THE SKEWED SUBJECT

A TOPOLOGICAL STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY

IN BOLLYWOOD FILMS

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INTRODUCTION

LACANIAN FILM THEORY AND POST-THEORY

Section I: The Excision

Psychoanalytic film theory—more specifically, film theory influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis—has all but disappeared from the field of film and media studies today. Lacanian psychoanalysis prominently influenced the prolific theorizations about film in the 1960s and 1970s—for instance, Apparatus theory, Feminist film theory, Suture theory, Marxist film theory, to name a few. However, in its current state, Lacanian film theory finds its place only in the margins of the discipline of film studies, as evidenced by the limited number of books and journal articles devoted to this approach—and this endeavor is undertaken by only a handful of scholars. These contemporary Lacanian scholars—such as, Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, Todd McGowan, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, Lee Edelman—remain dedicated to the Lacanian field, but are rarely included in the so-called mainstream of film studies. In other words, recent works on Lacanian film theory circulate within a coterie, and as a result, often suffer from intellectual myopia, whereby the dissemination and discussion of their potential contribution to film studies remain enclosed. The singular notable exception to the limited appeal of Lacanian film theory can be found in the works of Slavoj Žižek, who wields immense popular appeal outside of academia. However, in his self-assumed role as a "public intellectual," Žižek has also drawn significant criticism—some of which is indeed justified—for producing, what David

Bordwell has called, "free-associative film interpretation."[1] Indeed, Žižek is one of the putative figures through which Noël Carroll and David Bordwell construct their opposition to Lacanian film theory—which they label "Grand Theory"—in their influential 1996 book *Post-Theory*: *Reconstructing Film Studies*.[2]

In *Post-Theory*, Bordwell and Carroll called for a total rejection of psychoanalytic film theory, primarily on the grounds that such theorization is incoherent and unreliable, and insisted on the centrality of film as an empirical object which could be studied through scientific methods, as opposed to the alleged speculative method of psychoanalytic film theory. In fact, the authors clearly point out in the introduction to *Post-Theory* that—even though their goal is not to produce another version of unified film theory—the principle that organizes the volume is that "solid film scholarship can proceed without employing the psychoanalytic frameworks routinely mandated by the cinema studies establishment."[3] Although Bordwell and Carroll do not clearly define what they mean by "Theory" or "Grand Theory," they are emphatic in pointing out an alternative approach to cinema that depends upon "logical reflection, empirical research, or a combination of both," in order to move away from the "ethereal speculations of Grand Theory."[4] In his introduction, Bordwell identifies two versions of "Grand Theory": namely, subject-position theory, or psychoanalysis, and culturalism (3-4). Against the "overreaching theoretical commitments" of the aforementioned modes, Bordwell proposes "middle-level research": a third stance, which "tackles more localized film-based problems" (3-4). Bordwell goes on to argue that subject-position theory depends on certain assumptions, which should be challenged on the

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1 . David Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything,"*David Bordwell's Website on Cinema*, April 2005, http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/zizek.php.

2 . David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

3 . Ibid., xiii.

4 . Ibid., xiv.

grounds of their logical flaws: for instance, the recognition of subjectivity in representation requires a priori notion of subjectivity; or, Lacan's insistence on misrecognition as the basis of subjectivity leads to an infinite regress (8). Bordwell also points out that the "culturalist" model of theory later challenged the ascendancy of subject-position theory on the grounds that subjectivity is socially determined, and that, as a result, there is room for "agency" within this framework (8). Bordwell then criticizes the culturalist model by pointing out that it is also a version of Grand Theory, which makes broad and unfounded claims much like its predecessor, the subject-position theory. Thus, against the versions of Grand Theory, Bordwell champions middle-level research, which purports to study particular problems regarding cinema in a historically informed manner, and avoids making broad claims through the solution of specific problems. That this mode of research actively rejects broad speculations is evident in Bordwell's example in support of middle-level research:

> Contrary to what many believe, a study of United Artists' business practices or the standardizations of continuity editing or the activities of women in early film audiences need carry *no* determining philosophical assumptions about subjectivity or culture, *no* univocal metaphysical or epistemological or political presumptions—in short, no commitment to Grand Theory. (29)

This rejection of the speculative mode in favor of a historical or empirical one can also be found in Bordwell's 1989 book *Making Meaning*.[5] Interestingly—and perhaps not surprisingly—such rejection of psychoanalytic film theory quickly turned into an ejection of theory *as such* from film studies. As David Rodowick points out in his essay, "An Elegy for Theory," the turn away from psychoanalytic film theory coincided with a rejection of the speculative and conceptual work of film theory. Rodowick elucidates this point by referring to Bordwell's work in the following way:

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5 . David Bordwell, *Making Meaning*: *Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989).

> By 1989, however, Bordwell's attack on interpretation and his promotion of cognitivism as a model of "middle-level research" recast theory with respect to three particular propositions. First, his appeal to middle-level research calls for pulling back from broader concerns of ideology and culture to refocus attention on film's intrinsic structure and functions. Second, he promotes a comparable turn from psychoanalytic theories of the subject to the study of filmic comprehension as grounded in empirically delimitable mental and perceptual structures. Finally, his renewed emphasis on history also signals a withdrawal from high-level conceptual concerns to refocus research on the fundamental data of films themselves and the primary documentation generated from their production contexts.[6]

Rodowick's analysis of the propositions of Post-Theory alerts us to the grounds on which the idea of a film theory could be rejected by Bordwell and Carroll's historical poetics and analytical philosophy alike. The proponents of Post-Theory rejected a theory of film on the grounds that this model of thinking about film works to affirm certain a priori concepts or assumptions—rather than testing such hypothesis—whereby films become mere examples and not an avenue to produce new and verifiable knowledge. In other words, Post-Theorists accuse film theory for the lack of scientific rigor in its methodologies. At the same time, as Rodowick further points out, analytical philosophy rejected the idea of film theory—and in so doing, allied itself with Post-Theory—because, from the position of analytical philosophy, film theory is neither a legitimate scientific approach nor a valid philosophical inquiry. This is so because unlike scientific methodologies, film theory does not engage in the production of empirical data regarding the nature and effects of film through sustained research, even though it claims to test the hypothesis that guides it against specific external phenomena—i.e. specific films. On the other hand, film

6 . David Norman Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory," *October* 122 (2007): 96.

theory is seen as far from the concerns of philosophy proper because unlike philosophical methods—which centers on testing the limits of prior knowledge through intense self-investigation, rather than through the investigation of phenomena that are outside of the inquiring self—film theory seeks to study natural objective entities—i.e. films. In other words, according to analytical philosophy, film theory is wholly illegitimate because it is invested in the study of empirical phenomena, but falls short in the rigor necessary for such scientific investigations. Remarkably, even though Post-Theory and analytical philosophy formed an alliance against film theory throughout the 1990s, the former found the claims of film theory to be too broad or too Grand, while the latter found the methodologies of film theory to be too limited, too narrow.

Rodowick's defense of film theory demands that a rejection, *tout court*, of theory on the grounds that it is too broad or that it lacks the vigor of both scientific and philosophical inquiry is neither productive nor entirely justified. In answering the accusation that film theory receives from the quarters of Post-Theory and analytical philosophy alike, Rodowick is succinct:

> Film theories, like all humanistic investigation, concern human activities and thus presume a high degree of prior, even self-, knowledge and examination. Like any cultural activity, cinema is a human creation and thus is embedded in practices and institutions that form the basis of our quotidian existence. We may not have conscious knowledge of these practices and institutions, nor any desire to construct theories about them in the form of propositions or concepts, yet we act on and through them in coherent and consistent ways. This is why cultural theories are able to solicit agreement in the absence of empirical research and experimentation. Their power and plausibility is based on the extent to which they seem to clarify for us what we already know and do on a daily basis. Here

> we need no external examination beyond the critical investigation of our own practices as they evolve historically.[7]

Here, Rodowick's attempt is to not so much defend *theory as such*, but very specifically to defend a theory of *film*. Three crucial points become evident in this passage: 1) film theory is closely aligned to philosophy because it studies *film*, the experience of which depends on one's grounding in self-examination and a prior knowledge of culture; 2) film theory does not require empirical data-gathering and interpretation in order to become coherent and legitimate because it is grounded in a set of common human experiences; and 3) the prior knowledge of culture within which common human experience is founded—one that film actively solicits—is often unconscious, yet it produces coherence and consistency. Based on these points, Rodowick argues that film theory should be thought of, more properly, as an "aesthetic or [as] philosophy."[8] In this way, Rodowick wants move away film theory from Post-Theory's demand for "middle-level research," and instead wants to clear a much broader terrain in which film theory can continue the work of philosophy. For Rodowick, the task of film theory is, very specifically, to produce speculative and "propositional claims," supported by "clear, authoritative self-justification," with regard to the time-dependent transformation of cultural phenomena, in the process of which the theorist herself undergoes self-transformation (101). In other words, Rodowick shows that even though Post-Theory privileges an empirical approach to the historicity of film, maintaining such scientific-objective distance from that which Post-Theory wants to study cannot account for cultural knowledge, which "evolves in the context of multiple, diverse, and conflicting social interactions that require constant reevaluation on a human time scale" (101). The validity and the relevance of the propositional claims of film theory, therefore, will not derive from narrow, or limited claims, that are admittedly open to fallibility, made by an investigator who remains at a

7 . Ibid, 100.

8 . Ibid.

distance from that which he studies; rather, film theory can contribute to philosophical thought because film compels us to "evaluate our styles of knowing with the examination of our modes of existence and their possibilities of transformation" (Rodowick 2007, 101). Referring to Stanley Cavell's and Gilles Deleuze's philosophical investigations of cinema, Rodowick argues that, as a cultural product of Modernity, cinema is eminently philosophical because it compels philosophy to return to "problems of movement and time in relation to thought and the image" in the contemporary time (106). In other words, following Cavell and Deleuze, Rodowick claims that film facilitates philosophy not because of the specificity of its medium, but because film allows us to understand "how our current ways of being in the world and relating to it are "cinematic"" (107).

Rodowick's turn to Deleuze and Cavell in defense of film theory takes into account the distinctions and connections set up by Deleuze—Rodowick specifically draws on the *Cinema* books and *What is Philosophy?*—between "concepts, images and functions" in the three vital areas "human creation": namely, art, philosophy and science (Rodowick 2007, 101-3). Rodowick points out, following Deleuze, that while it is the task of philosophy to produce concepts, art produces images or "sensuous aggregates," and science creates functions (Rodowick 2007, 102). However, function—produced by science—relates thought to natural phenomena, and therefore remains "abstract and general, its generality deriving from its time-independence" (Rodowick 2007, 103). Whereas, concepts—produced by philosophy—are "abstract yet singular" that are specific, time-dependent and akin to images produced by (Rodowick 2007, 104). Because cinema is a form or art that gives expression to concepts through specific spatio-temporal connections, Rodowick argues that philosophy and cinema are closely linked. It is for this reason that he champions Deleuze in defense of a theory of cinema. The specific import of Deleuze in this regard—Rodowick, however, does not make this point clear in this essay—is that in Deleuze's formulations, a theory of cinema becomes a philosophy of cinema, at once abstract and singular;

unlike the psychoanalytic model, which—because it produces the subject as a fixed, rather than a metamorphic entity—is invested in the production of function, much like the methods of science, as Peter Hallward has pointed out in his essay "You Can't Have it Both Ways: Deleuze or Lacan."[9]

Similarly, Rodowick's turn to Cavell—in order to support a philosophy of cinema—calls attention to the ways in which Cavell attempts to "balance the concerns of epistemology and ethics" (Rodowick 2007, 106). According to Rodowick, Cavell's engagement with cinema brings to the foreground the ways in which cinema "presents philosophy's historical dilemma" regarding the relationship between one's perception of the world and skepticism (107). However, in Cavell's view, cinema—because of its reliance on movement, in the temporal sense—overcomes the problem of skepticism that had plagued epistemology, and thereby "opens the possibility of once again being present to self or acknowledging how we may again become present to ourselves" (Rodowick 1996, 107). Thus, Rodowick prefers this model, because a rethinking of cinema along the lines of Cavell allows one to account for the historical specificity of cinema, and to retain a sense of positivity or agency in one's perceptual relation to the world; unlike psychoanalysis, which insists on the subject, whose construction could be seen as being dependent upon a skeptical, or lack-oriented, relation to the experiential domain.

Contemporary Lacanian film theorists have echoed both Rodowick's concerns regarding the status of film theory and his proposition that film theory ought to closely align itself with philosophy, leaving behind the narrowness that had plagued it. Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle's anthology, *Lacan and Contemporary Film* responds to the accusations leveled against Lacanian or psychoanalytic film theory by the proponents of Post-Theory by attempting to revise what they see as a certain "narrowness" in film studies' approach to Lacanian psychoanalysis—

9 . Peter Hallward, "You Can't Have it Both Ways: Deleuze or Lacan," in *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Leen De Bolle (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven UP, 2010), 33-50.

one that led to the deligitimation of Lacanian psychoanalysis in film theory.[10] McGowan and Kunkle propose a "break from the previous incarnation of Lacanian film theory," in order to develop a Lacanian analysis of film that is adequate to the exigencies of contemporary film."[11] The authors go on to suggest that "the narrowness of Lacanian film theory manifested itself chiefly in two ways: in the way that film theory appropriated Lacanian psychoanalysis and in the way that film theory approached cinematic experience," and accordingly, call for a significant broadening of Lacanian ideas with regard to film studies.[12] Similarly, in *The Fright of Real Tears*, Slavoj Žižek argues, in response to the claims of Post-Theory, that "the reading of Lacan operative in the 70s and 80s was a reductive one—there is 'another Lacan' reference to whom can contribute to the revitalisation of the cinema theory (and of critical thought in general) today."[13] In the same vein, in his 2007 book, *The Real Gaze*: *Film Theory after Lacan*, McGowan points out that psychoanalytic film theory today is in a weakened and degraded state, not because of "its overreliance on purely psychoanalytic concepts, but because of its deviation from these concepts."[14] Thus, much like Žižek, McGowan argues that the problem with Lacanian film theory is that it is "not Lacanian enough," and that the proper response to Post-Theory's accusations is to "proffer a genuinely Lacanian film theory."[15]

It should be evident from the preceding paragraphs that contemporary Lacanian film theory finds itself marginalized, and therefore attempts reposition itself in the so-called

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10 . Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle, introduction to *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (New York: Other Press, 2004), xii.

11 . Ibid, xiii.

12 . Ibid.

13 . Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* (London: BFI, 2001), 7.

14 . Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 5

15 . McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and its Vicissitudes," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003): 44.

mainstream of film studies. In the next section of this introduction I will briefly summarize the trajectory of Lacanian film theory. However, before providing a summative account of the ways in which contemporary Lacanian film theory has responded to its limitation, I want to clarify my position and purpose in this dissertation. This dissertation is an entirely Lacanian project. My goal in this dissertation is to show that Lacanian theory can significantly enrich film theory and steer one's engagement with film in the direction of philosophy—away from the "middle-level research" of Post-Theory. Thus, in this dissertation, I extensively engage with contemporary Lacanian film theory—such as the works of Žižek, McGowan, Joan Copjec, Mladen Dolar and Hugh Manon. Admittedly, my intervention in Lacanian film theory—which I will elaborate momentarily—is indebted to the works of these theorists. At the same time, however, I offer detailed and original readings of some of Lacan's own writings, which are crucial in the development of film theory. In so doing, I not only explicate Lacan's writing that has not been taken up by Lacanian film theory, but also, I touch upon a significant part of the clinical side of Lacanian psychoanalysis—namely, the aspect of "topology" in the Lacanian oeuvre. The basic argument of this dissertation is this: in theorizing about cinema, there is way to rethink the question of subjectivity without taking recourse in the ideas of spectatorship and identification—championed by early Lacanian film theory—and this path runs through the subject's fundamentally skewed relation to what the subject—under the sway of *objet petit a*—sees as its Other.

Section II: Many Lacans: A Review of Psychoanalytic Film Theory

Although it is difficult to set up a strict timeline—i.e. first…then, and so forth—of psychoanalytic film theory, or, more specifically, of Lacanian film theory, one could say that a thought—whose trajectory indicated the opening up of the strictly clinical domain of psychoanalysis to include that which lies outside the psyche—regarding the relationship of the subject to the chain of signifiers of its discourse paved the path for a psychoanalytic film theory.

This thought, regarding the ways in which the subject relates to its signifiers through suture, was the subject of Jacques-Alain Miller's first and seminal short article, entitled "Suture: Elements of the Logic of the Signifier," written in response to Lacan's seminar of 1965. In this essay, Miller introduces the term "suture" in the following way:

> Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension—the general relation of lack to the structure—of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of.[16]

Miller's analysis orients the subject in relation to its discourse, or the chain of signifiers specific to the subject, in a topological way. Suture, for Miller, is the relation—between the subject and the signifier—which, because it is essentially lacking, allows the subject to take place in discourse. Miller's argument regarding suture addresses the topological relation between inside and outside, or included and excluded, in a nuanced and complex manner. While Miller located the subject in the lacking-ness of the domain of the signifier through the concept of suture, it was Jean-Pierre Oudart who adapted "suture" as a key term through which to understand the relationship between the subject and cinema.

Oudart's essay, "Cinema and Suture," first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1969, adapted the concept of suture—from the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis via Miller—to the study of the relationship between the spectator, or the "cinematic subject," and the signifying

16 . Jacques-Alain Miller, "La Suture: Éléments de la Logique du Signifiant," *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* 1, no. 3 (1966): 37-49. Also; Miller, "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)," trans. Jacquline Rose, *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977-78): 24-34. Also; Miller, "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)," *The Symptom*, http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html.

system, or the language of cinema.[17] Oudart credits Robert Bresson with the "discovery" of a "cinematic articulation irreducible to any other" which he calls "suture."[18] In significant contrast to Miller's understanding of suture as that which is lacking between the chain of signifiers and the subject, in Oudart's formulation, suture becomes "the closure of the cinematic *énoncé* in line with its relationship with its subject (the filmic subject or rather the cinematic subject), which is recognized, and then put in its place as the spectator."[19] Here, Oudart makes a distinction between the "filmed subject" and the "filmic subject": while the former is the "actor in a representation whose symbolic dimension is revealed in the process of reading and viewing," the latter is the spectator, "by and for whom the operation of suture works" (Oudart 1977-78). Thus, for Oudart, the filmed subject is the "signifying object," whose field—i.e. the cinematic field—is "echoed by an absent field, the place of a character who is put there by the viewer's imaginary, and which we shall call the Absent One" (Oudart 1977-78). It is in the process of reading and viewing by the spectator that suture can be said to occur, claims Oudart. The "Absent One" of the cinematic field is replaced by someone—i.e. a character in the film—in the process of viewing, and through the process of shot-reverse shot. In this way, the pure field of absence comes to be represented in the signifier of the present one in the cinematic field, in which the two fields are sutured together. Thus, Oudart defines suture as "the abolition of the Absent One and its resurrection in someone" (Oudart 1977-78). This process, however, takes place in and by the spectator, who, as a result, is

> doubly decentered in the cinema. First what is enunciated, initially, is not the viewer's own discourse, nor anyone else's: it is thus that he comes to posit the signifying object as the signifier of the absence of anyone. Secondly the unreal space of the enunciation leads to the necessary quasi-disappearance of the subject as it enters its own field and thus

17 . Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," trans. Kari Hanet, *Screen* 18, no. 4 (1977-78), http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/oudart8.html.

18 . Ibid.

19 . Ibid.

> submerges, in a sort of hypnotic continuum in which all possibility of discourse is abolished, the relation of alternating eclipse which the subject has to its own discourse; and this relation then demands to be represented within the process of reading the film, which it duplicates. (Oudart 1977-78)

Covering up, or mystifying this double decentering of the spectator—i.e. that the spectator is neither the "Absent One" nor someone in the film—is the effect of suture, which allows the spectator to view, read or understand cinematic representation as a fictional or symbolic system. In this way, Oudart's theory of suture seeks to understand the nature of cinematic representation in linguistic or semiotic terms, following the psychoanalytic framework set up by Miller.

Oudart's conception of the function of suture in cinema was further expanded by Stephen Heath in his essays "Narrative Space" and "Notes on Suture." In the latter essay, Heath explicates Oudart's argument in the following way:

> Cinema as discourse is the production of a subject and the subject is the point of that production, constantly missing in and moving along the flow of images, the very assurance of the flow, with suture, as it were, the culmination of that assurance. The awareness of absence breaks the immediate delight in the image; that absence is posed by the spectator as an absence of, the absent field of an absent one; that absent field is reappropriated into the film, the place of the absent one is filled by a character in the film; thus the pure field of absence becomes the imaginary field of the film, given as absent *from* the film, and the field of its imaginary, given in terms of the film's fiction; thus the break in the initial relation with the image is sutured, sutured across the spectator constituted

> as cinematic or filmic subject, essential to the realisation of image as signifier and to the articulation of shots together.[20]

Heath correctly points out that in Oudart's conception, cinematic suture points to the connection between the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders—in the sense of Lacanian psychoanalysis—and upholds the function of the Imaginary in the founding of the cinematic subject, or the spectator. Thus, in Heath's estimation, the concept of suture proposed by Oudart implicates the discourse of cinema in a sense of loss—i.e. "the loss of the extreme pleasure of absorption in the image *as* the spectator is set as the subject of the film."[21] However, Heath further points out that Oudart had characterized suture not only as a device in cinema, but also as the singular ideological operation that produces the subject in the discourse of cinema: it is this view of suture as ideology that is taken up by Daniel Dayan in his essay "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema."[22] Referring to Dayan's essay which explicates Oudart's "Travail, Lecture, Jouissance," Heath argues that although suture can serve well to name the process by which the specificity of the subject is inscribed in the cinematic space, Oudart's formulation collapses the continuity of this process into the singular figure of the "Absent One" (Heath 1977-78, 64). Heath critiques Oudart's use of the "Absent One" as a poor substitute for Miller's explication of the role of the Other in the process of suturing the subject to its discourse. Thus, Heath supplements the monolithic nature that the idea of suture came to assume with the conception of "central projection" in his essay "Narrative Space." In this essay, Heath suggests that cinematic space—in which the discourse of cinema could be said to "take place"—is organized around the "central projection," which is defined as "the art of depicting three dimensional objects upon a plane surface in such a manner that the

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20 . Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen* 23, no. 4 (1977-78): 58.

21 . Ibid., 59.

22 . Ibid., 61-2.

picture may affect the eye of an observer in the same way as the natural objects themselves."[23] The subject is sustained by the illusion of the "central projection," which is constructed heterogeneously through social, psychological and aesthetic means.

