

The Apparatus and its Constituencies: On India's Encounters with Television

Abhijit Roy

One

Television, as an institution connected to a set of cultural practices, seems to be somewhat resistant to the theorization of 'nation', of national specificity, to put it in a narrower sense. This is largely due to a somewhat conceivable global television form that is apparently unable to conjure up specific constituencies in territories under different nation-states. While one can contest such a suggestion on the ground that the only way to globalization is indigenization^[1], it doesn't take much strain to identify that the ways towards indigenization have always been in the form of using the local languages, highlighting local customs, rituals and narratives. In fact, most of the studies in the relationship between television and nation focus on this latter aspect of televisual image of the nation.^[2] One cannot entirely deny the utility of such studies, keeping in mind the limitations of the 'cultural imperialism' thesis that refuses almost all nations other than the US a place of agency in the terrain of subject-formation. Such studies are premised mostly on the rhetoric of 'resistance', engaged in the exploration of 'difference' at various levels, that of culture and, in a great number of discourses, at the level of policy pronouncements. This paper, while acknowledging the importance of such works, wishes also to complicate their axiomatic. For the moment, let us identify four problems. First, to suggest that television 'reflects' the cultures of a society is to undermine the particular operations of television, as a technology and as a 'cultural form', both embedded in Ideology. It is like deciphering television into merely an agent of dissemination that cannot be politicized. Secondly, there is no acknowledgment here of television as a site of audiovisual organization, a historically conditioned layout of images and sounds capable of generating, albeit porous and ephemeral, a set of perceptions related to specific issues in subjectivity. The emphasis is, one

can say loosely, more on the `content', which, as if exclusively, enables us to read the political location of the nation under examination. Thirdly, undermining the questions of form, most of these discourses conceive the nation invariably in terms antagonistic to a notion of the Global. One should, of course, at this point note that territorial alternatives or oppositions do exist. But this should not impair us from seeing the inter-constitutive relation between the Global and the National, and more importantly, a certain analogy between the ways they operate. This in fact brings us to a fourth problem: that of relating the nation only to a physical space^[3], thereby restricting the currency of it as a global form, as a certain idea inalienably attached to the travels of modernity worldwide. The last two problems are particularly discernible in the discourses of Globalization, which never forget to acknowledge television as a key player. The implications are crucial for any reading of the `Third World', as it is always the developing or the underdeveloped that has to bear the burden of `difference', for its peculiarly crafted temporal coordinate of `always belated'. It remains to be seen to what extent television *invokes the imaginary of the nation* in the conception of the `global'.

In my attempt at exploring possible connections between nation and the television `form', I shall initially try to track a major trajectory in television studies, that of the theoretical investments in the formal aspects of the televisual experience. I shall heavily draw upon the recent debates around the notion of `flow' in the work of Raymond Williams^[4] and relate them to another movement which is also, not surprisingly, called `flow' i.e. the flow of capital, channels and programs from one country to the other, the most familiar route being from the North America to the rest of the world. The object would be to investigate whether television inclines towards offering a specific kind of experience; whether, to put it more precisely, television comes closer to being an `ideological apparatus'. Then we try to locate the Indian context-with its particular histories of performance - of this apparatus and show that, to a large extent, the so called `pre capitalist' traits in the

Indian popular performative traditions are homologous with what western theorists try to specify (though in contradicting terms) as a somewhat 'central' television experience. One of the aims would be to account for such correspondence of televisual form in late capitalism to the heteronomous popular forms of the territories that continue to be highly heterogeneous in production relations. The paper tries to investigate the specific imports of this relation in the post-liberalization cultural lives of television in India with special reference to the way television has started imagining the nation. I shall draw upon various instances from the history of television in India to demonstrate the currency of this dialogue between the pre-television modes of addresses and the televisual flow in the constitution of televisual subjects in India. The significance of the Indian popular film form in creating a legacy for televisual reception would be a key area of concern. The work in Indian Film Studies over the last twenty years or so, their insistent emphasis on the political economy of popular audio-visual cultures, gives the paper a major point of entry into the study of the location of the televisual apparatus in a post-colonial context.

Two

Since 1974, the notion of 'flow' as constituting what Raymond Williams calls the "central television experience" has been subjected to repeated criticism, elaboration and reformulation. The debates seem to have two main trajectories: one refers to the formal aspects concerning the seriality of sounds and images in the televisual experience and the other to the very position that makes it possible for Williams to theorize American commercial television. The latter, a comparatively recent development, ascribes to Williams the point of view of ethnographer, the gullible position of someone experienced in British public television encountering the 'other' in US commercial television. We shall engage primarily with the first of them, not as much to evaluate Williams' theory, as to investigate whether Television really privileges a certain kind of experience that is historically conditioned to produce specific ideologies of subject-formation.

It seems that the sense of `uninterrupted movement', that of `smoothness' or perhaps of a `slippery sequentiality' in the very coinage `flow' has been somewhat unfairly taken to its extreme by most of the commentators. Williams' own contribution to this is not negligible, especially in his insistence that "...the notion of `interruption', while it has still some residual force from an older model, has become inadequate"^[5], in his emphasis on "sequence", "the published sequence of programme items" and "another sequence" of commercials and promos, and in his now famous (or infamous) account of watching television one night in Miami which made him register "some incidents as happening in the wrong film, and some characters in the commercials as involved in the film episodes."^[6] and so on. But what we lose sight of is the relative autonomy he ascribes to the segments that create a heterogeneous formation very much within what he significantly calls a "planned flow"^[7]. Williams finds the possible formal legacy or premonition of such a structure in the West in "internal variation and at times miscellaneity" of certain significant traditions of the pre-modern popular: dramatic performances with musical interludes, the almanac, the chapbook, the magazine which was "invented as a specific form in the early eighteenth century" and was "designed as a *miscellany*" (italics mine). He also refers to the modern newspaper that became a miscellany "very much more markedly from the nineteenth century"^[8]. On another occasion, he compares the television experience to a mixed baggage of segments from various genres, that of "having read two plays, three newspapers, three or four magazines, on the same day that one has been to a variety show and a lecture and a football match"^[9]. All these seem to allude to the experience of early popular performative traditions outside (or on the fringes of) organized capitalist production of cultural artifact. In fact he reminds us that the word `programme' has its "traditional bases in theatre and *music-hall* (italics mine)^[10]. In brief, Williams' theorization of television refers to a heterogeneous structure in which the segments keep the formal difference from each other alive to generate the effect of miscellaneity and which, at the same time, is capable of conjuring a synthetic image. This double-take

on two modes of representation, connected to parallel layers of modernity itself, in the notion of flow is somewhat undermined in the later commentators who always tend to highlight one at the cost of the other. John Ellis, for instance, proposes that it is "segmentation" that best describes the textual system of television and believes that it is almost impossible to form an overall narrative image out of the 'serial' experience of television^[11]. John Fiske also seems to get carried away by the nomenclature of Williams' category: "Flow, with its connotations of a languid river, is perhaps an unfortunate metaphor: the movement of the television text is discontinuous, interrupted and segmented".^[12] It seems that these critical articulations inescapably get the sense of the modern realist narrative in the notion of 'flow' despite Williams' contrary insistence, and this seems to be the reason why they emphasize discontinuity and segmentation, as if these are antithetical to flow. One can cite Ellis's contention "movement from one segment to the next is a matter of succession rather than consequence"^[13] to demonstrate the nature of the programming dynamics, and at the same time, to suggest (to foreground the limitations of Ellis' argument) that this lack of formal or narrative consequentiality doesn't necessarily pre-empt a continuity at the level of ideology. Ellis' insistence, which Jane Feuer endorses, that in television "the series implies the form of the dilemma rather than that of resolution and closure"^[14] undermines the continuity of a set of ideologies, sometimes with startling firmness, over a series of programmes. This not only prevents conceiving the consumer-preferring television with all its productive tensions as a relatively autonomous site of ideological production but may also lead to the way John Fiske celebrates television as privileging 'diversity' and conflict. It really needs to be seen how much of all these, in the name of multiplicity and difference, succeeds in producing political tussles and to what extent the increasing variety of options leads us to overlook a certain degree of ideological coherence. One, however, should never undermine the contingent nature of such a form. Flow can not only simultaneously hold on to ideas of segment and the movement, of appearance and dissolution, the momentary and the structural, it is

suggestive in its refusal of a beginning, middle and end, in its presence as a process that is itself a spectacle.

