friends want to inspire, and the one that is shown to have risen after their death comes to be primarily because of various media assemblages. Students across different colleges in India mobilize themselves around the incident as news of it spreads rapidly through other radio channels, T.V, messages, mails and so on (infact television's 'malfunction' in the film stems primarily from its failure to transmit at the beginning). The 'RDB phenomenon' post the film more prominently resembled the movement of the contagion. Blogs, mass sms's, group E-mails, magazines, newspapers, television shows together formed a mass entity around various cases like Jessica Lal, Priyadarshini Mattoo, the Reservation Bill etc. This was a crowd whose primary modus operandi was predicated on the logic of the contagion – a unique collective identity that gets formed as a piece of information spreads through contact from person to person, soon becoming a formidable formation in its own right. The idea of the crisscrossing, laterally dispersing germinal wave also gets appropriated by corporate strategies as a form of promotion and consumption. The RDB virus also gets capitalized, and the idea of a constantly trickling, percolating political consciousness that permeates through every sphere of life becomes a financial ethic. What slowly begins to get formed is the 'contagion-audience', a collective whose identity and articulations are predicated on the basic principle of the virus. Virality becomes a condition of life – unlike Abhijit Roy's 'live(ly) network', these audiences are not anymore the solidification of chimerical broadcast waves, but the realization of the maxim of the internet spam. *Peepli (Live)* is an interesting film to look at to consider the material fallouts affected by a contagion that spreads *within* the television sector.

<u>Peepli A(live): Eventing the Village</u>

In an interview director Anusha Rizvi once claimed

> "The idea of Peepli Live came while watching a news segment about Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to a district where 100 people had committed suicide. A package was announced by the government as compensation for the families of the dead; however……no compensation or packages were announced that would make sure that these situations do not arise again".[53]

Peepli Lives's humor in a way rests on this idea of inversion— the absence of the living farmer on Television is replaced by the obsessive visualization of the farmer about to die.

The onslaught of satellite television in India and the cumulative fallouts of liberalization processes signaled as Ashis Nandy has observed, a steadfast receding of the 'village' as a conceptual and visual presence from the urban-national imaginary (Nandy 2007). The contemporary conglomeration of cinema, television, new media and billboards incessantly churned out more or less agnate images of the urban experience and consumption. Rural experiences, especially of those involved in agricultural production, was fast relegated to a sort of inky, uncanny presence, appearing only sporadically in its most staid stereotypical forms. This sort of dereliction has, in the last few years, appeared most palpable in the Television media – where despite the steadily worsening general living conditions in the countryside (increasing poverty, exacerbated medical conditions etc) farmer issues found space in mainstream television news primarily in the form of numbers of deaths/suicides. In Anusha Rizvi's film, this slow inexorable march of death-statistics (of anonymous farmers committing suicide unknown to the popular media) suddenly gets disrupted as the next prospective 'number' in the record books announces its death beforehand. In so doing, it upsets and destabilizes the normative temporal order – the tradition of belatedly archiving the names of the dead.

Originally destined to be just another passing non-descript 'number' in a country ravaged by swathes of such tragic instances every year, Natha jilts the basic posthumous status of a suicidal-death. The logic of a State's response to a suicide

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[53] See Interview with Anusha Rizvi : Smita Mitra and Amrita Ghosh (Available at http://www.cerebration.org/anusharizvi.html) (Accessed on 26th june 2012)

fundamentally is, as Talal Asad points out a narrative of remorse - a way of looking back at an unchangeable, intractable past (Asad 2007). The response can be at best a rhetorical one – one of abject helplessness at an act beyond control or redemption. Natha's Hero-Hiralal like declamation however ruptures the otherwise smoothly kempt journey into expiration record-books.[54] The new temporal flow instead invokes the most basic tenet of the State's affirmative politics - the disposition to save and preserve a life that is publicly in jeopardy for no fault of its own. From the public announcement of his death-wish Natha's 'life-force' gets abdicated to now become a part of the state's civic province. He becomes in a sense then the anti-Homo Sacer, whose very provenance is within the civil rights arena, and whose body is of enormous value to the State.[55] His life-force becomes a discursive site fiercely battled over, protected as the core of the very foundations on which civil law and democratic polity rests. In that sense *Peepli (Live)* presents an antipodal diagnosis on the impact of satellite television wreaks on the rural countryside to a film like *Mumbai Se Aaya Mera Dost*. The image of the politically aroused and proactive television audience remains entirely absent right till the end of the film. In the new brand of the Television hyper-event (replete with hoards of competing news channels, 24 hours coverage and und ending analysis shows) the possibility of one singular unequivocal truth that can emotionally move and galvanize viewers (like Ajay's narrative in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*) evaporates completely. What emerges is a jamboree of competing voices, in a culture that lends itself most easily to the form of the satire. The television audience remains enduringly absent, exerting its presence only in daily lists of TRP's, flitting through a long succession of event after event, be it about star affairs, or farmer suicides. The film's satire draws from the internal dramaturgy of the production of the event. While reporters of a Hindi news channel are seen huddled around a conference table discussing the next possible event to manufacture (which range from freak vegetable growth stories to childhood affairs of film stars), an English news channel editor exhorts his reporter to create events in order to garner more TRP's. The event economy perpetually and relentlessly exerts pressure, while

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[54] Hero Hiralal (1981) was a film directed by Ketan Mehta about an auto-rickshaw drover who declares that he'll commit suicide in public after being jilted by his lover.
[55] **Homo sacer** (Latin for "the sacred man" or "the accursed man") is a figure of Roman law:
a person who is banned, may be killed by anybody, but may not be sacrificed in a religious ritual

the 'audience' figures primarily as a weekly numerical chart of TRP ratings (with the success of the manufactured event being constantly gauged by the dint of the ratings). In an incisive comment about the relationship between the television event and time Mary Anne Doane notes that

> "Time *is* only because something happens, and where something happens, there time is"[56]. Television fills time by ensuring that something happens—it organizes itself around the event. There is often a certain slippage between the notion that television covers important events in order to validate itself as a medium and the idea that because an event is covered by television—because it is, in effect, deemed televisual—it is important. This is the significance of the media event, where the referent becomes indissociable from the medium" (Doane 2006:251)

Peepli (Live) dramatizes this gap between the referent and the medium. Contemporary television, observes Doane is a sort of "catastrophe machine, continually corroborating its own signifying problematic" (Doane 2006:251). This is a problematic of "discontinuity and indeterminacy which strives to mimic the experience of the real, a real which in its turn is guaranteed by the contact with death"(ibid In a society where death is concealed to the point that its only general experience is one through society, a certain complex comes to be formed between death, liveness, and the catastrophic event. The greatest strength of TV is its ability to be there — "both on the scene and in your living room" (its not surprising that the ultimate catastrophe is the loss of the signal) (ibid:262). The death that is associated with "catastrophe ensures that television is felt as an immediate collision with the real in all its intractability—bodies in crisis, technology gone awry"(ibid:262). Televisual catastrophe is thus characterized by "everything which it is said not to be—it is expected, predictable, its presence crucial to television's operation" (Doane 2006:252). In fact, catastrophe itself was in some senses a condensation of all the attributes and aspirations of "normal" television (immediacy, urgency, presence, discontinuity, the instantaneous, and hence forgettable).

Taking off on the said news segment, Rizvi had written a film treatment about a villager who announces his suicide (and the ensuing media tizzy it whips up) as early as 2004.[57] On hearing from friends that Aamir Khan was interested in producing

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[56] Doane quotes this line from Ernst Bloch. *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970):124.
[57] Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU

concept films with smaller budgets, Rizvi mailed the treatment to him in a mail that was headed 'The Falling' (the working title of the film then). Khan was at that point working on a Ketan Mehta film titled *Mangal Pandey – The Rising*. Suspecting it to be some sort of a joke on his film's tagline, Khan was initially reluctant to read the synopsis[58]. Eventually, on realizing Rizvi's (a former journalist with NDTV) was a serious idea pitch, Khan began taking keen interest in the project, giving a final go-ahead by early 2005. Made on a fairly small budget and shot in the deep interiors of Madhya Pradesh, Rizvi's film used actors from Habib Tanvir's Naya theatre group and the local residents of villages near the shoot as the primary cast[59]. As the first Indian film to compete in the Sundance Film festival, Rizvi's film about the destitute farmer Natha (Omkar Das Manikpuri) and the media jamboree that surrounds him after getting whiff of his intentions to commit suicide, garnered good responses within the international film festival circuit (while it was invited for a special screening in the Berlin Film Festival, it secured the Best Film prize in the 31st Durban Film festival[60]). Eliciting extremely warm critical reviews the film also went on to be declared a commercial success in the Indian markets. While large number of responses in the media praised *Peepli (Live)* for grittily tackling the issue of farmer suicides, Rizvi repeated on various interviews that her film wasn't about farmer suicides but largely about the rural-urban divide and the national media industry. Having worked in television media for a fairly long tenure, Rizvi's interest also lay in tracking the perceptual upheavals the urban media onslaught wreaks on the rural countryside. *Peepli (Live)* stages a sort of clash between two different regimes of materiality: the pre-TV Peepli and the post-TV Peepli. The pre-media Peepli is clearly associated with a particular matrix of experiences – of the body (of its relationship with its physical surroundings), of a soundscape, of the passage of time, rhythms of speed etc. Natha's body in particular has a very specific affinity with the world around him. He

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[58] Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU
[59] Aug 20 2010 Asif khan Aamir picks stage actors for Peepli Live Entertainment
(http://india.liveoncampus.com/v5/article/7604/Aamir-picks-stage-actors-for-Peepli-Live.html)
Accessed on 2nd july, 2012
[60] Aug 3 2010 '*Peepli Live Named Best Feature Film*' – Hindustan Times: PTI;
(http://www.hindustantimes.com/Entertainment/Bollywood/Peepli-Live-named-Best-First-Feature-Film/Article1-581623.aspx) (Acessed on 2nd july 2012)
Also See PTI Feb 24, 2010 *Peepli Live at the Sundance Film Festival* : Times Of India (Available at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-02-24/news-interviews/28140568_1_anusha-rizvi-peepli-live-first-indian-film)

languorously meanders through fields carelessly caressing trees and crops as he passes them, lies comatose on mud-plated courtyards, perpetually carries broken branches/leave-twigs in his hands and so on. While telling Buddhia about his plan to make the Thakur's heart bleed by crying for help, he trips and falls on cow-dung. Squatting on the ground, with thighs and torso covered with cow-dung, Natha looks up and smiles, then jovially gets up and continues with his plans of extracting compassion from Bhai-Thakur. The moment underscores both a naiveté in his capacity to predict human apathy, and a fundamentally cozy relation that a number of Peepli residents have with the organic geography around them. But the village is also a space ensconced by a climate of looming death and decrepitude. On their way back, after being scruffily rebuffed by Bhai-Thakur Natha and Budhia encounter a series of death-related news. To their surprise the first set of villagers they meet and relate Thakur's absurd suggestion to (of them committing suicide and availing a government grant) don't t reject its ethical and practical validity. They instead endorse it, suggesting that there's nothing wrong if, say, an already sick villager commits suicide to ease off the financial burden off his family. On entering the village, they meet another villager who informs them of Ram Khilavan, another villager's death, trampled by a moving train on railway tracks nearby. Further on, the village grocery-seller informs them of the suicide committed by the village priest's young wife, by jumping into a well. The succession of Memento-mori's the duo encounter seem to nod towards the slow, asphyxiated death that the rural country-side is at various levels inexorably heading towards. Given the serrated economic privation, not only does suicide not appear inconceivable as a plausible step to alleviate conditions, but is also condoned by according it a higher, metaphysical form (two out of the 3 people the brothers meet philosophize it as a spiritual act -"*Ek na ek din to jaani hi hai sabko*"). The general material environment of the village makes the decision to commit suicide not wholly unimaginable both for Natha and the villagers.

The first moment of the television camera's incursion into the village is significant. Sternly briefed by her editor to somehow muster 'more eyeballs', the English ITVN newscaster Nandita Malik decides to pursue a 'farmer-suicide' story a local stringer gives her a lead to. As she and her team, surreptitiously sneak into

Natha's home, the television camera (and the very first one to shoot Natha) seems to visually prefigure his death; a sleeping Natha is shot as if he's a corpse – through reverse extreme close-ups of his forehead, eyes, skin-pores etc. As he wakes up with a jolt, Natha's first response on seeing the television camera is of (an almost prescient) terror, as he yells out in fear. In a prophetic moment, Nandita tries to calm him down by telling him that *"its only a camera... it cant do anything"*. This initial exchange ominously anticipates the media's eventual fetish for the corpsification of Natha's body, the vice-grip its gaze holds his life in, and his ultimate fleeing from his besieged house and the village[61].

As Nandita's story catches on a whole TV media cascade arrives in Peepli, bringing alongside it a whole regime of visuality. The film's camera emulates signature traits of the archetypal jostling TV camera in its representation of Peepli – jerky, handheld, high-contrast, bleached shots constantly zooming in, and mostly trying to scramble to get closer to its subject. The sense these cameras create increasingly becomes reminiscent of a sort of dizzying, fast-paced, fragmentary, and delirious sensory upheaval that has long come to be associated with a modern urban sensorium and experience. The coming of the media in *Peepli (Live)* marks, in some senses the coming of the metropolitan and its corollary arsenal of experiences to the village. Immediately after Nandita's story, small teams of reporters from other news channels start pouring in to Peepli. The material make up of Natha's surroundings undergoes rapid transformations – the hitherto barren courtyard gets inundated with meshes and heaps of wire, walls get stacked up with tripods, the insides of his hut gets washed with white halogen lights, and the sound of generators start filling the aural scape. Human movement also changes the perception of geography both inside and outside Natha's house. In an initial scene the camera follows a visibly disoriented Natha as he moves about his house brimming with journalists randomly moving about everywhere - striding through the bedrooms into the courtyard, from the clothes

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[61] Nandita's *breaking story* about Natha can only converse in a cardboard vocabulary. Words like "utter despair", "struggle" and so on are placed against visuals of villagers made to sit morosely in a line to package together a typical 'rural tragedy' story. Nandita's journalistic discourse it seems doesn't have the linguistic wherewithal to describe lived everyday experience of deprivation. The wry, casual demeanors of the villagers sit oddly against the status of 'tragic sufferers' Nandita's reportage seeks to situate them within. Much of Rizvi's films sense of irony comes from this sort of gap between languages of representation.

washing areas into where Natha's mother lies. Constantly moving in and out, flitting from room to room, dangling and passing wires and cables through windows and so on, the journalists reframe the interiors of Natha's hut.

As the Natha phenomenon gathers more steam in the media eye, the architecture of the entire village begins to radically change shape and texture. The area (hitherto shown untouched by markers of contemporary technology) begins to get re-materialized and re-sharded by various television accoutrements and inventories. The inherently carnival-like nature of the media swooning towards the suicide 'story' materializes into the formation of an actual physical carnival-like space. A veritable carnival (Rizvi's screenplay also refers to this section as 'The Mela') is set up outside Natha's courtyard besides the whole barrage of cameras, OB vans and reporters[62]. A bevy of shops selling bindi's, balloons, bangles, torches, various eateries, cotton candy, chaat etc get set-up; street entertainers like tightrope walkers, jugglers, dancers, mehendi-wallahs etc come, as the area adjoining Natha's courtyard begins to resemble something like a shopping arcade. New structures get constructed – large, temporary wooden edifices to facilitate top-angle long shots for the cameras, new pave-ways to work as roads for cars to travel on, tiny enclosures for media units, separate pavilions for the cops, and a quarantined house for Natha and family. The village Peepli increasingly comes to resemble a live news-studio designed specifically to facilitate live telecast. The coming of television is a messy and chaotic imposition in *Peepli (Live)*. While it inaugurates a new perceptual regime - a surface-level, frenetic disorientation of the senses; the media's incursion leaves the Peepli landscape even more desolate: Natha absconds to the city while the government refuses to grant any financial help to Buddia; and the village, still filled with tatters of posters, wall paintings, left-over cable meshes and wires etc bears only the fossils of an explosive erstwhile event that leaves it none the better.