Similar engagements with the role of cinema in constructing a subject of cinema were also evident in the works of Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey. According to Joan Copjec, the works of this group of theorist initiated a shift or a break in the ways in which Lacanian psychoanalysis was used in film theory, whereby the cinematic space, or the screen, came to be regarded as a kind of "mirror" that constructed the "reality" in which the spectator-subject is founded.[24] Copjec further points out that this view of cinema as an "apparatus"—a kind of machine or institution—which produces the spectator as completely subjected or subjugated to the function of the signifier through an imaginary identification, stems from Louis Althusser's reconceptualization of the Lacanian category of the "Imaginary" as the historical and ideological construction of the subject. Copjec writes:

> Althusser rethought the category of the imaginary, making it a part of the process of the historical construction of the subject. The imaginary came to name a process necessary for—rather than an impediment to—the ideological founding of the subject: the imaginary provided the form of the subject's lived relation to society. Through this relation, the subject was brought to accept as its own, to recognize itself in, the representations of the social order.[25]

Thus, it is through Althusser that film theorists, such as Metz and Baudry, came to accept the role of the cinematic screen as the so-called Lacanian "mirror" upon which the subject sees and

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23 . Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* 17, no. 3 (1976):75-6.

24 . Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," *October* 49 (1989): 57.

25 . Ibid., 58.

identifies with its specular image, or likeness. This process of identification—which is essentially a false identification, according to Althusser, and by extension, according to Metz and Baudry—produces the subject as fully controlled or determined by its social order. The project of a theory of cinema, therefore, is to dispel this false identification by revealing the ways in which cinema actively produces subjugation through the function of ideology.

Indeed, this goal of film theory is evident in Baudry's seminal essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." In this essay, Baudry sets out to question the supposed ideological neutrality of the cinematic apparatus, in order to reveal that the ideology operative in the cinematic apparatus produces the conception of the subject as the "active center and origin of meaning." Baudry writes:

> Cinematographic specificity (what distinguishes cinema from other systems of signification) thus refers to a work, that is, to a process of transformation. The question becomes, is the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a "knowledge effect" [Althusser], or is the work concealed? If the latter, consumption of the product will obviously be accompanied by ideological surplus value. On the practical level, this poses the question of by what procedures the work can in fact be made "readable" in its inscription. These procedures must of necessity call cinematographic technique into play. But, on the other hand, going back to the first question, one may ask, do the instruments (the technical base) produce specific ideological effects, and are these effects themselves determined by the dominant ideology? In which case, concealment of the technical base will also bring about a specific ideological effect. Its inscription, its manifestation as such, on the other hand, would produce a

> knowledge effect, as actualization of the work process, as denunciation of ideology, and as critique of idealism.[26]

Since the cinematic apparatus is invested in the production of ideological surplus value, leading to an increased mystification of the process by which it is produced, Baudry argues, that the goal of film theory ought to be de-mystification, by way of revealing the ideology that is the ground of the cinema apparatus. Thus, Baudry offers a thorough analysis of the ways in which the cinema apparatus—the camera as the "eye of the subject," and projection as the creation of the illusion of continuity and persistence of vision—ultimately produces a "transcendental subject" bound to the "screen-mirror" via "double identification."[27] Specifically, for Baudry, the camera functions to establish a model of perspective that—like its predecessor, Renaissance painting—puts the subject at the center around which the image becomes meaningful and totalized. Thus, as the center of this false fullness of the visual field, the subject discovers its being as homogenous. Baudry further argues that the camera's occasional deviations from the standard perspective work to reinforce the idea of perspective as "normal" vision. Another way in which the subject is duped into a sense of fullness and mastery of the visual or experiential field is through projection, Baudry argues. This is because the projector restores the false sense of continuity—represented by the moving images—by effacing the inherent differences, heterogeneity and discontinuity of the individuals shots that constitute a film. Moreover, Baudry argues, because the projection of cinema takes place in a "darkened room" and on a screen-mirror that is "bordered" or "framed," the spectator can sustain its false belief in the transcendental mastery of the subject who is supposedly at the center of this operation. However, the screen-mirror does not reflect reality; it

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26 . Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974-75): 40-41.

27 . Ibid., 41-45.

reflects images that have no real correspondence.[28] It is for this reason that Baudry concludes that the goal of a theory of cinema is to disturb or disrupt the elements of the cinematic apparatus, so that the instrumentality of the apparatus in producing the effect of ideology is properly revealed (Baudry 1974-75, 46).

Christian Metz' influential essay "The Imaginary Signifier" retained the aspect of the spectator's identification with the specular image, but introduced the concept of the gaze as the principal factor in this process of identification.[29] Metz, like Baudry, theorizes the cinema screen as a mirror, and argues that the ways in which the spectator identifies with the specular image on the screen-mirror is comparable to the Lacanian conception of the "mirror stage." Thus, the goal of film theory is very clear in Metz' writing:

> Reduced to its most fundamental approach, any psychoanalytic reflection might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province: an enterprise of displacement, a territorial enterprise, a symbolising advance; that is to say, in the field of films as in other fields, the psychoanalytic itinerary is *from the outset a semiological one,* even (above all) if in comparison with the discourse of a more classical semiology it shifts from attention to the *énoncé* to concern for the *énonciation*.[30]

The concern for the *énonciation*, or speech-act, that Metz identifies in Lacanian psychoanalysis in its application to the study of cinema, refers to the insistence on the ideological analysis of symbolic construction of reality in cinema, referred to in the previous paragraph. Thus, Metz is in

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28 . Ibid., 45.

29 . Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," *Screen* 16, no. 2 (1975): 14-76.

30 . Ibid., 14.

agreement with Baudry's proposition regarding the goal of film theory: to rescue the subject from the grip of the imaginary identification of ideology. However, Metz' project is more openly political: he sees the effect and function of ideology as specifically the product of capitalism and industrial civilization.[31] In this way, Metz is closer to Althusser's attempt to bring together Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Metz is clearly invested in the liberatory potential of the symbolic register of cinema, as opposed to the oppressive nature of the imaginary:

> [In the symbolic] we can find hope for a little more knowledge, it is one of its avatars that introduces 'understanding', whereas the imaginary is the site of an insurpassable opacity, almost by definition. Thus as a beginning it is absolutely essential to tear the symbolic from its own imaginary and to return it to it as a look. (16)

Thus, Metz' project is certainly to liberate the spectator from the imaginary identification with the screen-mirror, but he casts the spectatorial identification in terms of voyeurism. If cinema is constructed symbolically, Metz argues, the spectator engages with it at a safe distance: "What I have said about identification so far amounts to the statement that the spectator is absent from the screen *as perceived,* but he is also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even 'all-present' as *perceiver.* At every moment I am in the film by my look's caress" (56). Being absent as perceived and present as perceiver allows the spectator to escape the sense of real absence that characterizes life outside the cinema. For Metz, the cinematic apparatus allows the spectators to overcome temporarily the sense of lack that they otherwise endure. This experience provides a wholly imaginary pleasure, echoing that of the mirror stage.

31 . Ibid., 15.

The point at which the spectator finds itself "in the film," is the point of the gaze, Copjec argues in her analysis of Metz' work.[32] Copjec writes that the gaze, in this formulation, is the "ideal point," which "can be nothing but the signified of the image, the point from which the image makes sense to the subject. In taking up its position at this point, the subject sees itself as supplying the image with sense."[33] In the case of Metz—as in the case of Baudry's conception of the camera-eye, Heath's conception of the "central projection," or Oudart's conception of the "Absent One"—Copjec argues:

> the gaze is always the point from which identification is conceived by film theory to take place. And because the gaze is always conceptualized as an analogue of that geometral point of Renaissance perspective at which the picture becomes fully, undistortedly visible, the gaze always retains within film theory the sense of being that point at which sense and being coincide. The subject comes into being by identifying with the image's signified. Sense founds the subject—that is the ultimate point of the film theoretical concept of the gaze.[34]

Of course, it is Copjec's contention that this conception of the gaze is erroneous, and she argues that it is due to this false interpretation of the gaze in film theory that Lacanian psychoanalysis has come under attack in the field. This conception of the gaze, which associates it with the total visibility of the panopticon model, is a ""Foucauldization" of Lacanian theory," Copjec argues (Copjec 1989, 56). The problem of this model, Copjec points out, is that in the relation between the gaze and the apparatus, the subject is rendered "completely upright, completely correct": i.e. that the subject is fundamentally split, and that therefore engages with the symbolic order in an

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32 . Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan," *October* 49 (1989), 59.

33 . Ibid.

34 . Ibid.

oblique way—and not in the direct way as the proponents of imaginary identification would have it—is entirely missing from these formulations (62-3). Copjec goes on to point out that while Lacanian film theorists have followed Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the 'I' Function" essay in theorizing the relationship between the subject and its imaginary identification with the specular image, Lacan himself revised his theory considerably in "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*" (66). In the latter seminar, Lacan recounts a personal story—in which he is made aware of the anxiety-producing effect of the gaze on the "I"—to argue that the gaze is "that which "determines" the I in the visible; it is "the instrument through which … [the] I [is] *photo-graphed*"" (67). This, however, does not mean that the subject, or the "I," is fully determined or controlled by the gaze, Copjec writes, because "the hyphen that splits the term *photo-graph* into *photo*—"light"—and *graph*—among other things, a fragment of the Lacanian phrase "graph of desire"—as it splits the subject that it describes" (67). It is for this reason that—contrary to the claims of apparatus theory or gaze theory in cinema—Copjec claims that "the speaking subject cannot ever be totally trapped in the imaginary" (67).

On the grounds similar to Copjec's, Todd McGowan has also objected to the conception of the gaze in the standard Lacanian film theory. McGowan's intervention in the field of Lacanian film theory—especially in the kind of Lacanian film theory that had dominated the field in the 1970s—offers a reconceptualization of the gaze, set against primarily Laura Mulvey and Baudry's theorization of the same. McGowan points out that while the early Lacanian film theorists contended that the ideological danger of cinema lies in the fact that it compels the spectator to identify with the gaze, a more proper Lacanian conception of the gaze posits it on the side of the objective rather than the subjective. McGowan writes referring to Baudry and Mulvey:

> Baudry contends that identification with this gaze has the effect of controlling the spectator. [A]ccepting this identification, the spectator fails to notice that the perspective of the gaze is symbolically situated. Although the cinematic

> experience provides a sense of imaginary mastery, identification with the camera's gaze also hides the functioning of the symbolic order. […] For Mulvey, identification with the male protagonist supplements identification with the camera. The filmic spectator is thus provided with a sense of mastery over the gaze's female object. Identification with the male protagonist-like identification with the camera-provides a sense of complete mastery. Spectators accept and even pursue identification with this cinematic and male gaze because they are looking for mastery; for traditional Lacanian film theorists, this desire for mastery is *the* desire governing human behavior.[35]

For McGowan—unlike Copjec—this juxtaposition of mastery or power and desire, undertaken by early Lacanian film theorist, demonstrates a Nietzschean interpretation of desire as desire for mastery over that which one desires. McGowan argues that when critics accuse Lacanian film theory—and his example is Gaylyn Studlar's "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of Cinema"—of conflating desire with (male) power, such criticism is misdirected: Lacan himself never proposed that in the experience of cinema, the spectator desire mastery—quite the opposite. This is why McGowan recalls Lacan's formulation of the gaze as "the *objet a* in the field of the visible," and explains that the gaze is precisely that point in the visual domain which, because it distorts the subject's orientation with the field, draws the spectator into the picture. That is, the gaze, according to McGowan, "involves the spectator in the image, disrupting her/his ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema."[36] In other words, McGowan contests the claim of early Lacanian film theorists that what the spectator derives from cinema is mastery and voyeurism through identification with the gaze. Instead, McGowan explains that the gaze as *objet petit a* "indicates that this object is not a positive entity but a lacuna in the visual field. It is not

35 . McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze," 30.

36 . Ibid., 29.

the look of the subject at the object, but the gap within the subject's seemingly omnipotent look."[37] McGowan contends that early Lacanian film theory missed the proper dimension of the gaze because it "conceived of the cinematic experience predominantly in terms of the imaginary and the symbolic order, not in terms of the real."[38]

The missing dimension of the real in the early Lacanian film theory is what made it too narrow, and therefore open to the accusations brought up against it by the proponents of Post-Theory, McGowan and Sheila Kunkle write in their introduction to *Lacan and Contemporary Film*. The authors/editors set out to correct this shortcoming of Lacanian film theory in the aforementioned volume. They argue that, as result of this elision, early Lacanian film theory could not account for "any sense of the power of film to disrupt ideology and to challenge—or even expose—the process of interpellation."[39] Because early Lacanian film theory depended too much on the functions of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders, the authors argue, the signifier's perceived "authority" and flawlessness was never challenged. Moreover, such interpretation of Lacan elided the crucial role Lacan assigns to failure, interruption or disturbance in the production of signification. The authors very clearly point out the connection between such constitutive failure and the Real:

> Failure is necessary because the signifier must open up a space through which the subject can enter: a perfectly functioning system allows for no new entrants, no new subjects. As a consequence, if the symbolic order is determinative in the path that it lays down for the subject, it doesn't lay down this path smoothly but in a way that is fraught with peril. That is to say, the symbolic order continually

37 . McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 6.

38 . Ibid., 7

39 . McGowan and Kunkle, Introduction to *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, xvi.

> comes up against a barrier that disrupts its smooth functioning—a barrier that Lacan calls the Real.[40]

Accordingly, the authors clarify that the Real is not external to the Symbolic order—that is, the Real is not a material object that lies beyond the Symbolic. Instead, they conceive of the Real as the "gap" *within* the Symbolic. In other words, the Real is that which is missing in the Symbolic. Thought of in this way, it is easy to see the connection between the McGowan's reconceptualization of the gaze and the Lacanian Real. Expectedly, the authors go on to define *objet petit a*—of which the gaze is an instance—in terms of the Real:

> Lacan himself turned toward the Real as the central category of experience. He sketched the different forms of the *objet a* as little bits of the Real, as those partial objects—the gaze, the voice, the breast, the feces, and the phallus—that cause desire and are circled by the drives. The Real is not simply what "resists symbolization absolutely," but also the pivotal category in the process of subjectivization.[41]

Thus, by associating the subject with *objet petit a* and the Real—rather than with the Imaginary and the Symbolic—the authors cast the subject as the "stumbling block of sense," in a direct rejoinder to Copjec's estimation of the early Lacanian film theory's conception of the gaze.

However, what is significantly missing from McGowan and Kunkle's repositioning of the subject in relation to the Real is any reference to Miller's conceptualization of suture, even though the declared purpose of their book is to rectify the mistakes of previous Lacanian film theory. Now, I am certainly not claiming that in order to fulfill their purpose the authors ought to address *every* variation of Lacanian theory related to representation. However, the way in which

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40 . Ibid., xvi.

41 . Ibid., xvii.

McGowan and Kunkle want to rethink the relationship between the Real and the Symbolic—a relationship in which the subject can be located—is prominently topological, *precisely* in the way that Miller's conception of suture is topological. Consider the following passage from Miller's essay on suture, where he justifies—in a highly ironic way—his presence, as a non-clinician, in the psychoanalytic field:

> I will not keep you waiting. The justification lies in this, which will come as no surprise after the developments which have so enchanted your hearing at this seminar since the start of the academic year, that the Freudian field is not representable as a closed surface. The opening up of psychoanalysis is not the effect of the liberalism, the whim, the blindness even of he who has set himself as its guardian. For, if not being situated on the inside does not relegate you to the outside, it is because at a certain point, excluded from a two-dimensional topology, the two surfaces join up and the periphery or outer edge crosses over the circumscription.[42]

Obviously, Miller is addressing several issues here: first, as a young scholar who is not formally trained in clinical psychoanalysis, Miller is commenting on the fact that his presence at the seminar challenges the supposed signifying consistency of the psychoanalytic field. Topologically, Miller is outside the field because he is not an analyst; yet he is clearly present in the field by virtue of his attending the seminar as an interlocutor. Moreover, the fact that Miller has to account for his presence suggests that he is not fully integrated in the system/field/school of psychoanalysis, and therefore, his vocal presence inside the field serves to upset the closed-ness of the field. Second, Miller makes a clear reference to Lacan's "excommunication" from the IPA, and suggests that in the figure of Lacan one could also identify this topological problem: Lacan is excluded from the greater field of psychoanalysis; yet, his absence-presence continues to

42 . Miller, "*La Suture,*" http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html.

re-orient the field. Third,—and this is where he invokes topology *as such*—Miller points out that figures like Lacan and himself serve to demonstrate the ways in which it is possible to think of a topology beyond the two-dimensional geometry, where that which is seemingly excluded from the coordinates of a fixed geometral plane is also included in it as the absence that orients said plane. Following this nuanced preamble, Miller goes on to define the term that is his intervention in the psychoanalytic field: namely, suture. Miller defines the term in the following way:

> Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse; we shall see that it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension—the general relation of lack to the structure—of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of.[43]

Perhaps now it is not difficult to see Miller's preamble as a performance of the topological concept of suture: suture is that which is lacking in the domain of signifiers; yet its lacking-ness, in itself, signifies it in relation to other signifiers.

Consider, now, McGowan and Kunkle's description of the relationship between the Real and the Symbolic:

> This barrier is not external to the symbolic structure: the Lacanian Real is not a thing in itself existing beyond the realm of the signifier. Instead, the Real marks the point at which the symbolic order derails itself, the point where a gap occurs within that order.[44]

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43 . Ibid.

44 . McGowan and Kunkle, xvi.

Is this description of the Real as a gap *within* the *order* not exactly similar to Miller's conception of suture? In McGowan and Kunkle's formulation, what is the Real but that which appears as lacking within the Symbolic order and thereby *derails* it? It would serve us well to linger on this verb—derail. Obviously, "derail" invokes the image of a train that has gone off the two parallel tracks on which it runs. However, does this also not suggest that, once this metaphorical train is derailed, it occupies a geometral position that connects the two parallel planes/rails by, *precisely*, crossing over them? Thought in this way, the Real can no longer be either a "category of experience," nor can it be a "category in the process of subjectivization," as the authors would have it.[45] This is so because, topologically, the Real is neither a category, nor is it conducive to experience or subjectivization; rather, following Miller's topology of suture, one could argue that the Real is precisely the opposite of these. If we follow Miller's analysis, we will see that the Real is that which complicates and reorients categories; we will also see that the Real cannot be experienced; it can only be represented by a signifier (placeholder) to other signifiers in a system of signification. Thus, even though McGowan and Kunkle emphasize that the Symbolic order is not an always smoothly functioning monolith—i.e. an ideological apparatus—in order to open up the possibility of using Lacanian psychoanalysis to discover in cinema a challenge—rather than a mute obedience—to ideology, they do so by entirely rejecting early Lacanian film theory. A productive opportunity to test, modify and employ the analytical power of suture theory is lost in the process.

Slavoj Žižek's defense of Lacanian film theory against the critique of Post-Theory, however, takes up the question of suture theory. In *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek points out that the rejection of Theory as the so-called "Theory of Everything" (TOE) stems from an improper or insufficient understanding of the "paradoxical relationship between universality and its constitutive exception," and that this paradoxical relationship is best understood through the

45 . Ibid., xvii.

concept of suture.[46] However, in order to appreciate the position that Žižek takes with regard to suture, one must first explicate his analysis of the relationship between universality and its exception. In Žižek's view, it is this paradoxical relationship that animates the nature of Post-Theory's critique:

> Post-Theorists basically reproach Theory with two opposite, mutually exclusive deficiencies: on the one hand, Theory is a new version of the global TOE (against which one should assert *theories* (in the plural): modest, mid-level, empirically verifiable research programmes); on the other hand, Theory involves a cognitive suspension characteristic of historicist relativism: Theorists no longer ask the basic questions like 'What is the nature of cinematic perception?', they simply tend to reduce such questions to the historicist reflection upon the conditions in which certain notions emerged as the result of historically specific power relations.[47]

In Žižek's view, what Post-Theory finds problematic is the way in which Theory arrives at the dimension of the universal without passing through the particulars. While the first approach wants to avoid universal claims and proposes that one arrives at a concept through the means of inductive logic involving empirically verifiable data, the second approach embraces a more deductive mode by considering how notions emerge out of specific historical conditions. In other words, both methods consider the universal dimension of a concept or notion as analogous to the metaphysical Theory of Everything, and therefore they reject it. Žižek, however, suggests that "a proper *dialectical* approach offers a way out of the predicament. The key feature of this approach

46 . Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 14-31.

47 . Ibid., 14.

concerns the paradoxical relationship between universality and its constitutive exception."[48] This "proper *dialectical* approach," according to Žižek, is a procedure in which the universal dimension of a concept or notion is reached via "a direct jump from the singular to the universal, by-passing the mid-level of particularity" (25). Žižek's example of this "direct jump" is the way in which Freud arrives at universal assertions or concepts regarding certain psychic operations through the close dissection of some singular experience. Žižek points out that the obvious challenge to such universal assertion would take the form of skepticism regarding the verifiability of the universal in the absence of particular examples—i.e. how would one know for sure that the chosen experience is truly representative of universality? According to Žižek, the dialectical answer to this objection is that each particular example displaces universality in a specific way, and therefore it is impossible to arrive at a true universality in this manner.[49] According to Žižek, the "singular" example—which is also an exceptional example—on the other hand allows the formation of universality and the necessary rules thereof. The singular example does so by providing an exception that establishes this domain of rules. However, Žižek also asks: how is it structurally possible for the universal, or the domain of rules, to contain its exception? The answer to this, Žižek suggests, is to be found in the analysis of suture.

Suture, according to Žižek, is that which "concerns the gap between the Universal and the Particular: it is this gap that is ultimately 'sutured'" (31). In introducing suture, Žižek refers to its long history—and its loss of specificity—from Miller through Oudart to film theory. Žižek writes:

> The concept of 'suture' has a long history. It was elevated from a casual word that occurs once in Lacan into a concept by Jacques-Alain Miller, in his first and

48 . Ibid.

49 . Ibid., 26.