Compared to the accounts I have discussed so far, Jane Feuer's position seems productive as it acknowledges such dualities, the fact that television is constituted by a dialectic of segmentation (in Ellis' sense) and flow. Her contention that Williams should more accurately be meaning "segmentation without closure"^[15] can possibly be used to refer to the traditions outside the modern realist narrative modes, those of vaudeville and variety shows in the Western context and something else in others. The idea of a "viewing strip", a serial set of programs *actually* viewed, as the unit of analysis proposed by Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsh also accommodates, along with the heterogeneity and inter-textuality of programs, the possibility of conceiving a sort of global image that constitutes the ideological location of the viewer.^[16] The point is to note that the 'variety show' effect-with the formal character of the pre-capitalist entertainment forms appropriated into a somewhat integrated ideological formation in the age of consumerism- of a strip of televiewing cannot be simply denied on the basis of the dominant etymological sense of horizontal movement, and perhaps also of the 'modern' device of narrative continuity, in flow. Williams' own writing bears testimony to this. The much-criticized designation of flow as "irresponsible"^[17] emanates from a certain perspective of the modern realist audio-visual representational context (of particularly the Classical Hollywood film form) in which television appeared. One should look at this as probably a strategy of foregrounding the critique's location, not simply as the articulation of a modern sensibility or the projection of a crude realist impulse.

At this point we can possibly probe the skepticism towards the possibility of existence of a "central television experience", related to a larger problematic of whether television at all constitutes an apparatus. To suggest, as Mimi White does, that "...flow seems to describe television in its most advanced commodity form, undermining its value as a critical term for conceptualizing

the medium apart from its consumerist imperatives" is, in a way, to acknowledge the efficacy of the term in grasping the workings of television in a consumerist context.^[18] Apart from this, the utility of a conceptual category doesn't lie in explaining everything that comes under the rubric of the medium, but in creating a discursive field that can problematise the 'inclination' of a representational site and above all in constructing a discursive referent in relation to which we can engage with the peculiarities of specific formations.^[19] 'Flow' does characterize the era of commercial television, not that of the Public television. The public service television in its erstwhile form could sustain 'discrete' programs because of its singularity in a national context and its disinterest in privatization and hence in 'commercials'. Richard Dienst's insistence that "if flow designates a movement of multiplicity within a single channel, it has always been with us"^[20] is rather incompatible with our reading of Williams' theory in two senses. Firstly, though Williams always cites the operation of the flow-form in a single channel, one can extend it to the "viewing strip" (Let us remember Williams' 'viewing strip' in the Miami hotel) which can be strewn over multiple channels. This was not clearly manifest before the economic and the successive cultural turn related to changing nature of capital that the US largely experienced in the 1970s and, let's say, India in the early 90s. The agency of television in subject-formation that Dienst so fiercely argues against must be related to the technologies and cultural forms of reception. Second, flow is not simply a "movement of multiplicity" or a "mixture of generic forms", it encapsulates a variety that can no longer sustain the oppositional charge of the early entertainment forms but is liable to be appropriated by consumerizing discourses valorizing 'choice' and 'freedom'. Dienst's otherwise brilliant analysis unfortunately rejects contingent generalization of "experience" (as privileged by the television apparatus) and "intention" (of the institutions) as unwanted "abstractions", failing to realize the discursive imperatives of theorization and larger institutional tropes that insistently refuse 'intention' and 'experience' to be merely "subjective".^[21] No surprise then that he is uncomfortable with another materialist category

of Williams, "structure of feelings".^[22] The deconstructionist bent, apparently of the Yale School variety, of his analysis obviously would not lend itself to the construction of an apparatus as repository of a privileged set of meanings. But to emphasize "...findings of textual analysis - contradictory and diffuse.." and "details of the material" over abstraction of the "televisual transmission", to critique the apparatus as suspending "viewing subject's *rules of order* (italics mine) and as "unavailable to any single viewer" is to advocate notorious traps of empirical content analysis that he accuses Stephan Heath and Gillian Skirrow of.^[23] Once again, locating 'flow' in ideology seems to be discomforting to any attempt that tries to read it as simply a dynamics devoid of coherence of any degree. This brings us to a major point in the study of Heath and Skirrow. They rightly point out that the 'movement' of flow can only be conceived as a "stasis", "...can be measured only through the "stasis" of its regularities".^[24] This notion comes very close to that of the tableau mode-of-address in the Early Film form, with the all important difference that here the ideological trope is not as loose and flexible as it could be in a pre-capitalist form. The 'stasis' refers as much to the consistency in the pattern of institutional construction of subjects, as to 'flow', a certain arrangement of images and sounds that itself becomes a spectacle, something that we see and hear *whenever* the TV is switched on.

Three

Intellectual inquiry into the mode of address, graphic organization of frame, and nature of reception of television has created a relatively homogeneous constellation of positions compared to the flurry of counter-currents in the theorization of televisual flow. The traits on which a reasonable degree of consensus appears to exist are frontality of address, specific modes of reception embedded in family, the absence of the Western premise of realism in the disavowal of narrative continuity, capability of extracting intimacy and participation along the vertical axis of exhibition, reduced sense of depth in frame, the currency of the extra-apparatus elements in constructing 'externality of spectatorship', the open-endedness of segments and so on.^[25]

One can add to these the variety-show effect and the ideological “stasis” of the televisual flow-form that, as we have tried to show, bear the legacy of representations outside the framework of the liaison between modern realist narrative and capitalism. What is interesting to note is that, a wide range of audio-visual performative traditions in India has been described in somewhat similar terms. One can’t help but look at the discourse on popular film form in India, the currents in what has come to firmly establish itself as ‘Indian Film Studies’ over more than a decade now, for the deployment of such terms.^[26] Is it simply a coincidental analogy, merely a resonance in discourse that shouldn’t be over-read, or is this correspondence capable of opening up unexpected junctures in the theorization of television? Before we get into further exploration of this correspondence, a brief note on the possible relationships between television and cinema wouldn’t be inappropriate.