While the television apparatus recasts the surrounding areas architecturally, it also constructs its own visual history of Natha's life: a television biopic of Natha as the archetypal 'angry, aggrieved farmer' on the verge of a desperate suicide is drawn up. Different television channels recruit various material and human artifacts as

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[62] Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU

evidence to construct their own bildungsroman of Natha's life – an archive of materials (clothes, domestic utensils, swings, broken wall bits etc to build up his life on), a catalogue of spaces (the courtyard, village well, field etc which Natha inhabited), and people (villagers posing as Natha's childhood friends, others lead on to act as his relatives, well-wishers etc). The TV scripted biopic selectively assumes and imposes stock roles on to people in his life to build up the anatomy of a furiously frustrated farmer (the humor of the film, of course arises from the discord between their versions and the actual characters they encounter. For eg the Bharat TV reporter describes Natha's mother' situation as "kaise hoga us maa ka dil jo apni aankhon ke samne apne bete ko maut ke munh mein jaate hue dekh rahi hai. kya ye buri bebas aurat kho dehi apne aankhon ke taare ko." Right behind him Natha's mother nonchalantly smokes a cigarette, wryly apathetic about the whole affair.) The wry humor in Rizvi's film thus erupts in the gap between the discursive language the event is pitched in on TV and the actual emotional tenor of the innards of Natha's hut that the film makes us privy to.

One particular scene symbolically hints at the imposition of the new material regime in Peepli and in Natha's life. As political intrigue around Natha's suicide intensifies, different political parties deploy different gestures to gain political mileage. In a well-publicized, 'surprise' visit, an opposition Dalit leader called Pappu Yadav enigmatically decrees that "*Natha, will definitely die. But Natha will continue to live, even after his death*", and awards him a large T.V set in cardboard carton. It's an interesting moment at various levels. A small, diminutive Natha totters and wobbles, as he desperately tries to hold on to a large, bulky, unwieldy carton, the 'reward' for his courage. A little later the carton is seen again, kept awkwardly in the middle of an otherwise small room already overcrowded with people: unopened, relegated only to being a curious relic for kids to climb and play on in the house with no electricity. The bulky, cumbersome box is an enormous misfit in the house, a dead useless object at odds with everything around it, impeding the regular lives of Natha and family. The unwieldy incursion of the TV inside the house mirrors the maladroit presence of the whole TV media outside- an entirely alien material regime posing as a *gift* for Natha, while invasively refashioning his world within and without.

It's only when the television endowment momentarily lets up and loosens its visibility vice-grip over Natha's house that his erstwhile (pre-TV) organic bond with everything around him gets temporarily re-kindled. Too anxious to sleep, and riled by a son bustling him for an exact 'death date', a restless Natha suddenly feels something nudging his hand. On discovering a baby goat by his bedside, Natha at first peevishly tries to push it away, but as the animal perseveres, Natha hugs the goat, holding it close to him and caressing it in affection. This rare moment of quiet, intimate tenderness can occur only when the media glare momentarily wanes. A long shot taken from behind Natha reveals an artillery of cameras and lights, all trained on Natha, but the moment goes unnoticed underneath the manteau of the night.

This dichotomy between the more organic pre-media Peepli and what it transforms into post the onslaught of the urban-media-technology complex was a phenomenon the film-makers consciously worked towards. In an insightful comment about this Anusha Rizvi observes that on hindsight she feels there were three different 'material' regimes at play in *Peepli (Live)*

> "There were 3 factors at play then, there was the village, the media, and a third invisible factor – the 'factor of us', the unit who actually landed in the village with all our equipment… with lights, cables, trucks, etc. There was over time, a sort of feeling that gradually seeped into the entire unit – of us being the very media (in the village) that we were trying to portray in the film."[63]

Rizvi's self-reflexive analysis hints that spaces and material transformations in certain films also need to be investigated beyond what is just seen on screen. In *Greening the Media* (2012) Toby Miller argues that like most other disciplines within the humanities Cinema Studies also needs to develop a position that responds to the climate change and ecological crises we face today. He argues for an approach where motion picture production is evaluated ecologically - in terms of the despoliatary effects they have on a location while they shoot, during the production. Transformation in the shooting space *during the shooting,* contends Miller, needs to

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[63] Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. (Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU)

urgently be made a part of cinema-space debates[64]. Rizvi's observation points to the inherent violence often implicit in various processes of film-making. *Peepli (Live)*'s production required rigorous shooting sojourns in remote villages not entirely unlike the TV media's within the film. The crew's presence and shooting procedures disrupted the everyday quotidian flows of the village, almost laying siege to a small part of it over weeks – Rizvi recounts the camera crew cutting branches of trees to stick lights on, artificial roads being made for the large number of production cars, heavy technical equipments and cables being kept in designated huts etc; all in all mirroring to a certain extent the unwieldy presence of the television crew in the village in order to extract a desired set of images[65]. One particular experience recounted by Rizvi perhaps also finds its way into the film – she talks of a particular evening when a large herd of goats were being herded back while shooting was underway. Owing to the sound environment requirements the herd was made to stop halfway, till the scene's shooting was over. A kid goat was stopped halfway on one side of a road, while its mother had crossed over to the other side. Rizvi recalls the evident agony of the kid goat struggling to somehow go over to her mother's side while it was stopped by the crew's production manager till the shot was canned. The desperation of the goat at being prevented to cross over to its mother's side, made its way into the film in the form of the scene where Natha tenderly affections a kid goat in the quiet of the night while the television crew sleeps.[66]

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[64] Miller provocatively asks - "What would it mean if media studies were required, as an ordinary part of its work, to evaluate motion-picture production ecologically? What would it make, for example, of Danny Boyle's film The Beach? Thai environmental and pro-democracy activists publicized the arrogant despoliation they experienced when Fox was making this movie in Maya Bay, part of Phi Phi Islands National Park. Natural scenery was bulldozed because it did not fit the fantasy of a tropical idyll. Sand dunes were relocated, flora rearranged, and a "new" strip of coconut palms planted. The producers paid off the government with a donation to the Royal Forestry Department and campaigned with the Tourism Authority of Thailand to twin the film as a promotion for the country. Meanwhile, the next monsoon saw the damaged sand dunes of the region collapse because natural defenses against erosion had been destroyed by Hollywood bulldozers. All the while, director Boyle claimed the film was "raising environmental consciousness" among a local population that was allegedly "behind" Western levels of "awareness". Is this question on our agenda when we examine the film industry? If not, why not?" (From Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell's 'Risk Offscreen' 2011:271-289) Available at http://www.tobymiller.org/images/techenviro/RiskOffscreen.pdf) Accessed on 4th Juy 2012.
[65] Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. (Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU)
[66]Interview with author for Tehelka, Jan 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5UPFTpBvOU

The film's primary commentary on the stark conditions of economic privation in rural India (which Rizvi has repeatedly contended is the main theme of the film, as opposed to that of farmer suicides) is made in its representation of a side character called Hori Mahato. Mahato makes only small, fleeting appearances in the film, always appearing as a silent, silhouetted marginal character either immersed in his work or passing by events at a distance, barely ever interacting with anyone. For the most part, he's seen as a distant gaunt, sinewy figure immersed all day in digging away a hole in the ground, which he is ultimately found dead in. Mahato, in many ways stands at the opposite ends of a spectrum with Natha; and it is via him that the film posits it's most trenchant social critique of economic inequalities in the Indian countryside, and the event industry's devastating myopia. Unlike the sensational figure of the 'suicide-committing farmer', Mahato is characterized by a searing will to live, to persevere and tenaciously rive out a living despite exigent economic conditions. His death (and Rizvi mentions the strong influence of P.Sainath's '*Everyone Loves A Good Draught'*) refers to what some provocatively call a slow 'State genocide' – the slow inexorable death of multitudes in a number of rural spaces owing to large-scale malnutrition, lack of medical amenities, extremely harsh conditions of living etc[67]. Mahato's last days, spent slowly and painstakingly as he dug his own burial hole, culminated in a silent, unseen and tragically 'natural' death. Like his literary namesake (he's influenced by Munshi Premchand's character by the same name in his novel *Godaan* {1936} a tragically Sisyphean character destined to work and die noiselessly for precisely that which he's working for) Mahato dies a forlornly 'ordinary' and unremarkable death, bereft of any of the pathos that a suicide generates. For the indefatigably event-obsessed television media, Mahato's banal death, and the innumerable others like him are like blind-spots, the sort of stories that the English news journalist Nandita says "*No one does these days*".

The main mouthpiece of *Peepli (Live)*'s most incisive critique of the event economy however is the smalltime reporter Rakesh, especially vis a vis his relation

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[67] Rizvi explains that the real life of the actor playing Hori Mahato's character had echoes of the character's life. The actor Ellen Alvia lived near one of the villages the film was being shot in. The crew heard of his demise days before the premiere of the film, and discovered that he'd been suffering from TB for a long time.

with Mahato. Responsible for first giving Natha's flippant decision of committing suicide the form of a news scoop and thereby effectively catalyzing the whole TV carnival, as well as for Natha's ostensible 'death' in the end (in the eyes of the media, since it is his burnt body that is assumed to be Natha's) Rakesh can be rightfully called the primary lynchpin for the narrative's movement. As the jaded, disillusioned local news reporter, convinced that nothing important ever happens in Peepli, he sees the distant shiny world of IDNTV and Nandita Malik as the real firmament of serious, intelligent and rigorous political journalism. As Nandita one day suddenly contacts and recruits him as her local stringer for the farmer suicide story, he starts off as an ardent and exuberant assistant, eager to somehow impress Nandita and find an inroad into the urban media citadel. As the suicide story however snowballs rapidly into an unhinged jamboree, his attitude towards his profession and everything around him undergoes a slow transformation. It is through his cursory encounters with Hori Mahato that the latter gets first introduced in the film.

Rakesh gets increasingly intrigued by the lone cadaverous figure toiling away under a blazing sun at a mud pit that he passes by everyday to go to Peepli. Finally stopping and talking to him one day, Rakesh discovers that Mahato doesn't dig the pit to unearth anything, but to sell the upheaved mud itself, at extremely paltry prices. It's the subsequent sight of the empty pit one day, and the news of Mahato's abrupt death in it, that galvanizes a cardinal shift in the way he makes sense of everything around him. It is in his brooding self-introspection and gradual coming-of-age that the film articulates its primary ideas about the television media in *Peepli (Live)*. Dispirited and ridden by a corrosive self-doubt, he has a long, earnest conversation with Nandita, voicing thereby some of the most foundational questions about the media event - elliptical questions that the film also prods eventually.

Rakesh raises the most fundamental questions. He questions the privileging of Natha's prospective suicide as a grandiose media event while innumerable others like Mahato excruciatingly move towards a quiet but inevitable death. He also questions whether journalism has a 'political' base at all, a suggestion which is resoundingly rejected by Nandita who asks him to look at journalism only and strictly as a profession with its dictates, caveats and compromises, devoid of any exclusive

'political' charge. Rakesh becomes the only character in the whole journalist ridden landscape to actually feel a sort of pathos for Mahato, and draw an implicit connection between the hugely varied response to Mahato's quiet demise and Natha's prospective one. Its only inevitable then, that Rakesh too has to die a quiet, tragic and ambiguous death in the end, unable to fit the central protocols his profession demands of him. Its Rakesh's body - the charred unrecognizable face of the local media unable to comprehend the viewership calibrations of the 'big picture', that fits in the end as the facsimile body of Natha.

Peepli (Live) presents a very bleak prognosis of the Indian Television sector. Unlike *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani,* and *Rang De Basanti* etc Rizvi's film doesn't have a final redemptive scene where 'awakened' television audiences promise retributive action and justice. The television audience infact remains an entirely invisible concept throughout the film, expressing its interests only through quaint (and as Nandita hints, 'dubious') language, like TRP ratings. Unlike the other films there is no one (or group) of 'evil' politicians or businessmen, who's final comeuppance can cleanse and purge the system, nor a particular prescribed mode of action (like joining the government or being "*part of the system"* efficiently and honestly, as *Rang De Basanti* suggests) that can present the prospect of a better tomorrow. The malaise for *Peepli (Live)* is too systemically ingrained. – it lies within the basic structural organization of the 24 hour event-obsessed news channels dependent on sponsors that only evaluate weekly TRP charts. While this chapter investigated the moral vicissitudes of the television event as it travels across some of the recent Hindi films, the following chapter examines the rise of a new form of uncanny as technological objects become omnipresent in our everyday lives.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL UNCANNY

Bhai Saab ye Goat hai, is this a goat?
Ye Goat nahi, movie hain/ This is not a goat it's a movie
Ye boat nahi, movie hai / This is not a boat, it's a movie
Akhbaar nahi movie/ Not a newspaper, a movie)
Ye kabhi kabhi TV hai/ It's also sometimes a TV
Subramanim (is movie)
Aluminum (is movie)
Lafraa nahi, aji pyaar hai/ not scandal, this is love
Deewar (is a movie)/ the wall (is a movie)
Saara Sansaar (is a movie)/ the entire world (is a movie)
Movie-TV Movie-TV Movie-TV
TV pe movie, movie pe TV/ Cinema on TV, TV on cinema
Pesh hai Spice ka naya projector phone, ab saara sansaar movie hai

Introducing Spice's new projector phone, now the whole universe is a TV!

-Spice Mobile Projector Phone Advertisement (released in 2010)

The Spice Popkorn projector phone's utterly fascinating commercial begins with a white stuffed goat. A boy takes out the said goat from inside what seems a television carton as his parents watch from behind. He then projects a movie from a phone projector on to the body of the stuffed goat, as his amazed parents look on in wonder. Next, a group of youngsters are seen lying reclined on a beach projecting a movie from their phones on to the body of a boat on the shore. A young group of boys caught in a traffic jam project a cartoon on a newspaper a man in a car next to them is reading. Next we see a newly wed couple lying in bed, as the wife notices the husband clandestinely watching a cricket match on the ceiling, projected out of his phone. Following this we see a man on whose body an image of a dancing bare skeleton is projected, which then runs from out of his body on to aluminum cans stacked behind him. A bashful young boy projects a rose on the laptop a girl near him is holding. We then see an image of a zebra racing across different walls, shop shutters, billboards

etc. Following this, a cinema hall is seen in which a husband projects his own 'movie' of business pie charts and bar diagrams secretly on the side as his wife and the rest of the audience are engrossed in the movie. In the end we see an antique looking television set in which a new film seems to be projected, making the old rundown TV seem animated as if it were working. Advertisements of technological objects in recent times (especially of cell phones and televisions) seem significantly more prescient than contemporary art or visual theory has been in nodding towards the various perceptual changes these devices bring about in our lives. The Spice Projector phone commercial has a particularly exciting premise – it gestures towards the exhilarating independence the image suddenly enjoys as all sorts of framing-borders seem to abruptly dissolve. All solid physical phenomena then become potentially screen-able spaces, as the freely mobile image now lays siege to solid surfaces everywhere. What is singularly interesting, among the various other things happening in the forty odd seconds (especially as an entry point into the main conceptual arenas this chapter intends to broach) is the slippage of the ephemeral TV screen from '*aluminum*' to '*Subramanium*'. Like all concrete surfaces the body too becomes a potential TV screen, but the shot of a skeleton dancing on the torso of a portly middle aged man (presumably Mr.Subramanium) has significantly more to offer. Not only is the body an abeyant screen, the image itself (the skeleton) is inherently anatomical. It's as if the body-TV is a medium that can also screen densely embryonic images, from under the flesh (the projector can also assume qualities of its epistemic opposite – the x ray scan). This uncanny conglomeration between the body, and the digital image of the body's plasmic inside then extends on to the space around, roaming freely through all material presences nearby.

This can serve as an interesting entry point into the fairly straightforward argument I will try and chase through this chapter. But before that, a quick prologue follows. As I have suggested in the previous chapters, screens of various sorts are a ubiquitous part of our mundane everyday lives today[1]. A consequence of this, suggested by a large body of theory is a significant change not only in the way our

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[1] This is obviously an urban class-based observation about ownership of the televison. Huge sections of urban populations still remain that do not enjoy the wherewithal to access a television set. This particular argument on has to do with television spectators.

bodies negotiate the panoply of screening devices surrounding them, but also at a larger level, in the conventional hegemony of the visual itself. Television (and most screen surfaces) has traditionally been associated with the "general supremacy of the visual" (Verrips 2002:1), but a large section of media scholars, artists, and filmmakers have demonstrated in diverse ways that other corporeal processes are integral to the reception of screens. Infact with the preponderance of digital objects all around us, newer material experiences emerge. These newer digital sensoriums (which largely work through the visual) contribute to the change in the way vision itself is understood – it, now more than ever, becomes a process in which the body, all the different senses and corporeality gets implicated[2]. The established hegemony of optics, of 'seeing' and the primacy of the 'eye' shifts to a more sensuous and bodily form of vision in a world of unrelenting screens [as the Spice commercial's tagline goes – "*Saara sansaar TV hai*" ("*the whole world is a TV now*")]. As a result of these transformations our foundational idea of spectatorship begins to correspondingly shift as the screen gets corporealized and inversely, the spectator's body itself becomes a sort of medium (Wegenstein 2006: Mark B.Hansen 2004 Belting 2005).