> seminal short article, an intervention at Jacques Lacan's seminar of 24 February 1965. Here, it designates the relationship between the signifying structure and the subject of the signifier. Then, in the late 60s, it was taken over by Jean-Pierre Oudart. It was only later, when it was again taken over and elaborated by the English *Screen* theorists, that it became a major concept in cinema theory and opened up to wider discussion. Finally, years later, it again lost its specific mooring in cinema studies and turned into a part of the deconstructionist jargon, functioning as a vague notion rather than a strict concept, as synonymous with 'closure': 'suture' signaled that the gap, the opening, of a structure was obliterated, enabling the structure to (mis)perceive itself as a self-enclosed totality of representation. (31)

Two key points about the notion of suture become evident in this passage: 1) in Miller's formulation, suture indicated the specific way in which the subject comes into being in relation to the system of signification; and 2) in Žižek's interpretation, suture involves a misperception through which the system of signification *appears* to be universal. The system appears to be universal because the inherent failures—i.e. the gaps, the openings or the exceptions—are inscribed or stitched on as constituent elements of the system. In other words, Žižek argues that the process of suturing allows exceptions to be signified *as exceptions* within the system of signification, and it in this way that the system takes on the appearance of universality. Thus, for Žižek, suture perform an "ideological operation" in cinema, through which "the gap that separates two totally different levels—that of the enunciated content (the narrative fiction) and that of the decentred process of its enunciation—is flattened" (33). However, Žižek also points out that the process of suturing is never fully completed—i.e. gaps or distortions always appear within the system of signification. Thus, in Žižek's view, the role of film theory is to analyze the ideological functions through which the system of signification takes on the appearance of universality. He

argues that the best way dispel the misperception of universality of the system of signification is to foreground the points at which the system "can no longer sustain the appearance of seamless continuity" (33). This point of rupture, for Žižek, is the Lacanian order of the Real. Thus, Žižek proposes that the point or site at which suturing becomes necessary is also the point at which the system of signification breaks down due to the appearance of the Real. Thus, Real becomes the key concept through which Žižek challenges the notion held by early Lacanian film theorists regarding the symbolic order's complete domination of the subject.

Section III: Argument and Chapter Overview

The goal of this dissertation is to join with the contemporary Lacanian film theorists' claim that Lacanian psychoanalysis can significantly enrich film theory and steer one's engagement with film in the direction of philosophy—away from the "middle-level research" of Post-Theory. Thus, my intervention in Lacanian film theory is indebted to the works of theorists such as Todd McGowan, Hugh Manon, Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek . At the same time, however, I offer detailed and original readings of some of Lacan's own writings, which are crucial in the development of film theory. In so doing, I not only explicate Lacan's writing that has not been taken up by Lacanian film theory, but also, I touch upon a significant part of the clinical side of Lacanian psychoanalysis—namely, the aspect of "topology" in the Lacanian oeuvre. The basic argument of this dissertation is this: in theorizing about cinema, there is way to rethink the question of subjectivity without taking recourse in the ideas of spectatorship and identification—championed by early Lacanian film theory—and this path runs through the subject's fundamentally skewed relation to what the subject—under the sway of *objet petit a*—sees as its Other.

In contrast to early Lacanian film theory that sees the relationship between the subject and its Other as overdetermined and as a result, does not see any possibility of the subject's

autonomy within the totally flawless symbolic order, or the domain of the Other, I argue that the subject comes into being in relation to failures or disturbances that are inherent in the functioning of the symbolic order. As a result, the subject comes into being not as a mere puppet of the Other; rather, the subject comes into being by manipulating the inconsistencies in the field of the Other. Of course, the subject manipulates the Other because it desires to come into being—albeit retroactively—as a subject; or, more properly speaking, the subject manipulates the Other because it *desires*. Thus, in this process, the subject is also manipulated or lured by something that it sees as lacking, missing or inconsistent in the Other: essentially, a gap in the Other that *only* the subject can fill, and thereby can come into being. Thus, the subject in my formulation is a skewed subject: one that undoubtedly exists in relation to an Other, but one whose relation to this Other is off-kilter. To be sure, it is impossible for a subject—insofar as it is a subject—to conceive of an Other that has no inconsistencies, precisely because there would be no space for subjectivity in such a totality. These failures or disturbances in the functioning of the Other—that is, the symbolic order—that are necessary for the arrival of the subject is understood in contemporary Lacanian film theory as the Real. Following Lacan, contemporary film theorist suggest that the Real appears as part-objects, or as *objet petit a*, and thereby precipitates subjectivization. Thus, contemporary Lacanian film theory sees the Real as "the central category of experience" that, when transposed onto the study of cinema, can unleash the radical power of cinema to disrupt the hegemony of the symbolic order (McGowan and Kunkle 2004, xvii).

It is at this point—i.e. the point of the Real—that my analysis departs from contemporary Lacanian film theory. Instead of understanding the Real as a category of experience—which would necessitate an entity that experiences the Real—I see the Real as much more closely aligned with the structure of *objet petit a*, which can be understood as an object that appears to the subject as empty or missing. Just as the subject never really experiences *objet petit a* as a concrete object—whether part or whole—similarly, the Real is that which is missing from the

subject's experiential domain. In other words, I propose a reversal of the claim that there is no subject without the Real and argue that there is no Real without the subject, and that there is no subject without *objet petit a*. Thus, in my view—and this is what I show in this dissertation—the best way to understand the radical power of the Real is through a thorough analysis of the subject's relation to *objet petit a*. Rather than seeing *objet petit a* as a little piece of the Real—which suggests a hierarchical relationship—I see them as two co-existent elements of a triadic structure. The third element in this triad is the false fullness of its image with which the subject identifies in the order of the Imaginary, or the Mirror stage, taken up enthusiastically by early Lacanian film theorists in their analysis of spectatorship. My contention is that by understanding the relationship between these three co-existent elements and what appears as the subject, one can arrive at a proper theory of film that can account for one's experience with cinema in a more comprehensive manner.

I propose this re-thinking of the relationship between the specular image, the Real and *objet petit a* through the close reading of seven Bollywood films. This choice is guided by two primary concerns: first, much of my conception of culture is mediated by my experience with Bollywood films; that is, these are the film that I grew up watching, and therefore I relate to these films beyond the conscious, analytical level; and second, in my experience, Bollywood films seem to solicit the kind of spectatorial identification with which early Lacanian film theorists extensively engaged, whereby the rupturing of narrative and stylistic signification—such as, the prolific use of song-and-dance numbers that break up the narrative—is included in the process of signification as a routine. Hence, I chose Bollywood films because they allow me to push Lacanian concepts to their limit. Moreover, the seven films that I study in this dissertation are also specifically exceptional: in one way or another, each of these films reconfigures standard modes or practices of cinematic representation in the context of Bollywood. In other words, these films are avowedly at odds with the specific historico-cultural milieu within which they appear,

and as a result, clear the ground for a radical re-thinking of cinema. For this reason, these films also challenge the contemporary Lacanian film theory's claim regarding the power of cinema to disrupt—and not found—signifying consistency.

Section IV: Chapter Overview

I discuss the nature of the subject's skewed relationship with process or system of signification in four chapters: **Chapter I** discusses how the subject's relation to the system of signification is determined by temporal distortions. This chapter argues that the subject's relation to temporality is punctuated by retroaction and anticipation, rather than a linear, chronological movement. This temporal uncertainty turns the pacing of the subject's partial arrival into a hesitant one, and thereby allows for openness, freedom and difference in the subject's relation to the structure of desire. The skewed temporality of the subject and the hesitancy inherent in its arrival are prominently consequential when communal subjectivities—such as national identity—are taken into consideration. This chapter substantiates its claim through the analysis of *Rang De Basanti* (2006). **Chapter II** discusses the subject's appearance in the system of signification or the domain of symbolic language in terms of spatiality. Through the analysis of *Dil Se* (1998), this chapter argues that the precipitation of subjectivity is a factor of the endless deferral of signification in symbolic language: just as the signifier tends to but never fully conjugates with the signified to precipitate stable meaning, the subject tends to a fixed locus but never fully comes into being within the space of language. In this chapter, I contend that the subject's relation to the space in which it purports to occupy a locus is fundamentally skewed, even when the film depicting this relationship is neither overtly topophilic nor deliberately gaze-oriented. Rather, as *Dil Se* demonstrates through the interaction and intersection of multiple trajectories or vectors of subjective desire, the split or skewed subject appears where the process of signification fails to achieve closure. **Chapter III** discusses the psychoanalytic notion of the gaze. Contemporary Lacanian film theorists define the gaze as the point at which the consistency of the Symbolic

order breaks down, and in so doing, they depart from the path of early Lacanian film theorists, who considered the Symbolic order to be infallible and monolithic. However, contemporary Lacanians argue that the subject's appearance is entirely dependent upon the gaze as *objet petit a*, which holds the subject in the sway of the domain of the Other. In contrast, in this chapter, I argue that although subjectivity is indeed precipitated in the domain of the Other or the field of symbolic language in relation to the gaze as *objet petit a*, it is not that the subject has no agency in this matter. On the contrary, this chapter proposes that it is possible to conceive of a kind of subjectivity that comes into being via an oblique relationship with the space of signification, by recognizing the gaze *qua objet petit a* as that which is lacking in the Other, and then by manipulating the Other to reveal its lack. This chapter substantiates its claims through the analysis of *Tere Bin Laden* (2010). **Chapter IV** discusses the notion of object voice as another manifestation of the *objet petit a*. Through the analyses of the audio-visual dys-synchrony of *Alam Ara* (1931), *Abhimaan* (1973), and *Sholay* (1975), this chapter argues that a prominent factor in the subject's arrival is aurality—i.e. the domain of sound, which is constituted of audible and inaudible elements alike. This chapter further argues that the subject's appearance is predicated upon distortions or disturbances in this domain, whereby the signification of sound remains only partially completed.

CHAPTER I

THE SUBJECT'S TEMPORALITY

RETROACTION AND ANTICIPATION IN THE DESIRE FOR HISTORY

The relationship between cinema and temporality has been an intimate and privileged one since the inception of cinema. One could even argue that the essence of cinema lies with the phenomenon of movement—that is to say, the displacement of and in space in relation to time—that cinema makes available to its spectator. Indeed, to study cinema is to study the *moving images*, wherein each static or still frame is replaced with the next in accordance with the passage of time, creating—as its effect—the illusion of movement. The spectator's vision—to be more precise, the limitedness of vision—plays a central role in upholding the illusion of cinema as the moving images. Because the human eye can perceive only a limited number of images within a given duration, the continuous replacement of still images or frames *coupled with* the sense that some time has passed creates an illusion of movement for the human eye. To clarify then, one could delineate three basic elements that constitute cinema as moving images: first, serial replacement of still images; second, passage of time; and third, human spectator who experiences the first two elements. If and when these individual elements or the relationship between them are subjected to modification, the result is a noticeable and often radical reconfiguration of cinema. For instance, hypothetically, if we conceive of a film that contains only one still image or frame, the resulting product will be disorienting, to say the least. A somewhat different version of the hypothetical scenario occurs in Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964): in the former film, the spectator sees a long take footage of John Giorno sleeping for five hours and twenty

minutes, and in the latter, the spectator sees—for eight hours and five minutes—the exterior of the Empire State Building, with its lights flickering periodically. As such, both films contain the evidence of some movement; however, the passage of time becomes almost unbearable in each case due to the relative stillness of the images. Noticeably, the radical nature of both films depends on the considerable amount of time that passes between the first frame and the last frame. In other words, the very awareness that *a long time has passed* in which *very little image-replacement has occurred* re-orients one's relationship to the films. At the same time, it could be argued that none of the above-mentioned points are really relevant if no human spectator is watching these films: if these films are unbearable, they are so for the human eye. For the non-human eye—i.e. the camera that records John Giorno or the Empire State Building—the passage of time and the relative stillness of the images are irrelevant. To put this in slightly different terms, then: the temporal-spatial nature of the moving images must pass through a consciousness that can differentiate between time A and time B, as well as between image A and image B. It is in and through this consciousness—one that can differentiate—and its relation to the passage of time that the experience of cinema is best understood.

Thus, the goal of this chapter is to discuss the relationship between subjectivity and temporality. Specifically, this chapter argues that the subject's relation to temporality is *not* linear-chronological; rather, the subject's relation to temporality is punctuated by retroaction and anticipation. This temporal uncertainty turns the pacing of the subject's partial arrival into a hesitant one, and thereby allows for openness, freedom and difference in the subject's relation to the structure of desire. The skewed temporality of the subject and the hesitancy inherent in its arrival are prominently consequential when communal subjectivities—such as national identity—are taken into consideration. A desire-based notion of communal subjectivity *demands* the presence of difference, dissention or exception as its necessary constitutive element. The emergence of this difference or exception that founds its corresponding system—which is not a totality, but *precisely* a contingency—can be accounted for only when one recognizes that the subject relation to temporality

is fundamentally skewed. I substantiate my argument through the analysis of a *Rang De Basanti* (2006), a Bollywood film, which demonstrates how temporal retroaction and anticipation punctuates the subject's relation to its national identity and history, and thereby demonstrates that the purported subject of desire is differentiated and free.

That cinema has always been responsive to the question of time is one of the central points made by Todd McGowan in *Out of Time*: *Desire in Atemporal Cinema*. McGowan points out in the introduction the crucial role that temporality plays not only in the construction of cinema, but also in its dissemination:

> From its inception, cinema has privileged time. The essence and the appeal of the cinematic art are inextricable from the experience of temporality that it offers spectators. Whatever else films explore, they inherently take temporality as their subject due to the nature of the medium. Whatever occurs in the filmic image—or between filmic images—occurs within the temporality of the film's projection. Every film orders time in some fashion or other, and the privileged role that time plays in cinematic art distinguishes film from all other arts. That is, the way that a film orders time shapes its status as a work of art.[50]

Three crucial points or claims should be isolated from this passage: first, the essence of cinema is that it allows the spectator to experience temporality; second, cinema is inherently bound to explore temporality as its content and in its form; and third, cinema's relation to temporality is a medium-specific one. The first point allows McGowan to properly lay out the relationship between the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious—specifically with regard to the Freudian "death drive" that dominates the unconscious through repetition—and the experience of cinema. In other words,

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50 . Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 2011): 4.

McGowan's first point contributes to the consideration of temporality in the theorization of cinema in the context of Lacanian film theory. However, the last two points—because they are more closely aligned with the Modernist notion of medium-specificity—diverge away from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, McGowan merely touches upon the medium-specificity argument, and offers a series of assertions regarding it, all the while accepting the notion of medium specificity as an a priori. The first part of McGowan's argument—one that seeks to isolate the role of death drive in the question of temporality in cinema—is far more interesting.

Referring to Freud's introduction of the death drive in the work of psychoanalysis, McGowan writes

> If the death drive structures the psyche, then the dream is not simply the fulfillment of a wish but the repetition of a trauma. […] Adapting [the theory of the death drive] to the cinema, cinematic images would not simply fulfill an unconscious desire but would also be a site for the repetition of loss. This conception of the cinema runs up against the imaginary plenitude of the cinematic experience, which seems to preclude loss instead of foregrounding it. It also collides with the basic temporality of the cinema, which tends to move forward in time from an experience of absence toward the realization of the spectator's desire through the presentation of a fantasy object, such as romantic union. But what the theory of the death drive can explain is the role that absence plays in the cinema. Films do not directly reproduce the unbroken time of everyday experience so much as reassemble time through the editing process and even through the projection of images itself. There is a gap in cinematic time in which an absence repeats itself, and this repetition corresponds to that of the death drive. Though most films hide repetition under the cloak of the fantasized realization

> of desire, some accentuate this repetition and thereby suggest a different form of temporality.[51]

McGowan goes on to suggest that while the kind of cinema that hides the repetition of loss inherent in the temporality of the cinematic medium promotes a desire-based subjectivity whereby the causal-linear progression of time leads to teleological point of resolution, a cinema based on the repetitiveness of the death drive yields a form of subjectivity that is atemporal:

> The subject of the death drive becomes atemporal in the sense that time can provide no hope for an alteration of the fundamental problem animating it. Rather than looking forward to a future in which desire might be realized, the subject of the death drive views past, present, and future on the same plane.[52]

To be clear, McGowan does not mean that the subject of the death drive—i.e. the subject that atemporal cinema promotes—has no relation to time; contrarily, McGowan's point is that, in its centralization of the death drive, atemporal cinema challenges the extraneousness of temporality to the subject. In desire—and by extension, in the desire-based cinema—the subject experiences time as chronological and linear, leading from absence or lack of the object of desire to the telos of presence or plentitude of the object of desire. In this operation of desire, McGowan suggests, time remains extraneous to the basis of subjectivity itself, because under the sway of desire, the subject believes that even though it is *presently* alienated from the fulfillment of desire (i.e. one does not have *everything* that one wants at any given point of time), in *future* it will have fully realized its desire. The subject remains alienated from its desired fullness, and this alienation propels the subject in the path of desire in the first place. However, this realization remains foreclosed for the subject of desire. To put this in different terms: the basis of subjectivity is that the subject cannot surpass the exigencies

51 . Ibid., x-xi.

52 . Ibid., xi.

of time and fulfill all its desires. This realization is foreclosed in desire-based or temporal cinema, which therefore needs to organize time in chronological and/or causal order so as to promise future fulfillment of desire. Whereas in atemporal or drive-based cinema, the spectator experiences the inevitable temporality of the persistence or repetition of loss as the very basis of its subjectivity. Therefore, McGowan argues that the notion of atemporal cinema yields an "ethics of temporality," along the lines of Heidegger, Bergson and Deleuze.

McGowan points out that the thinking of temporality through the death drive leads to an ethical position because it accedes to the fundamental incompleteness of subjectivity, and in so doing, opens up the subject to otherness. Referring to Heidegger, McGowan writes:

> The great failure of the history of Western philosophy, according to Heidegger, lies in its inability to think temporality as the basis of being itself. This failure produces the idea of stable essences, including that of the subject, that fall into time rather than emerging out of it. As long as we continue to think of time as added to being, we will view ourselves and others as completed objects. In Heidegger's conception, a proper sense of temporality allows us to grasp ourselves as constantly self-transcending. Unlike the traditional subject, Heidegger's *Dasein* finds its being only through its temporality, which opens it to the otherness of its own future and of other beings. Grasping our temporality permits us to recognize otherness in a way that Western philosophy has been systematically unable to do. (McGowan 2011, 3)

In McGowan's view, then, atemporal cinema and the subject of the death drive are analogous to Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*. Just as *Dasein* is out-of-joint with its temporality—i.e. its own future is "other" to it—the subject of the death drive is unable to instrumentalize time in the service of its own isolated future satisfaction, McGowan argues (4). In this way, atemporal cinema, and its drive-based subjectivity, can open up the possibility of a politics of non-isolation—i.e. an ethical

politics based on the community of others, rather than the desire-based politics that isolate subjects in its lure of fullness. However, the ethics and the politics of the atemporal cinema of the drive, McGowan argues, are truly against the notions of futurity and causality, McGowan points out:

> The fact of the drive—and psychoanalytic thought in general—demands an atemporal attitude. In this sense, psychoanalysis represents a countercurrent to the major movements of twentieth century thought. Rather than affirming the primacy of time, it insists on the subject's resistance to temporal change. The repetition of the drive provides the foundational horizon for the subject, and no amount of time will allow the subject to transcend this horizon. The only possibility that the future offers is that of a new form of repetition. (12)

In other words, it is not that by rejecting the desire-based production of chronological temporality, atemporal cinema promises another future where the subject can recover from its foundational loss, perhaps in the formation of a community. On the contrary, the subject of atemporal cinema accepts—and enjoys—the inevitability that it can never reach a state of plentitude, and a result of this sustained incompleteness, keeps open its interaction with others while disregarding the dominance of the causal structure of chronological time. Thus, when this subject of the drive acts—i.e. does something in relation to others—it does *not* do so with the purported view that its action will *cause* the dissipation of its loss; rather, this subject acts outside of the dominance of the cause-effect logic that a chronological notion of time demands.

In McGowan's view, the way in which the subject of the drive resists the dominance of causality and chronology is by asserting its own form of subjectivity, which is other than the desire-based subjectivity. This, McGowan argues, is the "freedom" that atemporal cinema offers:

> The point [of atemporality] is not that time is just an illusion (as it is for Parmenides and the Eleatic philosophers) or that it is just a form of appearance (as it is for Plato)

> but that time does not hold within it the promise of openness and difference. The rejection of the idea of an open future that occurs with the logic of the drive seems to imply a rejection of human freedom. [However,] the atemporality of the drive resists the causality of time by rupturing it with the assertion of subjectivity. The drive's repetition is at once the subject's insistence on its own path and its refusal to submit to the reign of causality that governs time. Without the drive, without this repetition of loss that marks our entrance into society, we would have no means for resisting the determining power of causality. (12-13)

Two clarifications are necessary to properly grasp the argument that McGowan offers in this passage. First, when McGowan refers to the subject of the drive, it is not to be confused with the subject that desire produces—while the subject of desire maintains the causality of chronological time, the subject of the drive ruptures the unity implied in these notions. Second, when McGowan refers to the path in which the subject of the drive insists, it is to be understood that the path of the drive is circular (repetitive), as opposed to the linear (causal) path of desire. In this way, for McGowan, atemporality frees the subject from the structure of desire, which always compels the subject of desire to follow the logic of causality, promising direct access to particular objects of desire. In other words, it is the nature of desire to de-emphasize or minimize the time that it takes for the subject's action *qua cause* to yield the *effect* of having access to the particular object of desire. The satisfaction of the drive, on the other hand, subsists in the continuation—rather than the prompt resolution—of the search. It is McGowan's claim—and this is why he promotes the atemporal cinema, the cinema of the death drive—that while the former isolates the subject from its community of others and renders irrelevant the object of desire, the latter allows for an ethics of non-alienation to emerge by allowing the subject to experience the inevitable horizon of temporality in a more proper way. McGowan elaborates this point by providing a personal example: while attempting to recall certain intertextual reference about a film, McGowan sought the help of a colleague, who promptly produced the necessary information

via a quick internet search. This process, McGowan argues, demonstrates the way in which desire ultimately renders the object of desire "empty":

> Rather than spending days thinking about the possibilities and asking other friends, the Internet provided an instant resolution and thereby diminished the importance of the object. I knew the answer, but I lost the object. I experienced the fleeting pleasure of finding the correct answer instead of the prolonged satisfaction of desiring it, and the fleeting pleasure revealed the emptiness of the object. This resolution and others like it make immediately evident the gap between the satisfaction that one expects from desire's realization and that which one receives. (27)

One could derive from this passage that the promptness with which the object of desire—i.e. the information, the intertextual trivia—became available leaves the desiring subject ultimately dissatisfied. In other words, the libidinal force that the object of desire acquired when the subject did not have access to it rapidly dissipates once the object becomes available, leaving the subject to an anti-climactic[53] resolution. This, for McGowan, is the structure of desire. The reverse of this process—i.e. the atemporality of the drive—is presumably the one that McGowan wants to promote. In other words, the subject of the drive would not have performed the internet search (the cause) to find the correct information (the effect) which would resolve quickly and chronologically the process of searching. Instead, the subject of the drive would spend time in the search itself, and in so doing, would open itself to the possibility of other experiences: i.e. the possibility of sharing one's desire with others, the possibility of finding information only tangentially related to the purported object of the search, etc. This mode of being, which foregrounds the drive, would liberate the subject from

53 . The pun in the reference to "climax" is an intended one, in this case. As I see it, the "gap between the satisfaction that one expects from desire's realization and that which one receives," contains an unavoidable reference to the expected aura of coitus which rapidly—and rather bathetically—loses its turgidity post-coitus.

ultimately dissatisfying reign of desire and bring to focus the fact that the subject is never coherent or complete—something must always remain lacking in the subject.