Cinema, in fact, is crucial to television not only because the former is equally capable of creating strong constituencies of mass appeal but also because it is the only parallel site containing streams of recorded sounds and images involving concurrent questions of form. Along with the radio broadcast form, film has given television a significant context. Since reception of a representational site is inalienably attached to the formal legacies of the apparatus concerned, one can’t afford to undermine the formal histories of a ‘national’ cinema in shaping the viewership of television in a particular cultural context. This is not to repeat the cliché of trying to grasp the specificity of the televisual medium in comparison to film, but to suggest that the faculties of viewing and listening engender particular historical relationships between the two media. Of all possible relationships, the historical is most crucial, not in cinema’s sheer precedence to television, but in the possibility of the former being *appropriated* by the latter. Television seems to be a catalogue of devices that once aspired to contradict the terms of institutional modes of representation in film. In fact the gradual rise in the reach and popularity of commercial television in America and Europe at about the same time as the demise of the Classical Hollywood form is not at all

coincidental. From the politics of rupture in the avant-garde to the Godardian strategies of foregrounding, all the erstwhile devices of filmic iconoclasm found a new formal application, without their iconoclastic charge, in another apparatus at a moment when the cinematic institution was finding it difficult to sustain its bond with the `modern', with the values of realism, continuity and closure. In the Americas and Europe, given the legacy of a realist film form, the emergence of the flow-form (first in USA) would embody a major *shift*. I think the `shock' that Raymond Williams exhibits in his description of the encounter with American television, is indicative of the perspective of primarily the cinematic modern, or its somewhat corresponding form in public television, from which the west looked at television. I'm sure the reaction wouldn't have been less intense in America had it not groomed itself in commercial television broadcasting right from the beginning, in `flow' that engendered *irrational* overlap and mixture of `published sequence' with the unpublished ones. Williams, with his experience of `discrete' programmes on British public television, simply encountered something that was to come to his country a few years later.

My suggestion is that India's encounter with what can be called the television apparatus, with all the imports of `flow', did not mark a *shift* in that sense. The trajectory was different, or even inverted, compared to the west. The shift, here, was posited rather by the state television, which tried to align itself to a realist-developmental aesthetic concomitant with a state-sponsored cinema.^[27] It was a shift, not as much for the urban upper and middle classes who were relatively competent to simultaneously grasp the codes of realism and those of the indigenous entertainment, as for the rural addressee who was expected to master the codes of what was a relatively new audio-visual regime for them, the modern realist codes of development. In fact intertwining questions of class and cultural geography with the reception of state-sponsored television yields particular insight about the nature of the televisual apparatus. One major instance is the SITE. The state television, with an agenda of development not unconnected with its parallel

coercive drives during the Emergency, failed considerably in enchanting the rural peasantry by its moralist `citizenizing' mode of address. While the failure of SITE can be attributed to a number of reasons, the discord between the preferred popular form and what Sevanti Ninan describes as `dull programming', seems to be a key one.^[28] The relatively low popularity of public television in areas where private satellite television is available in India, perhaps can also be attributed to the strain between the representational imperatives of the welfare state and such a form. Transmission of popular films on state television (which was a soft option because the films provided the scope for cheap programming), to an extent, vindicated the State's effort to homogenize the addressee through the grand leveller of development. The instance of banning Hindi popular film songs from radio by B.V. Keskar in 1952 perhaps can be best understood as the state's effort to curb the entry of this popular in the sacred confines of home that were supposed to be the exclusive realm of television in few years' time. To telecast *Bobby* to disrupt an Opposition rally is actually a curious testimony to the state's acknowledgement of the popular film as a mass entertainer, though a corrupting one.^[29] In brief, the era of public television always exhibited a certain degree of uneasiness with the popular film form, a form that was preferred by the clientele of development television. In spite of being highly impoverished, the State channel couldn't think of considerably exploiting the cheap option of telecasting films, as would be possible in the era of private satellite programming. The surge of films in the satellite era cannot be explained simply by the dictates of 24-hours programming. The order of conformity between the apparatus and the performative traditions that the popular film form represents, is of particular significance here. The moment television started expanding from 1982 through the nineties based primarily on the logic of market expansion, the apparatus started showing its signs: increased number of `breaks', reduced duration of shots resulting in a speedier *irresponsible* movement. I am suggesting that this was far more resonant with the indigenous forms of entertainment connected to the legacies of an unresolved modern, to an incomplete process of

bourgeoisification of the state-form in India, to the simultaneous existence of a variety of production relations.^[30] An abstraction of the `popular' as the frontal, the spectacular and the non-continuous, as representing the inclination of the tastes of the majority of people, of the sensibility of `not-so-modern' subject, has been productive in understanding not only the popular film form in India but, broadly, a host of manifestations of the indigenous performative traditions. This `popular', however, as Chris Pinney reminds us in his study of the `visual history' of India, is best described as an "alternative modernity"^[31], and one can add, can only be theorized, not as the mark of an ontological value or a different historical location, but as very much a coordinate in the cartography of modernity. The work of Madhava Prasad, which I intend to take up a little later, deals with the mutual constitution of this form and the form of a post-colonial modernizing state.^[32] Ashish Rajadhyaksha, in his endeavour to locate the points of negotiation between the popular cultural forms and a nascent but struggling cinematic apparatus in India, also invokes the continuing efficacy, in shaping the realms of modern, of an identifiable set of pre-capitalist commercial representational forms in indigenous artefacts.^[33]

The palpable orders of semblance can also be discerned in what Rick Altman has described as television's capacity to generate, through its overt investment in sound, a parallel `household flow'.^[34] While one can see the implication of this in the reception of soaps by the family-at-home, the significance of orality, music and sound in the indigenous popular aesthetic in contrast to the ocular-centric modernity of the west^[35] is not difficult to locate here. In the fields of vision also, the way Jane Feuer contests the application of cinematic apparatus theory to television is worth our attention. She points towards the inability of the western cinematic institution to account for the implication of `family' in the peculiar mode of spectation that television engenders, provoking us further to look for a legacy elsewhere, in some other form of address. I quote: "...the `implied spectator' for television is not the isolated, immobilised pre-Oedipal individual described by Metz and

Baudry in their metapsychology of the cinema, but rather a post-Oedipal, fully socialised family member". While we can contest the term "fully socialised", one that disavows the tension between the primal pulls of the 'individual' and the 'familial' embedded in Symbolic, the insistence on a representational content that "proposes a reflection, however distorted, of the body of the familialised viewing subject" is suggestive.^[36] Historically, the continuing efficacy of 'community' or rather of a relatively blurred boundary between the private and the public possibly makes television play a different role in a post-colonial context like India.

One should of course be cautious to note the absence of a symmetrical analogy here. We certainly don't want to be trapped in the teleological history of a sort of pre-figuration of the apparatus and deny the specific novelties of the medium. One should in fact try to simultaneously foreground the points of dissonance to underline that this correspondence can *never* be analogical. The relationship can perhaps be rightly described as 'homologous' in the sense that Raymond Williams uses the word on another occasion. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's "surprising but convincing configuration of the ragpickers, the 'bohemians' and the new poetic methods of Paris under the second empire", Williams remarks that "at one level correspondences are resemblances, in seemingly very different specific practices, which may be shown by analysis to be both direct and directly related expressions of and responses to a general social process." He then goes on to chart various possible relationships from analogies to displaced connections and finally concedes that the concept of homology indicates "a sense of corresponding *forms* or *structures*". I wish to quote a rather long passage

Resemblances and analogies between different specific practices are usually relations within a process, working inwards from particular forms to a general form. Displaced connections, and the important idea of homologous structures, depend less on an immediately observable process than on an effectively completed historical and social structural

analysis, in which a general form has become apparent and specific instance of this form can be discovered, not so much or even at all in content, but in specific and autonomous but finally related forms.