While the first chapter investigated the newer regimes of materiality inaugurated by the ubiquitous use of cellular technology, focusing especially on the aural materializing of phantasmatic phone bodies that often get processed into themes of surveillance, terrorism, and new forms of cell phone based romance narratives, the second chapter mapped the complex ways in which the television event materializes a new form of televisual public in recent Hindi films. In this final chapter I revisit the site of the television and cell phone but for a different end. I will look at the experience of a 'new' form of technological uncanny vis a vis the television and the cell phone as it unfolds across the cinematic. The perversely distorted body of the spectator and spectral television presences are increasingly mobilized in what appears to be a new kind of cinematic body-horror that I refer to as 'spectator-horror'. I look

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[2] Various thinkers and artists like Wegenstein (2006), Verrips (2001), Hansen (2004), Synott (1993) Taussig (1993) Schneider (1997) Buck Morss (1993) have argued in various different ways on how the 'eye' is only a part of the whole process of the visual perception, and how visuality actually includes various other kinds of sense perceptions. A large body of work which I will reference subsequently also focuses on the change in vision post the explosion of the digital moment.

at Sanjay Gupta's *Zinda* (2006) and Vikram Kumar's *13B* (2011) as projectiles where a morbid relationship between the TV spectator's mutilated body and the uncanny television set gets extensively processed to evoke a new arena of 'spectatorship horror'. Just as Television becomes the site for the production of the uncanny in *Zinda* and *13 B*, in Ekta Kapoor's *Ragini MMS*, it is the cell phone that becomes the medium through which the technological uncanny begins to articulate itself. I will specifically focus on the form and movement of the MMS and the spectral experience of the cell phone user's body in '*Ragini MMS*'.

The Digital Uncanny

It was as early as the 1960s (when television screens started becoming ubiquitous in regular households in America) that Marshal Mcluhan envisioned a future society inundated with television screens where the main mode of experience would not be the eyes but a conjunction of different senses (the chief of which he claimed, would be the sense of touch). In the provocative (and incredibly far-sighted) book *Understanding Media* (1966) Mcluhan argued that the new medium of TV introduced a 'sensuous' revolution, since its images exerted "a unifying synesthetic force on the sense life of... intensely literate populations" (McLuhan 1966: 315). It was the 'hot' medium of TV (as opposed to the 'cool' and distant medium of film) that served as 'a massive extension of our central nervous systems' enveloping ''Western man in a daily session of synesthesia" (ibid). While the invention of photography and the radio, led to an extension of visual and aural sensory experience, the TV was, for Mcluhan, "an extension of the sense of touch, which involves maximal interplay of all the senses" (ibid.:333). In a discussion of how distinct his ideas about television were given the time of writing, Jojada Verrip opines that:

> "McLuhan's great merit (is) that… he forces us to rethink and revise our fivefold sensorial classification with the sense of vision at the top and the touch at the bottom of the hierarchy. In a sense he not only reverses this hierarchy in case of TV watching, but he also seems to go in the direction of understanding the sensorial experiences of vision, hearing, taste and smell as specific instances of touching or tactility in a physical sense, which I think is crucial for developing deeper insights in what happens when we are confronted with 'moving things or processes', for example, in our environment or on screens of sorts. (2002:32)

McLuhan's work then becomes an extremely sophisticated precursor to the ideas of Laura Marks, Nana Verhoepp and others working on the theme of embodiment and haptic visuality in cinema (Laura Marks 2002, Verhoep 2012). These scholars explore different forms of sensorial responses to screens, destabilizing the conventional role of the optics in visual perception. For Marks haptic visuality is a form of visual perception in which tactility and the sensation of touch becomes central to how an object is perceived (Marks 2002). She develops a critical approach to the spectator's intensely sensual and physical engagement with the image, an approach that focuses on '*grazing*' the image rather than gazing at it from a distance. Marks looks at hazy, unclear images; sensuous imagery that evoke memory of the senses (i.e. water, nature); the depiction of characters in acute states of sensory activity (smelling, sniffing, tasting); panning across the densely textural surface of objects; decaying film and video imagery; optical printing; scratching on the emulsion etc. In a discussion of Mark's work Donato Totaro contends that the haptic image in that sense requires the viewer to contemplate the image as a material presence rather than an easily identifiable representational cog in a narrative wheel (Totaro 2002).

It is important to note the distinctness of the contemporary context within which many of these writers working on the changing relationship of the image, and the body are situated. The question that needs to be confronted head-on is the impact of the digital explosion in the contemporary moment. A large compendium of our banal daily activities now gets carried out by a variety of digital interfaces that pepper our everyday lives. The interaction with these screens and visualizing planes happens in diverse ways and via different senses. In the first chapter I had spoken about how the cell phone is a screen epiphenomenon that gets more and more visually detailed and accomplished by the day. Touchscreen devices (cell phones, Ipads, Ipods) are sensitive screens that inaugurate a new form of materiality where the screen is perceptive to what our fingers touch, while our finger itself cannot independently tell what it touches. The interaction of the Touchscreen, works on a logic of a new kind of vision that is a synthesis of the finger and the eye, wherein the faculty of touch is both degraded and injured (in that the fingers cant sensually differ between what it touches like they can in the 'real' world, and depend purely on the eye to navigate the flat

117

glass screen) and *extended*, in that the innards of the electromagnetic screen become far more prone to it. While *touchscreen* technology kills the autonomy of touch-sensation, it ordains a new form of visuality where the eyes breathe through the fingers. Similarly a large number of screen devices today (televisions, microwaves, laptops) come equipped with voice command technologies – the screens themselves designed to function and respond to specific sound emanations from its users. All in all with the proliferation of umpteen new digital technologies, our negotiation with screens increasingly occurs on sensorial registers where different sense perceptions of touch, sound etc and not just the scopic get mobilized. Screens get corporealized as the body becomes a central part of the visual itself.

In her comprehensive historical exposition of the relation between the window and human experience, Anne Friedberg points to the gradual interchange between the window and the wall (Friedberg 2006). As the window becomes the wall, an ontological shift is catalyzed – the opaque becomes the transparent, and the transparent boxes the 'peripatetic viewer' on all sides, as if living inside a frame[3]. Shiny plexi-glass surfaces become wall like foundations, huge photographs with luminescent cloth under bright lights or magisterial LED screens as billboards constantly and imposingly surround us, structuring our daily geographies and routes of movement. Screens then becomes our primary building substance – large digital imprints serving as architectural monuments and artifacts that surround us and spatially situate us. Different sizes of framed digital moving images start serving as the overarching material conclaves that our bodies momentarily reside in as urban tenants. As a number of contemporary theorists working on the digital suggest, the body itself becomes a sort of medium in which images get created and played out in this hyper screened world (Wegenstein 2006, Verrips 2002, Lenoir 2003, Deleuze 1996, Hansen 2006, Hans Belting 2004) [4]

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[3] Ashiq Khondler provides a detailed description of Friedberg's study (Khondker 2010)
[4] A number of contemporary theorists use Henri Bergson's twin ideas of the body: *l'image du corps* and *l'image de corprs* as their founding premise. While on one hand *l'image du corps* is the way in which the body becomes the necessary intermediate between the self and the reality outside the body; arranging the relation with the outside through the mediation of images (Wegenstein 2005: 29); *L'Image de Corps* considers the body as the perceptive apparatus for the world – in other words, the body itself produces all images (it is 'autoperceptive'). It functions

It is this digital context that has produced a new order of the uncanny. Right from its most traditional conception, the uncanny has always been understood as a basic and unmistakable experience of disorientation - where the world we inhabit everyday suddenly seems strange, alienating or threatening (Collins and Jervis 2008). It is the inexplicable eruption of the disconcerting within the mundane; a foundational indecision "or uncertainty, at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural. And this uncertainty is unsettling, even potentially terrifying, yet also intriguing and fascinating" (ibid: 2). The uncanny testifies to a fundamental sense of disaffection and dislocation that is ubiquitous within modern experience and the modern construction of selfhood. As reasoned thought and 'rationality' become core cultural values, so "the threats posed to them by these recalcitrant experiences, seemingly emanating from 'inside' (the 'unconscious') as much as 'outside', become all the more troubling" (ibid). The traditional 'outside' however – the inanimate objective world has undergone foundational changes in recent years. Formerly solid, inert and quiescent surfaces now become animated, digital images with different kinds of visual expositions constantly threatening to play out on them. Disembodied digital visual technologies, as Philip Carr suggests, trades on and substitutes the same sense of awe and the uncanny previously provided by mystical phenomena (cited in Hollington & Kyprianou 2008). It stands to reason then that we need to think of the uncanny not only as a basic and constitutive aspect of our experience of the modern but as also being closely linked to the technological changes that characterize the modern. In the last two decades, the digital has been the most

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therefore, at the same time as the mirror and the screen for images from outside for our perception.It's the second conception that a number of the aforementioned scholars find fascinatingly resonant for the contemporary digital context. In his influential reading of Bergson, Deleuze imagines the process of perception as selective framing of certain images from the flow of images in the world that are indifferent to the viewer. In other word, the image gets created by us only when we look, frame, and thereby subtract from the general flow of images all around us. Wegenstein discusses the new media theorist Mark Hansen's ideas as he suggests that in the contemporary world of constant screens:
"the human body qua center of indetermination functions as a direct filter of information and creator of image— It serves as living media that make us perceive, project, or remember images. Images have to be thought of as happenings or interventions performed by bodies, which have been exposed to images from the outside. (2006: 62) In that sense, Wegenstein argues, the media are more transmitters instead of being the originary producers of images, and it is the body that actively participates in the reproduction of the images. It's not a surprise therefore, for her that the notion of the "*body as constitutive mediation*" (2005:119) becomes central in today's media and digital image studies.

significant technological development. In his work on spectrality in the media Jeffery Sconce suggests that:

> 'Sound and image without material substance, the electronically mediated worlds of telecommunications often evoke the supernatural by creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form', and by bringing this 'spectral world' into the home, the equipment takes on the appearance of a 'haunted apparatus' [Sconce quoted in *Uncanny Modernity* (2008): 5]

Others like Roland Barthes, Wilem Flusser and Susan Sontag have on different occasions hinted that it might have been the camera that carried this sense of technology as uncanny into twentieth-century culture (Barthes 1980: Flusser 1983: Sontag 1977). Similarly, Tom Gunning has elsewhere noted that photography was experienced 'as an uncanny phenomenon, one which seemed to undermine the unique identities of objects and people ... creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles alongside the concrete world of the senses' (Gunning 1995: 42-43 Elsewhere Hollington and Kyprianou observe that

> The relationship between new technologies and the resurgence of irrational belief is well documented. The development of early photography in the 19th century was … indelibly linked with the rise of spiritualism. It was the very revolutionary newness of the form which encouraged the spiritually minded to imagine the possibilities of recording events which until that point had remained un-recordable. A market was born, and so entered thousands of visual con artists who manipulated photographic processes to give the believers the proof that they had longed for. '*Spirit Photography*' was a boom industry amongst the early adopters of photography, their double exposures, photomontages and cheese-cloth ectoplasm were hailed by many as the ultimate proof of the afterlife, a strange new technology adapted to provide comfort in a time characterised by threatening industrialisation and social economic transformation. Now, the evidence was recordable, a powerful affirmation of the reality of one phenomenon through the technology of another. (Hollington & Kyprianou 2008)[5]

The artificial *image* of the body which was separate from the 'real body', retained traces of an inherent spectrality, a strange phantasmatic presence bereft of the real body. Today, the conjunction of 'disembodied voices' and 'disembodied images' that are pervasive in contemporary communication technologies, are also central to what constitutes an uncanny substructure of modern experience (Hollington & Kyprianou 2008)[6]). Everyday we confront visions of a looming electronically generated

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[5] Hollington and Kyprianou , "Technology and the Uncanny" (paper presented to the EVA conference at the London College of Communication, London, 11-13 July 2008) . Available at http://www.electronicsunset.org/joint_projects/technology_and_the_uncanny, accessed on 22nd july 2012.
[6] Ibid

autonomous world that threatens to substitute this world, or atleast that promises the unmitigated capacity to strongly control it. In the last decade and a half, architectural material is replaced by newer technologies of simulation virtual reality and cyberspace replete with their own "obscure ontological status, and their own uncanny potential for disembodied messages in parallel worlds of simulation where material reality itself seems only to exist as a hallucinatory memory (ibid: Unpaginated)". As thousands of such television like screens increasingly girdle our walls and become a part our surrounding architecture (and as a sensorium altering 3D technology threatens to become a part of our quotidian) the image and the medium itself becomes the new quarter where the uncanny now begins to manifest itself in newer ways.

In this permeable space where the medium becomes corporealized and the body more medial, newer contours of what constitutes horror and fear get drawn. Technology itself becomes a site/sight of abomination as our bodies, inseparable from their newfound technological extensions often take on unfamiliar and potentially grotesque forms. 'Body-horror' a sub-genre of horror fiction in which the horror is principally elicited via the graphic degeneration of the body (through disease, decay, mutilation, parasitism) and the subsequent sense of repulsion and abhorrence, now gets invigorated with various new energies and charges (Badley 1995, Mcroy 2005). In the new matrix of body-screen relationships, horror gets created as the viewer's body often gets disfigured and mutilated into newer potentially eerie shapes. Screens take on overtly 'bodily' personas (used in films like David Cronenberg's '*Videodrome*' (1983) or via the perverse distortion of the viewer-medium relationship {like in Darren Arnofsky's '*Requiem For A Dream'* (2000) or Ben Stiller's *Cable Guy* (1996) or stories of individual screens infiltrated by supernatural phenomenon (like in Tobe Hooper's '*Poltergeist'* (1982) or Gore Verbinski's *The Ring* (2005) Both '*Zinda'* and '*13B'* provide interesting situations of horror in the context of changing relation of the body-screen and the digital image in question here. While the latter presents a scenario where a television set gets inhabited by mortified bodies of an earlier time who in turn start activating the bodies watching the particular television set, *Zinda* presents a distorted TV-viewer relationship where the television becomes

the only extension of senses available to the viewer. Both films trace a new form of uncanny television-spectatorship.

Zinda: TV and the Tortured Spectator

The middle of January of 2006 was an odd time to be reading film websites, magazines, review forums or film gossip columns in newspapers in India. The unlikely catchword the entire movie media circuit seemed peculiarly astir with was 'Korean cinema'. Only a few months ago, one of Hindi film industry's most notorious film re-hashers, Sanjay Gupta, (who'd previously rehashed Oliver Stone's *U-Turn'* (1997) into *Musafir* (2004), infamously lifted Tarantino's cult film 'R*eservoir Dogs'* (1992) for *Kaante* (2002), Peter O Fallon's *Suicide Kings* into *Plan* (2004), and before that the Demi Moore starrer *The Juror* (1996) into *Khauff (2000)*) had announced his next film *Zinda* that was allegedly based on the recent international success *OldBoy* by the South Korean director Parker Chan Wook[7]. The film's outline on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) almost word to word echoed Wook's Korean film – "A man taken and locked up for 14 years (15 in "Oldboy") without any reason, is suddenly released, and has 4 days (5 in "Oldboy") to figure out why this was done to him". The only alterations in the primary plot were at best minor numerological changes; the founding premise seemed an exact copy. Even *Zinda*'s publicity poster looked nearly identical, retaining the two pronged hammer that was by then preeminent in the *Oldboy* iconography circulating the internet. While speculations about 'Show East', the Korean production company that made *Oldboy* suing Sanjay Gupta was doing the rounds, a part of the Indian film media launched a virulent attack on Gupta's brazen creative counterfeiting. Raja Sen of Rediff.com wrote a stinging and immensely popular online open letter to Sanjay Gupta stating why he did not intend to ever buy tickets and watch the film. Sen recounted that

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[7] The film won the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes film festival, besides winning at a number of other international film awards. It opened to a slew of extremely favorable reviews, was highly praised by the President of the jury Quentin Tarantino and and was named among the best Asian films ever by CNN. See- 2008, Gerry Plaza, "CNN: 'Himala' best Asian film in history", *Inquirer Entertainment* December 11th . Available at http://showbizandstyle.inquirer.net/entertainment/entertainment/view/20081112-171695/CNN-Himala-best-Asian-film-in-history, accessed on June 15th 2012.