While McGowan's analysis of the difference between the drive and desire in the passage above is undoubtedly insightful, one cannot help but question McGowan's central premise: i.e. the promptness of the result of the internet search *resolved* the trajectory of desire. At the very material level of the example, one could argue that the function of the prompt internet search is *not* to deliver the result to the subject on a permanent basis. That is to say, when one performs an internet search for a prompt result or answer, one will not retain this information forever. Rather, the structure of the internet search—as a presumed infinite repository of information—is such that it allows the subject to immediately forget the answer, since the subject derives satisfaction from the anticipated certainty of retrieving the same information at a moment's notice. To be more precise, in the internet search, the subject seeks after something; but, rather than hoarding this object for itself, the subject releases it *so that it can continue to perform internet searches.* To assume that any internet search carries with it a sense of certainty, finality or resolution is naïve, to say the least. If it were so, one would search for something on the internet once and *only once*, which is obviously not the case.

On a more abstract level, however, the problem of desire indicated by McGowan—i.e. that desire tends towards quick resolution, and thereby robs the subject of its freedom from causality and chronology—is far more consequential. This notion—that of the subject's non-autonomy and fixity with regard to desire—presents desire as a determinative and monolithic structure which wields absolute control over the subject fails to account for the fact that there is, in fact, no sense of finality in desire. The purpose of desire is to maintain the subject *qua* desiring, and as such, it does not lead the subject to any resolution. Hence—and McGowan correctly points this out—the object of desire is ultimately an empty object. It is the emptiness of the object of desire that turns it into the object/cause of desire—in other words, the Lacanian *objet petit a*. Thus, the causal logic that McGowan sees the subject of desire following is premised upon the non-substantiality of the object, which, by extension,

cannot lend fixity, coherence or certainty to the subject in a linear-chronological manner. On the contrary, the subject that McGowan sees coming into existence in the structure of desire *never fully arrives*, precisely because the process or structure of desire never closes upon itself in completion. In desire, the subject's arrival is always a factor of temporal retroaction and anticipation: that is, the subject of desire always *will have arrived*. The anticipated-retroacted arrival of the subject is prominently recognizable when the subjectivity in question is a communal one—for instance, the notion of a national subjectivity. McGowan argues that a drive-based subjectivity is open to the community of other as a determinative factor of its being, while a desire-based subjectivity is fundamentally alienated, isolated in its pursuit of the object of desire. It is on this ethical-political ground that McGowan ultimately rejects the subject of desire and favors the subject of the death drive, which he finds in atemporal cinema. However, given that the point of desire is not closure but a repetition of itself, one fails to see why the desire-based subject would not be open to the community of others. More crucially, in desire, the community in which the subject finds itself never reaches a state of completion or finality, either. In other words, the community that desire engenders is based upon difference, unlike the temporality of the drive, which "does not hold within it the promise of openness and difference" (McGowan 2011, 12). Thus, a desire-based notion of national subjectivity would allow for the emergence of differences within its system, wherein each purported national subject relates to its community in a contingent or provisional way, thereby transforming the notion of national subjectivity itself. Whereas, in a drive-based notion of national subjectivity, there would be no space for difference or distanciation—each purported national subject would experience the entire structure of national identity *at all times*. A drive-based notion of national identity cannot allow for dissention. Thus, McGowan's rejection of the subject of desire and the promotion of the subject of the drive is far more problematic than it appears on the first glance.

It is my purpose in this chapter to argue that in desire the subject's relation to temporality is *not* linear-chronological; rather, the subject's relation to temporality is punctuated by retroaction and

anticipation. As a result, the subject of desire never fully arrives into existence. This temporal uncertainty turns the pacing of the subject's partial arrival into a hesitant one, and thereby allows for openness, freedom and difference in the subject's relation to the structure of desire. The skewed temporality of the subject and the hesitancy inherent in its arrival are prominently consequential when communal subjectivities—such as national identity—are taken into consideration. A desire-based notion of communal subjectivity *demands* the presence of difference, dissention or exception as its necessary constitutive element. My discussion of the formation of communal identity follows Ernesto Laclau's analysis of populism, especially with regard to Laclau's formulation of the empty signifier as the exception which contingently establishes a system. In Laclau's writing, the temporal aspect of the formation of populism through the function of the empty signifier remains implied, in the background. However, I extend Laclau's argument to claim that the emergence of this difference or exception that founds its corresponding system—which is not a totality, but *precisely* a contingency—can be accounted for only when one recognizes that the subject relation to temporality is fundamentally skewed. I substantiate my argument through the analysis of *Rang De Basanti* (2006), a Bollywood film which does not follow the characteristics of atemporal cinema, as proposed by McGowan. McGowan lays out the characteristics of atemporal cinema in the following way:

> The atemporal cinematic mode does not distort forward-moving time simply because of the demands of story, as is the case with science fiction. Its distortions are instead formal ones. The distortion of time takes place in the filmic discourse (what Russian Formalism calls the *syuzhet*); that is, it occurs in the way that the story (or *fabula*) is told, not in the story itself. (8)

In contrast, *Rang De Basanti* distorts the forward-movement of time *precisely* because the story demands it, and this distortion takes place at the level of form or style as well as at the level of the narrative itself. However, in spite of its difference from McGowan's prescription, *Rang De Basanti* allows us to see the ways in which temporal retroaction and anticipation punctuates the subject's

relation to its national identity and history, and thereby demonstrates that the purported (national) subject of desire is differentiated and free. Thus, in my analysis, I engage with the film's narrative elements as well as with the stylistic elements. Specifically, in terms of style, this film foregrounds the ways in which one's temporal access to historical events is always mediated through aesthetics, and by doing so calls attention to the inalienability of stylization from representation. The visual aesthetic of *Rang De Basanti*, therefore, functions on three interrelated registers: on the side of self-reflexive *mise-en-abyme*; with a certain opacity of style that draws on symbolic or double deception; and by interrupting the possibility of consistent style through stylistic hybridity. Insofar as narrative is concerned, the film engages with history specifically as an open question, whereby the truth-status of historical events in relation to the present is staged against the linear or teleological conception of temporality; one's relation to history is staged through retroaction and anticipation. In this way, *Rang De Basanti* presents the question of national history as a contingent—rather than completed—myth-construct which is punctuated through moments of interruption posed by the act of its restaging in popular culture.

Section I: Three Temporal Lines

Rang De Basanti (Paint it Saffron), directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, was released in 2006, closely following a group of films that represent a resurgent interest in Indian national history and politics. Even though I risk oversimplifying the complex socio-political scenario of India, allow me to offer this brief context: as India moved toward 'future,' i.e. the culture of globalized economy, the question of national self-definition posed itself with deep urgency. It is in this context of temporal tension that *Rang De Basanti* looks back wistfully to the Indian freedom movement as the inaugural moment of Indian national selfhood. *Rang De Basanti* foregrounds the 'untimeliness'—that is, being out of sync with the moment when one can utter "*I am*"—of the question of national identity in its plot, which I will briefly describe.

Struggling British filmmaker Sue McKinley comes across the diary of her grandfather, Mr. McKinley, who served as a jailer in the British Army during the Indian independence movement. Through the diary, she is compelled by the story of five freedom fighters to make a re-enacted documentary film about them. When her pitch is rejected, Sue travels to India, and with the help of her friend, Sonia, Sue casts five young men, Daljit "DJ", Karan, Aslam, Laxman and Sukhi, to portray as the revolutionaries, inspite of their feeling that a film about the independence movement has no bearing upon the present. In the process of making the film, they gradually begin to realize that their own socio-political context is eerily similar to that of the characters they portray in Sue's film. Meanwhile, Sonia's fiancé Ajay, a Flight Lieutenant in the Indian Air, is killed when his flight crashes. While the government blames the pilot, Sonia and her friends claim that he sacrificed his life to save hundreds of others that would have been lost had he ejected from the aircraft and left the aircraft to crash into the populous city. They learn that the defense minister is responsible for this incident because he had been bribed to accept faulty aircraft parts. To their surprise, they also learn that it was Karan's father who had bribed the minister. The group and their supporters decide to stage a peaceful protest, which the Police forcefully break up. Ajay's mother is severely hurt and slips into a coma. The friends decide to react following methods of the early freedom fighters from Sue's film, and they murder the defense minister and Karan's father to uphold "justice." The minister is reported to have been killed by terrorists, and therefore is hailed as a martyr by the media. To bring forth their intentions behind the killings, just as the five freedom fighters did, the five of them attempt to reach the public. They forcibly take over the All India Radio station, where Karan goes on air and reveals the truth about their actions. While still on the air, they are all killed in an ambush by the police and military commandos.

It should become immediately apparent that the plot has three distinct yet interdependent temporal lines that intersect, and thereby hold the plot together, *only* when a subjective identity (that

is, being able to say "I am this") is precipitated through a misrecognized identification. To wit, one should see the following temporal lines in the plot:

1. The time of Mr. McKinley's observation of and writing about the five revolutionaries (T1)
2. The time of Sue's film that seeks to bring T1 to signification through re-enactment (T2)
3. The time of the five young men that runs askew from the times of both Sue's film and McKinley's narrative (T3)

As the plot reveals, the only way T1, T2 and T3 can intersect—that is, become identical—to produce a coherent, meaningful narrative is *if* the five young men (mis)recognize themselves as the five revolutionaries. However, this misrecognition has to pass through an *act in good faith*: namely, the five young men must act *in the place of* the five revolutionaries, and not *as if* they were the five revolutionaries. In other words, even though the men's identification with the revolutionaries is a fundamental misrecognition, the men *must not* perceive this as such. On the contrary, for the men, the three temporal lines must collapse, creating a temporal exigency that not only spurs them into decision, but also lends them subjective consistency, whereby they can proclaim: "I am the revolutionary."

In fact, this is precisely what happens in the plot of *Rang De Basanti*: the five young men *become* the revolutionaries, making Sue's cinematic representation of McKinley's narrative possible, and thereby making the narrative of *Rang De Basanti* one that is coherent and meaningful. How are we to read the temporal exigency of the collapse of three temporal lines that precipitate the five young men as subjetivized signifiers of a national, historical past? In other words, what conception of time is operative in the narrative of *Rang De Basanti*? The answer—one that will show us that, in this film,

one's relation to history is staged through retroaction and anticipation—is to be sought in Jacques Lacan's essay "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism."

Section II: The Error that Binds

In this essay—written in 1946, revised in 1966, one of Lacan's earlier works—Lacan illustrates the ways in which the subject (read, the *cogito*) comes into being *as such*—not via its full identification with the signifier, but as a result of the gap between two signifiers. Anyone who is familiar with Lacan's oeuvre would recognize this formulation from his more widely circulated essay, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1966), where Lacan repurposes the structure of the Sassurean sign to argue that the subject, as the subject of knowledge, comes into being through what Lacan calls a "quilting point" that binds the synchronic sliding of the signifier. What then is unique about "Logical Time"—that is to say, what element of signification does this essay offer that "The Insistence" does not? I propose that while Lacan's analysis of the subject in "The Insistence" is primarily spatial—one can clearly see this in the metaphor of verticality of the quilting point—in "Logical Time" the analysis of the subject takes into account the temporal aspect of the sliding of the signifier and the moment of penetration enacted by the quilting point to precipitate the subject. In other words, "Logical Time" stands against the commonly held charge that, in Lacan's formulation, the subject is a-temporal or a-historical, by insisting on the time it takes for the quilting point to stop the sliding of the signifier as a necessary coefficient of the subject's arrival. "Logical Time" performs this analysis by offering a logical problem that I summarize in the following way: Three prisoners are invited by the warden to play a logical game, the winner of which will be set free. In this game, the warden shows the prisoners three white discs and two black disks, and unbeknownst to all of them, pins a white disk to the back of each prisoner. Each prisoner, who can only see the disks on the other two, but cannot communicate with his fellows, must *logically* deduce the color of his disk. Following

this, the prisoners contemplate each other *for some time* and exit simultaneously with the exact same rationale for his identity.[54]

In Lacan's analysis, the temporal span—from the moment of the prisoners' perception of each other to the moment of decision preceding the act of their simultaneous exit—is of tremendous importance. Lacan argues that there are three stages or steps to this process: namely, the instant of the glance, the time for comprehending, and the moment of concluding. In other words, there are three temporal lines running through this operation, which must somehow collide or intersect to spur the act of exiting, whereby the subject can proclaim: "I am white." Although the structural similarity of the temporal lines of this formulation to that which we find in the plot of *Rang De Basanti* is striking, let us continue to pursue Lacan's analysis, so as to better understand the temporal complexity of the plot.

Of the three steps of the prisoners' logical problem, Lacan proposes the following:

> One can isolate [in the sophism] three evidential moments whose logical values prove to be different and of increasing order. To lay out the chronological succession of the three moments would amount once again to spatializing them through a formalism which tends to reduce discourse to an alignment of signs. To show that the instance of time presents itself in a different mode in each of these moments would be to preserve their hierarchy, revealing therein a tonal discontinuity essential to their value. But to discern in the temporal modulation the very function by which each of these moments, in its passage to the sequential one, is reabsorbed therein, the last

54 . Jacques Lacan, "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism," in *Ecrits* (NY: Norton, 2006), 161-75.

> moment which absorbs them alone remaining, would be to restore their real succession and truly understand their genesis in the logical movement.[55]

What Lacan is rejecting here is precisely the teleological notion of temporal movement, which will organize the three instances in a line of progression whereby the inaugural moment of the glance necessarily and chronologically leads to moment of conclusion or decision. However, such an analysis does not account for the temporal modulation of these moments—that is, the ways in which temporal exigency (haste) and temporal delay (hesitation) animate the relation between the three moments. This analysis of the temporal modulation takes into account the contemplative, hesitant *inaction* of the prisoners—embodied in the time for comprehending—that sequentially aligns the moment of decision to the moment of glance. It is in this way that the moment of decision *anticipates* its certainty by *retroacting* to the moment of glance through the time of comprehension. In other words, each moment has to absorb, *as its antecedent*, the previous moment *while* anticipating the certainty of the following moment: only this can spur the subject into concluding the duration of contemplation or hesitation through a decisive action. Without this process of retroactive absorption of anticipated certainty, one is caught up in a signifying quagmire of infinite doubt, and the cogito-subject cannot come into being as such. The inter-absorption—in other words, becoming-identical—of the three moments is what precipitates the subject. However, such identification that engenders the subject—as Lacanian scholar Bruce Fink points out in his analysis of "Logical Time"— "is entirely based on an error [that] reminds us of the error involved in the mirror stage."[56] He further explains that "the error in reasoning is needed to bring the time for comprehending to a close…Indeed, the error is responsible for the advent of the subject here, for the all-important precipitation of subjectivity."[57] What is this "error" if not what Lacan calls the "fundamental misrecognition,"

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55 . Ibid.,167.

56 . Bruce Fink, "Logical Time and the Precipitation of Subjectivity," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud* (NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 363.

57 . Ibid.

whereby the subject comes into being by identifying with and assuming the fullness of its image on the mirror, even though in reality the subject is far from fullness?

Section III: Uneasy Collapse--"The Time for Unrest is Here"

If one starts with this erroneous identification with one's representation, one should be able to see the ways in which in the plot of *Rang De Basanti* is brought to a signifiable closure by the five young men's *identification* with their *specular image*—that is, with the revolutionaries of Sue's film, and by inclusion, with the revolutionaries in McKinley's narrative. That this identification is erroneous should be quite evident: the five young men are, in fact, not the five revolutionaries; yet in the course of the plot of the film, they *assume* not only the signifying position of their purported specular image, but also *enact*, in good faith, the actions of the revolutionaries. It is evident that it is at the precise moment when the five young men re-perform the revolutionaries' violence by murdering the corrupt minister and his partner-in-crime that the three temporal lines of the plot come to a resolution. From this moment onwards, *Rang De Basanti* will no longer invoke the revolutionaries—that is, a common past; a national history—through Sue's film, since the act of murder has subjectivized the five young men *as* the revolutionaries. Indeed, Sue's presence in the plot becomes increasingly tertiary following the murder, as she is relegated to the position of a mere observer of the actions in which the five men engage. The exclusion of Sue and her film from the plot of *Rang De Basanti* following the murder clearly indicates the ways in which the five young men have assumed, *as retroactive certainty*, the figure of the five revolutionaries *as their common, inter-subjective history*. Similarly, the young men's initial doubt about the timeliness of Sue's project, and their subsequent participation in it, *anticipates* their relationship to national history *as* the inaugural—precisely because they mark it as incommensurate—moment of the time in which they currently live.

Nowhere is this temporal complexity more prominent in *Rang De Basanti* than the song-and-dance sequence placed between two significant events: the successful completion of a large part of

Sue's project that brings the five young men closer to their specular image; and the crash-death of Ajay, the fighter pilot, that will propel the five young men in path of subjectivization through the re-enactment of violence. Understandably, this is a turning point in the film's narrative, where the temporal processes of retroaction and anticipation are embodied through visual style.

The song-and-dance sequence, aptly titled "*Khalbali*," or "agitation and confusion," begins with a deep-focus shot of what is clearly signified as remnants of pre-colonial Indian civilization. In the foreground of this shot is one of the five young men, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, looking away from the ruins. This shot orients the viewer in two ways: spatially, it locates the main characters in seclusion from the political turmoil of the metropolis; and temporally, it juxtaposes the contemporaneous with the ancient, by situating the decidedly apolitical and post-ideological (at least up to this point in the narrative) characters in their ancient sanctuary. The camera cuts to reveal all of the main characters engaged in frolicking dance movements that draw more from western club or music video dance-choreography than from typical Indian dance moves, while the song proclaims—"the time for unrest is here." Although the signifier "unrest" gestures towards the literal political unrest in which the characters will participate, at this point in the song-and-dance sequence, unrest seems to suggest more of a youthful exuberance and restlessness. Yet, anticipated even in early part of the song-and-dance sequence is a message of revolution that invokes a phrase commonly used in the Indian Freedom Movement: *Inquilab Zindabad*, Long live revolution. In fact, intercut with the dance in which the characters engage, the viewer sees one of the main characters spray-painting this phrase—among other graffiti-works that he has purportedly done in the past—on the wall of the ruins. In keeping with the motif of youthful unrest, the graffiti-works on the wall are brightly colorful in their combination of mundane catch-phrases and images. A deep sense of irony—perhaps even that of pastiche—prevails in the graffiti: the catchphrases (such as, "My India is Great," "Go Slow" etc.) on the wall are something one might expect to see on the backs of commercial trucks in contemporary India; the images replicate the practice of mass-produced yearly calendar art of various divine or

mythological figures. Yet, these commonalities are slightly transformed in the graffiti: for instance, the truck-bumper catchphrase, usually written as "*Mera Bharat-OK-Mahan*" (My India-OK-is Great), is transformed into "*Mera Bharat OK*" by crossing out *"Mahan*." Prominent in this tongue-in-cheek re-purposing of nationalistic pop-art is the young men's engagement, in a decidedly oblique fashion, with the politics of Indian nationhood.[58] The moment of the song-and-dance sequence, however, captures one of the five young men spray-painting "*Inquilab Zindabad*" in bold, red monochrome letters across and over the other graffiti. Crucially, this is the *only* slogan in the graffiti that does not go through an ironic transformation. It is as if this slogan invokes the past moments of anti-colonial struggle in an unadulterated form, posits them in an ironic, contemporary context, only to anticipate the merging of these two temporal lines in the forthcoming revolutionary actions of the five young men.

Fig. 1. Screenshot from *Rang De Basanti*[59]

58 . Crucially, these signs or slogans tend to appear mostly on the bumpers of commercial trucks that have "national permit": i.e. they are allowed, by the government, to make commercial runs anywhere in India.

59 . *Rang De Basanti*, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (2006, Mumbai, India: UTV Studio, 2007), DVD. All subsequent screenshots are from the same source.

The spatio-temporal line of the song-and-dance number is further complicated through retroaction and anticipation, when the bright and colorful representation of the main characters is intercut with the sepia-toned reproduction and re-enactment of Indian freedom fighters in a British jail. This re-enactment and reproduction of the past moments of anti-colonial struggle—ones that eventually precipitated the independent Indian nation—belongs to Sue's documentary camera, and not to the omniscient narrative camera of *Rang De Basanti*. Indeed, the camera becomes less mobile, and less panoramic in the sepia-toned intercuts, compared to the highly mobile and deep-focus camera style of the song-and-dance sequence. One could perhaps argue that the relative immobility of the camera, and the sepia tone of the re-enacted sequences signify the past in its insularity, in that the past is clearly marked as "different" from the present in terms of cinematic style. One could also argue that Sue's motive in making a film about the Indian freedom movement, based on the diary of her grandfather, who was a jailer in British India, is to memorialize the past *qua* past—without any regard to the context of post-independent, postcolonial politics of Indian nationhood. Yet, the song-and-dance sequence reveals the temporal impossibility of such teleological memorializing of the past: the main characters of *Rang De Basanti* have not only become actors impersonating Indian revolutionaries in Sue's film, they have also imbibed the gesture of revolution, which anticipates their actions in the later part of *Rang De Basanti*. The temporal line that runs through the sepia moments within the song-and-dance sequence, then, *anticipates* the future *retroaction* of the revolutionary spirit on the part of the main characters of *Rang De Basanti*. This double movement of time through retroaction-anticipation is brought in clear relief by jump cuts, through which the song-and-dance is juxtaposed with the gruesome torture scenes in the British jail.

Fig. 2. Screenshot

A third temporal line is also available in the song-and-dance sequence: namely, the pure present moment of song-and-dance, as captured by Sue's video camera. These sequences—also juxtaposed with the narrative camera of *Rang De Basanti*, and the documentary camera of Sue's purported film—are remarkably different in visual style from the other two temporal lines. In sharp contrast, these moments are represented by a shaky, handheld camera aesthetics; where one is made aware of the ongoing process of video recording by blue-tinted, two-tone images that are visibly framed by the rectangular video recording space, as well as the continuously blinking, red "recording" light typical of video cameras. The camera angles are decidedly unprofessional, in that the images are often distorted when the camera is brought too close to objects. However, home-movie aesthetics of these moments complicates the temporal identification of the narrative camera of *Rang De Basanti*, which is evidently recording the same dance movements as the ones recorded by the handheld camera. The temporal complication is brought to the foreground when one asks: if the panoramic, colorful capture of the song-and-dance symbolically identifies *the present*, and if the sepia tone signifies the *retroacted-anticipated past*, then what is *time* of the handheld camera capture?