Apart from theoretically exhausting the contingency of such a form ('effectively completed...analysis'), the major problem associated with any exercise in homology, Williams suggests, is that of "procedural selectivity of historical and cultural evidence".^[32] Aware of this, we should stress that we are trying to deal with a *possible level* of homology between the structure of the apparatus and of a representational tradition that is neither archaic nor residual, and not propose an all-encompassing grid of similitude. In fact any effort of opportunistic selection for a perfect 'fit' is bound to fail here miserably precisely because television doesn't reproduce, but negotiates the forms of entertainment that bear an order of alternative-modern legacy, and constitutes and simultaneously gets constituted by these forms.

The most crucial level calling for a negotiation is manifest in television's operation in the domain of the home, relegating the erstwhile primacy of communitarian reception of popular entertainment to what is intended to be privatized consumption. Television (and previously radio) in a sense, remains primarily responsible for expanding the semantics of community/public leisure in which, the element of '*going out* for the speciality of spectacle' is somewhat rendered secondary with the emergence of the new lexicon of 'entertainment', the ever-presence of a quotidian domestic flow. The larger community beyond the family, however, always intrudes as a rule through the apparatus itself, generating a peculiar space of 'privatized public'. Television, beyond doubt, has given rise to a new home, a site that is torn between a sense of threat to its integrity as the site of property and peace, and a possible feeling of security, an intensification of the boundary of home underlined by the 'distance' of reception. The specific import of what I have termed the 'record-mode' of address elsewhere - represented primarily in the satellite television news that has a relatively enhanced value to the so called 'educated' class - is particularly instrumental in creating this friction.

The 'play-mode' on the other hand is oriented towards assigning the home a more secured status, helping the 'self', of the viewer and of the family, posit a certainty of location.^[38] Both of these modes of address trigger an impression that is not exactly of 'being at home' but of, I would say, 'being in one of the homes'. The home and the familial space here harbour a certain order of porosity and ephemerality; numerous versions of this home constitute the domain of the new public. The order of communitarian engagement, hence, is not completely lost from television. This has been largely undermined in discourses of television that have always emphasized the home/family in its literal sense of being opposed to 'street', thereby sticking to the modern distinction between the private and the public. While one cannot but accept the effectiveness of such a distinction in certain contexts, what is necessary is to amply complicate this distinction to underline the mutual constitution of television and the emergent overlap of the private and the public. The overemphasis on the familial mode of televisual reception largely obscures the way pre-capitalist forms of public participation around audiovisual performance lend a certain legacy to the new televisual *public* domain. The all-important difference is that the new community enacts itself in a de-territorialized manner. Reception at home cannot simplistically mean that the space of reception of *television* is essentially and only that of the family or the individual. It seems that the element of liveness, which makes possible the vastness of the oral culture around television, remains primarily instrumental in suturing the new televisual public. The trope of the modern, one should remember, does operate in this public, but less in the sense of a 'reading public', and more in that of the relegation of the territorialized social assembly to the deterritorialized space of liveness. So, we see that privatized reception of television doesn't simplistically impair the predominance of a 'public community' in the reception of popular audio-visual representations in the post-colonial context, but enters into a new relationship with it, a relationship that helps us read the political contours of television and perhaps also the related issues in subjectivity.

Another possible objection to the homology between the structure of flow and the local aesthetic is the nature of gaze deployed in television. The common belief that television can only generate 'glance' and not deeply contemplative viewing doesn't seem to be convincing. The viewing strip should more aptly be seen as the repository of a series of resolutions constituted by the viewing subject, who moves to another channel only after the 'narrative interest' of a fragment has come to some temporary resolution. This is more close to a form that is comprised of a series of short contingent events/spectacles/gags, more like the indigenous film form and less like the avant-garde that could generate a critical spectatorship. In brief the focus should be as much on the higher order of negotiations as on the primary order of homology that makes the negotiations possible.

Four

Some questions seem to arise at this point. One, what does such a correspondence (between flow-form television and Indian popular film form) mean or what does one do with it? Two, how does one explain it, a structure that is post-colonial in its legacy of an indigenous colonial modern and that is at the same time the signifier of the apparatus which, according to many, largely represents the post-modern? Three, what particular instances can be cited from the history of television in India to demonstrate the significance of such a correspondence? And finally, how does this help theorization of a possible relationship between television and nation?

To begin to answer the first question is also to lend oneself to a possible theoretical slippage: that of appropriating the disparate functions of television in a cultural context to a *common* attribute that is, as if, always instrumental. To avoid this, we should reassert that we are talking of only the flow-form television here that, we have suggested, bears a certain formal correspondence to Indian popular film form. We are not bringing in our purview the other forms that contemporary television, albeit rarely, can invoke (think of an occasion when a realistic film is shown without any break

and someone actually watches the whole film through). In case of the flow-form, which is undoubtedly the dominant worldwide, the sense of this correspondence is so insistent in the constitution of the televisual subject in this part of the world, so very operative even in the `modern' subject, who, despite being armed with the legacy of classical/literary realism, is simultaneously vulnerable to the vibrant appeals of the indigenous aesthetic, that denying its force becomes difficult. I propose that the homology in form tends to orient the televisual subject in India, and broadly in the non-West, in a grid of *identity*. It is not identification *per se* in the psychoanalytic sense of the term deployed in studies of classic realist film, based on a set of possible psychic operations in the individual. It is rather a certain perception of `us', not of `I', that identifies its major expressive conduit in the televisual form here. The drive is more towards a desire to *re-member* the `self' over and over again in the televisual flow, the immediately available and most coveted domain of `public'. The question of class, and broadly, that of power are highly contextual here. The disempowered section would not only want to be acknowledged by the apparatus but would also want to see itself perpetually *present* in it.^[39] This presence succeeds in generating the trope of identity through a certain formal organization, and not usually through representative content as such. While this is quite possible in the space of television's birth, I suggest that the relatively large constituency of a class that *is* consumer but is still to a great extent outside the empowering functions of modern epistemes, makes this kind of affiliation more applicable to the Indian context.

On the other hand, Television to North America and Europe seems to have been primarily a tool of *representation*, a facilitator of the panopticon, necessitated primarily by a renewed surge in the global flow of capital. This is where we want to highlight a certain association between the flow of programming across the globe and the particular structure of the televisual flow.^[40] That the notion of the central television experience of flow is inconceivable without a particular context of competition-oriented market has

already been pointed out. What remains to be said is that this market's drive to expand spatially to all the corners of the world in a certain period is somewhat proportionate to the intensity of the televisual flow. The consumerization of a society cannot be unrelated to the extent of capital inflow that it has received from outside. In this sense, the transition from discreet programming to 'flow' not only marks a shift from a system of closed governmental control to that of a porous market, but also the increased mobility in the flow of capital and a concurrent inflow of foreign satellite channels making the 'viewing strip' lose its discreet nature. Seen from this perspective, the flow-form is the inevitable signifier of the global flow of capital and of images and narratives.