"during a press conference at the Goa Film Festival last month, you (Sanjay Gupta) categorically told me you've lifted one scene from Chan-wook Park's astonishing Korean film,*Oldboy*. The rest of the film, you assure me, is a whole different story. Friends familiar with the original laugh, and rush to declare this not to be the case, and, having watched a few rushes on screen, I am inclined to believe them. Especially given your track record…. As I said, I refuse to watch *Zinda*. Not just because I've watched and worshipped *Oldboy*, but I find this style of flagrant plagiarism so reprehensible that I, personally, refuse to endorse it, to give you any of my money by buying a ticket. You know what the scary thing is, Mr Gupta? I'm not alone"[8]

As Sen's letter went 'viral', a sort of domino effect raced throughout the English film journalism sector. Sudhish Kamath started his review for *The Hindu* by with a terse tongue in cheek comment:

"We know the way to the DVD library too, Mr. Sanjay Gupta. So if you want us to watch a movie that you are absolutely fascinated with, talk about it in an interview. Don't make the film again. At least, do not replicate it with the same elements. Maybe you could change it a little to feign originality considering you do talk about all your movies like they are the most creative films ever conceived." (The Hindu, Jan 2006)

While various other critical responses pointed to the unmistakable similarity between the two films, a number of reviews praised the technical finesse Gupta's film had managed to accomplish. Like most of Gupta's films *Zinda* had slick production design and treatment, impressive acting by its lead Sanjay Dutt, a bestselling music album and fight sequences quite unlike any other Hindi film[9]. What most reviews did not spend much time on, however were the distinct changes Gupta initiated into his version – the removal of any form of incest, and (crucial to this analysis) a significant change in the way the television screen figures in the Indian version.

Like Wook's film, *Zinda* also builds on this new uncanny mode of perceptual engagement between the televisual and the spectatorial body. The film begins with a shot of a crowded Bangkok street inundated with gleaming neon billboards on high-rises, as hoards of car head-lights and amorphous figures flit past in soft focus. Through this sea of bodies washed in blue neon evanescence emerges the protagonist

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[8] 2006, Raja Sen, 'Why I wont watch Zinda', Jan 20th . Available at
http://www.rediff.com/movies/2006/jan/20raja.htm, accessed on June 15th 2012.
[9] 2006,.Nikhil Kumar, "Zinda a Movie Review"., Available at
http://www.apunkachoice.com/titles/zin/zinda/mid_640/reviews-editor/, accessed on June 15th 2012.
2006, Narbir Gosal , Zinda – A Review, Available at http://planetbollywood.com/Film/Zinda/, accessed on June 15th 2012.

Balajit Roy (Sanjay Dutt) all bloodied and beat up, tottering through what appears like an apathetic crowd, as a voice over begins in the background. Balajit Roy recounts his life story by first gesturing to his special relationship with the passage of time ("*It's said that time heals all wounds, but time itself is my wound... I don't know what time has made me, otherwise I used to be human once*"). This relationship with time becomes a sort of template that runs through *Zinda* (2006). As the title credits fade in, the film cuts to a flashback completely disparate in mood and texture. We see a visibly younger, sprightly Balajit Roy celebrating his first marriage anniversary with his wife Nisha (*Celina Jaitely*) and his closest friend Joy (*Mahesh Manjrekar*) in a plush Bangkok restaurant. Bala, we're told is a software engineer who's just shifted to Bangkok with his wife to lead what he expects to be his 'dream life' in a "*dream house*"- a sprawling sea-facing bungalow with a jettee protruding deep into the coast waters. Within days of their anniversary, we're shown Nisha receiving news of her pregnancy. But as she rushes towards the jettee to inform her husband (who she sees there moments ago), Bala seems to have mysteriously disappeared without a trace, only his watch and tools remaining in the jetee surrounded by the sea on three sides. We then see a pair of brown shoes kick open a trapdoor to slide in a tray of food. The opened trapdoor reveals a haggard, slightly crazed Bala prostrate on the ground, stretching out immediately to cling on to the shoe, desperately begging to be let out or at least be told why he's being kept prisoner for months on end *("its been three months... atleast tell me why you're keeping me here, or what I've done").*

The better part of the first half of the film is devoted to Bala's life as he's kept prisoner in the eerie, black-stoned, blue-lit room with only a television set (and a cctv ceiling camera trained on him) for company for nearly fourteen years. The film initially evokes the sheer terror of Bala's unbearable isolation through the food he's made to eat during his captivity. Bala is unrelentingly fed only fried wantons for the entire 14 year period, as a long montage of successive trays of identical wantons sliding through the trapdoor indicates. It is through the olfactory that the torturous sameness of Bala's life is suggested, as close ups of the wantons (placed alongside Bala's expressions of disgust at seeing them) invoke a sense of nausea and claustrophobia. The food itself becomes tactile and tasteable - Bala's inner repulsion

124

almost visualized through close ups of the oozing fried porous skin of the inexorably unchanging oily wantons. It's while eating these wantons that Bala is also seen watching the TV set, the squeamishness of the food almost extending and effecting the various discordant images the screen placidly projects. Balajit Roy's experience of the TV during his prolonged quarantine opens up interesting ideas around the arena of televisual spectatorship. The TV set isn't just the only portal to the world outside, in the staggering absence of anything else it *becomes* the outside world. It serves as the only evidence of the existence of sentient beings outside of himself, and of his cell not being a post apocalyptic nucleus in what seems an extinct, cadaverous world (in Wook's original, the protagonist sums this up with the dialogue – "*The TV is both a clock and a calendar, it's your school, home, church, friend… life"*).

Our body always attempts to exist *in relation*, in trying to position itself according to other phenomenological occurrences. The TV in Bala's one room-universe becomes the quintessential *other*, the only sample of animation to pitt oneself against. It serves not merely as the synechdochical reassurance of there being a world outside, but also as the defining principle for Bala's body to be defined as a body at all in the all-nullifying void it finds itself plunged into. The television and the spectator co-constitute each other, with Bala's corporeal body also bleeding into the images he receives via the TV screen. The electronic images thus get ascribed with a thick carnal density - as the images become for him the only things to see, smell, touch, and hear within the room. At the heart of his punishment is the scrunching up of sensory experience. He only tastes the same food for 14 years, smells the same scents, touches the same surfaces of his cobbled wall, the iron door and his bed and sees only the insides of the room. The visuals on the TV screen assume a special 'haptic' charge as the images become the only tactile connect Bala can possibly forge with the world outside (Marks 2004). Television in such a scenario has to serve as a surrogate sphere of sensory experience. It becomes the somatic presence that stands in for the erstwhile material world he earlier engaged with through sensory perception.

In his grand work *Corpus* (1992) Jean Luc Nancy talks about the body's relation to a community of other bodies, and the sheer impossibility of conceiving of the body outside of this relationship. "Bodies are first and always others*",* suggests

Nancy, *"the other is a body because only a body is other"* (Nancy 1994:31). [10]At the face of it, this statement appears a trite tautology, but what Nancy actually alludes to is "the inherent alterity of any body is the condition sine qua non of being as such, of being a particular body - a body that is exposed to its own extremities" (ibid). In a similar vein, Gail Weiss develops a theory of embodiment as *intercorporeality*. For her, to think of embodiment through such a lens is to inherently acknowledge that "the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non human bodies" (Weiss 2001: 5). In the absence of anything else Bala's room functions as an *inter-corporeal* zone, and his body retains traces of its former self only by repositioning its relationship with the TV - the latter (in the otherwise unchanging panoply of tastes, smells, and touch etc) now provides the sole source of diverse sensory engagement. The television obviously isn't just a device filtered via our sensory apparatus but a contiguous extension of it - Bala's body itself becomes both the perceptive screen on which the images play out as well as the primary producer of those very images (like a dramatic exaggeration of Bergson's notion of the 'corpocentric*' body* discussed earlier.)

But as the electronic device coalesces into a basic sensory extension of the body, the elemental question that gets posed is about the transformation Bala undergoes. In such a hybrid space what does Bala/the TV spectator conceptually become? Recent ideas around technology and the radical reconsideration they propose of what it means to be human, can help in pushing this question further. Swathes of theorists in the recent years have suggested that given the various ways in which we have started to merge with machines, we're increasingly becoming 'posthuman' (Haraway 1985, Pepperell 1995, Hayles 1995). For Katherine Hayles, the "posthuman is not a being but a point of view that privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, that views consciousness as an epiphenomenon rather than the seat of human identity*"* (Wegenstein 2006: 10*)*. The body via such a perspective functions as an original but largely substitutable set of prostheses, that have the capacity to articulate humanness through 'intelligent machines'. As the distorted body vacates its

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[10] Cited- (Wegenstein 2006: 7)

erstwhile place in regimes of sensory perception, Machines, especially communication technologies become the site that constitutes 'human-ness'.

Bala too works as an amalgam, a 'material-informational' entity who's capacity to remain human is dependent on his prosthetic senses. At various points in the film Bala's voiceover talks of a time "*when he too used to be human*" in contrast to the "*thing he has become now*". The horror of Bala's experience (and the perverse transformation into the abhorrent "thing" he has mutated into) also stems from his relationship with television. In a split-screen montage sequence we see Bala stonily looking at a whole diverse coterie of television programs while eating wantons. He sees different movies, cartoons, anime, cooking shows, soaps, travel shows, sport events and so on. Yet throughout this diverse body of programming content, his face remains eerily blank, emotionless and unchanging (appropriating almost the unfailing staleness of the food he's eating). It is as if the sequence provides us with hints about the slow withering and decaying of his senses (traditionally seen as the markers of human-ness in bodies – a human can smell, touch, hear, and mainly, feel) and the gradual adoption of the TV as the prosthetic extension through which the 'world' is 'sensed'. The act of '*watching*' the television therefore is a necessary exercise to resuscitate, preserve, and thereby alter the senses - but is overall, a transaction completely bereft of emotions. Sanjay Dutt's blank face then has to do with the gradual transformation of the way the images are consumed by him, and the erasure of all kinds of emotion. His transformation into an 'inhuman' bestial entity is closely tied to the seamless conjoining of the TV with his sensory setup, and the dwindling of his emotional connection with the images he's confronted with. Television and Bala's practices of viewing it are therefore, central for the production of the awe-inspiring 'monster' we later meet Bala as. The technological uncanny now arises at the uncertain intersection of the human and the technological object (the spectator and the television), as both collapse into each other to create a new disquieting unfamiliar entity

There are two screens in Bala's cell: the wall mirror (that he's shown staring into a number of times) and the television. Ordinarily, while the former mimetically reproduces an image of the viewer the latter supplies images from everywhere but of

its own location and viewer. In Bala's universe both image-screens seem to be in intense dialogue with his body. On different occasions the TV also serves as a screen/mirror that visualizes Bala's interior paranoia and fears. At one particular point Bala has a terrifying nightmare – he wakes up from sleep to see his wife Nisha sitting on his bed. As he starts talking to her he sees blood oozing out of a slit in her neck and within seconds her severed head drops down onto the bed. A petrified Bala rushes to the corner of the room hiding his face into the wall to avoid seeing the image behind him. The very next day the television seems to visualize and thereby realize it for him. Bala comes across a news story which reports the gruesome murder of his wife, and names him, Balajit Roy, as the chief suspect for the murder (his fingerprints are allegedly discovered on the scene of the crime). The television seems to take on a supra-natural quality – a sensory prosthetic that materializes the worst fears within the deepest recesses of Bala's mind. Utterly distraught at the news and his sheer incapacity to do anything, Bala picks up his food bowl and flings it at what appears to be the television. Yet in what seems a deliberate directional axis jump in the editing, the bowl is actually flung at the wall mirror which shatters into shards. Bala's violent response is veered towards the destruction of his original self (his mirror image and not the TV), the mirror then almost symbolically becoming the instrument for self annihilation as he picks up a long pointy shard and slits his veins with it.

The television is also crucial in understanding Bala's relation with time throughout the narrative, and the temporal arrangement of the film's structure at large. With the coming of modern penitentiary jurisprudence, the notion of punishment undergoes a regime shift - punishment through physical pain graduates into punishment via temporal pain. 200 whips become 20 years of imprisonment. The passage of time itself (the very 'being' of the convicted person) gets subjugated into a form of punishment, a larger cumulative experience of pain. For Bala it is the prospect of the eternal deferral of knowledge about this inexplicable plundering of his time (while the rest of the world plunges ahead in different paces, as his TV shows show him) that becomes torturous. The archiving and recording of this 'history' of a dead time *literally* becomes a painful body wound (the film begins with the line "*it is said that time can heal any wound… but time itself is my wound*") as he marks each

passing year in captivity with a deep glass gash in his body. The 'time' in the cell thus leaves actual lasting tactile imprints on his flesh, changing his relationship to skins and flesh forever. The TV set and the everyday archive of television news becomes for Bala, the only markers of plotting time experientially and retaining memory. He sees Princess Diana's funeral, the millennium celebrations, the Indo-Pak War, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, the Tsunami, the Australian cricket team's World Cup victory, and so on. All these television events serve as signposts to array his memory of the period, their images forging a special affective connection with his flesh.

On being released after the completion of his fourteenth year in confinement, Bala can rely only on the most specific of his senses to navigate the city in search of his captor: the sense of smell and of taste. He hires a taxi [driven by his soon to be companion Jenny (Lara Dutta)] to drive to all the Chinese food outlets in town in order to taste their chicken wanton preparations, certain that he'd be able to tell the particular hotel where the fried wantons he ate for 14 years were prepared. 'Smell-taste' is the most resolutely specific and individual of all senses with a strong relation to emotional memory. It is also the sense that is most assaulted by repetition during his incarceration, and the one he hasn't used at all in 14 ears of a solely TV based sensorium. On coming out Bala uses the sovereignty of these abused and mutilated senses as evidence to follow the trail of revenge in what is a completely alien urban scape for him.

In a fascinating essay called the *Logic Of Smell* (the title a clear play on Deleuze's essay with a similar name called '*The Logic of Sense'*) Laura Marks scrutinizes the faculty of smell, its usage in various haptic images and its specific sort of materiality that "is inherently resistant to instrumental uses" (2002: 114). Looking at corporate endeavors such as *iSMELL* (part of the company *DigiScents* that produced computer gaming hardware that ejected designed sets of smells at fixed points to give the player a 'realistic feel' of the gaming environment) and their subsequent commercial failure, Marks suggests that smell is a sense perception that inherently resists idealization and insists on particularity of phenomenon more than all our other perceptions (ibid: 115). Of all the senses, smell she contends is the most

privately mimetic and calls upon a semiotics so resolutely specific that all attempts at imposing a unified, idealized, standardized pecking order collapse. Urban post-industrial society, she explains is increasingly dominated by symbolic signage – corporate capitalism requires to "disembody meaning into abstract, exchangeable and easily consumable*"* forms (ibid: 116). It has to annex smell into a small recognizable branded few – the smell of Nescafe coffee, Ponds soap, Tetley tea, a particular shampoo and so on. But it's aspiration to unify smell experience like visual experience, has according to Marks, failed till now given its obstinately sovereign and intensely personal and bodily quality.

Bala in many ways presents a perverted and distorted form of the perfect consumer – he consumes a product till the point it becomes impossible for him to survive without it and his senses can respond only to the sensual appendages of that product alone (the captor interestingly, is also a business tycoon, who says his "actual business" was to make Bala into the "*perfect sample*".) On coming out therefore his crippled smell and taste faculties (ones damaged to the point that they can only now recognize their forced diet) get wielded as the only weapon to unearth and track his tormentor with. *Zinda* largely, is a film about the senses. Balajit Roy's 'purgatory', as I've argued has to do with the degradation of the senses. Throughout the fourteen years there's a CCTV camera on the wall of Bala's cell incessantly watching him. When he's released, the excruciatingly silent eyes of the camera take the form of the mysterious voice on a cell phone he finds in his pocket. The malaise in his life sheds its quiet optical form to become a phantasmatic aural presence on the phone (the phone's ringtone, significantly is the same music that Bala hears for 14 years whenever valium gas is filled into his chamber to wash/clean him etc). To counter this antagonist of the senses, Bala also uses his own debilitated sense perceptions. As pointed out, Bala wields the gustatory and the olfactory to counter his mysterious aural nemesis, his nose and tongue guiding him through the opaque and threatening landscape of Bangkok to a place where he can find out information about the voice on the phone. Once he actually comes into contact with the bodies of his captivators, his assault resorts to the most 'bodily' of his senses – the flesh. Bala's own relation with his skin, undergoes a certain ontological change since it's singed with the markers of

televisual time, his own flesh becomes the tactile inventory of the time he spent as a captive. His methods of 'questioning' about that time spent also therefore have to do with the flesh – he pulls out people's teeth with a hammer, puts a driller into a person's shoulder, peels off another's skin; and so on.