Since the handheld camera neither retroacts, nor anticipates, I claim that these sequences are caught up in the pure—hence distorted—presence of the Lacanian moment of glance. Hence, the double temporal movement of retroaction and anticipation becomes necessary to transform the distorted or a-contextualized captures into signifiable temporality.

Fig. 3. Screenshot

The pertinent analytical question presented to us by the temporal complexities of the three distinct cinematic styles is the following: where and how the temporal lines intercut, and what effect does it precipitate? The answer, I propose, is to be found in the concluding shot of the song-and-dance

sequence, where we find the main characters reclined *among* the ruins.

Fig. 4. Screenshot

Noticeably, the colorful narrative camera of *Rang De Basanti* frames this shot, and both the documentary camera of Sue's film, and the handheld camera captures have receded. The characters seem to be lost in a reverie—physically located in the present among the ruins, yet not-quite-there, as represented by their body language. As the narrative of *Rang De Basanti* will later reveal, this is the proverbial calm before the storm of revolutionary actions leading to the violent death of the main characters. The deep-focus camera captures the background—the graffiti-laden wall—prominently, which now bears the fully-formed slogan "*Inquilab Zindabad*," as well as "Well, the rebel has arrived," in bold, colorful letters. The announcement of the rebel's arrival—evidently, an already accomplished event—cannot be understood without the context of the revolutionary slogan that visibly emerges through the song-and-dance sequence. In other words, the rebel can only arrive when the three temporal lines collapse, and anticipate the future moments that echo the revolutionary moments of the past.

Clearly, what begins as a somewhat unexpected—dare I say, untimely—dance sequence, presented as such through the stabilizing and panoramic lens of *Rang De Basanti*, unravels to reveal, respectively, the presence of Sue's documentary camera through grainy, black-and-white images, and the presence of McKinley's description of the revolutionaries as represented in Sue's film, through the use of sepia tone and a somewhat theatrical performance of the actors. The gaiety of the five friends, the performed seriousness of the enacted past, and the candid nature of Sue's documentary camera repeatedly intercut each other in this sequence. Clearly, the juxtaposition of the three distinct visual styles in one sequence—where we also have to grapple with the fullness of the upbeat music-track against the brutal violence perpetrated on the revolutionaries—does not necessarily produce a seamless, fully identified signification. Rather, the formally insistent hybridity of this sequence—that seems to jump between three temporal lines—causes the emergence of a particular kind of subjectivity: one that is thoroughly contingent in its structure, yet misrecognizes its contingency as identity. In other words, *Rang De Basanti*, is actively engaged in thinking about the ways in which the subject of misrecognition relates to its supposed moment of inauguration, by revealing the temporal modulations that go into the construction of a national history.

Section IV: Untimely History of the Popular; Or, A Gramscian Syllogism

Even though it is evident that the song-and-dance sequence, "*Khalbali*," stages an uneasy collapse of the three temporal lines operative in the narrative of *Rang De Basanti*, one is compelled to interrogate the nature of the proposed historicity that such a collapse might precipitate. In other words, one needs to ask: What constitutes history in *Rang De Basanti*? Understandably, this question is central to the plethora of responses that *Rang De Basanti* has generated in the academic community, as well as in popular-culture communities, such as blogs. Neelam Srivastava's essay, "Bollywood as National (ist) Cinema: Violence, Patriotism and the National-Popular in *Rang De Basanti*," is singularly crucial in its thoughtful engagement with the question of historicity in this film. Srivastava's essay compares, at the level of the narrative and aesthetic form, *Rang De Basanti*

with *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) to argue that while the latter proposes a revolutionary view of the post-colonial nation-as-collective, the former restages national history in a conservative or bourgeois fashion. Srivastava's engagement is echoed in Aarti Wani's essay, "Uses of History: A Case of Two Films," which positions *Rang De Basanti* in a somewhat similar category of bourgeois or neo-liberal recuperation of national history that empties the Indian freedom struggle of its revolutionary or popular content. One could argue that Srivastava's and Wani's critique of *Rang De Basanti* hinges upon the following three-fold syllogistic structure:

> 1) *Premise*: The forging of a post-colonial nation takes on the form of national-popular as the convergence-point of diverse class interests, bringing about a working-class hegemony through struggle;
>
> 2) *Premise*: The post-colonial national-popular, if restaged to empty out its essential content of class-consciousness, precipitates a false or revisionist, bourgeois view of history;
>
> 3) *Conclusion*: *Rang De Basanti* performs a bourgeois recuperation of anti-colonial struggle, because it does not produce class-convergence in its representation of national history.

One cannot help but notice the equation of the category of the post-colonial nation with the category of the popular in this formulation that proposes a very specific definition of both the categories. This is particularly evident in Srivastava's invocation of Antonio Gramsci, when she offers the following comparison between *The Battle of Algiers* and *Rang De Basanti*:

> Films that represent political violence as forging the nation contextualize it within a situation of 'national-popular' struggle. But these forms of the national-popular take on very different configurations in the two films, which have less to do with the historical and political differences between the Algeria of the 1960s and the India of

> 2006, and more to do with the sort of 'imagined' national audience that these films aim for. Commercial Hindi cinema actually reverses Gramsci's aspirations for national-popular culture as a unifying force for different class interests, especially that between the intellectuals and the masses; in other words, it is instrumental in bringing about a bourgeois hegemony.
>
> In Rang de Basanti we see this regressive version of the national-popular in action. By focusing on the urban middle class as the sector of society that can ultimately solve the ills of the nation, it elides any possibility of alliance with the working-class or the rural poor which does not entail the dominance of the bourgeoisie over these other groups.[60]

Clearly, what is at stake in Srivastava's analysis is a contestation regarding the proper definition of the structure of the category of the popular. Noticeably, Srivastava's interpretation of the national-popular considers it as a point of convergence—a unifying force that precipitates nation as a coherent form of community in its ideal, Gramscian mode. It is precisely because *Rang De Basanti* fails to produce such a community that Srivastava criticizes the film as regressive. In order to examine the import of this charge against *Rang De Basanti*, it is therefore necessary to interrogate the concept of the popular itself.

Section V: The Popular

The word popular, when used as an analytical category in the study of politico-cultural forms, gestures to a connotative paradox: in its positive dimension, popular is admired by many people—hence democratic—but in its negative dimension, popular is also vulgar, coarse, and ill-bred. Raymond Williams points to this paradox of the popular in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* in the following way:

60 . Neelam Srivastava, "Bollywood as National(ist) Cinema: Violence, Patriotism and the National-Popular in Rang De Basanti," *Third Text* 23 no. 6 (2009): 705-6.

> Popular estate and popular government, from C16, referred to a political system constituted or carried on by the whole people, but there was also the sense (cf. COMMON) of 'low' or 'base.' The transition to the predominant modern meaning of 'widely favored' or 'well-liked' is interesting in that it contains a strong element of setting out to gain favor, with a sense of calculation that has not quite disappeared but that is evident in a reinforced phrase like deliberately popular.[61]

What interests me particularly in Williams' analysis is the conflation of a systemic wholeness with a high degree of intentional calculation in the formation of the politico-cultural category of the popular. This conflation gestures to a fundamental question vis-à-vis the ontology of the popular that Williams' analysis cannot resolve—namely, if the popular is constituted by the whole people, then from whom does such a formation solicit favor? In other words, what is the nature of that entity which evidently supersedes the whole that constitutes the popular—for whose eyes the popular is staged? The question seems more insidious and inscrutable where cultural productions that identify themselves as popular are concerned. It seems that such self-identification is directed toward an unseen audience that exists beyond the perceived wholeness. Yet, it is this entity—this unseen observer—that allows the popular to constitute itself as a whole; as such, this entity appears to be the condition of possibility of the popular. A subsequent analytical problem arises from this conception of the popular: since the category of the popular as a systemic wholeness is constitutively dependent on that which exists beyond this whole, then how is the wholeness constituted *as such*? In other words, if there exists *beyond* the whole—validating the whole as such—an entity, then the perceived wholeness of the popular involves an ontological fallacy. Insofar as the formative core of the popular seems to contain a fallacy—an impossibility—the anatomy of the popular itself demands sustained critical inquiry. Hence, the second question that I pose to the concept of the popular is the following: structurally, how does the popular represent itself to its condition of possibility?

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61 . Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 237.

Ernesto Laclau, in his essay "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics," theorizes the formation of the category of the popular as a hegemonic operation. Laclau's definition of hegemony will be particualr interest to our present discussion of the ontology of the popular. Laclau Writes, referring to Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of hegemony:

> In a climate of extreme repression any mobilization for a partial objective will be perceived not only as related to the concrete demands and objectives of that struggle, but also as an act of opposition against the system. It is not, consequently, something positive that all of them share which establishes their unity, but something negative: their opposition to a common enemy. If the function of the differential signifiers is to renounce their differential identity in order to represent the purely equvalential identity of a communitarian space as such, they cannot construct this equivalential identity as something belonging to a differential order. This pure equivalential function representing an absent fullness cannot have a signifier of its own—for in that case the 'beyond of all differences' would be one more difference and not the result of the equivalential collapse of all differential identities.[62]

In this definition of hegemony, Laclau argues that a popular movement against repression—a movement that brings people disparate socio-economic interest together as a people—functions as a hegemonic system whereby the constitutive particularities within the group are subsumed under the common goal of opposition against the enemy. Hence, the common goal cannot have a positive content, since opposition, in its very nature, is predicated upon the negation of that which exists. It is this negative content of their relation to the enemy that the group recognizes as their commonality, and therefore is constituted as a group of identical entities. However, such a consensus among disparate entities is enforced precisely because that which signifies—stands for—their unity is never

62 . Ernesto Laclau, "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter," in *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996), 41-42.

fully available to them. The fullness of such a signifier—insofar as the signifier fully represents the group as a popular entity—is always already absent. This signifier-*sans*-positive-content that makes the formation of the popular possible *as such*, is the empty signifier in Laclau's formulation. However, in his definition of the empty signifier, Laclau points out that such a signifier can never be represented in positive terms within the system of signification. Laclau writes:

> An empty signifier can, consequently, only emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion, etcetera) of the structure of the sign, that is, the limits of signification can only announce themselves as the impossibility of realizing what is within those limits—if the limits could be signified in a direct way, they would be internal to signification and, *ergo*, would not be limits at all.[63]

Hence, it is precisely at the point where the structure of signification fails—when the system of signification is interrupted by a structural disjunction—that the empty signifier can be said to exist as such. It is only because the empty signifier always remains beyond direct—hence positive—signification that it can enforce the consensus that holds the "differential" entities constitutive of the signifying system in an equvalential chain. It is the fundamental structural impossibility of the empty signifier that holds the system of signification together as wholeness. In terms of cinematic representation then, it is precisely at that point where dys-synchrony appears—precisely where a part of the film remains in disjunction to the system of representation of the filmic diegesis—that the empty signifier emerges. Functionally, however, it is the inverse of this operation that makes the representative wholeness of the film possible: it is precisely because disjunction and dys-synchrony exist that the film can represent itself as "popular." Clearly, this formulation is particularly salient to our analysis of the "item number" as an instance of disjuncture and dys-synchrony in Bollywood cinema. One can now claim that the representation of Bollywood cinema as the bearer of the popular

63 . Ibid., 37.

is possible because of the structural failure that the song-and-dance sequence introduces in the structure of signification of the film itself.

If the item number constitutes the popular in Bollywood cinema, one needs to understand the ways in which such a structural operation becomes possible. Drawing upon our previous analysis of the item number as an instance of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, and as an instance of the empty signifier, we can argue that the formation of the popular in Bollywood cinema is politically significant because such a consensus-formation depends on a fundamental misrecognition of the negative content of the empty signifier or *objet petit a* as the possessor of a positive content.

The representation of the empty signifier—the *objet petit a*—in the case of the Bollywood song-and-dance sequences (such as "*Khalbali*") takes the form of what Mladen Dolar calls *the object voice*. In *A Voice and Nothing More*, Dolar formulates the object voice—which is an instance of the Lacanian *objet petit a*—in the following way: "an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation."[64] If we read the blind spot and the disturbance as instances of representational failure, we will see how the song-and-dance sequence is an instance of the *object petit a*, or an empty signifier. But what is its effect? In other words, what does the object voice produce as an outcome of its structural operation? Dolar's analysis of the object voice attempts to answer this question in the following way:

> There is the signifying chain, reduced to its minimal features, which yields, as a result or as a leftover, the voice. It looks as though there is a reversal: the voice is not taken as a hypothetical or mythical origin that the analysis would have to break down into distinctive traits, not as a diffuse substance to be reduced to structure, a raw

64 . Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 4.

> material to be tamed into phonemes, but, rather, the opposite—it stands at the outcome of the structural operation.[65]

Here, Dolar refers to Lacan's formulation of the graph of desire in "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire." Significantly, the structural operation—of which the voice is a leftover—also has, as one of its terms, the subject *in the act of knowing*: and this is precisely what Dolar chooses not to address. Herein lies the political significance of the empty signifier and the production of the popular as such: this operation also produces the subject as one who knows. Lacan, however, points out necessary misrecognition that engenders the subject in the act of knowing itself. In *Ecrits*, Lacan writes:

> Here arises the ambiguity of a misrecognizing that is essential to knowing myself. For, in this "rear view," all the subject can be sure of is the anticipated image—which he had caught of himself in his mirror—coming to meet him.[66]

In this passage, Lacan refers to that vector in the graph of desire, which Dolar chooses not to address; i.e. the line that represents the movement that produces the subject *qua* subject of self-knowledge. This vector takes the subject through that line in the graph of desire "which yields, as a result or as a leftover, the voice."[67] Therefore, voice—or more specifically, object voice—as a leftover, produces the subject in the act of knowing itself: although the act of knowing is fundamentally a misrecognition. In order to explain why misrecognition is essential to the subject's self-knowledge, Lacan posits the schema of the subject's anticipated image captured in the rear view. The subject's image in the mirror refers to Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage as a formative juncture of the subject's unconscious—but that is not our point of inquiry at this moment. Consider instead, the specific locus of the image vis-à-vis the subject: the self-image is something that the subject is never

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65 . Ibid., 35.
66 . Lacan, *Ecrits*, 684.

67 . Dolar: 35.

fully cognizant of. Although the subject's encounter with the image is always in the past—denoted by Lacan's rear view metaphor—in the sense that the image has already appeared in the subject's experiential domain, something is always left over in that encounter. The subject's cognition of the image, in this sense, is never complete: the subject's encounter with the image is always irrevocably in the past that gestures to the future, and *never* in the present. In other words, the subject never *possesses* the image fully: while the subject's encounter with the image *has already taken place*, the subject continues to expect that it will be able to fully possess the image *in future*. The self-image, for the subject, is that which is always *to-be-had*. This recognition, on the part of the subject, that there exists—albeit in future—a locus where the self-image will be fully available is therefore a fundamental misrecognition: the subject's encounter with the self-image is always a missed encounter.

We can now see the political dimension of the popular—insofar as it is represented as such—as the empty signifier: it produces, as a necessary outcome, the subject of misrecognition. However, this misrecognition is not equal to the Marxian view of ideology—*they do not know it, but they are doing it*—rather, this misrecognition uses cynicism as a form of ideology. The formula of cynical ideology can be expressed in the following way: *they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it*. The popular, then, insofar as it is represented as popular—without addressing what it means to *be* popular—produces the subject as a subject of hegemony. I claim that the possibility of transgressing hegemonic politics—and as result, the possibility of opening up a site of ethical, emancipatory resistance—can come out of an ontological inquiry into the popular. The solution, if there is any, is not in knowing what the popular means; rather, we should constantly interrogate what it means to *be* popular.

Section VI: The Impossible History

What I am suggesting with regard to *Rang De Basanti* is that here the idea of a nation is never *fully* precipitated: what this film presents, as Srivastava points out, is the concept of a nation in its fragments. Srivastava's charge against *Rang De Basanti*, as I point out in the previous sections, is that this film upholds a bourgeois hegemonic view of the nation precisely because one—i.e. the bourgeois middle class—fragment among the many insidiously occupies, while precluding the working class, the signifying position with regard to the postcolonial Indian nationhood. In other words, Srivastava argues that *Rang De Basanti* offers a partial or incomplete representation of the national-popular history of the Indian freedom struggle. However, if we follow Laclau's analysis of the category of the popular as an instance of the Lacanian *objet petit a* (i.e. part-object), it should become apparent that the unifying force of the nation must always-already draw upon the exclusion and elevation of at least one signifier that precipitates the coherence of all the other (disparate) signifiers in the form of the national-popular. Hence, it could be easily argued that the form of Gramscian national-popular—which, according to Srivastava, *Rang De Basanti* is *not*—can present a unified narrative of history only through a fundamental misrecognition: i.e. a signifying chain in which a part is taken for the whole. This kind of signifying operation will necessarily smooth out or obliterate the presence of hesitancies in terms of its form and content.

Yet, the presence of a deep temporal hesitancy is undeniable in *Rang De Basanti*. My analysis of the song-and-dance sequence, "*Khalbali*," reveals the ways in which the audio-visual dys-synchrony and the narrative inconsistency repeatedly point up to the *failure* of coherent signification. I claim that in its formal register, "*Khalbali*" embraces formal hybridity precisely because *Rang De Basanti* refuses to engage in the production of the fundamental misrecognition that the inauguration of the national-popular necessitates. The hesitant, almost schizophrenic movement of the song-and-dance sequence between the three temporal lines, as represented by three very different, and often incongruous stylistic modes of the camera, does not allow the formation of a singular temporal point

where the three lines of time intersect in a signifying wholeness. Rather, it appears from the analysis of the song-and-dance sequence that it is precisely this hesitation and interruption that *Rang De Basanti* turns into a moment of celebratory enjoyment by stretching out its formal hybridity on a formal register. If "*Khalbali*" plays out a gesture of foreshadowing with regard to the narrative arc of *Rang De Basanti*—in that it seems to declare the arrival of the rebel—then the moment of purported inauguration is repeatedly interrupted: it does not cohere around a causal nucleus. The possibility of coherent signification—whereby the five young men might come to fully signify the freedom fighters, and thereby create an unbroken temporal line through past, present and future—always remains tentative and fragile. Moreover, even this fragile possibility of a coherent national history which will come into being when the five young men fully assume such a temporal continuity can only exist in the domain of representation: i.e. in the form of historicity that Sue's film project tries to enact. The only moment in *Rang De Basanti* where this possibility comes closest to fruition is during the narrative turning point of "*Khalbali*;" yet, even in this sequence, we are only left with contesting aesthetic modes through which *Rang De Basanti* continuously attempts, and fails to access history.

Keeping in mind the drawing-out of this moment of failure or hesitation, if we turn our attention to Lacan's "three prisoner" problem, we will be able to see that *Rang De Basanti* dwells on the "moment of hesitation," and thereby endlessly defers the arrival of the temporal quilting point that will mark the inauguration of a coherent subjectivity. The subject—that never fully arrives in *Rang De Basanti*—remains one that is thoroughly contingent.

CHAPTER II

THE SUBJECT'S SPACE

FIELD OF SPEECH AND THE ARTICULATION OF DESIRE

The previous chapter of this dissertation discussed the role of temporality in the precipitation of subjectivity. Continuing with the examination of subjectivity in relation to the experience of cinema, the present chapter takes up the question of space as a prominent factor in the precipitation of subjectivity. In other terms, if the previous chapter asks "*when does the subject arrive?*" then this chapter asks "*where does the subject arrive?*." To be clear, my interest does not lie with the material analysis of the actual or physical space in which a subject could arrive or come into being: although interesting and valuable, such study would necessarily be an incomplete one, since one cannot take into account *every* instance of space. Just as the consideration of temporality is not directly related to the material manifestation of the passage of time as indicated by, say, the forward movement of a clock-hand, in the same way, the consideration of spatiality in this chapter has very limited relation to the physical manifestation of space as indicated by, say, an apartment, a neighborhood or a continent.

In contrast, this chapter argues that the subject arrives by announcing its position in the field of language; that is to say, the subject comes into being retroactively by assuming or taking upon itself a locus in relation to the two axial coordinates of symbolic language—namely, the synchronic and the diachronic axes. Through the analysis of *Dil Se* (1998), this chapter argues

that the precipitation of subjectivity is a factor of the endless deferral of signification in symbolic language: just as the signifier tends to but never fully conjugates with the signified to precipitate stable meaning, the subject tends to a fixed locus but never fully comes into being within the space of language. In this chapter, I contend that the subject's relation to the space in which it purports to occupy a locus is fundamentally skewed, even when the film depicting this relationship is neither overtly topophilic nor deliberately gaze-oriented. Rather, as *Dil Se* demonstrates through the interaction and intersection of multiple trajectories or vectors of subjective desire, the split or skewed subject appears where the process of signification fails to achieve closure.