In brief, we are suggesting that the recognition of a body of formal devices in television in a post-colonial context is tied not only to a local legacy, but largely to a certain history of capitalism's renewed drive to expand spatially in the post-Fordist era. This however can wrongly be projected as a simplistic thesis of cultural imperialism: not the monstrous skirmish but the subtle ploy of a global institution to generate strong identity through its apparatus in a prospective market. While such a design is not difficult to figure in the workings of advertizing agencies, the practice of intense classificatory research and the system of ratings, the trope of *formal* identity nearly refuses to be explained by the grid of ideological critique alone. To trace the historical reasons for such an adjacency^[41] of performative modes, we should draw attention to what is predominantly a temporal expansion, along with the spatial, of the representational framework of the big entrepreneurial institutions. At a certain juncture in history, in conjunction with the imperatives of an all-inclusive politics of consumerism, there emerged the need to incorporate the hitherto unaddressed 'lowly' forms into the dominant modes of cultural dissemination in the west. Though this was manifest primarily in the thematic concerns, I propose that a certain class can never subscribe to the emergent ethos of participation that television invites and valorizes unless the former, to a certain extent, *recognizes* the form. We

shall remember here the reference to vaudeville and variety show in Williams' effort to characterize the commercial televisual form. The cultural logic of late capitalism can not only be the thematic appropriation of sub-cultures and of the past of a certain class through nostalgia industry. It has to receive succour from a certain graphic organization and mode of address that, to an extent, are continuous with the erstwhile cultures of the emergent consumer and that, especially in the mammoth terrain of the heteronomous popular, can never be only modern in the literary sense of the term. The proximity of the expressive mode of the working-class in the west to the audio-visual performances of the colonial subaltern is perhaps best instantiated by the rubric of Primitive Mode of Representation in film in the West. It can explain a lot, though not the whole, of colonial India's silent film performance. This is where I think the primary reason of the adjacency lies: a drive to incorporate the residual cultural forms in the west and simultaneously to spread across the world, especially in the realms where the pre-modern is not liminal, the two drives being associative in their effort to incorporate the subject hitherto marginally addressed. This makes it possible for television to devise for itself a certain form, a new dominant that becomes the signifier of appropriation of the residual and of redefinition of the emergent, now successfully engaged in an inclusionist rhetoric.

While the transition to a modern cinematic expression was relatively continuous in the actual site of invention of the cinematograph, enabling the somewhat modernized spectator of television in the west to *look back* or to reinstate a provisional loss, in India the 'educated', the subject conversant with the modern modes of spectation would rather engage synchronically with the appropriated pre-capitalist order of television's appeal. Those who have had relatively less access to the modern frames of knowledge are more likely to be tied in a bond of recognition with the televisual apparatus.^[42] So, to clarify, we are not joining the post-modernist celebration of difference, of that between the inclination of a sense of 'representation' in the west and of a sense of 'identity' here in televisual experience. It is more the currency of

a certain order of spectator-subjectivity, inconceivable without its relations with the maverick travels of modernity that makes possible a particular mode of engagement. And hence the identitarian intimacy would be no less powerful in a certain section of the audience in the first and second worlds. We are simply suggesting that this order of subjectivity is contingently operative in a wider section in a post-colonial context and the apparatus has a layout that can appeal quite successfully to this order along with a simultaneous appeal to the modern *per se*. In this sense, the late capitalist configuration of television harbours serious traces of formal continuity in post-colonial contexts, rather than the projected 'break' that has come to pervade discourses of contemporary media. Television theory so far has largely undermined the possibility of understanding the televisual form and experiences in terms of the renewed geopolitical imperatives of capital. Our instance of the Indian context helps problematize the standard notion of 'coming of television' to the non-west. It is rather a certain consideration of the need to spread to the non-west that already informs the televisual form and acts as the condition of possibility for television to act as the biggest representational site for consumerism. Our effort, hence, is not to devise an Indian theory of television, but to envisage a possible *theory of television* that can account for (and that is inconceivable without) the particularity of the non-west's encounter with television, typically instantiated by the Indian context.

Five

A close look at the genealogy of the commercial television form thus suggests strong orders of complementary exchange between diverse trajectories of capital and modernity and helps comprehend television as a signifier of a certain moment in their career. In India, possible modes of formal identification with the global televisual form showed signs of prefiguration especially from 1975, before actually being evident in the 1980s after the Asiad, and particularly in the 1990s with the coming of the foreign satellite channels. We have already discussed the relation of this to the

failure of the state's experiment with development communication (SITE). Let us now try to investigate the internal conditions that made such an identificatory grid of attachment possible. To be precise, we shall look into how a specific type of mercantile culture emerged right in the heart of coercive statist operations in India and what role it played in generating a context conducive to the workings of the apparatus.

The parallel running of a developmental project and a state of Emergency (1975-77) should not only be seen as two mutually constitutive practices of the same political agenda, but primarily as the symptom of crisis of a certain state-form. What we usually lose sight of is that the crisis was largely economic in the uncontrollability of a market which the multinationals ravaged by inserting cheap and pirated gadgets. This made the state play an apparently dissident but actually, in the last analysis, an endorsing role in the whole drive of commercial usurpation. Rajadhyaksha's point that the "Emergency in India was, in many ways, an effort to shore up, as almost a last-ditch stand, the orthodox protectionist measures of a national market in India—a promise that had been especially made to the Indian bourgeoisie during the freedom struggle" and that it was a sort of response to the "flood of cheaply manufactured electronic durables" is illuminating here.^[43] The expansion of a capitalist regime had two primary effects that can account for the imminent rise of the televisual form as the key site of commercial aesthetics. Firstly, the state itself tried to expand its grip through "production control" and shift from the geographically controlled distribution systems to licensing over areas hitherto unreached, efforts that can not be isolated from the propaganda through SITE. Secondly, this led to a surge of artisanal modes of production in small localities, the widespread availability of "cheaply manufactured electronic durables using various modes of memory-recall and information storage - from the radio-and-tape recorder, two-in-ones to calculators, to various kinds of easily piratable computer software, and of course the VCR", which the State "could do nothing to control".^[44] This shows how the post-Fordist capital can give rise to small artisanal sites and

local modes of reception, relocating the erstwhile rural and small-town popular into a deterritorialized frame of large communitarian dissemination.^[45]

Both of these developments signal the imminent projection of a not-so-modern gaze at a representational form that bears the ethos of both the emergent market and the new state-form. I am referring specially to the telecast of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that, in a way, announces the birth of popular television in India. The telecast of the epic serials that amounted to being a reinvocation of Ravi Varma style iconography into an emergent 'society of spectacle' and reminiscent of the 'mythological' that played a negotiating role in the colonial encounter with film, had as its condition of possibility the 'flow', a form that springs, not accidentally, effective modes of identification for a certain constellation of subjects. Progressive melodramas, like *Humlog* and *Buniyaad* in the post-Asiad era- interestingly, imports from another third world context-should not be seen merely as having the legacy of a realist-statist cinema. They rather marked the negotiation of a form that the state could not exclusively sustain any more, with the still-forming lexicon of the new popular. The very emphasis on the word *Humlog* by Ashok Kumar, who with his familiar avuncular demeanour appeared at the end of each episode, invoked a sense of bondage with television itself. In this sense, I would see serious traces of continuity between the pair of developmentalist tele-fictions as testimony to the state's effort to negotiate a certain form through its usual staple of realism, and the serialisation of Hindu epics as the mark of an almost perfect compatibility attained by then. Arvind Rajagopal's point in *Politics after Television* that there is no 'inherent shared logic' between the economic reforms and *Hindutva* demands a major qualification in this regard. I would rather like to draw attention to the forms of iconography and aurality that give both of these regimes of representation a certain ideological premise for a discursive coalition.^[46] The formal layer of signification that constitutes the television apparatus and that has the capability of triggering intense engagement based on identity seems to be

undermined in Rajagopal's work. His acknowledgement, nevertheless, of the agency of 'national television' in bringing split-publics to the fore is indicative of the simultaneous orders of subjectivity that consumerist satellite television can bear.^[47] This, however, is inadequate for accounting for the possible reasons of such intense investment in identity at, shall we say, the *moment of television*. Connecting the serialization of epics to the crisis of the Congress party and of a certain kind of electoral politics has far-reaching consequences. The most palpable is attributing to the Hindu Right a certain design that makes it wait for the opportune moment and finally exploit the 'images of the commodity market' to push its agenda. At the end television remains only a technology of dissemination and not a cultural form that orchestrates content, reformulates tradition and subjectivity in ways *specifically* conditioned by history.