Didier Anzieu introduces an interesting concept of the "skin ego" within which he draws a comparison between the complexity of the skin's different functions that is "anatomical, physiological, cultural—and the complexity of the psychic ego" (cited in Wegenstein 2005: 25*)*. The skin works as the primal *interface* between *me* and the *other* by enveloping the ego and providing a secure covering for it, while on the other hand demarcating and dividing it from the whole outer world.[11] Bala's sense of perceptual demarcation between the world and himself gets completely destroyed during his tenure in his cell. His own skin becomes only pure affect – the pain serving as the only realization of his existence, and the 'wound of time' he has to bear. His basic sense of the integrity of the other's skin therefore seems to have completely withered away, till the point Jenny rekindles and re-animates it by being physically intimate with her (its just when jenny kisses him that a song breaks out with the words "the *breath still runs, the blood still flows… could it be that I'm still alive*"/ "*chal rahi hai saanse, beh raha hai lahoo, kya main Zinda hun"*. Jenny is his "*precious thing*" because she changes his relationship with his own skin and flesh).

Oldboy's plot premise, in some ways was also founded on a really complex terrain of the stigma around incestuous love. The protagonist's Oh Dae Su's (Choi Min Sik) 'folly' when he's young is that he sees a kid Woo Jin ('Rohit' here) being sexually involved with his sister Soo-ah and spreads the news of their affair throughout the school (resulting ultimately in her suicide). Woo Jin's revenge, after 16 years, is also cast in the same coin. He facilitates a sexual relationship between Oh Dae Su's and the young chef Mi-do after Daee Su's release, revealing only much later that Mi-Do is actually Oh Dae Su's own daughter. *Zinda* however removes the incest

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[11] Anzieu suggests that among our perceptive organs the skin remains the most vital one: one can hypothetically live despite being blind, deaf, and without the senses of taste and smell, but lacking the integrity of the major part of the skin organ, it would be impossible to survive. The skin has also the greatest mass (20 percent of the total body weight of a newborn and 18 percent of an adult's weight), and occupies the largest surface (1800 sq.cm. of the newborn, and 2500 sq. cm. of the adult) of all our organs.(Anzieu 1995)

angle in the story almost entirely. The impelling agency behind the whole imprisonment-torture-revenge saga in Sanjay Gupta's film is a hyper-paranoid patriarchal and at times misogynistic imagination. Bala's inadvertent 'crime' during his schooldays is that he fuels a rumor about having slept with Rohit's sister who also happens to be in the same school. Traumatized at being referred to as a 'prostitute', Rohit's sister commits suicide by burning herself in front of a helpless eight year old Rohit. Rohit's obsessive fixation about the past however, seems not so much about the death of his sister but about the tag of her being a woman of 'bad character'. He viciously stabs Rohit's friend Joy (Mahesh Manjrekar) by stabbing him with a snooker cue, only because Joy refers to her as a "*slut*" (while recounting the whole school episode to Bala on the phone), all the time screaming "*my sister was not a slut*".

The entire grandiose machination to extract the perfect revenge is also based on a plan to 'dishonour' the bodies of women in Bala's life. Rohit (presumably) has an affair with Bala's wife, and meticulously brings up Bala's daughter to have him witness her final moral "destruction" ("*tabahi*"). His "final attack" on Bala also involves television screens - just this time fancy LCD television screens hanging in Rohit's office. Except this time the screens project footage from CCTV cameras - images of a young adolescent girl standing meekly as animated middle aged men shout out figures, presumably to 'buy' her, are seen on the TV screens. Rohit's ultimate act of revenge and his final wielding of the television is to inflict on Bala the trauma of witnessing his daughter's (the young girl seen on the screen) 'de-sacralization' via screens. In the final moments of the film, Rohit instigates Bala by telling him that his daughter *"will be sold" ("Teri Beti bikegi"*), that videos of her body will be made, that porn CDs involving her will be sold, and that her image will travel endlessly across the internet (all the while Bala barking out desperate 'no's!). A desperate Bala then begs Rohit to save his daughter, telling him that he'd even cut out his own tongue if Rohit demanded (ready to sacrifice even his flesh to save the 'integrity' of his daughter.).And as the tension reaches a crescendo, Rohit (in slow motion and a high drama background score) yells out "your daughter will be fuuu…(fucked)" - not being able to bear hearing the words Bala pushes Rohit off the

high storey apartment balcony. The whole premise of the technological uncanny in *Zinda*: be it the mutilation of Bala's perceptual set-up, the sudden appearance of a headless Nisha (followed by its actualization in the TV news), or the final apparition of Bala's daughter on the TV screens in Rohit's office, seems closely connected to a historical affront to feminine morality.

13B: Terror Has a New Address – Televising Specters ("TV mein kuch hai")

In her latest work *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema* (2012) Sangita Gopal provides a thematic typology and a detailed historical lineage of the Hindi horror film of the last few decades. She distinguishes between two particular key moments in the tradition: an earlier moment beginning in the 1970s with a spate of low budget B-circuit productions made by the prolific Ramsay brothers[12] that were released right up until 1990, and a newer coterie of post liberalization films starting with *Raat* (1992), followed by *Raaz* (2002) *Bhoot* (2003), *Phoonk (2008), 1920* (2011), and *13B* (2011) which she categorizes as 'New Horror'.

For Gopal, early Hindi horror films were "*made conspicuous by their relative absence*" during the classic period of Hindi cinema (1945-70)[13]. The horror film's belated arrival can be earmarked around the early 1970s when a succession of campy, low budget, B-circuit horror films made by the Ramsay "cottage industry*"* began circuiting in theatres at the smaller centers[14]. Despite the prominent 'monster' track, many of these movies were known for being unseamly mishmashes of tropes extracted from the reigning generic form – they often included healthy doses of elaborate song and dance routines, action sequences, comedy, romance, and family melodrama (all peppered alongside stock situations involving ancient curses, gory murders, and intra-family monsters). Significantly, the horror in these films would largely "function exclusively on the field of the social"– the monster (usually the

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[12] The more popular Ramsay brothers films included *Do Gaj Zameen Ke Neeche* (1972), *Darwaaza* (1978), *Hotel* (1981), *Veerana* (1988) and *Shaitani Ilaka* (1990)

[13] This was a period largely dominated by what Ravi Vasudevan has described as the *omnibus form* of the 'social films' (2012: 93).

[14] Kartik Nair *Ramsay Brothers: The Men, The Movies, The Memory* Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU, 2010

product of curses cast hundreds of years ago) would unleash itself on a larger social collective (usually a group of friends as well as a whole neighboring village), and the collective would in the end work together towards enacting the exorcism. (Gopal 2012: 99*)* The realm of the monster was socially, and geographically contiguous (often a deep basement of the Bungalow the main group lives or a ramshackled old part of a manor house) and commonly known space that characters could easily traverse and access if they wanted. The lair of the evil in these earlier set of films, contends Gopal, was not a closely concealed or invisible realm (ibid: 101).

New Horror on the other hand, started with the release of Ram Gopal Verma's '*Raat*' (1992) which was especially crucial in its expressly unambiguous desire to break out of the melodramatic and unrealistic format that the Ramsay horror films had since cemented (ibid). The primary drive in *Raat* (and all the aforementioned films that released over the following decade) was to announce a radical break from the earlier moment by being firstly, 'naturalistic', and deflecting the horror on to a much more interiorized psychological arena (ibid). The source of horror is not seen anymore, its presence is merely indicated either by placing the camera as a point of view of the spirit's optical field (usually as it creeps in on or surreptitiously watches the protagonist) or just by showing the sheer horror in the face of characters that see 'something'. New horror is based on individualistic psychology rather than folklore, and focuses on upwardly mobile, urban couples that speak in the language of science, progress and development. This new phenomenology of horror works through affect created by technologies of sound, shaky steadicam and handheld camera movements with quick, jolting cuts (ibid 104-107). Horror isn't situated in the archetypal haunted bungalows {a situation that only presents itself in spoofs or children's ghost films like *Bhootnath* (2008) today} but in modern, fancily designed apartments and swanky high rise buildings. Instead of cobwebbed, sinister looking interiors with dark shadowy corners and hidden labyrinthine passages these films have clean, ordered, almost sterile looking interiors where horror is evoked through everyday material objects like fridges, televisions, cell phones, lights etc (ibid). Replete with a number of these new characteristics, *13B* also significantly layers and enriches the possibilities of this new sub genre even further

After winning the national award for his film '*Silent Scream'* in 1999, Vikram Kumar wanted to work on the burgeoning obsession for television soaps that was raging across most parts of India at the time. By 2008 Vikram had written a short treatment for a film that he had tentatively titled 'Channel', about a ghost-ridden television set that played a daily soap which predicted the lives of the family watching it. As veteran cinematographer P.C Sreeram, art director Samir Chanda and editor Sreekar Prasad came on board, Vikram Kumar went on to direct what he calls the first full length feature film'. While the Tamil version of the film went on to become a resounding commercial success, the Hindi version released as *13B: Fear Has a New Address* (2011), allegedly managed moderately good returns as well. The film also garnered relatively favorable reviews, with almost every response flagging the new distinct form of the supernatural presented in the film. Nikhat Kazmi of the *Times of India* noted that it was

> "a topical dig on the 21st century global obsession: the all-pervasive and prying influence of television which seems to have completely taken over our lives. And if that's not a strong-enough statutory warning, the innocuous idiot box may soon be replaced by the inimical mobile as a sanity-threatening device, it concludes";[15]

Elvis D'silva of Rediff.com noted that it was only a matter of time before a *desi* film came along that cast the television set as an important character in a motion picture".[16] Within a few months, it was announced that the Hollywood studio Weinstein Company was planning to buy the script from Kumar, validating what a number of people in the media had called a 'new direction not only in Indian horror but in horror ideas across the world[17].

Manohar (Mahadevan) and his family (which includes his wife, mother, brother, brother's wife and two kids) have just shifted to a swanky new flat in a high rise building. Right from the beginning small things seem to be going oddly wrong in the flat – the milk gets sour everyday, no nails can be bored into walls to hang deity pictures, and inexplicable tiny accidents. It seems to be particularly odd for Manohar

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[15] See *13B Review*: 2009, Nikhat Kazmi,"" *Times Of India* 5th March.
[16] See- 2009, Elvis D'Silva, *Terrifying Telly Tales*, *Rediff.com,* March 6th. Available at http://www.rediff.com/movies/2009/mar/06hindi-review-13b.htm, accessed on June 12th 2012
[17] Also See- 2009, Joginder Tuteja, 'Hollywood shows interest in Hindi horror film '13B'. 17th March. Available at *http://www.bollywood.com/hollywood-shows-interest-hindi-horror-film-13b*, accessed on June 12th 2012.

specifically - the building lift never works when he tries using it alone, while it plies fine for everyone else, and electricity switches suddenly seem to not work when he's handling them. He begins to actually get worried when he realizes that whenever he takes a picture of himself with his cell phone within the premises of the house the picture comes distorted whereas everyone else's picture from that very cell phone seems to get captured just fine. The real trouble however begins when one day Manohar stumbles upon a daily soap called '*Sab Khairiyat Hai*' (he doesn't really stumble upon it, the TV gets automatically switched on at 13:00 hours everyday for the show, and for the next 30 minutes all remote controls and buttons get mysteriously deactivated). Soon Manohar realizes that the soap (which has characters almost mirroring those in his family) has a storyline that predicts exactly what is about to happen to his own family. Things soon take a sinister turn; the television soap shows the younger wife having a terrible accident and a subsequent miscarriage. And surely enough Manohar's wife Priya (Neetu Chandra) also has a fatal accident that causes a miscarriage. Manohar goes to a family friend Dr Shinde (Sachin Khedekar) who has some sort of knowledge of paranormal activities, who advises him to try and find out exactly what it is the ghosts inside his TV are trying to communicate to him. Within a few days, Manohar is led to discover a photo album buried deep inside his compound garden. Inside, he's shocked to find pictures dated from thirty years ago (1977) of the people he sees in the serial everyday, looking just the same as they do now. Extremely alarmed at the growing accidents the soap seems to be predicting, Manohar and his police inspector friend Shiva (Manohar refuses to tell his whole family about the ordeal, given that he and his brother have taken a hefty loan from the bank to buy this house and they have no option but to stay in the house) go to a newspaper archive to search for events around the time the photo is dated. Manohar soon recognizes the photo of one of the characters in the serial in the paper. It turns out that the girl Chitra, was a famous news reporter thirty years ago who lived with her mother (Suhasini Mulay), brothers Ganesh and Mohan (Amat Upadhyay) and Ashok (Deepak Dobriyal), their wives and kids in 13B Kailash Vihar (in the same place Manohar's building was built on). On the day of Chitra's wedding, a young eccentric man calling himself Sai Ram comes to their house, insisting that he loves Chitra and watches her on the TV news everyday and he wants to marry her. Chitra's brothers shoo him

136

away, and that night the news of SaiRam's suicide comes. Within days of Sai Ram's suicide Chitra and her whole family (barring the mentally ill brother Ashok) are murdered. The police arrests Ashok, given that he's the only person present in the house, and all possible evidence points to him. Discovering all this via old newspaper reports Manohar and Shiv try and find the asylum in which Ashok is still kept.

'*Sab Khairiyat Hai'* however has an episode in which the whole family gets brutally hammered to death (just like Chitra's family was 30years ago). Frantically worried about his family, Shiva rushes to Dr Shinde giving him air-tickets for his family to leave 13B and requests him to personally hand the tickets to his family. When Dr Shinde reaches Manohar's house late in the night, the TV suddenly starts playing. Chitra appears on screen, and addresses Shinde directly – accusing him of their murders and the unjust indictment of their brother Ashok. It is then revealed that Chitra's lover Sairam, who had committed suicide was actually Dr. Shinde's younger brother. After Sai Ram committed suicide Shinde decided to avenge his death killing those he thought responsible. Stunned by the sudden appearance of people he had killed years ago, Dr. Shinde starts breaking the TV screen with a hammer, abusing and cursing it all the while. As Manohar's family comes rushing to the living room at the sound of the commotion, they see a crazed Dr Shinde hammering away at the TV with a hammer. Shinde however starts hallucinating. Just as Shinde advances towards the family with the hammer (just like he had all those years ago) Manohar reaches the flat. Seeing the whole scene he attacks Shinde with a sledgehammer, killing him. The film ends with everything back to normal, all the electronic appliances seem to be running just fine, and the spectral presences seem to have left 13B.

In *13B* terror does indeed have a new address. The site of the ghostly shifts from the body to the TV, as the latter becomes a complex form of the body-screen.[18] Before investigating this it is necessary to see it in consonance with the context of urban television spectatorship practices in India. By the year 2002 a spate of daily

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[18] A long standing stock situation in horror films (that has endured across older and newer paradigms) is the theme of 'possession': in a number of the New Horror films (*Raat, Bhoot, Phoonk, 1920)* a central female character gets 'possessed' by aggressive spirit-like forces. The body of the woman then becomes like a pure screen, an exteriority on which the spiritual force can inscribe meanings to be communicated to the people around her

family soaps with staggering TRPs had become the defining face of Indian primetime television[19]. Shows like *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kahaani Ghr Ghar Ki*, *Kasautii Zindaagi Kii, Kkusum* etc became enormously popular, while the lead characters *Tulsi (*Tulsi Irani)*, Mihir (*Amar Upadhyay)*, Parvati*(Sakshi Tanwar)*, Kusum* were a national rage (Gokulsing 2004). These serials cemented a certain style of presentation that became a sort of template for Indian television at large, while at the same time becoming a common and widely identifiable source of spoofs and deliberately exaggerated re-makes. The dramatic acting, loud background scores, frequent double-takes in editing, extremely long (and often incredulous) story lines congealed into a sort of widely known social stereotype. The other distinctive feature of these shows was the putative rise in female viewership (Jensen 2002). These shows (largely about intra-family moral crises and tribulations) were supposedly targeted at women audiences, who ardently followed the show so that the death of lead characters would cause enormous emotional responses[20].