Consider the following illustration of the two axial coordinates of symbolic language—namely, the synchronic and the diachronic axes—in relation to which the subject comes into being:

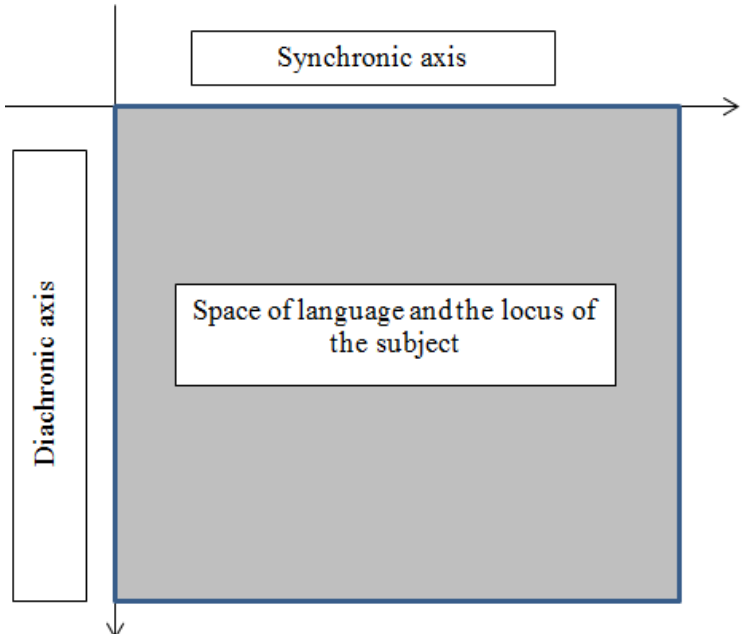

Fig. 5. Synchronic and diachronic axes

It should be noted that the space designated as the locus of the subject in this graph is neither an actual or physical space, nor a determinative or fixed position in which the subject can be found. Rather, this figure graphically renders the concept of spatial relationality, which consists of three variable elements: namely, the synchronic axis, the diachronic axis, and the space marked off by the two axes. The subject, when it arrives in this relational space, comes into being in the form of *will have arrived*; that is, the subject never fully arrives. Since the subject's hesitant arrival is spatially relational, it should also be noted that the subject cannot appear all by itself: when it appears, it must appear in relation to other entities. Therefore, in the most basic form of this relationality, the subject's appearance requires the assumed presence of at least two vectored points of reference: i.e., the two axes in the figure. However, even though its arrival is in relation to the two vectors, the locus of the subject's arrival is not relativistic or arbitrary. Rather, this arrival is the result of a specific set of operations and causes. To be more specific: a) the subject *will have appeared* in the field of language by articulating or naming its desire when the synchronic and the diachronic axes intersect or interfere; and b) this intersection or interference is retroactively anticipated as the object-cause of the subject's arrival. In other terms, the subject comes into being *where* interference or disturbance occurs in the field of symbolic language: i.e. the locus of the subject is coterminous with a certain failure in the process of signification. To be sure, the failure of signification does not refer to an absolute lack of synchrony between the signifier and the signified; rather, failure is to be understood as serialized deferral—a process by which the signifier and the signified temporally postpone and spatially displace their assumed conjugation. Now, since the disturbance or failure in the field of symbolic language does not occupy a fixed locus, the subject that will have arrived in relation to this disturbance cannot occupy a fixed locus, either. To be clear, the failure of signification is a vector: i.e. a geometric point set in motion in relation to other geometric points. Therefore, the subject—which must assume upon itself this failure of signification in order to come into being—can only *tend toward* the failure of signification. Thus, the subject is a vector, rather than a fixed point. However, the

question that becomes immediately apparent is this: if the subject is a vector, then what causes its setting-in-motion? In other words, what is the spatial relation between the field of symbolic language—which consists of the serialized deferral of signification—and that which appears as the subject?

The question of the subject's spatiality or location has been a crucial one in psychoanalysis—represented, prominently but somewhat inaccurately, in numerous films by the so-called spatial arrangement in an analytic session where the analyst remains half-hidden, seated behind the analysand, who remains supine on a couch. This popular imagination aside, for Lacan, the subject's location has been a crucial factor in understanding the subject's structure or constitution. Lacan remained interested in the subject's spatiality throughout his career: while early in his career Lacan used various graphs to provide a map of the subject's itinerary, later Lacan's interest shifted to relational and three-dimensional geometry as a way to explicate the subject through Venn diagrams and topological paradoxes. The culmination of Lacan's investment in this avenue of inquiry is, of course, the infamous turn to "knot theory" towards the very end of his career: one can clearly see the evidence of this radical investment in his seminar entitled "*Le Sinthome*," where Lacan spends considerable amount of time on the Borromean knot.

Given that cinema—in a very prominent way—is about spatial organization, one would think that Lacanian film theorist would take up Lacan's exploration of the subject's spatiality through and in cinema. This, however, has not been the case: Lacanian film theorist, by and large, avoid the graphs, the topological figures, the Venn diagrams and certainly the knots. In so doing, Lacanian film theorists quite unnecessarily miss a promising opportunity of revitalizing psychoanalysis on the one hand and film studies on the other hand, while establishing a dialogue between the two with regard to spatiality should not be difficult at all. Consider, for example, the question of *mise-en-scene*, a crucially important aspect of any film: what is it if not *relational organization of space*? That is, if *mise-en-scene* is the careful positioning of that which appears in

front of the camera, it is so because central to its concern is the establishment—and transmission—of a certain sense. To put it in other terms, in creating *mise-en-scene*, one composes the orientation of a given space, where the position of each object has significant relational bearing upon the position of other objects, so that something is thereby *placed in the scene*: what ultimately emerges from the scene is *meaning*, which makes possible the spectators' experience of cinema. Thus, one could easily envision the application of Lacan's conception of spatiality—say, the Venn diagrams—in generating a complex analysis of *mise-en-scene* as that from which the meaning or sensibility of a film emerges. Even an elementary graph, such as Fig. 1 in this chapter, can demonstrate the way in which framing works in the creation of *mise-en-scene*: just as the subject's locus emerges in relation to the two axes that frames it, similarly a figure (human or otherwise) appears comprehensible only when it is framed in relation to other objects occupying the same space.

Hugh Manon is one of the few Lacanian film theorists to employ the notion of the spatiality in explicating the relationship between subjectivity and space in cinema.[68] In his essay, "Living Dead Spaces: The Desire for the Local in the films of George Romero," Manon argues that when a film offers an abundance of specific or localized information about the space in which the narrative of the film purportedly unfolds, the result is an "anamorphic blot in the field of vision, a desire-inspiring blockage," that foregrounds the *Spaltung* of the subject—what Manon calls, "split viewership."[69] Manon suggests that films approach the notion of topophilia—i.e. the love of places—in one of two ways: 1) by presenting isolated traces of the local that

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68 . Theorists of the Lacanian psychoanalytic clinic, on the other hand, have extensively explored the notion of topology. See, for instance, Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), *Lacan: Topologically Speaking*, eds. Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (NY: Other Press, 2004), and Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimity," *The Symptom 9,* June, 2008, http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=36.

69 . Hugh Manon, "Living Dead Spaces: The Desire for the Local in the films of George Romero," in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, eds. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 317.

generates a sense of familiarity and realistic context, and 2) by offering an abundance of specific information about the narrative space. The first approach is more common in narrative cinema, because such presentation of place or space upholds the perceived realism of cinema. However, the second approach—of which, according to Manon, the films of George Romero are prime examples—resists such identification of realism, and instead makes localness uncanny. This uncanny manifestation of localness, Manon argues, is akin to Lacan's discussion of anamorphosis in Seminar VII. Manon writes:

> In anamorphosis, each of two coherent, yet oppositional perspectives (one local, one non-local) destabilizes the other, rendering it lacking, partial—and this lackingness and partiality is what sustains the viewer's engagement with the overall representation. No matter from where one gazes at an anamorphotic representation, one of its two fields necessarily distorts, becomes alien. In anamorphosis, the viewer can't have it both ways, but equally important is the fact that neither the readable image nor the indecipherable stain ever reaches its final destination, since each is always/already in the process of morphing, of becoming something else. Anamorphosis functions similarly in the films of George Romero, although they do not of course involve a literal optical transposition; audiences do not physically reorient themselves to view the screen at an angle. Instead, Romero repeatedly allows the region of America in which his films are produced to overflow his narratives, usurping the spotlight and daring us not to notice. The result is a nagging awareness of the gravity of local space, a disquieting sense of mundanity and inertia that decodes either as uncomfortably naturalistic or uncannily familiar.[70]

70 . Ibid., 318-19.

Here, Manon makes a crucial point regarding anamorphosis and spatial orientation: anamorphosis is that point in the subject's visual field in which at least two orders of spatial orientation interfere with each other. In other words, when an image—static or mobile—contains an anamorphic element, the spectator is presented with a dilemma—she cannot experience as comprehensible both spatial orientations; legibility must lie with one or the other. This is clearly understandable in the case of anamorphic paintings, where the spectator must physically reorient herself each time she wants to view one of the spatial orientations present in the painting. However, this is not the case with cinema—as Manon points out, the spectator does not move. What constitutes anamorphosis in cinema, then? In other words, if anamorphosis is operative in George Romero's films, where is such disturbance of the visual field to be located? Manon does not provide an explicit answer to this question; although he goes on to suggest, towards the end of the essay, that the figure of the zombie in Romero's films "rise up as a metaphor for the problem of localness itself."[71] In other words, for Manon, Romero's zombie is a stand-in for the notion of anamorphic distortion.

In order to properly understand Manon's equation, anamorphosic blot↔zombie as metaphor, one needs to study his essay on the nature of the gaze, entitled ""*Comment ça, rien*?": Screening the Gaze in *Caché*." In this essay, Manon argues that the Lacanian notion of the gaze is best understood as "masked-off-ness" in the field of the Other, which is also the space or domain of symbolic language.[72] In explicating the notion of the gaze as that which is masked-off, unavailable to vision, or unoccupied, Manon writes:

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71 . Ibid., 331.

72 . Manon, ""*Comment ça, rien*?": Screening the Gaze in *Caché*," in *On Michael Haneke*, eds. Brian Price and John David Rhodes (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 106.

> As you read this essay, you presumably have no sense that you are being watched; nor are you aware of any gap or blind spot in your field of vision. Now imagine how the room you occupy might look from a nondescript spot in the corner, any one of the millions of points in space with a clear view of your body. Where in this arrangement does the gaze reside? Inasmuch as your body forms a seeable part of the room, the gaze cannot belong *to* you because it also includes a multitude of perspectives *of* you. Likewise, the gaze cannot belong to any other (small "o") that you can see peering back at you from the corner—betrayed perhaps by a pair of eyes or a camera lens—since this look cannot include itself as a part of what it sees. Instead, the gaze must be understood as encompassing both of these looks simultaneously, along with every other available line of sight in the room.[73]

The crucial point about the structural antagonism between the spatial orientation of vision and the gaze that Manon clarifies for us is this: the gaze appears *where* two or more visual planes interfere with each other. Each of these visual planes have their spatial coordinates that make each plane comprehensible to vision—i.e. renders each plane visible. However, a spectator—the subject for whom the visual plane is comprehensible—cannot occupy *all* possible spatial coordinates. When the subject moves from one visual plane to the next, the coordinates of the previously occupied space is lost to the subject. It is in this way that vision and gaze are mutually exclusive. To put it in different terms, gaze is the failure of vision, or the failure of the comprehensibility of the visual plane. Consequently, the gaze is that structurally or geometrically impossible point where *all* planes of vision intersect each other. As such, then, the gaze is that locus where all spatial orientations of all visual fields are manifested. In other words, the gaze supplies the spectator with an unbearable abundance of information regarding visibility or

73 . Ibid., 111-12.

spatiality. It is for this abundance of specificity that the gaze disturbs or resists the smooth functioning of visual comprehension. Since comprehension—visual or otherwise—takes place in the order of symbolic language, the gaze appears as and in the failures of the space of symbolic language. Moreover, as I have previously discussed, the space of language is not a static field; rather, it is marked by the synchronic and diachronic vectors of the signifier. Consequently, any failure in this field cannot be a static point, either. Hence, the gaze—the failure in the visual field—must also be a vector. Consider the following graph, which presents, in the most rudimentary form, the vector of the gaze:

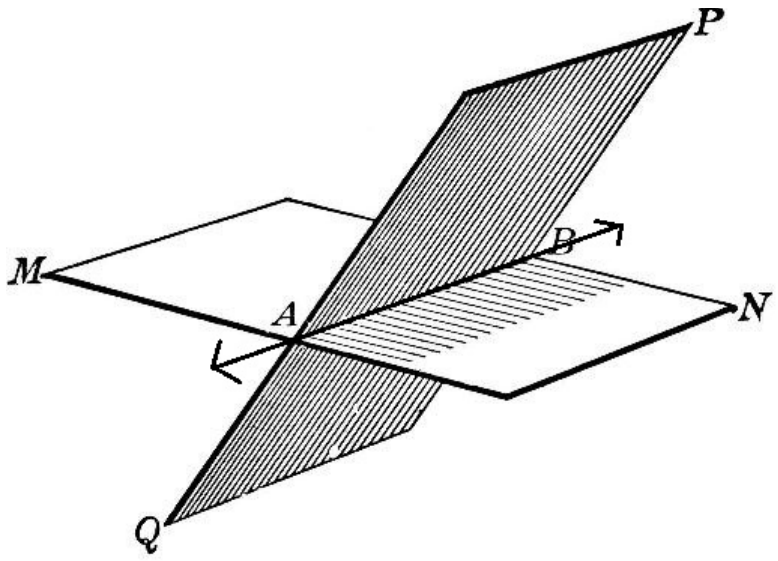

Fig. 6. Two intersecting planes

To be sure, *MN* and *QP* are the two available fields of vision, marked by their individual spatial orientation. We can easily imagine numerous spectatorial positions or points within either *MN* or *QP*. However, the two planes intersect along the *AB* vector, and all imaginable points on the *AB* vector fully belong to *neither MN* nor *QP*. Therefore, either no spectatorial position can be imagined along this vector; or, if so imagined, the spectatorial position will not have visual comprehension vis-à-vis either *MN* or *QP*. This rudimentary graph—and this graph could be

made far more complex by adding *n* number of planes that intersect with each other variously—elaborates one point: the gaze—when it appears—has more to do with comprehension than it has to do with the physics of vision. In other words, if the gaze is that which appears as masked-off in the field of vision, it is not that some material visual element suddenly becomes invisible or that something else covers it like a mask. Rather, the gaze is that which appears incomprehensible or unimaginable in terms of vision, and therefore it is that which refuses to fall under any signifier: the gaze is that which resists and defers signification. To put it in simpler terms, the gaze is not something we do not or cannot see; rather, it is something that we cannot quite understand or name *precisely when we see it*.

The two essays by Manon are crucial in pointing out the relationship between subjectivity and spatiality in cinema: the former essay brings to focus the ways in which an excess of spatial specificity precipitates a kind of subjective engagement that vacillates between comprehension and incomprehension, and the latter essay describes the gaze as ultra-saturated visual locus that remain inaccessible to vision precisely because of its plentitude. However, in both essays, visuality and its failure is predominantly understood in terms of physical or material elements: the former essay focused on the regional accent of the zombies as a prime example of localness, and the latter essay understands the gaze through the physics of vision. The question of comprehensibility or understandability is hinted at in both essays, but neither dwell on this matter. In contrast, my goal in this chapter is to extend Manon's insightful argument about spatiality and subjectivity to its proper domain: i.e. the domain of symbolic language, in and through which the subject comes into being by naming its desire. In this chapter I argue that the precipitation of subjectivity is a factor of the endless deferral of signification in symbolic language: just as the signifier tends to but never fully conjugates with the signified to precipitate stable meaning, the subject tends to a fixed locus but never fully comes into being within the space of language. This form of deferred subjectivity—which is akin to Manon's "split viewership"—can certainly be

found in films that are overtly topophilic or gaze-oriented, as Manon shows through the films of George Romero and Michael Haneke. However, through my analysis of *Dil Se* (1998)—a Bollywood film by Mani Ratnam—I contend that the subject's relation to the space in which it purports to occupy a locus is fundamentally skewed, even when the film depicting this relationship is neither overtly topophilic nor deliberately gaze-oriented. Rather, as *Dil Se* demonstrates through the interaction and intersection of multiple trajectories or vectors of subjective desire, the split or skewed subject appears where the process of signification fails to achieve closure.

Section I: Terror in the Space of Desire

Dil Se (From the Heart), directed by Mani Ratnam, was released in 1998, closely following a decade of steadily escalating border tension in the Kashmir region between India and Pakistan. *Dil Se* was not the only Bollywood film of its decade to dramatize the historic tension between India and Pakistan and the resulting specter of terrorism: *Sarfarosh* (1999), *Mission Kashmir* (2000) and *Fiza* (2000) are some of the many films that represent the Indo-Pak relationship through the lens of domestic and foreign terrorism. It is also possible to see in Mani Ratnam's oeuvre a continued meditation on the subject of contested spaces—especially in his earlier works *Roja* (1992) and *Bombay* (1995). While many of the aforementioned films apparently seek to establish the Indian nation-state as just, good and valiant by focusing on the representation of military action in a proto-realist mode of film-making, *Dil Se* engages with the dichotomy of citizen subject and terrorist non-subject in completely oblique manner. *Dil Se* responds to the conflicts between India and Pakistan—specifically in the Kashmir region—by foregrounding two interrelated registers of tension: namely, a spatial tension regarding the liminal status of the Kashmir region between the two nation-states; and a tension of signification with regard to the individuals with an articulated position about the spatial tension. The structural

impossibility of signifying a contested space and the liminal subjects therein is at the core of the plot of *Dil Se*, which I shall briefly describe.

As India celebrates fifty years of independence, All India Radio news reporter and radio jockey Amar (Shahrukh Khan) is sent to the Northeast province of India to cover common folk's response to this historic event. As the Northeast province is a hotbed for anti-state separatist activities, Amar also plans to interview a so-called terrorist leader for his radio program. However, while Amar waits to board the train that will take him to the region, he comes across a mysterious woman (Manisha Koirala) for whom he develops an immediate fascination. He attempts –without success—to cajole personal information from the woman in the hopes of forming a liaison with her. The woman disappears, leaving Amar in throes of fantasy. From this point forward, the search for this woman becomes the primary motivating factor for Amar's actions, and his duties as a reporter takes the second place. Once in the Northeast, Amar's interviews with the so-called common people and terrorist leaders reveal the brewing discontent with the political and power structures of the Indian nation-state, yet Amar remains blissfully unaware, singularly fixated as he is in his desire for the mysterious woman. Through two chance encounters, Amar eventually gets to know the whereabouts and the name of the woman, Meghna. Upon his insistent advances, Meghna informs Amar that she is a married woman, and asks him to leave her alone. Amar, now remorseful, arranges to meet with her one more time so that he can apologize to her. However, Meghna arrives with two men—ostensibly including her husband—who severely beat up Amar, but let it slip that Meghna is, in fact, not a married woman. Invigorated, Amar resumes his search, and—again, by chance—discovers that Meghna has left for Ladakh, in the Kashmir region. Amar immediately finds a reporting gig in Ladakh, where—amidst the police shooting of a suspected terrorist—he finds Meghna, with whom he boards a bus. Amar proceeds to tease and torment Meghna about her supposed husband, and he is intercepted by security guards whom Meghna fends off by saying that Amar is her husband. The

bus breaks down, forcing the duo—along with the passengers—to hike through the Ladakh valley for two days. Amar tries to force himself on Meghna, who suffers a debilitating anxiety attack as a result. Despite this, the duo fall for each other on this trip, but Meghna disappears once again, leaving Amar no choice but to return home to Delhi. Once home, Amar attempts to forget Meghna, and agrees to get married to another girl that his family chooses for him. As the wedding arrangements are underway, Meghna shows up unannounced in Amar's house in Delhi, and asks for a place to stay. Amar obliges, and finds her a job in All India Radio. However, Amar is soon interrogated by the Police as his name turns up among the belongings of a terrorist—one of the two men who had assaulted Amar—who, along with Meghna, were being investigated in connection with a suspected plot to assassinate the President at the Republic Day parade. Amar continues to pursue Meghna after learning this truth about her identity, and finally confronts her—bombs strapped to her body—at the parade. He tries to dissuade her from carrying out the act, but eventually tells her "If you won't be with me, then take me with you." They embrace, and the bomb goes off, killing both Amar and Meghna.

Clearly, the coherence of the plot of *Dil Se* depends upon the parallel development—and eventual intersection—of two distinct lines of desire: 1) Amar's desire for Meghna, and 2) Meghna's desire to claim some sort of answer from the nation-state with regard to politically contested spaces, such as Kashmir and the Northeast. It should also become obvious from the above summary of the plot that both the lines of desire are not destined to realize. In other words, Amar will not really get to know or have a romantic relationship with Meghna, and Meghna will not really elicit an answer or a response from the nation-state regarding the contested spaces. Both of them will, as we know, simply die at the conclusion of the film. One could also argue that both characters, on some level, are aware of the impossibility of their desires. Yet, they continue to pursue the object(s) of their desire—as if their lives depended on it—at the cost of their purported goals. However, it is also crucial to note that in the plot, the two lines of desire cannot

endlessly continue parallel to each other; they must, at some point, intersect. In other words, the plot must find a common ground between Meghna's desire and Amar's desire. It is at the site of this common ground that the film can be said to have a message with regard to the issues of terrorism and national politics. As we know, this common ground only appears at the end of the film, when Meghna and Amar die in each other's arms, obliterated by the exploding bomb. In other words, the common ground is one where the two lines of desire cross out each other, and the desiring subjects (Meghna and Amar) disappear. How are we to read the message of *Dil Se* with regard to a kind of subjectivity specific to the terrorism films? More specifically, we need to ask, perhaps in a Freudian manner—in showing that the contesting desires of the terrorist and the citizen can only converge either in fantasy, or in mutual obliteration, what does the film *actually* want us to see? The answer, I propose, is to be sought in Jacques Lacan's exploration of the articulation of desire *vis-à-vis* the object/cause of desire, specifically in his 1966 essay, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious."

Section II: The Truth of Desire

Lacan's attempt, in "The Insistence," is to point out that the ways in which the subject tentatively comes into being as subject-of-articulation by signifying—i.e. naming—its desire. In other words, Lacan argues that one is not a subject unless one is able gives a name to that which one desires. However, Lacan also points out—against the common understanding of the function of language—that this act of naming is far from a stable, accomplished fact. The subject—insofar as it retroactively comes into being through and after this act—while naming its desire, must arrest the synchronic sliding of the signifier through what Lacan calls a quilting point. In Lacan's view, however, it would be a mistake to consider either the subject an active agent responsible for the function of the quilting point, or to consider the act of quilting final. The subject, in Lacan's oeuvre, is far from an agent; rather, the subject is, quite literally, held under the sway of the Unconscious. Thus, it is the subject's assumed position in the field of the Unconscious—which is

also the domain of Language and the Other—that allows the subject to retroactively arrive in relation to the object/cause of desire. In other words, the Unconscious is responsible for the subject's arrival—the subject itself is rather powerless in this regard. Moreover, the Unconscious brings the subject's desire to articulation—thereby giving birth to the subject, as it were—through the manifestation of the Other as the object/cause of desire (also known as *L'objet petit a*) around which the subject's desire turns. Notably, in contrast with the foregrounding of temporality in the construction of the subject in "Logical Time," Lacan's analysis of subjectivity, in "The Insistence," demands a spatial understanding, not only of the relationship between the signifier and the signified (in a sign), but also of the position where the subject comes into being in the process of signification. Lacan unfolds his analysis in three steps: first, he introduces the revised or inverted Saussurean schema of the sign; then, through the revision of Saussure, Lacan presents the idea of the signifying chain to reformulate the role of the signifier in precipitating meaning; finally, Lacan points out, following Freud, the ways in which the signifying chain brings about the subject.