In the section called 'how has television changed the context of politics in India?' Rajagopal rightly refers to a relentless attraction to 'television' even when one is critical of the content, but doesn't relate that to the questions of form or to ideology. He refers to the way the Hindi newspapers represented the Ram Janambhoomi movement in sympathetic terms as opposed to the set of English ones that had a more secular and objective tone.^[48] To extend this very useful line of analysis, I would suggest that the huge reading public of the vernacular newspapers, who are by statistics far larger than that of the English newspapers in India, represent a certain subject that has a wider role to play in determining television's form precisely because it is this subject's role in consumption that is most sought after by the drivers of the apparatus. The synchronic melange of a variety of components that commercial television has to nurture as an imperative would be particularly close to the subject less appropriated by unifying principles of modernity and this can never mean taking the pleasure off the relatively 'modernized' subject with colonial legacies of representation. The latter, I argue, shall extract pleasures of *representation* along with identification. It is the television news and reportage adhering primarily to the 'record-mode' that

tends to generate in the relatively rationalized subject a certain identification with `flow' as the device of scanning and of analysis. In any case, the writings on television in India have so far been indifferent to the debates concerning the flow-form or the television apparatus in general and have been interested more in the power of reflection (and constitution) of subjectivities that televisual *content* presumably has. I think one needs to further investigate the transaction between modes of dissemination of the telecasting technology and levels of cognizance of a certain audiovisual form to understand the workings of a predominantly late capitalist form in a post-colonial context.

To return to our overarching question of what can possibly conjure a meaningful entry-point into the reading of television's operation in India, one can look particularly at the way Madhava Prasad uses Marx's distinction of formal and real subsumption in his study of the Hindi film. Prasad, while trying to establish the contextuality of an ideology of formal subsumption, constantly draws our attention to the need to dismantle it because, as he says, the conditions of its applicability "are fast disappearing as capitalism has been unleashed in the subcontinent with unprecedented haste". He reminds us that we are possibly witnessing the certitudes of this theoretical project "dissolve in the flux of contemporary events".^[49] Analyzing the formal structure of two films that were released in the two successive years after the New Licensing Policy of 1991, Prasad speculates the working of the order of real subsumption in the emergent popular form. He particularly stresses the need to look at "music video as an autonomous form" which, in his words, represents a certain segment of the cultural market of film-song as a sub-commodity and at the "vast televisual system that is still expanding and experimenting".^[50] Given our effort to show that the television form is replete with traces of capital affecting the production process, that it can hold the ideologies of both the state and the market in such a manner as to make each of them capable of *representing* the other, can one say that the televisual form does incline towards an ideology of real subsumption? The

actual corresponding economic process of bourgeoisification of the state-form, however, is definitely far from being complete, if it is at all ever fully possible. One possible signifier of this is that the flow-form is not equally manifest in all the sites; there still exist a host of television channels (and sometimes segments within a channel) that consistently announce the nurturing of a different production process refusing to fit into the organized capitalist order. But can't we say that television itself is one of the crucial constitutive agents of a resolution of the struggle over the state-form, a struggle that is intrinsic to the process of formal subsumption? In India, the increasingly judgmental, quasi-state stance of the private news channels, the judicial acknowledgement of telecast media as the custodian of *public* property ("air-waves"), the consistent performance of democratic processes by interactive television programmes - all point towards television's and largely media's capability to enact the post-liberalisation state-form. The "two resolutions to the narrative crisis" of the 'classical' Hindi film that made the Law say the last word but only as a formality, or the centrality of Law in films from the early seventies^[51] - neither seems to be an imperative of the popular soaps in India precisely because the state no more needs to figure itself in isolation. The formal traces of real subsumption, of course, don't show up corporeally in all spheres of *television* per say in India. But one perhaps cannot deny its visibility in those sites which lure the unsubsumed representational forms with a certain telos, in those channels in India, to be specific that carry the legacy of the global television form. A mode of examination predicated upon the erasure of such a distinction in production-relations within India is bound to undermine the fissure within the representational order and hence be unable to see the power of the more prestigious national/global channels in informing the audiovisual and organizational structures of channels in the lower stratum of the hierarchy. So, the ideology of real subsumption can offer us an effective tool of analysis as long as we are ready to accept this is as a discursive edifice, as a horizon of the scope of flow-form television, not as a corporeal omnipresence that can explain the world of television in India. The point is to recognize that in

advanced capitalist contexts the *formal* ramification of this process of real subsumption is more tangible.

In our assertion of a certain correlation between the global flow of capital and the televisual 'flow' and of a concomitant correspondence of the repertoire of indigenous performative forms to the televisual apparatus, we should locate another subsumption, the process through which the representational structure of a global institution is trying to subsume the national, the localized production-relations. Isn't this connected to the imagination of the globe increasingly in terms of the constellation of values that the new Nation embodies? I think the comprehension of an antagonistic relation of nation to a world order, so much in vogue in the days of internationalism, considerably loses its charge in the televisual system. That television is particularly proficient in harbouring the national and the global simultaneously, and in making possible representation of one by the other, reveals perhaps a unique power of the cultural form in question. The 'ideal nation' that aspires to construct the globe in its own image, a de-territorialized abstraction, a 'value' in itself, goes hand-in-hand with the notion of the territorialized nation under the jurisdiction of a nation-state. The global, in this sense, is indeed the *nation*-al. The way of theorizing the efficacy of 'nation' in television possibly lies not in rummaging for evidences of 'national specificity' but in looking into the degree of distinction with which these two imaginaries of the nation function. On a more conjectural note, would the televisual apparatus, due to its resonance with a set of pre-existing local forms, be more powerful in representing the territorialized nation in contexts like India?

References

[1](#) M. Madhava Prasad, 'Television and the National Culture' in *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, numbers 32-33, April 1999, p.126.

[2](#) See 'Beyond Globalization Theory' in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, ed. James Curran and Myung Jin-Park, Routledge, 2000, p.11-12 and p.15. Here 'De-Westernizing' aims at

identifying in the non-West various traits that are different from those in the West. It is worth noting that the variety is sought to be discovered in production and distribution patterns, economic and policy structures, reception contexts, but never in the audiovisual configuration of television screen or spectatorial engagements.

3 See Michael Richards, 'Television, Development and National Identity' in *Television in Contemporary Asia* ed. David French and Michael Richards, Sage, 2000, p.29-41

4 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* ed. Ederyn Williams, Routledge, London, 1990, p.86-96.

5 *ibid.* 90

6 *ibid.* p.92

7 *ibid.* p.86

8 *ibid.* p.87

9 *ibid.* p.95

10 *ibid.* p.88

11 John Ellis, 'Broadcast TV as Cultural Form' in *Visible Fictions*, Routledge, 1992 p.112,p.116-120.

12 John Fiske, *Television Culture*, Methuen, London, 1987, p.105. Fiske, the champion of 'polysemy' and 'resistance' in television, considers zapping as "segmentation taken to the extreme of fragmentation" that "...makes television the most open producerly text for it evades all attempts at closure".(p.105)

13 Ellis as quoted in 'Narrative Form in American Television', Jane Feuer, in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film* ed. Colin MacCabe, Manchester University Press, 1986. P.102

14 *ibid* p.102

15 Jane Feuer, as quoted in Mimi White, 'Flows and Other Encounters with Television', paper presented at the conference entitled 'Media in Transition 2: Globalization and Convergence' at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. The full paper is available at <http://cms.mit.edu/conf/mit2/Abstracts/MimiWhite.pdf>

16 Newcomb, Horace and Hirsch, Paul, 'Television as a Cultural Forum' in Horace Newcomb ed. *Television: the Critical View*, 5th edition, OUP, New York, 1994, p.509-510.