It is this larger matrix of over-coded melodramatic content, style and the recent history of emotional reception that the ghosts in *13B* seem to strategically tap into. They seem to very closely emulate the intricacies of the visual syntax and the performative address typical of the deluge of similar shows that flooded television channels around the time. The typically syrupy title song, the opening montage of a regular happy family (replete with the usual slow motion dissolving shots of smiling faces, kids playing etc), the distinctively flat high-key lighting, the dramatic editing, the shooting styles (a preponderance of slow zoom-in close ups) and the hammed up style of performances seem to have the exact ingredients to impeccably mime a show undistinguishable from any of the numerous popular serials produced by Balaji Telefilms at the time. The film provides a fairly sound internal logic to explain the spectral shift to television as the medium, and the choice of melodramatic address for the ghost family as the preferred mode of articulation. Dr. Shinde (the solitary voice

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[19] 2008 Smitha Verma , "If it's Arushi, it's got to be a serial", *The Telegraph* , July 6th .
Available at http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080706/jsp/7days/story_9510390.jsp, accessed on June 6th 2012.
[20] There was a huge backlash against the abrupt death of the character Mihir from Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi. 2001, Report, " Dead Man Walking: Amar Upadhyay". Available at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2001-07-13/mumbai/27229406_1_mihir-virani-television-serial-kyunki-saas-amar-upadhyay, accessed on June 6th 2012.

that calls for a reasoned consideration of the supernatural in the film) articulates a logic of inhabitability to explain the situation when Manohar and Shiva come to him for advice. He says:

> "What is the most complicated machine in the world? It's the human body, there's nothing more complicated than a human body, and who knows this better than a doctor. If it's said that a spirit has possessed a complicated machine like a human being everyone believes it, but if it's said that the spirit has possessed an ordinary machine like a TV no one is prepared to believe it. Anyway, why do these lost souls do this – the lost souls need a medium to contact the real world. So why not a televison, change is not for the humans alone but for the spirits as well. Time changes for everyone."

The first interesting idea Shinde moots in this small exchange is the idea of television being just another (infact easier) medium-body to inhabit, through which the spirits try to communicate with the real world; dissolving through this explanation the usual binary opposition tht is set up between the supernatural and the scientific. Secondly he suggests that just like our everyday material climates change in their constitution as everything becomes technological, the material artillery of the uncanny also changes. Technology therefore, Dr Shinde argues, should not be perceived as the habitat that erases the supernatural but one that just changes its mode of articulation.

But as the screen replaces the biological body, it gives rise to an extremely complex universe of grotesque embodiment. The annexed television (between 13:00 to 13:30 everyday) becomes a sort of interzone – an eerily permeable zone between the past and the present, the image and the body, the ghosts and the living (and by extension perhaps the virtual and the analog). The family-melodrama form allows the spectral family-in-crisis to be contemporary and forges communication with the family of the present. Soon an ominous link is formed between the television family and the real family, as the virtual image becomes a scarily clairvoyant (and frightfully accurate) doppelganger for real bodies. Accidents involving bodies in virtual space start playing themselves out through similarly fatal incidents in the real – real bodies get flung in the air following the lead of their cathode counterparts, people get luridly pummeled in the head with sledgehammers; all seemingly at the behest of the television prognosis. Concrete physiognomic masses become increasingly surrogate to a conflation between the virtual and the ghostly.

The crisis in *13B* can also be read in terms of a conflict between analog and the digital. A primary source of horror in the contemporary stems from the conceptual possibility of a virus-like, ever-multiplying digital presence that spills into the analog to overwhelm and subjugate it, making our analog existence itself a subordinate copy (Rodowick 2009). In *13B* also the digital world of copies of the past (themselves copying a popular form of the present) threatens to explode into the real and usurp the present, the image almost entirely overtaking and re-materializing the body of the spectator. Spectatorship then, becomes a fairly complex terrain in the universe of *13B*. In an insightful comment about the genesis of the film's script, director Vikram Kumar revealed:

> "During the 2006 elections in Tamil Nadu, one political party promised to give 20 kilograms of rice free every month, 10 sovereigns of gold free for their daughters' wedding and also a computer free. Not to be outdone, the opponent promised to give everyone, if they were elected, a free television set. Guess who won? The one promising the TV set!People would rather go without food, without getting their daughters' married off and without providing their children proper education, than doing without their daily dose of the idiot box. This got me thinking. My story is a social commentary too. I feel a lot of people will relate to the story. *13B/Yaavarum Nalam* is my effort of spinning an interesting yarn around the TV, using a typical Indian family with its fascination for home grown soaps, as the backdrop."[21]

Interesting to read in conjunction with this is the beginning of the film's synopsis available on the internet movie database website IMDB.com:

> "In today's world, the major source of relief, information and entertainment is the TV. So much so, that it has moved up from its modest position of being just another 'household appliance' to actually determining the power equation in a family. It is easy to identify the hierarchy in the family depending on who controls the remote control. So what happens when the TV begins to take control? What happens when instead of showing you the facts, the TV, begins to show you what it wants you to see? What happens when Manohar, to his great horror, realizes that this is exactly what is happening with his family, who has just moved into their new home at 13B?"[22]

The obsessive 'desire' projected towards television content in urban and semi-urban India, particularly in the form of the frenzied mass following of daily soaps in recent years gets perversely distorted and exemplified to a grotesque extreme in *13B*. Obsessive viewership becomes forced viewership - this is a TV show you *have* to

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[21] 2009, Interview,,"*13B/Yaavarum Nalam* is my effort of spinning an interesting yarn around the TV" *Rediff.com*, 4th March. Available at http://www.rediff.com/movies/2009/mar/03slde3-director-vikram-on-13b.htm, accessed on June 6th 2012

[22] See – 2009 13B: movie synopsis (Uploaded by Anonymous) Available at (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1385824/) . (Accessed on June 6th)

watch, because it comes on automatically at 13:00 hours everyday, during which time the TV cannot be shut off. As the only member of the family who is not an avid television watcher, it is ironic that the possessed TV chooses Manohar for its hyper-spectatorship paradigm. From the beginning the house is shown to have a typically robust culture of TV viewership. The kids insist on going late to school so they can finish watching their cartoon shows, the women in the house are compulsive daily soap consumers[23] - the mother passionately discusses TV shows on the phone with friends, the two wives come to mock wrestle with Manohar barely at his suggestion that the cable connection should be given up. The film infact establishes this avid following not as an unusual condition specific to this family, but a universal one (inspector Shiva also jokes about how his wife refuses to even budge to answer door bells once her favorite shows are on.) An integral part of the fear *13B* manages to strike is in its representation of an incompetent TV viewership. In his discussion of Gore Verbinski's cult horror film '*The Ring'* (2002) about a cursed video tape whose viewers die within seven days of watching it, Chuck Tyron argues that in a number of television horror films "tension derives from a desire to impose control over the video image, playing with the dynamics of horror film spectatorship, the passivity or activity of the *film* viewer." (Tyron, 2009: 48) A large part of the horror in *13B* is also about the incapacity of the viewer as the TV runs its own errands, beyond any human comprehension.

Interestingly, television spectatorship is also central to the lives (and death) of the spectral family that now parades as the TV soap family everyday at 13:00 hours. In a small sepia tinted flashback section we're introduced to the lives of the spectral family back in 4th July 1977, on a day a television set is brought to their home for the first time. The installation of the black and white television is a major event both within the house and outside it as scores of intrigued people from the neighborhood congregate outside their courtyard to watch, as the younger son Mohan (Amar

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[23] The film infact does tremendous disservice to nearly all its female characters – not only is the stereotype of women as hapless melodrama admirers strongly reinforced, the women in 13B seem to be plain asinine in their inability to see the glaring commonalities between '*Sab Khairiyat hai*'and their own lives despite closely watching it everyday, while Manohar is able to spot the uncanny overlap in just one accidental viewing.

Upadhyay) struggles to find the antennae signal on the terrace of their flat[24]. The experience of the television itself clearly belongs to an entirely different regime of materiality (which the film painstakingly details) – where the outer form, the large cumbersome wooden body of the TV seems to become the focus of various rituals. The set is neatly sheathed in a wooden box adorned with two drawable curtains in front of it, akin to erstwhile cinema halls where curtains would part to announce the beginning of the film. Like other purely physical, tangible objects such as cars, houses and large furniture, the television becomes the momentary physical altar in front of which incense sticks are lit, 'aarti' is done, and inaugural prayers are read out. We're then told that the TV set has been bought so that the family can watch a news show together in which the youngest daughter works as a newscaster. As the bustling neighborhood crowd outside is invited inside to watch the TV, the two brothers also bring out Ashok (Deepak Dobriyal) their mentally ill brother to watch their sister on the new TV. While Ashok gets excited as he sees his sister Chitra on the screen, he begins getting very agitated as hoards of new alien faces enter their new house to see the TV. He gets a sort of nervous fit wherein he yells and tries throwing things at the new faces he sees around, and his elder brothers Mohan and Ganesh have to forcefully whisk him away and lock him in his room. The whole family (barring Ashok, who's found bathed in blood and is indicted as the prime suspect) gets murdered within a few days, bludgeoned ruthlessly to death with a hammer.

The cause of Chitra's family's death is also (albeit indirectly) an obsessive form of television spectatorship. Sairam's fanatic desire to consume the television image that he "*sees everyday*" (and an inability to separate the referent from the real) leads to his suicide; and subsequently to the gruesome murder of the whole family as Shinde ruthlessly clubs them to death. The *13B* universe is an oddly simulacral order - it is a fetishistic love for Chitra's TV simulation that warrants Sairam's suicide and in extension Chitra's family's demise; the murdered family's spectral simulations then become copies themselves of regular fictitious TV families, who in turn machinate their revenge by making the Manohar's family a copy of them. Television becomes

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[24] The film very cleverly deploys an extra cinematic reference here, the younger brother in *Sab Khairiyat Hai* is played by Amar Upashyay the actor who earlier played *Mihir* in Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi.

the gridiron within which this whole ethic of *copying* repeatedly plays itself out, the collapse of the TV image and real bodies always inevitably leading to bloody and cadaverous repercussions. It is no surprise then that in this world of endless television specters, the only believable evidence of authentic origins lies in a physical/chemical form of indexical representation – the photograph.

On different occasions in *13B* it is the photograph that reveals the impregnably concealed 'truths' underneath the artifice of the television image. Manohar and Shiva discover the actual spectral force bolstering '*Sab Khairiyat Hai*' after they discover a photo album consisting of photos of Chitra's family that is dated 1977. The photographic alone can reveal the true historical 'faces' of the myriad simulated people inside the otherwise impenetrably counterfeited television image. The revelatory power of the photographic is essential not only for the film's characters but also for the extra knowledge provided to *13B*'s actual viewers. The very first time the women in the Manohar's family stumble upon the serial '*Sab Khairiyat hai*', the title credit ends with a frontal long shot of the whole family (the mother, her two sons, their wives and the two kids). Before the shot fades out, the camera starts panning away from the TV screen, only to come to rest at a photo-frame of Manohar and his family kept nearby. Vikram Kumar's film audience is made privy to information in this moment that the characters are not – the picture of Manohar's family and the last shot of the title sequence are mirror images of each other. The photographic thus provides cues hinting at television's subterfuge both within *13B's* diegetic world and outside it.

In a way Ashok's crazed hatred for the television (he's found bashing the television set with a large sledgehammer the morning after the murder) perhaps comes from a subliminal realization that Chitra's TV image is in someway implicated in the bloodbath in his house. The television is also to a large degree responsible for Ashok's unfair indictment and long incarceration in the mental hospital (his neighbors recall his frenzied outburst in front of them on the day the TV first brought to the house, and speculate that Ashok must've killed his family in a similar burst of rage against the television). 30 years later Ashok (in a much more exacerbated mental condition) is discovered in an asylum drawing pictures of TV like boxes with his

blood on the walls of his cell, suggesting that he is aware of his former family 'existing' still within the television set they were actually killed for, over 20 years ago. The relationship with the past is a complexly fraught category in *13B*.

Sangita Gopal contends that old Ramsay films always interred the demonic presence in pre-modern sites (like villages, forests, distant run down towns and so on) and would usually involve the protagonists journeying back from an urban locale to a rural hinterland in order to confront the evil[25]. Unlike this paradigm which usually nests in retrospective mode from a long past, *New Horror* is "*ineluctably joined to futurity* (Gopal 2012, 107)". The horror in the new films is actually triggered by the protagonist's ardent desire for a future[26]. Manohar's family is literally bound to the flat (as is repeatedly mentioned in the film) because the two brothers have taken a hefty loan to purchase the flat and expect to repay it only after twenty years of monthly installments[27]. Manohar's family's primary impulse like most liberalization middle class Indian society is to aggressively acquire and invest in the hope of a better future, irrespective of what the history of the asset is. The capital market exists in an inexorably unchanging 'now', a pure present propelled solely by incentive considerations, where all historical contexts and past narratives get nullified. The nucleated family unit in itself is a social formation which functions primarily in the temporality of the present, disavowing notions of collective lineage, heritage and shared histories that the joint family structure inherently espoused. Inhabiting the haunted house is for all these nucleated families an economic and existential ethic.

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[25] The Ramsay monster's temporality then was essentially always of the past (Gopal, 106). The originary event when the evil (demon/curse/spirit or all of these together) has its genesis is usually relegated to a distant past from centuries ago. Both in *Purana Mandir* and *Bandh Darwaza*(1990) the primeval event that spawns the evil occurs in an impenetrable past, the knowledge of which is passed down socially through traditional stories and folktales.

[26] A similar sort of impulse can also be traced in some other films like *Phoonk (2008)* , *1920 (2008)*, and in *13B*. In *Phoonk,* the evil is generated by the malicious black magic practitioner Madhu (Ashwini Kelaskar) who wants to take revenge from the protagonist Rajiv (Sudeep) who denies her and her husband a lucrative construction contract. Her casting of an evil spell is an act of revenge because Rajiv spoils the future that she and her husband had pinned her hopes on. Similarly in *1920*, the evil spirit haunting Palampur haveli only kills architects trying to commence a demolition project in order to prevent a new architectural future.

[27] The unmistakable commonality in all these films is the theme of the prospective architectural contract. The protagonists in all these films are architects from middle class families for whom these projects are crucial since they hold the promise of immediate upwards mobility (the alleviation of the loan pressure for Manohar, a financially secure world for Rajiv in 1920, and the chance for Vikram in *Phoonk* to move into an even better house).

The ghostly TV show plays on this, showing a family's daily vagaries as it shifts into its dream house.

The television uncanny seems to spill into a sort of network of ghosted technological objects. Gopal notes that in New Horror a whole assortment of everyday objects including small mundane electronic appliances, mirrors, furniture, kitchen utensils, fridges, cell phones, electricity points and so on collude in creating a simmering sense of foreboding (Gopal 2012). The new material life of regular technological consumer goods gets mobilized in invoking a sense of impending menace in *13B* too[28]. The entire film is peppered quite generously with object point-of-view shots - shots which seem like they're taken from the point of view of inanimate objects (like the introductory shot of Manohar's mother who's seen opening a cupboard from the perspective of the cupboard's interior, or of Priya pouring tea into a cup that we see through the point of view of the cup.) The conspicuously frequent use of these shots give a strangely menacing sense to the whole material life inside the flat, as if the objects themselves are in a quiet unison watching the characters every second. This sense of the inanimate having an eerie sort of will and consciousness gets increasingly accentuated throughout the first half of the film. The building lift (like in *Bhoot*) seems to have a definitive will of its own, refusing to move when Manohar takes it alone while working perfectly for everyone else, all in all contributing majorly in the growing sense that Manohar begins to have

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[28] The site of horror now, according to Gopal is a smart, swanky, well furnished modern house which looks as unlike the traditional abode of the uncanny as can be. (Gopal 2012:107)It is well lit, utterly technologized, freshly painted and nearly anti-septic in how well ordered and controlled it appears. But the Indian cityscape has in the last two decades undergone more churning than it ever has - each city now working as a wobbly, oddly schizoid, unseemly mass where extreme architectural decay and decrepitude are spatially coterminous with an immaculately ordered new high rises. Historical debris under the veneer of the new paint or under the reconstructed building then often erupts, conversing not in the lexicon of erstwhile horror but through the new architectural environment itself. The sparklingly unsullied designer flats themselves becoming the new ominous order. The unblemished and laundered new flat in *13B* starts imposing spectral signs on the family from the very first day of shifting in. The walls remain obstinate in not allowing pictures of gods and deities to be put up, as Manohar and his brother keep trying to hammer nails in, without being able to dent a single hole. Milk goes sour every single day, while water seepage patterns seem to form in the walls that take on ominous and scary shapes. No matter how much it is forced, the neighbor's dog refuses to (literally) set foot inside the flat, clearly alarmed by the presence of strongly unpleasant forces in it. Despite at no point being shown any actual visions of ghosts or specters the house in all its seemingly innocuous tidiness soon assumes a palpably sinister charge, a distinctive ominous character of its own.

that something is amiss. The electricity in the house also seems in on it, jolting the driller who comes to drill a hole to put the deity pictures up, making bulbs stay on despite Manohar's repeated attempts to turn them off etc. The first evidence Manohar gets of some sort of an unholy presence is through his cell phone – he notices that any picture of his that he shoots inside the flat gets distorted while stepping even a foot outside the flat seems to make the phone work just fine. It is only after he confirms this phenomenon by physically testing it himself, that he becomes certain of there being something wrong with the flat. It is only after this whole prologue and build-up that the television switches itself on, and Manohar witnesses the serial for the first time. The technological paraphernalia in other words subtly preempts and prepares for this new spectatorial body to be created.