In the first step, Lacan addresses the problematic of signification by calling into question the structuration of the Saussurean sign. In order to do so, Lacan invokes the famous Saussurean diagram of the tree, which is the following:

Fig. 7. Lacan's diagram of the tree[74]

To be sure, in the Saussurean schema, the word "TREE" is the signifier, and the physical tree (or its image) is the signified—the signifier *represents* the signified, through what Lacan calls "the bi-univocal correspondence between the word and the thing, even in the mere act of naming."[75] Moreover, Lacan points out that the line or the bar between the signifier and the signified puts the former over and away from the latter—this suggestion of spatiality or distance is crucial in understanding the function of the quilting point in the precipitation of meaning. However, Lacan objects to this "bi-univocal correspondence" because, in his analysis, such an assertion, when taken to its extreme would mean that "there is no language in existence for which there is any question of its inability to cover the whole field of the signified, it being an effect of its existence as a language that it necessarily answer all needs."[76] Of course, considering such a language—which would need to be a meta-language—would amount to logical positivism, and meta-language, Lacan argues, does not exist. Against the S/s schema, Lacan suggests the following:

74 . Jacques Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink. (New York: Norton, 2006), 117.

75 . Ibid., 116.

76 . Ibid., 116.

> one will fail even to keep the question in view as long as one has not got rid of the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever. [Because in the] formula S/s: if we could infer nothing from it beyond the notion of the parallelism of its upper and lower terms, each one taken in its globality, it would remain only the enigmatic sign of a total mystery. (Lacan 2006, 117)

Here, Lacan's argument regarding the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the precipitation of signification has significant bearing upon the way in which we want to understand the parallel development, and eventual convergence of the trajectories of Amar's and Meghna's desire. What Lacan is trying to point out here is this: if we were to maintain that there always remains a strict boundary or bar between the signifier and the signified, then the two would never converge to precipitate signification or meaning. Both the elements of a sign would remain inexplicable in their parallel separation, if we are to follow the Saussurean schema. Thus, the problem that Lacan identifies here is eerily similar to the complication that we run up against when trying to decipher the relationship between Amar and Meghna's articulation of desire in the plot of *Dil Se*. To be sure, it would be impossible to understand the plot if there remains a bar between the trajectories of the two characters, much like the enigma that Lacan points to in his analysis of the Saussurean sign. Hence, it follows that if we pursue Lacan's re-formulation of the sign—one that will tell us how and where the reciprocal infringement of the two elements precipitate meaning—we will be able to better understand the way in which *Dil Se* concludes with the mutual obliteration of Amar and Meghna.

After pointing out the structural problem of the Saussurean sign—i.e. that, in this schema, the signified incessantly slides under the signifier—Lacan proposes a revised form of the schema

that addresses the topography of the reciprocal infringement of the signifier and the signified. The following is what Lacan proposes:

> We are forced, then, to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier - which F. de Saussure illustrates with an image resembling the wavy lines of the upper and lower Waters in miniatures from manuscripts of Genesis […]. All our experience runs counter to this linearity, which made me speak once, in one of my seminars on psychosis, of something more like spaced upholstery buttons as a schema for taking into account the dominance of the letter in the dramatic transformation which the dialogue can bring about in a subject. (121)

In making this seemingly off-hand reference to his seminar on psychosis, Lacan is alerting us regarding two very crucial elements of his theory of the subject: namely, the upholstery button, and the dominance of the letter in transforming the subject. The upholstery button has a lengthy genealogy and several manifestations in Lacan's thought. However, the manifestation with which we familiarized ourselves in reading Lacan's "Logical Time" is called the quilting point. Allow me to present three observations regarding the quilting point: it is an element of symbolic language; it occurs at the level of the signifier; it does not totalize signification. The first two observations call attention to the fact that the quilting poin is a linguistic function that arrests the incessant sliding of the signifier, and brings together the signifier and the signified to precipitate signification. The third observation, however, is more crucial: the quilting point does not petrify the signifier and the signified in a singular, stable signification. If the quilting point were to have a stabilizing effect, then each signifier would be permanently tied to its assigned signified, and there would be no such thing as connotation. In fact, it is *precisely* where the quilting point performs its tethering function that the possibility of connotation becomes evident. In other words, the quilting point calls attention to the necessity of

quilting by its very presence, and alerts us to the fact that the signification is not constitutively stable. Thus, the quilting point leaves a residue—a gap or hole in the process of signification—in its wake. This is what Lacan means when he characterizes the quilting point as a *spaced* upholstery button.

It is in this space that the dominance of the letter gives birth to the subject by supplying it with the object/cause of desire. The letter that so dominates the subject is none other than what the letter *a* designates in Lacanian algebra—namely, *L'object petit a*. Consider the following diagram—of the appearance of the subject—from *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*:

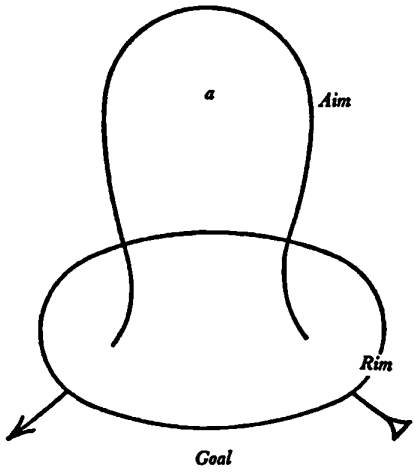

Fig. 8. The graph of the quilting point[77]

To be sure, this diagram—in addition to representing the circuit of the drive and the locus of *objet petit a*—shows us the structure of the quilting point, as represented by the upward-and-backward trajectory of the sign delta (Δ)[78]. The three tiers of this graph—i.e. goal, rim and aim—correspond

77 . Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (NY: Norton, 1981), 178.

78 . The "delta" (Δ) at the right end of the vector, in Lacanian matheme, is the pre-linguistic, undivided, biological entity, or the mythical "real." In another manifestation of this

to the three tiers of Saussurean sign, namely, signified, bar and signifier. However, the fundamental difference between the Saussurean and the Lacanian schema is that while in the former the upper and the lower tiers remain inviolate along the middle tier, in the latter schema the trajectory of the delta *passes through* the middle tier and binds the upper and the lower tiers. What is crucial in the movement of the delta-vector—from its point-of-origin to its goal, via its aim—is the way in which *object petit a* compels the vector to turn upward and backward. This itinerary of the vector—caused by *objet petit a*—posits the subject *qua* subject-of-signification in a retroactive manner.

Now, if we apply this understanding of the retroactive-anticipated arrival of the subject through the process of signification, as precipitated by the quilting function of *objet petit a*, we will be able to better comprehend the trajectories of the articulation of Amar's and Meghna's desire. As noted in the plot summary of *Dil Se* in the previous section of this chapter, it is evident that the characters *anticipate* the imminent failure of their desire for each other; yet, they persist in their *aim*, so that they can *retroactively* attain the goal of their desires. However, the itinerary that is their aim must turn around the object/cause of their desire. Evidently, in *Dil Se*, Amar and Meghna function as each other's *objet petit a*. Thus, when they arrive—come into being as subjects—at their goal, they mutually realize that the object/cause of desire which initiated their journey is nothing but a hole in signification. Hence, as subjects who recognize their inaugural misrecognition, they embrace this hole: i.e. they obliterate each other. However, this recognition-of-misrecognition can take place *only* after the (anticipated) subject completes the trajectory of desire at the level of the signifier. The domain of the signifier—here we must recall our reading of the problems of the Saussurean sign—is fraught with slipperiness, where signifiers synchronically refer to other signifiers, creating a chain of metonymic substitutions. This metonymic chain—through which Amar's Meghna's desires unfold—is also vertically

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graph—i.e. the Graphs of Desire in "The Subversion of the Subject"—we find the subject *qua* the "barred subject" (S̶) at the left end of the delta-vector.

punctuated by the articulation of relevant contexts that allows us to understand the particular nature of the itinerary undertaken by the characters in *Dil Se*. Nowhere is this trajectory more prominent than in the song-and-dance numbers in which Amar and Meghna articulate their desire for each other. The following reworking of Lacan's graph represents this economy:

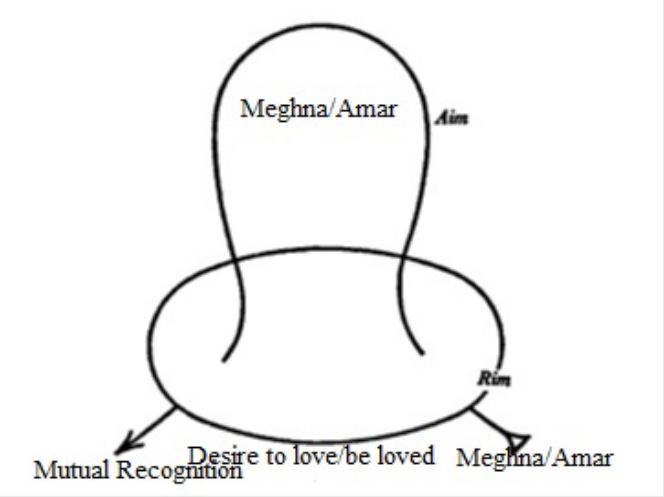

Fig. 9. Reworked graph

Section III: Substitution One—"Walk in the Shadow of Love"

The expository sequence of *Dil Se* is, at once, incredibly reticent and exceedingly forthright: it presents us with Amar and Meghna, the two main characters, within the first three minutes of the film; yet, the plot does not reveal anything about the background of the characters. This move, by itself, should tell us that *Dil Se* engages obliquely with the genre conventions of Bollywood cinema, where the establishing sequence is expected to—on the one hand—provide a thorough socio-cultural context of the main character(s), while on the other hand it is also conventional to introduce major character(s) halfway through the film. Clearly, the opening sequence of the film is intended to whet the viewer's appetite for signification, in that the film compels the viewer to ask: *Who are these characters? What is their history?* In fact, this desire to

know is voiced by Amar immediately after his chance encounter with Meghna on a forlorn railway station where both are waiting for a train. Amar demands that Meghna respond to his interest in her: "Tell me something about you, anything at all," he tells her. Just when he is about to give up hope, Meghna tells him that she would appreciate a cup of tea. This request bears a certain promise for Amar: by letting on what she wants, Meghna has also opened up the possibility of a liaison. Clearly, *Dil Se* wastes no time in establishing that Amar desires Meghna. However, Meghna's status changes from immediate object of desire to object/cause of desire rather rapidly when she boards a train with two unknown men, giving Amar the slip. Amar, tea in hand, watches Meghna leave, and with a wistful expression utters to no one in particular: "This has to be tiniest love story in the whole world."

But of course, Amar's expression tells us that the story that is to come will be anything but short. If anything, Meghna's teasing departure has lured Amar into pursuing this matter further. This wistful tone is also writ large on Meghna's face as she looks at Amar from the window of her train—we see this from Amar's point of view.

Fig. 10. Amar's POV[79]

We should not fail to note what this shot so clearly reveals: Amar and Meghna recognize each other's desire, as substantiated by not only Amar's point of view of this shot, but also Meghna's reciprocation of this look. We should also note that a bar splits the shot in two distinct sections. While the left of the screen is occupied by Meghna looking at Amar (read, at the camera), the right of the screen is populated by men who look at Meghna in somewhat threatening and possessive manner. A significant portion of the shot is also saturated with dark colors, while the brightness of Meghna's face and the separating bar stand out in clear relief. If there was any doubt that Meghna becomes Amar's object/cause of desire from this point forward, these visual elements of the shot should allay such reservations.

I propose that we read this shot in the following way: Meghna, who clearly wants Amar, is beyond his immediate access—behind the bar as she is—while others' clearly have greater access to her. Hence, it should not be surprising that this shot launches Amar in the trajectory of

79 . Screenshot from *Dil Se*, directed by Mani Ratnam (1998; Mumbai, India: Eros Entertainment, 2007), DVD. All subsequent screenshots are from the same source.

desire, *precisely* in the way that *objet petit a* compels the subject in the circuit of desire. The visual structure of this shot substantiates Lacan's formulation that "Desire is the desire of the Other."[80] Naturally, Amar's response to this moment, in which he is captured by his *objet petit a*, is to create a dream-scenario, where, through a series of synchronic substitutions, he can engage in the process of desire.

This is precisely what allows *Dil Se* to present its first song-and-dance number; one that I shall categorize as an "item number," since the lead female dancer, who is a pure substitutive signifier for Meghna, never again appears in the film. This inaugural song-and-dance number is aptly called "*Chaiyya Chaiyya,*" "Walk in the Shadow of Love." The sequence begins with a tight close-up of Amar's face, as he is lost in a reverie with his eyes closed and head tilted slightly up, as if to match the angle of Meghna's last look.

Fig. 11. Amar's face

80. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 235.

Even though in this shot the camera is still tethered to physical reality of the railway station, the space of the film has been transformed via the upbeat song that has already started in the audio track. Matching the mood of the song, Amar is far from crestfallen at the loss of his object of desire. He appears to enjoy this initial moment of fantasizing. Noticeably, the colors of this shot reflect the doubleness of loss and desire: while the bright red color of Amar's jacket foregrounds the element of desire, shadows are still present—albeit in the background. Naturally, the next we see Amar in the sequence, we find him emerging from the shadows, standing on the roof of a train, silhouetted against what clearly appears to be the opening of a tunnel. What is this but a metaphor for Amar's arrival into the bright light of desire? What is this if not a metaphor for the birth of his subjectivity, through the womb-like tunnel through which the train passes?

Fig. 12. Train through tunnel

After this dramatic emergence, Amar engages in an energetic, upbeat, and physically impossible song-and-dance routine on top of the train with a woman (known simply as "Dancer on Train" in the credits) and group of people, whose overtly traditional costuming clearly marks them as common folks. As they go through the repetitive dance motions, Amar and the woman also sing

an intricately composed, fully aspirated, musical ensemble-accompanied song. In this dream-space, the film allows itself not only to defy narrative continuity, but also allows itself to defy laws of physics. The gyrating bodies of the actors jump on the train as it moves, apparently at a high speed, through serpentine, undulating train tracks on a hilly region; yet, surprisingly, none of the actors find it difficult to perform the extremely acrobatic dance movements, let alone fall off the roof of the train. In fact, the film gleefully highlights this physical impossibility by capturing, in several long shots, the bodies of the dancing actors on the roof of the train.

Fig. 13. Dancing on train

We should not fail to notice that color-scheme of the shot has completely changed at this point—there are no shadows to be found in this bright and soothing green setting. Even though Amar dances with the others—and one should note that the common-folk dancers look eerily similar to the men with whom Meghna left Amar—his attention is clearly on the "Dancer on Train." The sexual charge of Amar's desire for Meghna finds a substitution in the clearly sexualized representation of the body of the "Dancer." The sequence foregrounds the sexual way in which Amar finds the "Dancer" alluring. In close-up, we see Amar joyful face against her bared midriff,

while her face is cut off in the framing of the shot. We see that Amar is looking up and away, at the "Dancer," but we do not see her making eye contact with him. In fact, I would argue that the tease or lure of the "Dancer" is formally similar to the path that Amar's desire takes with regard to the absent figure of Meghna.

Fig. 14. "Dancer on train"

The deeply sexualized body of the "Dancer" that the camera takes obvious pleasure in showing never reveals all. Although copious amount of skin is shown on screen, although the dance movements are clearly suggestive of the act of copulation, the "item number" remains at the level of fantasy by steadfastly refusing to follow realism of any kind. Crucially, as any Indian viewer would not fail to recognize, the stylized garment worn by the "Dancer" is fictional: i.e. no village belle would *actually* wear such a non-functional dress. Apart from the clearly identifiable fakeries, the viewer would also be aware that the bodies, which defy the laws of gravity— by not falling down from the roof of a moving train while dancing—could not be real by any means. . I would further argue that, precisely because the "Dancer" is evidently *not* real that Amar, now a subject-of-desire, can use her as a substitute for Meghna in a sexually charged dream scenario.

Therefore, the "item number" *promises* a beyond, but refuses to deliver its promise, thereby allowing Amar to desire *per se*. However, what really allows us to comprehend this "item number" as Amar's desire to assign signification to Meghna is the way in which this sequence is visually punctuated, or framed. Just as it began with the metaphoric birth of Amar through a dark tunnel, the dance sequence ends when the camera fades to black as the train enters another dark tunnel. It is within the frames of this double metaphor that one begins to comprehend the sexual-Oedipal nature of Amar's desire. If the disappearing face of Meghna can launch Amar into a dream that is framed by what Freud would call the desire for the Mother, then what else could Meghna be for Amar but the object/cause of his desire? In the following section, I shall substantiate this argument further by demonstrating the ways in which Amar's eventual real encounter with Meghna precipitates catastrophic effects in his dreamscape.

Section IV: "A Heart's only a Heart"; or, Why the Letter Kills

Although the dream-sequence that is "*Chaiyya Chaiyya*" takes Amar from the forlorn railways station to the troubled Northeast region of India, where he is to interview common folks and terrorist leaders for All India Radio, his search for Meghna continues unabated. However, it is at this point that *Dil Se* begins the doubled narrative of terrorism, national politics and violence one the one hand, and Amar and Meghna's desire on the other. To be more exact, it is at this point that the film begins to position the love story against the background of terrorism and the violence of the nation-state. This doubling at the level of the plot helps to bring out the theme of liminality. To be sure, the theme of liminality is reflected not only in the film's thoughtful consideration of the political issue of terrorism, but also in the nature of Amar and Meghna's relationship. The terrorists in this film are neither *fully* inside the nation-state, nor totally outside of it; similarly, Amar and Meghna can neither fully consummate their desire, nor can they move away from each other. As the two parallel trajectories of desire get closer to each other, Amar and Meghna are caught in a deadlock. Yet, anticipated in this deadlock is the retroactive certainty of

their mutual demise. Nowhere is this doubled, back-and-forth movement of Amar's and Meghna's desires more prominent than in the song-and-dance number entitled "*Dil se re,*" or "From the heart/ A heart's only a heart."

This sequence begins when, after a few chance encounters, Amar is finally able to locate where Meghna lives, and confronts her there. This is a remarkable incident as far as Amar's desire is concerned: this is the first time that he gains access to his object/cause of desire. He has been singularly dedicated in his pursuit of this imagined moment, where he would profess his love for Meghna. The singular insistence of his desire has been undeterred by the other side of his experience in the Northeast; namely, his conversations with the common folks and terrorists who are equally disgruntled with the nation state. Amar seems unmoved when his interviewees tell him that fifty years' of independence means nothing for them, as they have been systematically disenfranchised by the independent nation-state. He does not seem to recognize the threat of violence when his interview with the terrorist leader reveals an immense training camp for militant activists. Quite literally, for Amar, the crucial theme of terrorism against the nation-state fades in the background, compared to his obsessive search for Meghna. However, since Amar's desire has to play out at the level of the signifier (i.e. in the domain of the Unconscious), the metonymic sliding of the articulation of his desire is haunted by images of violence. That which he tries to repress or foreclose as mere background—namely, the clear presence of violence in which he is caught up, along with Meghna—returns in the form of uncanny symptoms. It is in this context of uncanny haunting that Amar comes face-to-face with Meghna, declares his love for her. The camera immediately transports the duo to a day-dream sequence that is presented through a song-and-number, following the conventions of Bollywood cinema.This is crucial because this is the first time that Amar and Meghna appear—*sans* the substitutive "Dancer"—in each other's fantasy. Naturally, one would expect this sequence to closely correspond to the joyous rhythms and bright colors of the previous dance sequence. However, the song-and-dance

sequence does *exactly* the opposite: the number opens with images of military violence, the initial shot dominated by the darkness of shadows and bright orange of fire.

Fig. 15. Fire motif

This shot, which frames the song-and-dance sequence, is ambiguous in many ways. First, the sequence does not reveal from whose point of view we are witnessing this bleak, almost apocalyptic mise-en-scene. Moreover, since this frame is captured in long shot, one cannot be sure *if* this is a point of view shot at all. In other words, the initial shot does not reveal whose dreamscape is being presented to the viewer. However, certain visual cues relate this shot to the moment in "*Chaiyya Chaiyya*" when Amar emerges—captured in a silhouette—from the dark tunnel. Similarly to the previous metaphor of emergence, the soldiers emerge—rather suddenly—from a field of swirling mist. As the figures of the soldiers become more visible, the fog recedes somewhat, revealing the setting of this sequence—a city in the state of violence. In the background, one can see the hints of a large building and tall street lights, suggesting the urban nature of this devastated landscape. The silhouetted figures clearly reveal an essential feature of their identity: they are clearly not a civic force (i.e. the police); they are, indeed, members of the

military force, substantiated by their attire and guns. Also noteworthy is the way blocking is used in this sequence to reveal the purpose of these figures. They are organized in a phalanx, evidently following the military mode. Yet, we cannot forget that the military figures are quite similar to the image of Amar-in-emergence. The darkness of the figures only heightens the sense of threat that perhaps erupts in Amar's unconscious as he gets dangerously close to his object/cause of desire. The doubleness of fear and desire is figured in the color scheme of this shot. The bright orange flame in the left foreground is in stark contrast with the predominant dark tones of the rest of the shot. The reddish-orange color of the fire not only invokes Amar's jacket of a similar color-scheme from the previous dance number, but this colorful fire also continues to (re)appear as a motif of the conjugated presence of desire and death from this point forward.

The indeterminate nature of this shot's point of view is further complicated by the appearance of both Amar's Meghna's faces, captured in tight close-up shots, intercut with images of violence. These close-up intercuts are always followed by either the threatening soldier-figures who rush toward the camera, or by the reappearing motif of bright fire. Thus, it is rather ambiguous whether the nightmarish signifiers belong to Amar or Meghna, especially because both have experienced manifestations of violence to some degree. However, the violent mise-en-scene is not completely detached from the articulation of their desire for each other. A shot-reverse shot sequence captures the potentially violent aspect of the erotic charge between the two. First, we see Meghna from Amar's point of view, followed by its reverse.