17 Williams, *op. cit.* P.92

18 Mimi White, *op.cit.*

19 In a sense, Williams' category of flow is proximate to Marx' coinage of 'production in general' in *Grundrisse*. There is no particular phase in the history of production that can be attached to the term. Marx says that this discursive abstraction is "...a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition" (*Grundrisse*, London, 1973). Antonio Negri, in his *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the*

Grundrisse (Autonome/Pluto, London, 1991), comments that Marx' passage contains "...the construction of general conceptual abstraction, its particular determination *on the basis of difference...*" (p.43). To Negri, what emerges here is "...the concept of *totality as a relation and a unity of differences...*" (p.44). The notion of flow also exhibits such unity in the sense that even though the structure and relations the idea represents can be absent in a particular site, it would be possible to read a particular instance vis-à-vis the structure of flow. Usually every television channel aspires to bear the structure of flow in the era of satellite commercial television. See Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, 'Alibabar Guptabhandar', *Sharodiyo Baromas*, 2000, p.51-52, for an elaboration on the need to take the Marxian category as contingent.

[20](#) Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1994, p.27-28. To Dienst zapping has not introduced any novel element in the whole structure of televiewing: "at best zapping reintroduces the moment of circumscribed chance, making a transverse cut through the grid from one programme zone to another until *sense appears*" (italics mine).

[21](#) *ibid*, p.32

[22](#) *ibid*, p.26

[23](#) *ibid*. p.32

[24](#) *ibid*. p.32. Dienst here is referring to 'Television: A World in Action', an essay by Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, *Screen* 18 (Summer 1977).

[25](#) See John Ellis, 'Broadcast TV as Cultural Form' (p.111-126) and 'Broadcast TV as Sound and Image' (p.127-144) in *Visible Fictions*. Almost all books on television, published so far, more-or-less subscribe to these generalizations on television. I am mentioning only Ellis' book because it is one of the most influential books that undertook the task of *characterizing* television.

[26](#) One should remember here that it is only a set of *formal* association that, I am suggesting, exists between the Indian popular film form and consumerist television. The corresponding tropes in ideology cannot be said to have the same function, though can be historically related in interesting ways. Indian popular film form has been widely theorized as harboring traits incompatible with the Classical Hollywood film form: frontality of address, exhibitionism, discontinuity in narrative thread, the predominance of 'spectacles', the condensed semantics of the Iconic image etc. These traits don't represent the autonomy of a set of unfiltered cultural/performative 'traditions', but they rather exist in film as vibrant conduits of negotiating the Modern institutions of transformation (See Prasad, 'Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction', OUP, Delhi, 1998, p.1-26. See also Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke Era', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, No. 14_15, 1987). Vasudevan's comment relating to frontality in Indian film can be broadly and effectively applied to the understanding of recorded audiovisual performance: "At one level frontality would mean placing the camera at a 180 degree plane to the figures and objects constitutive of filmic space. These may display attributes of direct address, as in the look of characters into the camera, but a frontal, direct address is relayed in other ways, as in the way the knowledge of the spectator is drawn upon in constructing the scene, through the stylized performance, ritual motifs and auditory address that arise from a host of Indian aesthetic and performance traditions." ('The politics of cultural address in a 'transitional' cinema: a case study of Indian popular cinema' in *Reinventing Film Studies*, Arnold, 2000, p.138). The Indian popular film's investment in the *iconic* is perhaps the only trait that needs to be further explained in order to identify its formal correspondence to the televisual apparatus. According to Geeta Kapur the iconic is "an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which moreover they achieve stasis" ('Revelation and doubt: *Sant Tukaram* and *Devi*' in T. Niranjana, P. Sudhir and V. Dharieswar eds. *Interrogating modernity: culture and colonialism in India*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1993 p.23). In our effort to theorize the flow-form television as a grand

accommodator of the alternative-modern, as a site that makes possible for the latter a renewed negotiation with the Modern, we shall try to suggest that `television' itself (in the sense of watching *television*) becomes a repository of aspirations for the *alternative modern* subject, the main addressee of consumerist television.

[27](#) Ashish Rajadhyaksha rightly recalls the connection between the progressivist series like *Humlog* and *Buniyad* with the project of New Indian Cinema of the 1970s. See Rajadhyaksha's `Beaming Messages to the Nation', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, no.19, May 1990, p.41-42.

[28](#) Sevanti Ninan, *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India*, Penguin Books New Delhi, 1995, p.18

[29](#) Ninan, *ibid.* p.26

[30](#) I don't mean by performative traditions in India a homogeneous set. I am referring rather to the popular aesthetic that has predominantly come to be embodied in the popular Hindi film form in India. While it is true that one needs to consider the evolution of this form especially in terms of the emergence of particularly the super-genre of the `Social' after independence that subsumed various Studio-era genres within itself, the `variety show' look of the Hindi film was always actually present. Still, if one wishes to underline a particular period or form, it would be the `all inclusive Hindi film', the Social, that most aptly exemplifies the negotiations with the indigenous traditions of performance and reception. Most crucial here is to remember, as Madhav Prasad has suggested (*Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, pp.46-50), that the historical condition for such a negotiation is "an unevenly developed market capitalism" (p.48). To Prasad, "the ideology of the all-inclusive film, whose vision of the world tends to be multi-faceted, episodic and loosely structured" should be related to a production process in which the logic of product-differentiation, as in organized capitalism, "has not advanced beyond the elementary stages". My conviction is that the televisual subject in India, and broadly in the non-West, is historically related to the particular audio-visual configuration and conditions of this form.

[31](#) Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.204

[32](#) See M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*.

[33](#) See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, `The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, no.14-15, 1987, p.47-78. In case of the negotiated colonial modern space of painting and later film in India, visibility is oriented more towards the `iconic' and what has been called `darsanic', both of which refer to a certain formal staticity and a gaze engaging more in the vertical axis of reception, triggering more a trope of `identification' than of discovery/representation. The point here is to recognize that the televisual flow is less proximate to the visual dynamics of classical narrative cinema with the latter's import of causality and resolution, than it is to the stasis of *television* as a whole, both in terms of watching and community-talk about it. Flow of course refers to a dynamics, but of a sort that itself becomes a spectacle, an ever-present event that we want to play over and over again.

[34](#) Altman as quoted in Dienst, *op.cit.* p.29-30. The primacy of sound in television is also discussed extensively by Ellis, `Broadcast TV as Sound and Image', *op.cit.*

[35](#) See `The Centrality of the Eye in the Western Culture' by Chris Jenks (*Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks, Routledge, 1995, p.1-25) and `Scopic Regimes of Modernity' by Martin Jay (*Modernity and Identity* ed. Scot Lash and Jonathon Friedman, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p.178-195) for an elaboration on how an overt investment in vision informs the Modern pursuit for authenticity and truth. See also my `Bringing up TV: Development Communication

and Citizenship in India' (forthcoming) for a discussion on how a certain aurality becomes the key constituent of the post-colonial popular.

[36](#) Jane Feuer, 'Narrative form in American Network Television' in *High Theory Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film*, p.103.