The horror however heightens manifold as Manohar discovers that the show has no production history or set up anywhere. As he discovers the show's name listed in the TV schedule section in a newspaper, he rushes to the studio wherein the show '*Sab Khairiyat Hai*' is allegedly produced. On reaching there, he realizes that '*Sab Khairiyat Hai*' is a talk show hosted by Roshan Abbas, entirely unlike the family soap he sees on TV everyday. Horrified at the prospect of what he is up against Manohar rushes to a TV store, putting on the channel on which the show comes everyday on a plethora of TVs strewn across the showroom. As the clock strikes 1 o clock, it's the Roshan Abbas show that comes across a multitude of screens, not the show he watches on that very channel at that very time everyday. The horror of the TV show is that it is self-spawning; it is a digital entity that can programme and generate itself in the standardized model without a real external referent, without an airwave, designing itself singularly for the residents of flat number *13B*.

The only time the television presence takes real tangible form is in Dr Shinde's imagination in the end. Chitra directly addresses Shinde when he comes to 13B; excoriating him for their gruesome murders and the fate he imposed upon Ashok in the process. Enraged and scared at seeing these ancient apparitions of his past on the television, Shinde takes a hammer and busts the screen of the television, repeatedly striking it like one assumes he struck the actual bodies of the family members all those years ago. The physical desecration and destruction of the

television screen (the current 'body-medium' of the spirits) has a peculiar effect. The television breaks and goes blank and the apparitions disappear, only to re-house themselves in other objects. As Manohar's family wake up at the commotion and rush out, they walk in on the odd site of their venerated Shinde Uncle dementedly pummeling the television set with a hammer. What Shinde however sees on turning around is not Manohar's family but Chitra's old family members. This is an interesting moment, the physical destruction of the television screen by Shinde (in a manner reminiscent of his actual hammer murders years ago) results for the first and only time in the film the spectral family coming out into the real space of the flat. They don't however take actual tangible form, but get superimposed within Shinde's imagination on the real bodies of Manohar's family. The TV images finally 'come out' and merge indistinguishably with the spectator's body, transforming the spectator's body itself into a source of unmitigated fear. The TV legacy however reaches its final apotheosis only when Manohar (filtered visually as Chitra's older brother in Shinde's vision) beats Shinde to death with a sledgehammer. The final conclusion thus, is reached only when the perfect analogous simulation of the virtual finally commits the requisite act of justice, when the spectators mimic and play out virtual revenge within the actual physical precincts of the flat. In other words only when the flat 13B itself functions momentarily as a large television screen.

The film thus reaches a quintessential 'happy ending' only when the 'family crisis' long plaguing 13B gets finally resolved and the fragments in the spectral family get sutured. Chitra's family can peacefully vacate the premises only when the youngest son Ashok, gets re-united with a new surrogate family. The ending then also gesturing towards a final conflation between the real and the spectral family, as Manohar's family now substitutes Chitra's as Ashok's family. The deity statues and pictures can now go up on the wall, the television, the cell phone and the lift work just fine for Manoj, and the shadow of the uncanny seems to have generally passed from the house. The film however ends on what seems like something of a mock ending – as Manoj gets into the lift, he gets a call from Dr Shinde's cell number. As he answers the phone, a dead Dr Shinde speaks up – telling him that from this generation onwards, ghosts will communicate to the real world via cell phones. The film ends

with a shocked Manoj staring at the phone, as the camera zooms into what seems the next site of terror in 13B.

Both *13B* and *Zinda* trace an uncanny that navigates primarily through the viewer's relationship with television. As television sets increasingly become the inconspicuous material skin of our quotidian lives, the psychic sphere gets replaced by this sound-image producing technology as the site where the uncanny suddenly erupts and manifests itself. The spectatorial body's inter-bleeding with the screen becomes the conclave within which these flights of uncanny fancy stoke most wind. Television assumes its unsettling form in two major ways: through the regimental shift it can heave in our perceptual apparatus, and in becoming a platform where the ghostly can suddenly stake its existence. *Zinda* fictionalizes the former, through an extreme parable-like case of sensorial mutilation. It presents the prototype of a man whose primary perceptual engagement with the world is only through the television. Through this 'ideal' TV viewer/consumer it illustrates almost a new ontology of televisual viewership, Balajit Roy's journey within his cell providing a nightmarish bildungsroman for the new TV viewer's gradual maturation. *13B* brokers the uncanny in a more conventional form. As an unexceptional ingredient in our regular lives, the TV screen works much like the protagonist's mind did in the better part of Modernist literature - an otherwise familiar, ordinary and knowable site that suddenly registers the outbreak of alien, unfamiliar and frightening charges every now and then. The spectator's body is always under jeopardy, constantly threatened by the apparitional presences in the TV that seem on the verge of spilling into the real world and subjugating real bodies into becoming copies or simulations of the images themselves. But unlike Cronenberg's tales, the New Bombay Horror doesn't advocate the destruction of the technology itself, it suggests instead that specters need to be heard out, and their plea for justice satiated. What it calls for then, is not for a confrontation with the screen, but just for us to watch our shows closer.

MMS Hauntings – Bluetooth Ghosts From Tomorrow?

Ghosts, it would appear cannot ever be High-Definition. They can well be low resolution, and work superbly with 240p, but can never be captured on high-resolution images. A simple generic Youtube search for *'real ghost seen on camera/ true video of actual ghost/ paranormal activity captured on camera'* or variations of such, throws up long lists of pixilated, grainy low resolution videos – all of them almost uniform in their granular texture. The lower the resolution and the coarser the footage, the scarier (and crucially, the truer) the video seems. HD videos in comparison seem far less potent in capturing ghosts, as if 1080p erases ghosts. Unlike the carefully crafted and constructed aesthetic of conventional cinema, it appears un-fabricated and uncontrived. Its vocabulary is that of the *grab-footage,* an image recorded purely for other functional use that accidentally (and objectively) unveils specks of phenomenon activity from our everyday that we seem to have passed unnoticed. There is also the undeniable looming legacy of the documentary – these jerky, handheld, low quality videos get easily situated in the heritage of the documentary image that was traditionally conceived as somehow 'truer' and more 'real' than the clearly fictitious cinematic image. While scores of voices have long pointed to the fictive and constructed nature of the documentary, its putative authenticity has consistently and unwaveringly been processed by horror film machineries across cinema cultures. Films like *The Last Broadcast* (1998), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Ring* (2002), the whole *Paranormal Activity* franchise (2007, 2010, 2011) have regularly worked with variations of the found footage/grab footage formats to evoke horror.

While hints of the uncanny and the spectral within TV viewership begin appearing in recent Hindi film texts, the cell phone hasn't yet been subject to similarly mysterious or macabre incursions. Cell phones however, do seem to present the next tropic level of a technological medium of ghostly articulation. In "*Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*" (2000), Jeffrey Sconce traces the long standing and persistent association of new electronic media – right from the invention of the telegraph to the advent of television and computers - with paranormal or supernatural spiritual phenomena. By laying out a detailed historical and cultural analysis of the relations between communication technologies, discourses of

149

modernity, and metaphysical preoccupations, Sconce delineates how accounts of *'electronic presence'* have gradually changed over the decades "from a fascination with the boundaries of space and time to a more generalized anxiety over the seeming sovereignty of technology" (Sconce 2000: 264). Sconce earmarks five significant cultural moments in telecommunication history from the mid-nineteenth century to the present: 'the advent of telegraphy; the arrival of wireless communication; radio's transformation into network broadcasting; the introduction of television; and, contemporary debates over computers.' But if Dr. Shinde's spooky prophecy at the end of *13B* is to be taken seriously, cell phones do seem the next potential media technology that "*ghosts of our generation will communicate through.*"

What has taken on a significant spectral quality within cellular technology is the content that cell phones are known to circulate (instead of specific instances of haunted cell phone sets). The MMS in particular, has taken on a distinct cultural identity within Indian urban spaces in the recent years. The first 'MMS scandal' (now almost a codified generic description for pornographic videos involving heterosexual couples in sexual positions shot on cell phones) to get widely discussed in popular media was the infamous 'DPS MMS scandal' in 2004. The two minute thirty seven second video involving two 17 year old students from the posh Delhi Public School R.K Puram became something of a media sensation, as a student of IIT Kharagpur uploaded it for public auction on the online auction/shopping site Bazee.com[29]. This spiraled into a full blown media event as the then CEO of the online auction company was booked under the obscenities section of the IT Act (2000), and the Delhi court stipulated that anyone found possessing the clip in their cell phones or personal computers could be imprisoned for 6 months and/or be charged a fine up to 10,000 rupees[30]. The clip spread like a contagion across cities, spawning a number of similar

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[29] See – 2008, Sanjay K Singh, 'eBay chief moves SC in DPS MMS cas*e' Economic Times*, Aug 13. Available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2008-08-13/news/28457096_1_video-clip-ebay-apex-court, accessed on June 4[th]2012
Also see – 2010, Manjima Bhattacharjya, 'Redefining Rape', , May. Available at http://infochangeindia.org/women/third-wave/redefining-rape.html, accessed on June 4th 2012
[30] 2007, Nishant Shah, 'PLAYBLOG: PORNOGRAPHy, PERFORMANCE AND CYBERSPACE*'* Available at http://www.networkcultures.org/_uploads/24.pdf, accessed on June 4[th]2012
Also See- 2008, IANS, 'Proceeding allowed against Baazee.com for sex clip auction' May 29. Available at at www.theindian.com, accessed on June 4th 2012

MMS related 'scandals' soon after. Following these were other prominent 'cases' that caught the media eye, like the Mona Chopra MMS in 2006, the 'Sahranpur MMS' in 2009, the JNU 'sex scandal' in 2011 and a string of celebrity MMS's – the Shahid Kapoor-Kareena Kapoor 'kiss' clip in 2004, the Riya Sen-Ashmit Patel sex video in 2005, the Soha Ali Khan 'beauty saloon' clip, the '*baba-MMS*' involving Godman Nithyananda with tamil actresses Ranjitha and Yuvarani, the Sania Mirza 'shower footage' MMS and so on[31]. These MMS clips create their own circulation economies, proliferating across cell phones via Bluetooth in school canteens, tuition centers, playgrounds, and boy's hostels; or video sharing internet portals like DailyMotion, Vimeo etc or a plurality of social media pages, porn websites, dedicated chat rooms and forums (to the point that mostIndian porn sites now have a separate page banner heading called 'MMS'). Within a few years Hindi films also began drawing on what was rapidly becoming a comprehensible social anecdote around the technology. Anurag Kashyap's *Dev D* (2008) and Dibakar Banerjee's *Love Sex aur Dhokha* (2010) based parts of the narrative on MMS scandals, exploring the possible lives of people involved before and after the outbreak of the scandal. Both films (especially *Love Sex Aur Dhokha*) work on unraveling a dystopic moral counter-side to the general celebratory euphoria around globalization and the digital explosion. While Kashyap's film used the MMS scandal and the moral jamboree around it as a back-story to peg the character Leni's entry into sex work, Banerjee's film fictionalizes the digital environment that builds up to a climactic point where a boy decides to surreptitiously record his sexual enterprises with an unsuspecting girl.

Buoyed by the unexpected success of her first 'found-footage' film *Love Sex Aur Dhokha* producer Ekta Kapoor's *Balaji Motion Pictures* moved towards producing more of the "smaller, cheaper, quicker" variety of films that could also

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[31] See 'Indian Celebs in MMS scandals' at ndtv.com
(http://www.ndtv.com/album/listing/entertainment/indian-celebs-in-mms-scandals-7193/slide/21) (Accessed June 5th 2012)
Also see- 2012, Manash Gohain, 'Porn MMS goes viral in Jawaharlal Nehru University, 3 suspended , June 4. Available at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-06-04/delhi/32030891_1_h-b-bohidar-s-k-sopory-mms, accessed June 4th 2012
Also see- 2011, Aprajita Sarcar , 'JNU and the 'sex scandal', Kafila, February 16th, Available at http://kafila.org/2011/02/16/jnu-and-the-sex-scandal-aprajita-sarcar/, accessed on- June 4th 2012

easily win its money back at theatres[32]. In collaboration with Siddharth Jain, the CEO of iRock and *Zombie Talkies* (a production company that produces graphic novels and films around zombies, super heroes and comic books) Balaji telefilms decided to make "low budget, high concept films like *Ragini MMS*, that was sure to recover money from its select audience"[33]. The impulse was to tap into 'cult' sectors of horror, comics, violent graphic novels and so on (Siddharth Jain is also producing the upcoming Navdeep Singh directed zombie comedy '*Shaadi Of the Dead*'). The genesis of the idea of Ragini MMS was predicated on the idea of the MMS cult. In an incredibly insightful explanation the film's writer Mayank Tiwari quips:

> "In some ways you can think of *Ragini MMS* in close relation with the 2nd story (the 'Sex' part) of LSD. What if a similar character tried something similar in a place that was haunted? We thought it might be interesting to see what happens if a ghostly entity punishes the boy for what he's doing MMS works through cults. All of us know that MMS' usually spread through small private groups where boys hang out ("tune ye waali dekhi, ye waali hai tere paas? etc)... No one really knows who the actual girl is, her life and the details of the relationship with the man etc. In some ways a woman who was killed many years ago because of being termed a witch is also a victim of a senseless tag about that spreads through people, causing great damage to her – just like in the case of the MMS victim. That way the ghost in the film is a little like Ragini – in the end the ghost can kill everyone else but not Ragini despite torturing her, because she is innocent, unlike Uday and can rightfully say "I have not done anything". The film is a combination of voyeurism in sex and in the supernatural. In a way you can say the film itself is a MMS, it's a MMS that tries to make the making and watching of a MMS scary."[34]

The connection between the prosecution of supposed witches and " hounding the girl faces" post the MMS' spread seems heavy-handed, and the assumption of the woman's necessarily miserable state seems to leave no space to imagine a woman who might choose to remain unconcerned about the dissemination of the image of her body. What Tiwari's intervention does provide is a radically alternate reading of *Ragini MMS* in relation to what the film's promotion and the film itself would suggest.

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[32] Box office collection statistics sourced from- LSD Box Office Report on www.bollywoodtrade.com http://www.bollywoodtrade.com/box-office/love-sex-aur-dhokha-lsd/all-gross/1263/) (accessed on june 3rd 2012)
[33] 2011, Siddharth Jain , 'Indian youth is not just ready for a zombie film, it is demanding one*'*, September 12th   Available at
http://www.tehelka.com/story_main50.asp?filename=Ws120911Cinema.asp, accessed on- June 4th 2012
[34] Interview with author, July, 2012.

Ragini MMS revolves around a young couple Ragini (Kainaz Motivala) and Uday (Raj Kumar Yadav) who drive to a secluded house deep in a forest for the weekend, primarily to have sex "*without getting interrupted*". From the very beginning, small things seem to be going eerily wrong in the house – the food they carry suddenly gets worm ridden, packets get opened by themselves, and a mysterious presence seems to lurk in the many shadows of the old house. Unknown to Ragini, the entire house is filled with hidden video cameras in every room so Uday can make a MMS and sell it to his influential 'friend' Panditji, and it is the footage from those cameras that become the audience's optic for the film. As Uday playfully handcuffs Ragini to the bed, the strange occurrences in the house begin getting only worse, at one point the electricity goes in the Bungalow and Uday gets a mysterious gash on his neck; at another Uday get's pulled hard by the hair by some unknown presence. Uday soon becomes alert to some supernatural presence in the house, and tries to quickly pack their things and get out. While he's scampering about for the key to the cuffs Ragini spots a camera and realizes that Uday was surreptitiously shooting a sex film of them. As she ferociously starts yelling at Uday, Uday (by now petrified of the spectral presence haunting them) decides to leave her there alone handcuffed to the bed while he runs away. The spirit does not let him leave as he comes back into the room, whimpering, badly bruised and bloodied. Within minutes the sprit seems to possess his body, as he suddenly starts speaking in Marathi to Ragini, repeating continuously (as the Hindi subtitles inform us) – "*I am not a witch*". He then picks up a screw driver from the floor and stabs himself dead in the neck, as Ragini watches on helplessly cuffed to the bedstead. The whole of next day passes and the night falls again with Ragini still cuffed to the bed unable to wrench herself free. As night falls the spirit seems to come back to torment her. Though Ragini finally manages to cut her hands open with a piece of broken glass and run back into the jungle, the spirit pulls her back into the house. The spirit then is revealed as an infrared (inverted-image) of a woman in a Marathi attire who repeatedly says "*I am not a witch, I did not kill my children. I will not go from here. I will not let any one else go either*". The spirit tortures Ragini for an entire night, lifting her in the air, pinning her to the wall and trying to make her stab herself like Uday, but Ragini seems to somehow resist it. Morning dawns and the spirit lets her go. The film ends with an information card that

says a local boy '*finds Ragini unconscious nearby and takes her to a hospital. She has to go through intensive psychiatric treatment for 10 months, and then agreed to tell her story'*.