[37](#) Raymond Williams, 'Typification and Homology' in *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1985, p.101-107

[38](#) I have discussed these two modes of televisual address in detail in my 'The *Bhadralok* and the New Popular' (unpublished, 2000). Here I talk about the two aspects of the 'new televisual popular' that engage two different not-mutually-exclusive modes of addresses. We would identify the 'entertainment-popular', best represented by MTV (the popular proper?) as engaging primarily a 'play mode' because things-song, dance, film, fiction-are 'played' here with the dominant impression in the viewer being "it's being *played* for me/us". As opposed/alternative to this we can think of the 'news-popular' (BBC-Star News-*Aaj Tak*) as predominantly engaging a 'record mode' generating impression of things *recorded* for me/us. These two modes deploy two different kinds of proclamations; the record-mode *produces* 'documents' of 'life caught unaware' and the play-mode lays emphasis upon 'performance'. My categorization was largely inspired by Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's ('Ray's Memory Game', *Journal of the Moving Image*, no. 2) meticulous theorization of two basic instincts of the post-industrial human: 'will to record' and 'will to play' (in the sense of a 'game') that, almost as a rule, collate into representations making it virtually impossible to 'record without play' and vice versa. The play and the record modes of televisual address do not refer to simplistic distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction' and definitely not to a categorization that would engender concrete division of programmes along these lines. For our purpose here, it's important to relate these two categories to the varying degrees of 'sense of being in the secured confines of home' that they are capable of generating.

[39](#) See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Viewership and Democracy in Indian Cinema' in *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*, ed. Ravi Vasudevan, Oxford university Press, Delhi, 2002, p.270-285. Rajadhyaksha hints that one of the reasons of film being so frontal in the Indian context is that here popular cinema largely remains patronized by the people outside the empowering frames of modernity. This section, by presenting itself in the film theatre, exercises the modern democratic rights that it is usually barred from doing outside the theatre and derives a certain sense of being "empowered" out of it. "We can now start seeing why the cinema came to mean so much to Indian people at large. Those basic 'enumerative' rights of democracy- the right to be counted, the right to receive welfare - are precious, since these are often the only kinds of rights that people in general basically have in a place like India, and people to different degrees are aware of and 'recognize this' " (p.283)... "At this level, therefore, when the viewer purchases a ticket, enters the auditorium and 'releases' the film, saying 'I am here' ('I am present..I help it to be born'), what the cinema is also doing is to incarnate one of the most fundamental, even if ambiguous at times, rights of democracy. The inscribed viewer category comes in precisely through the invitation to viewers to identify it, and then identify *with* it: hence both statements, 'It is true' and 'Do you recognize what you see?'; or even, in admittedly different kinds of political contexts, 'You see this/ You own this'. What is to be 'recognized' is not necessarily what is on screen: what is also recognized is that the abstract category of *viewer* whom the film is, so to say, 'supposed to' be addressing..." (p.283). I think, television spectatorship, though inconceivable in terms of the exercising of democratic rights in a public place like film theatre, is nevertheless crucially premised in the disempowered viewer in the non-West. The viewer, by entering into a parallel frame of democracy, of surveying the market and choosing the right TV set, of applying for loan or borrowing and ultimately 'owning' the TV set and hence subscribing to a certain *publicly accepted* order and daily routine at home, would demand a form that would enable a transaction between the modernizing institution and the existent popular of the *actual* viewer and would *recognize* "the abstract category of *viewer*" whom the television is, "supposed to be addressing". The *moment of television* is a moment when strong identitarian attachment is sought from those who had been hitherto considered relatively insignificant in the spread of

Capitalism. But more than deciphering the apparatus in terms of merely the class, a geo-political understanding can be helpful. Television is also capable of invoking strong identificatory engagement in the upper class viewer of the third world as well, due primarily to TV's reassuring gesture that the much-despised subservient position of the post-colonial bourgeois vis-à-vis their Western counterpart can now be erased. The point is that though the natures of dissemination of film and television are different, the theorization of flow-form television cannot ignore the way the historical encounter with film-a certain horizon of possibility of audio-visual organization - in India has been theorized.

[40](#) See Yosefa Loshitzky, 'Travelling Culture/traveling television' (Screen, 37:4, Winter 1996) for also using 'flow' in such terms. But according to her the notion inclines more towards an ethnographic stance that, she thinks, is the reason of William's incomprehension of the American flow-form. I have already raised certain questions on unproblematically accepting this contention.

[41](#) Paul Bove uses Edward Said's term 'adjacency' to refer to a certain lineage of the Poststructuralist approach to 'systems of thought'. Tracing a major source of influence over Foucault in Georges Canguilhem's contention that 'different sciences and systems of thought "cohere"', Bove suggests that this approach forces to consider "...how, within the "systems of thought" they constituted, various "sciences" might be institutionally and even conceptually discontinuous; how they might be practiced, as it were, at disparate points within a culture and yet, given their "adjacencies", make up a coherent system of thought spread across a range of institutions and discourses whose family resemblances can be traced by the genealogist interested in their multiple origins, transformations, and their value for the present". Paul Bove, 'Discourse', *Critical Terms for Literary Study* Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1990, p. 55-56.

[42](#) This section of the audience definitely has allegiance to a certain class, but the question of cultural geography is also central. Consideration, for instance, of Bengal's privileged historical location, reveals the ineffectiveness of solely class as the determinant of access to the modern.

[43](#) Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Beaming Messages to the Nation', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, no.19, May 1990, Delhi, p. 37

[44](#) *ibid.* p. 37

[45](#) Of special interest here would be the rise of Santosh, the manufacturer of tape recorders and radios and Super Cassette Industries, the publishers of 'T-series' brand of music through audio cassettes, both being instrumental in popularising the emergent modes of dissemination in the territory of the underprivileged and in exposing the *regional* cultural frame to the emergent market. These companies can largely inhabit a grey market disavowing the modern dictates of copyright and can exhibit an order of pre-capitalist traits of production because they cater to a highly de-authored cultural terrain. T-series, that was possible in 1979 precisely because of the post-1975 situation we have tried to describe, "started with a small studio where they recorded Garhwali, Punjabi and Bhojpuri songs..". (Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.67). The identitarian grid of engagement vis-à-vis the emergent media in India that we are trying to historicize and that which, I would argue, acts as a condition of possibility of the telecast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, should be related to these prior invocations of a negotiated indigenous gaze into the local dissemination of new global technologies.

[46](#) Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.3. What is interesting to note in Rajagopal's account is that he constantly refers to the fact that there *is indeed* a potential in each of them for an alliance with the other and uses phrases like "opportunistic alliance",

"shared their technologies of transmission", "overlapped or crossed over" to elaborate on the nature of alliance.

[47](#) *ibid.* p.25-26. Rajagopal talks about the "boundary-piercing character of television" while referring to television's capability of enacting the conflict between the erstwhile split publics (p.152). I would suggest that more than staging the antagonism, television can create a broader *formal* level of semiotic exchange between and co-existence of various subjectivities and identities and thus become a quasi-nation, quasi-globe space. And precisely because identities tend to increasingly collate, chances of extra-televisionic conflicts escalate. The peculiar relation of popular television to the intensification of identity-politics in India, in this sense, should also take into consideration the questions of televisual form.

[48](#) *Ibid.* 'A "split public" in the making and unmaking of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement', p.151-211.

[49](#) M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, p.25-26

[50](#) *ibid.* p.236-237

[51](#) *ibid.* p.218-219