Both the film's innovative marketing before its release and the review-responses to it after, seemed to consistently refer to the inherent MMS-like character of the film. In an extremely unconventional strategy, Ekta Kapoor designated hoards of auto-rickshaws across Bombay and Delhi that carried chatty comments about the film. Several autos carried the message – "*Ragini ka MMS dekha kya'*"? ; while others boldly declared – "*Ragini yahaan baithi thi*". In a similar vein, while film critic Pankaj Sabnani from Glamsham.com commented "Ragini MMS isn't worth *'circulating*', if you have a large appetite for horror", Mayank Shekhar wrote in the *Hindustan Times* about the "basic instinct of voyeurism*"* while watching a film that resembles a MMS[35]. Nearly all other reviews commented on the mix of sex and horror in the film – while the *Times Of India* film critic Nikhat Kazmi called it "a MMS that makes a heady cocktail of sex and horror", Priyanka Bhardwaj observed that "the mix of titillation and horror form a lethal combination" and Ajay Barua in *The Open* called it an unoriginal, heavily-derived film that is ...lowbrow entertainment that can hook the highbrow"[36]. In his interviews about the film Rajkumar Yadav who plays Uday repeatedly mentions that while he's in *this film* "he always feels bad for the women whose MMS' get made and circulated uncontrollably through cell phones and porn clips online."citation

Ekta Kapoor's promotion strategy was to mobilize and create a sort of intrigued prattle and banter around the illicit image that would connect to the navigation circuits Mayank Tiwari describes of the MMS clip. While "*Dekha Kya*" (*Did you see it?)* quotes the sense of entitlement and viewership-based cults the watching of the clip allows (especially for a young male audience, where having seen the film becomes a sort of cultural password into being considered contemporary

[35] 2011, Mayank Shekhar, " Mayank Shekhar's Review" May 13., Available at http://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/reviews/Mayank-Shekhar-s-review-Ragini-MMS/Article1-697080.aspx, accessed on June 4th 2012
[36] See- 2011, Nikhat Kazmi , " Ragini MMS Review, May 12[th.] Available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/movie-reviews/hindi/Ragini-MMS/movie-review/8272923.cms, accessed on June 4th 2012.

enough); "*Ragini yahaan Baithi Thi*" (*Ragini sat here*) nods at the sort of aura and reification the 'body' of the girl in the MMS usually attains after becoming 'viral'. It hints at a culture where individuals immediately begin staking historical claim at the woman's body once the video's out (like in *Dev D*, where other boys also start claiming past relationship with Leni, while others think of her as being generally 'available' to people.) "She sat here" is the forging of a historical instance of interaction with the real body behind the fuzzy figure in the low quality pixilated image traveling through thousands of cell phones.

At the face of it, *Ragini MMS* does not involve cell phones at all, and barring a stray moment where a distressed Uday tries calling Panditji for help, the technology barely even appears in the film. Yet in the attitude towards it in its reception, its marketing strategies, and its visual aesthetic (and in the motivations of the supernatural force haunting its characters) the MMS as a kind of traveling contraband sexual image predominates and endures throughout. What if, the film seems to be asking, the woman in the endlessly circulated image decided to punish those who make the videos? What if the image itself decides to haunt and punish its producer-distributor? In a different context, after a spate of similar films released between the summers of 1999 to 2001 David Rodowick observed that:

> "This was the summer of digital paranoia. In a trend that began with *Dark City* the year before, films like *The Matrix, Thirteenth Floor,* and *eXistenZ* each played with the idea that a digitally created simulation could invisibly and seamlessly replace the solid, messy, analog world of our everyday life. Technology had effectively become nature, wholly replacing our complex and chaotic world—too "smelly" according to the lead Agent in *The Matrix*—with an imaginary simulation in which social control was nearly complete….The digital versus the analog was the heart of narrative conflict in these films, as if cinema were fighting for its very aesthetic existence. The replacement of the analog world by a digital simulation functions here as an allegorical conflict wherein cinema struggles to reassert or redefine its identity in the face of a new representational technology that threatens to overwhelm it" (Rodowick 2007: 4)

Unlike *13B* the anxiety in Ekta Kapoor's movie doesn't stem from a new digital that threatens to overwhelm and subjugate the real world, but from its perverse opposite. It is the analog, the real body in the image that decides to wreak revenge against the image maker(s); it is a violent impulse against a rapacious misogynistic image production and distribution set up itself. From the very beginning of the film, the producer of the image and the voice heard from behind the camera, Uday is set up as a

hawkish, avaricious presence. The film opens with a male hand (of the person recording the video) loudly pounding on an apartment door. A young sleepy girl (who we later discover is Ragini's roommate) opens the door. The camera quickly tilts down to zoom into the room-mate's legs as she peevishly tells the camera that Ragini's sleeping. The camera (held by Uday, who the film hasn't established till this point) however shoves the room mate aside and strides in towards Ragini's room, with the roommate shrieking and desperately trying to stop him from behind. The camera enters Ragini's room, parts the curtains, switches on the lights, zooms into Ragini's cleavage and then tries to shake Ragini awake. As Ragini doesn't wake up, the camera-presence climbs on top of the bed with his slippers on. As the roommate yells at him for dirtying the bed, the camera presence gets off the bed, clutches the roommate by the arm, literally pushes her out and locks the door. Uday (we now see a glimpse of him holding a camcorder in a mirror reflection) then picks up a bottle and throws water at Ragini, jostling her into the bathroom to get ready. We see Uday properly only when the two of them are in the car driving to their holiday spot, as they kiss in the car (at which point he again surreptitiously switches the camera on) or as they stop by at places to eat, shop, laze around in a beach, get food and buy packet of condoms. Right from the beginning Uday (synonymous for the entire first half as the camera perspective) is set up as a violently misogynistic and penetrative figure that barges into women's rooms to shoot them, manhandles women around him and constantly manipulates the camera to shoot intimate moments with Ragini while she is unaware. As he gets to the 'location', he rushes to a store room in a desolate corner of the house, turning on a multi-screen console that controls all the hidden cameras strewn all across the house. It's these cameras, designed to clandestinely capture images of Ragini's body that then form our 'vision' for the rest of the film.

The image that Uday intends to supply of Ragini, and the larger image-politics *Ragini MMS* partakes of is the product of a specific and recent historical-technological development. By 2003 Nokia had launched its first cell phone with video recording facility in India, within a year and a half Youtube.com had made a prominent entry into India; this was also the period when the biggest Indian porn databases like DesiBaba.com were set up. What these formations allowed and bred

was a robust culture of shooting videos/pictures, transferring them through Bluetooth, or uploading them on different video sharing internet platforms, downloading, re-editing, and re-distributing as intricate networks of dissemination came to be established. These new images were lighter, more malleable, easily wieldable and generally moved about with a velocity hitherto unthinkable with the traditional cinema image. Hito Steyerl provides a nuanced conceptual description of this new brand of digital images and its new economy of circulation. For Steyerl this 'poor image' is a

> "…a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution. The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction… (I)t is a visual idea in its very becoming.…Its genealogy is dubious. Its filenames are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all (Steyerl 2011: 1).

The conventional digital hierarchy of images based on sharpness or resolution gets entirely destabilized and punctured. It does not matter whether the girl's body in the MMS is visible or just an indistinguishable haze of blurry pixels. What matters is the act of transfer and the shared viewership. The MMS is an integral part of a digital culture, where the 'clip' does not really have viewers, it has a widely dispersed community of users - "the editors, critics, translators, and co-authors of poor images" (ibid). These poor images are poor primarily because they are usually heavily compressed and can travel lightly – in their steadily dematerialized form "they lose matter and gain speed" (ibid). The MMS is mostly a 240p AVI file, extremely lightweight and therefore easily sent around. The real bodies in the video thus move towards an inevitable destruction by impenetrable fuzziness that gets exacerbated each time a newer FLV video file is uploaded on Youtube.com or any other file-sharing/P2P hosting platform.

In *Ragini MMS* the production of this 'poor image' (the governing logic of the whole plot, and its optical logic) gets violently disrupted and ravaged. Various

instances of attempted sexual consummation get forcibly interrupted and aborted because of mysterious external reasons. The food gets worm-ridden, the electricity goes, there are sudden knocks on the door, Uday's hair gets pulled – each occasion disrupting Uday's attempts to commence the sex video he hopes to make. Further strengthening this sense of a potential MMS video in the offing is the conspicuous intertextual links the film draws with Ekta Kapoor's earlier film '*Love Sex aur Dhokha'*. Raj Kumar Gupta plays Adarsh, a character not too unlike Uday, who is also similarly bent on somehow making a surreptitious sex video with a girlfriend after a friend gives him a glimpse of the money prospects involved. At other points Uday is shown listening to songs from '*Love Sex aur Dhokha'*, particularly the song '*Tu Nangi acchi lagti hai"* (*I like you when you are naked*- an overtly misogynistic song sung by a distinctly rapacious character called Loki in LSD) right before he expects to have sex with Ragini.

If the ghost in the film can actually be read as a perverse form of a cleansing moral female energy (that kills the lascivious male character and punishes the woman for imprudence) *Ragini MMS* mobilizes two conventionally stock female characters in horror films. It constructs the woman victim of the horror as well as the monstrous-feminine, both well-established presences in the history of the horror film. "Women" as Robin Wood argues have always been the focus of threat and assault in the horror films" where "teenagers are punished for promiscuity" and any form of persuasive sexual expression (Wood 1987:81) gets violently chastized. Given that Balaji Motion Pictures also pitched as the first Indian 'date horror' movie *Ragini MMS* locates itself in a long litany of cautionary fable like moral narratives where monstrous entities threaten teenage/young couple that venture off into the woods/deserted house for physical intimacy (the whole *Friday The 13th* series, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974, 2002), The Cat People (1942)* etc deal with women protagonists being unceasingly chased by threatening presences.[37]

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[37] In many of these films, as Tania Modleski argues "the female is attacked not only because she embodies sexual pleasures but because she represents great many aspects of specious good" (Modelski 1986: 772); the films become as Susan Hayward suggests, exercizes in the "normalizing of misogyny" (Hayward 2000: 186). But besides being the pre-eminent victim the woman is also often placed on the side of the monstrous. Drawing upon Julie Kristeva's theory of 'abjection' Barbara Creed provides a psychoanalytic reading of the female monster in horror films. She observes that

The violent didactic impulse gets deflected on to an altogether different site in the contemporary digital moment. The source of anxiety is not so much the sexual prurience of the young couple but the sheer possibility of being captured as the digital image. The primordial moral fear now is of the body getting de-materialized and dispersed into a plurality of multiple light weight, low-quality images that can travel uncontrollably through the endless annals of the digital world. The spectral presence therefore, has to not only kill off Uday, but also (alongside the three other murders in the house) the technician Panditji sends to fit the whole surveillance system in the house (Ragini stumbles upon his body later on in the console room of the house). The Marathi woman's ghost infact seems to penetrate the multiple cameras in the house - at times inexplicably turning them off, on others causing long static disturbance and at some points allowing an infrared inverse image of herself to get visualized on the camera. The film ends on an eerily ambiguous note – the final slide says Ragini's MMS goes viral on the internet within 10 months of the incident. This seems a deliberate obfuscation, given that the couple doesn't actually have sex (or get into physical intimate positions) throughout, and mainly because the whole film itself is pitched as a 'found-footage' film wherein everything the viewer sees is supposed to have actually been gleaned off the material captured by the video cameras. The only MMS that can be made of Ragini then cannot include the usual clips of copulation, fallatio or close ups of female body parts, it can at best be a cautionary clip indexing the presence of the spectral (a part of the sum of video material that culminates in the whole film itself). 'Ragini-MMS' then (the speculated MMS that goes viral in the end and the film as a whole) is an MMS in absentia, a meta-MMS that mobilizes its own form to exhort against the production of MMS' in general. With reports of the sequel

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depictions of feminine monstrosity fall largely into two broad categories, corresponding to specific Freudian and Kristevan psychoanalytic hypotheses. While the Freudian relates female monstrosity to castration anxiety, the Kristevan is about the reproductive function and general association of the feminine with the corporeal. For her suggested cinema of abjection, Creed builds directly upon Kristeva's lexicon of abject symbolism, and especially on the female figure as the abject personified. Creed distinguishes different strains of the horror film's typical imagery of the abject. The most relevant in this context is the one which relates to the abject's problematic of *borders*, by drawing marked depictions of borderline states: between human and nonhuman (werewolves, etc.), between natural and supernatural, and by extension, between human and the technological image (ibid). Following Kristeva's lead, Creed also places the female body itself in this category as a signifier for "the border", since the female body signifies the abject state of anxiety about boundaries of the body (ibid).

Ragini MMS 2 nearing completion, and speculations of a part 3 in the pipeline being rife, it appears that the uncanny's inauguration of the cell phone is occurring primarily in its navigational, mobile form. The primary fear, as Adarsh's friend from *Love Sex and Dhokha* says, is "*shoot karke phail jayega*" (It'll spread after shooting).

CONCLUSION

The genesis of this dissertation, among other things was a lost cell phone. The loss of a phone I used for close to two years during a trip to the National Film Archive in Pune last year was a slightly jolting experience. Gone with the body of the phone were hoards of ancient, closely preserved and strictly guarded text messages, photos, videos and contacts: a whole neatly inventoried personal archive of two years. Stranger still was the experience of being without a phone in an unfamiliar city. That technological objects like the cell phone are now an endemic part of one's sensory engagement with the world was then more than ever, resoundingly evident.

The journey of this dissertation began with a tracing of the sensorial changes these technological objects triggered in the most pedestrian mores of our lives and an inspection into how cinema tapped into these new orders. Probing the cell phone's role in recent Hindi films revealed a tapestry of different sorts of usage, but the technology seems to have figured most prominently in crime/terrorism films. The cell phone's propensity to forge different sorts of communication network, and the affective quality of the unknown 'voice-body' continues to stem different kinds of anxiety, fear and paranoia in social discourse today. Some recent films have however dramatized newer kinds of urban experiences related to the usage of cell phones. Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K's recent *Shor in the City* (2011) shows slum boys who go around posh (and for them inexclusive) parts of the city clicking pictures of places they'd otherwise never be able to access. The cell phone's capacity to create, circulate and curate a whole 'poor image' (Steyerl 2009) economy presents an avenue that calls for greater scrutiny. The experience of the encounter with television suggested an entirely different brand of a moral regime. A number of the films I looked at seem inflected by a moral crisis – their virulent critique of the TV event economy seemed to be bolstered by a quasi-utopic desire to recuperate the 'good object' television used to be while under State tutelage less than two decades ago. I also argued that the seamless conjoining of these technologies in the everyday engender a new form of technological uncanny. Long seen as a zone at the opposite end of all things spectral,

technological objects like television and cell phones become the new abode for ghostly possessions. As news of a more expensive, star-studded *Ragini MMS 2* flits in*, 13B's* closing predictions about cell phones becoming the next frontier for ghostly haunting seem eerily accurate.

The major technological apparatus however, that the project did not have the bandwidth to accommodate is the computer. The web obviously is today an epiphenomenon permeating nearly all forms of daily transactions. This ubiquity manifests itself in the cinematic as well. *Mujhse Dosti Karoge* (2002) and *Mujhse Fraandship Karoge* (2011) have been recent films that have mobilized online communication to package young school/college romances. Recent films like G*amer* (2009), *Social Network* (2010), *Untraceable* (2009), *War Games* (2008*) Die Hard* 4.0 (2007) etc suggest how different genres in Hollywood have processed web technologies and computers as central narrative cogs. Recently *404 (error)* (2011) was a Hindi psychological thriller that dabbled with the collision of virtual and real domains. These technological assemblages foundationally re-shard our consortium of daily experience, and as such trigger various forms of anxieties, paranoia and fear one hand, as well as a sense of excitement, hope and euphoria about the prospective potential on the other. After all our "truest sorrow" as Ranciere once said "lies in our not being able to enjoy the false one[1]."

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[1] Lawrence Lang's interview with Jacques Ranciere (Feb 12 2009) (at http://kafila.org/2009/02/12/interview-with-jacques-ranciere/)

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