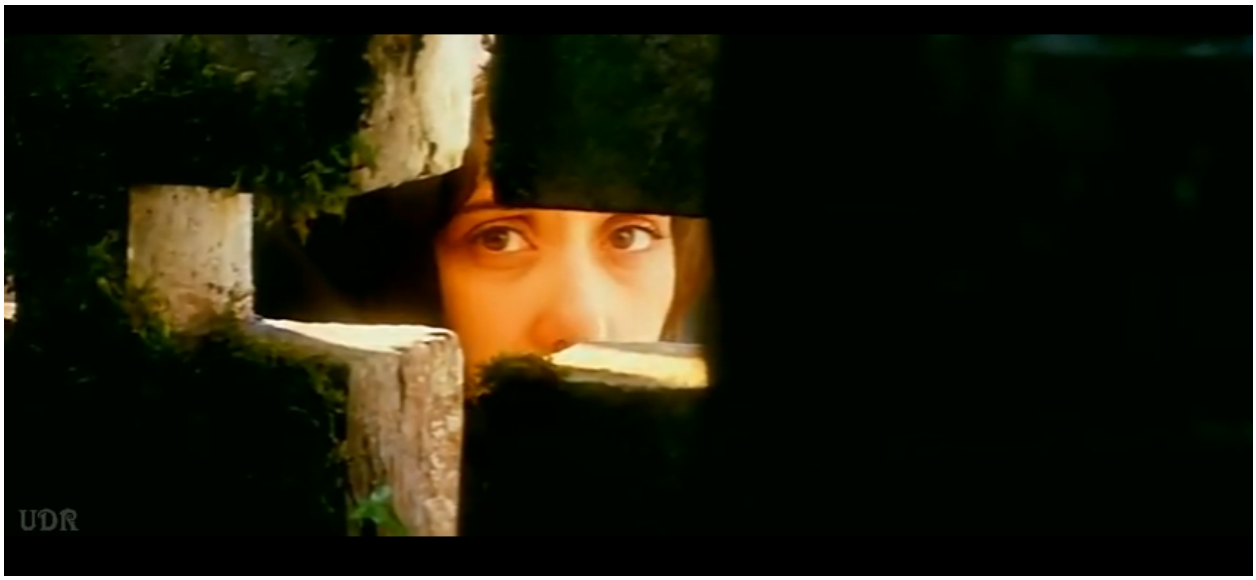

Fig 16. Through the balistraria

In this shot, what captures Amar's point of view is Meghna's steady look at the camera (hence, at him). Clearly, the shot emphasizes the element of the look by blocking most of Meghna's face, to the point where we are left with a condensed moment of glance. The glance, however, is charged with signification. Although one can read Meghna's look in many ways, an immediate reading of her expression cannot miss the sense of accusation and betrayal. Hiding behind what looks like the wall of an old fort, Meghna looks at Amar and the violent world in which they are caught through a balistraria. This image is revelatory in many ways: the balistraria invokes the genealogy of violence in a very specific historiographic way; the crouching posture of Meghna (since she is clearly lit from above) hints at a primal sense of fear; moreover, the balistraria, which also looks like a cross, invokes the militant aspect of Christianity in a pointedly postcolonial way[81]. Remarkably, what remains indeterminate is Meghna's intention—one simply cannot say whether she is hiding, or crouching in a predatory position. The motif of fire—representing death, desire and violence at the same time—is clearly on Meghna's side in this shot, as her face is lit up with

81 . Needless to say, the colonization of India began with the arrival of Christian missionaries.

the orange hue of the flames. The fire-motif also appears in the reverse shot, where Amar's face is captured in close up, presumably from Meghna's point of view.

Fig. 17. Fire motif 2

The eye line match of this shot shows that Amar, much like Meghna, is in a crouching position. Further, half of Amar's face is blocked by the raging flames—in contrast with the dark wall that blocks Meghna's face. However, this blocking achieves a similar effect by making it difficult to read Amar's expression. However, noticeably, Amar's attire is very different now. Instead of the bright red jacket, he wears what appears to be military jacket, with the tell-tale shoulder strap clearly visible. If this shot is indeed from Meghna's point of view, her desire has metaphorically equated Amar with the military power of the nation-state. In other words, if Meghna's desire addresses someone or something, it is certainly not Amar-the-subject; rather, the substitutive sliding of the signifier has assigned to Amar the role of representing state power. The foregrounding of the fire—in keeping with its motif-status—invokes passion, desire and death. However, the significant difference in this shot is that Amar touches the fire, yet remains unaffected by it, at least for the time being. What is this if not the visualization of the phrase "playing with fire" in all its connotations? Indeed, Amar is playing with fire, in the sense that he

has come too close to his object/cause of desire. In so doing, he has also subjected himself to Meghna's desire—one that seeks response from the state power—that has transformed him.

This sequence of shots in the song number also anticipates, through a retroactive move, the coming-together of Amar and Meghna. They had indeed come face-to-face once before, in the initial moments of the film. However, if that encounter revealed anything about the possibility of Amar and Meghna's conjugation, it is that their desire for each other is centered on a constitutive impossibility—a lack or hole in signification. The present song-sequence metaphorically reveals this inaugural lack: Amar's point of view unveils the lurking danger in Meghna; and Meghna's point of view reveals the ways in which Amar is associated with state power. Hence, the only way the parallel trajectories of their desire could intersect is by cancelling out each other. I would argue that the ending of the film—where Amar and Meghna explode together—is already inscribed in this sequence. Indeed, the eventual death-in-explosion of the duo is prominently featured at the end of this song sequence. However, this foreshadowing has one significant caveat—while in their final moments Amar and Meghna remain fixed within the ring of fire, in this sequence they run away from a bright orange fireball that rushes toward them. I would argue that this move—away from the all-consuming fire—demonstrates that the trajectory Amar's and Meghna's desire has not yet run its course.

Fig. 18. Explosion

Of course, we will see the same conflagration re-appear at the end of the film, where Amar and Meghna will recede—almost invisible—in the background, while the blindingly bright explosion will occupy the foreground. However, if we want to follow the trajectory of their desires to their goal, where they will be effective annihilated as individuated subjects and come together *sensu stricto*, we have to look no further than the song-and-dance sequence that celebrates the moment when Meghna and Amar consummate their desire for each other. In the next section, we will follow the final leg of their itinerary by reading "*Satrangi Re*" (O one of many colors)

Section V: Unmoored Subjects

The pacing of *Dil Se* changes significantly following the "*Dil Se Re*" song- sequence. The editing leaves behind the unrestricted, slow and associative pattern, and embraces a faster-paced, linear and cause-effect pattern. It is as if once the end of Amar and Meghna's love story is in sight, the film cannot wait long enough to reach this point. Hence, the song-and-dance number that effectively declares the eventual mutual obliteration of Meghna and Amar—namely, "*Satrangi Re*"—feverishly takes the duo from one impossible mise-en-scene to another. The

cursory attempt at realism of the previous song sequences no longer limits the film, as it launches into the creation of a dreamscape that is completely surreal. The signifying terrain of this sequence is filled with metaphors and metonyms, as if to instantiate the synchronic sliding of the signifier. If we apply Lacan's diagram of the quilting point to the scenario of this song number, we could argue that the delta-trajectory of Amar and Meghna's desire is passing through the rim at this point. In the Saussurean schema, they are passing through the bar that separates the signifier and the signified. In other words, they are passing through the strata where meaning is at its most unstable form.

Indeed, the opening shot of the sequence disorients the viewer. The subjects we have come to know as Amar and Meghna seem alien—removed from any known reference frames, set amidst rapidly changing mise-en-scene. The inaugural scene of this sequence—one that will chronicle the eventual un-anchoring of the subjects—captures Amar and Meghna singing and dancing in a landscape that has no real correlative in the diegesis.

Fig. 19. Unreal landscape

Diegetically, Amar and Meghna should be somewhere in Kashmir, in the Ladakh region. However, the terrain in this shot does not correspond to the way in which Ladakh has been previously established in the film. Instead of attempted realism, this shot steadfastly refuses to reveal anything regarding the location. Moreover, in contrast to the insistent eye line match and shot-reverse shot structure previously followed, in this shot Amar and Meghna's look can only be described as being awry. They are neither looking *at* each other, nor are they prominently looking *away from* each other; they seem to be caught up in completely different (focal) planes. The layering of the shot is decidedly more complex than the usual background-foreground separation, where the two planes are commonly tethered by axially exchanged looks. Here, one finds no visual evidence that the plane occupied by Amar and the plane occupied by Meghna are causally connected. The only visual similarity between the two planes is the color-matching of the attires. While both wear black outfits that make them stand out against the beige tone of the rocks and the light blue of the sky, Meghna's clothes are emphatically orientalized. The eroticism latent in orientalism is brought out prominently by Meghna's bared midriff and ever-so-slightly translucent bustier. In contrast, Amar's costuming covers him up almost totally, and does not anchor him in any standard visual code. However, the camera does not reveal any preference with regard to their subjectivity: in deep focus, the camera captures both characters with equal lack of grounding.

The initial shot quickly gives way to an entirely different locale in a subsequent shot. Here, we find that Amar and Meghna have exchanged planes—Amar is in the foreground now. Moreover, they have left the dry landscape of the previous shot, and now appear next to a lake in a snowy field.

Fig. 20. Snowy field

Amar retains his black outfit, but Meghna has changed into a white dress. She is almost invisible, placed against the blinding whiteness of the snow. Yet, her image is doubled: the camera captures Meghna's reflection on the surface of the still lake. It is this reflected image that seems to intrude into the plane that Amar occupies, while Meghna's body seems distant—almost inaccessible—and indistinguishable from the natural elements. The rapid shift of the location of the shot, as well as the reversed positions of Amar and Meghna underscores the radical substitutability of the signifiers in this sequence. It is as if Amar and Meghna are entirely expendable as individual subjects; their only function is to carry out their assigned roles in the signifying chain.

The evident surrealism of this sequence is taken to its extreme when, in a subsequent shot, Amar and Meghna symbolically consummate their desire. To be sure, this is the infamously reticent rendering of the so-called sex scene following the Bollywood convention in this regard. In this shot, we find Amar and Meghna wrapped in a bright orange sack-like object. They occupy the same plane in the shot; yet, it is the rendering of the background that completely negates any possibility of subjective consistency. The background in this shot is strikingly similar to a painted

backdrop that renders, with obvious fakeness, a lake and snowy mountains. The obvious visual reference is the lake from the previous shot, where Amar and Meghna were clearly separated. Evidently, the only way the duo can physically come together is by exchanging the real lake with a painted lake. This honest fakery compels the viewer to ask the fundamentally crucial question: namely, is there a "there" there, where these two subjects can have what they desire? This shot seems to suggest that the only way in which Amar and Meghna can intersect as subjects is when the very basis, anchoring and grounding of their subjectivity is radically unmoored.

Fig. 21. Fire motif 3

We should not fail to notice the re-appearance of the fire motif in another manifestation in this shot. The sack-like object in which the characters are wrapped bears close resemblance—with regard to color and shape—to the orange flames in the previous song number. Noticeably, Amar and Meghna are no longer running away from the metaphoric flame; in fact, they seem contently absorbed in each other while being enveloped in it.

This shot clearly foreshadows the ending of the film, when Meghna and Amar would be similarly enveloped by the flames of an exploding bomb. In other words, this moment in the

song-sequence is also an anticipated moment of completion-in-death, albeit at the level of the signifier. But how are we to read this ending-before-the-end? Are we to read the mutual obliteration of the two characters as "narrative irresolution" leading to a "subversion of heteronormativity?"[82] Or, are we to read this representation of terror (state-sponsored or otherwise) as "phantasmic spectacles" that enable the "circulation of an endless political cliché?"[83] While I partially agree with these observations, in that *Dil Se* indeed subverts "heteronormativity," and that the films creates a "phantasmic" ground, I argue that the claim that *Dil Se* is either irresolute or spectacular entirely misses the point of the film.

I propose that one should read *Dil Se*—especially the scene(s) of Amar and Meghna's death—in the following way: *Dil Se* presents the possibility of a radical politics which recognizes that faith bestowed upon the supposed coherence of the subject inevitably leads to a kind of ontic and ontological violence where the desires of each individuated subject run contrary to each other. Hence, *Dil Se* seems to suggest, a properly radical politics would embrace the desires as what they *really* are: namely, the trajectory of a subject that retroactively comes into being by misrecognizing the vacuity of the object/cause of desire as concrete or quantifiable. By embracing the foundational lack of desire, *Dil Se* proposes a kind of subjectivity that is truly radical in its refusal of coherent anchoring. If *Dil Se* is gleefully produces of a phantasmic space, it does so precisely to underscore that it is through fantasy that the subject comes into being as the subject-of-desire. Thus, when this fantasy is *clearly* and *overtly* marked *as* fantasy the *cogito*-subject has no other choice but to become unmoored. The subject, thus un-anchored, would then be able to embrace the truly terrifying lack or hole that had once constituted its subjectivity. This askew-subject—a contemplative, lost subject, just as Meghna and Amar are finally absorbed in each

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82 . Ananya Kabir, "Allegories of Alienation and Politics of Bargaining: Minority Subjectivities in Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se*"*South Asian Popular Culture* 1, no. 2 (2003): 141-59.

83 . Sujala Singh, "Terror, Spectacle and the Secular State in Bombay Cinema," in *Terror and the Postcolonial* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 345-60.

other's foundational lack—would not only reject heteronormativity and/or hegemonic national identity, but also it would reject the very foundation of the *cogito*-subject: namely, subjectivity itself. Thus, Sujala Singh misses the point of *Dil Se* when she writes the following:

> These films, I contend, are caught up in the bind of guilt and responsibility. Even as they attempt to imagine a secular, all-embracing India, they also depict state violence and torture, Problematic though the erasure of specific histories, the infantilism of terrorist figures or the inclusion of token "good" minority characters may be (as I show later), these films attempt to humanize "othered" identities.[84]

The "erasure of specific histories" in the case of Meghna and Amar is neither problematic nor does it humanize the characters. Contrary to this claim, when Amar and Meghna meet for the first time, they have no histories—specific or otherwise. The plot of *Dil Se* consists in creating a history that is very specific to these characters. Their histories are indeed specific to their desires; yet, the film reveals over and over that the characters have to traverse (i.e. leave behind, residue-like) this history in order to achieve the goal of their desire. The history that Amar and Meghna write is a history of their itinerary (aim) to their *goal*. Their goal, however, is not to humanize each other; neither is it the goal of *Dil Se*. Their goal—that is, the goal of their desire—is to simply be totally absorbed in each other. This is clearly not a goal consistent with the *cogito*-subject who must be able to think (as himself) in order to *be* (exist as individual). The goal of *Dil Se* is to compel the subject to trade its desire for knowledge for enjoyment. In this sense, *Dil Se*'s position is not the liberal-humanist one where the othered is humanized; *Dil Se* is radical precisely because it is avowedly anti-humanist.

84 . Ibid., 346-7.

Similarly, when Ananya Kabir praises *Dil Se* for its "narrative irresolution" and consequent "revolutionary potential," she misses the chance of deriving a thoughtful conclusion from what is otherwise an astute observation. Kabir writes, "The paradox of distance that beckons and keeps at bay is the complication needed to propel the narrative forward, but it also prevents narrative resolution."[85] She goes on to substantiate her claim through a quick reading of the song-sequence "*Dil Se Re,*" where she aptly identifies that for Amar, Meghna always remains slightly out-of-reach. However, when she deduces from this observation that "such elusiveness stalls progress towards an integrative denouement," she misses the crucial point that this elusiveness is nothing but the substitutive-synchronic movement of the signifier toward its goal. A resolute end, far from being absent in this song-dance-sequence, is *anticipated* in every step of the way. Much like Singh, Kabir's inability to read *Dil Se* properly is caused by the faith that humanism (i.e. Cartesian subjectivity) is the ultimate good. Naturally, to these critics, *Dil Se*'s subversive commitment to foreground the un-anchoring of subjectivity appears to be the proof of either formal unsophistication, or clichéd politics. The problem is not that these critics—and I invoke them to exemplify a particular *way* of reading, and nothing more—are not good readers of audio-visual texts; the problem is that while *Dil Se* unfolds in a register that is decidedly queer, askew or awry, the critics attempt to read it from a sincere or straight perspective.

85 . Kabir, "Allegories," 145.

CHAPTER III

THE SUBJECT AND THE GAZE

AN INTIMATE EXTERIOR

The previous chapters of this dissertation discuss the ways in which the subject—or, that which assumes the position of subjectivity—comes into being hesitantly in relation to the field or space of language, which is also the domain of the Other. The subject appears *only* when a partial failure, disturbance or distortion occurs in the domain of the Other. Contemporary Lacanian film theorists have focused on this element of partial failure or disturbance of the Symbolic order in their analysis of subjectivity, and in so doing, they have departed from the path of early Lacanian film theorists, who considered the Symbolic order to be infallible and monolithic. Lacanian film theorists today approach the necessity of the failure of signification in two prominent ways: first, theorists consider the failure of signification as the rupturing of the Symbolic order by the appearance of the Lacanian Real *qua* part-objects or *objet petit a*; and second, theorists concentrate on the *partialness* of the failure of signification to argue that it is the promissory or the not-quite-completed nature of *objet petit a* that attracts or compels the subject to come into being as a split subject. The former approach is evident in the works of Todd McGowan, especially when he discusses atemporal cinema as a cinema of the death drive. The latter approach is less common; however, Hugh Manon's works prominently demonstrate the importance of partialness in the precipitation of split-subjectivity. Both scholars investigate the element of failure or rupture by theorizing the notion of the gaze as the primary

manifestation of *objet petit a* in the experience of cinema. The common ground between these two ways of thinking about the failure of signification is this: the subject's appearance is entirely dependent upon the gaze as *objet petit a*, which holds the subject in the sway of the domain of the Other. In other words, contemporary Lacanian film theory argues that the subject is powerless—i.e. it lacks agency—where the gaze, and by extension, the Other is concerned.

In contrast, I argue that although subjectivity is indeed precipitated in the domain of the Other or the field of symbolic language in relation to the gaze as *objet petit a*, it is not that the subject has no agency in this matter. On the contrary, this chapter proposes that it is possible to conceive of a kind of subjectivity that comes into being via an oblique relationship with the space of signification, by recognizing the gaze *qua objet petit a* as that which is lacking in the Other, and then by manipulating the Other to reveal its lack. This fundamentally skewed subject manipulates the Other by creating and inserting a cipher—a blank or fake object—at the level of the system of signification. This cipher, which is structurally akin to the gaze as *objet petit a*, serves to reveal the lack in the Other—which is to say, the cipher serves to reveal what the Other desires. The subject—by manipulating the Other in this way—comes into being by assuming the place of the cipher. To put it in different terms, I argue that the skewed subject is the agent of its own appearance in the domain of the Other, rather than being a non-agent, whose being is completely dictated by the gaze *qua* the object to which only the Other has access. However, it is crucial to clarify that my claim regarding the subject's manipulation of the Other through the creation of a cipher or gaze-effect is not a turn to the early iterations of Lacanian film theory, which sought to locate the gaze on the side of the subject, rather than on the side of the object. In contrast, my argument about the skewed subject's agency is an extension of contemporary Lacanian film theory, which has demonstrated that the gaze is *objective*, rather than subjective. The *only* difference between my approach and that of Lacanian film theorist today is that while I

argue that the skewed subject *can* manipulate the gaze *qua* object, the contemporary theorists argue that the subject has no such capacity.

In this chapter, I substantiate my argument in three ways: 1) I propose a re-thinking of the structural relationship between the Other and the gaze through the topological analysis of the gaze as extimate to the Other: in this, I follow the discussion of the notion of extimacy by Jacques-Alain Miller; 2) I offer original readings of Lacan's theorization of the gaze and the Other, especially through the analysis of the L-Schema; and 3) I draw on *Tere Bin Laden* (2010), a Bollywood film directed by Abhishek Sharma, to provide examples of the ways in which the skewed subject establishes agency in relation to the Other. *Tere Bin Laden* shows that subjectivity—an awry or skewed one—is precipitated only when a cipher appears in the domain of the Other. The creation and insertion of this cipher, in whose name or place the subject will appear, is the form of agency that *Tere Bin Laden* entertains for the subject. In particular, this film shows that the gaze-like cipher that the skewed subject brings to bear upon the domain of the Other is extimate to it: that is, the cipher is positioned in the interior of the Other as an object or element that is fundamentally exterior to it. In other words, in this film, the cipher becomes an intimate constitutive element of the Other, but *precisely* as an element that turns outward the interiority of the Other's space or surface. In this outwards turn of the Other's space, it is revealed that the Other is not entirely consistent with or fully enclosed upon itself. This non-enclosure of the Other—i.e. the lack or the gap in the Other—that the cipher reveals demands a signifier. This signifier of the Other's lack—in other words, the signifier of the distortion of the interior and the exterior—is *objet petit a*: the extimate object. Thus, in order to properly grasp this turning outward of the Other's interior space, one needs to consider the topological analysis of the gaze as extimate to the Other.

Section I: Lack in the Other

Although Lacan has often discussed the distorted relationship between inside and outside, interior and exterior or container and contained, he used the neologism—extimacy[86]—to designate the condition of interiorized exteriority only once in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. However, even earlier than this neologism, Lacan's conception of the Freudian unconscious was that it was outside—rather than interior to the subject—and therefore the subject was "ex-centric."[87] Most prominently, the question of interiorized exteriority is taken up by Lacan in his topological analysis of the three-dimensional form of a torus.[88] Lacan never fully developed the notion of extimacy; it was Jacques-Alain Miller who brought out the significance of this notion in understanding the topological relationship between the Other and *objet petit a* in his essay entitled "*Extimité*."

In this essay, Miller argues that the term extimacy is used by Lacan to "designate in a problematic manner the real in the symbolic."[89] Miller goes on to suggest that the consideration of extimacy is crucial because it allows one to move away from the distinction between the interior and the exterior through which the relationship between the Real and the Symbolic is commonly understood. Miller presents a simple diagram to represent the relation between the interior and the exterior:

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86 . Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1992), 139.

87 . Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 2001), 130.

88 . Ibid., 78.

89 . Jacques-Alain Miller, "*Extimité*,"in Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society (New York: NYU Press, 1994), 75.

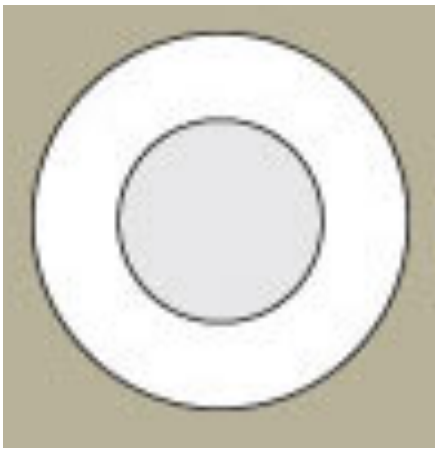

Fig. 22. Interiorized exterior[90]

To clarify, Miller argues that the grey circle is the exterior that is present in the interior of the larger white circle. Miller's point here is easy to misunderstand: he is not demonstrating that some external object or element has been imported in the interior space of the white circle. Instead, Miller suggests that the grey circle marks the most interior or intimate part of the white circle. Precisely because the grey circle is intimate that it "has a quality of exteriority," Miller argues.[91] He writes that

> It should be observed that the term "interior" is a comparative which comes to us from Latin and of which *intimus* is the superlative. This word is like an effort on the part of language to reach the deepest point in the interior. Let us note as well that quotations from literary works given by dictionaries show that one says commonly, constantly that the most intimate is at the same time the most hidden. Therefore, paradoxically, the most intimate is not a point of transparency but rather a point of opacity. (Miller 1994, 76)

90 . Ibid.

91 . Ibid., 76.

In other words, the space which is designated as interior—by virtue of there being a space that is designated as exterior—is not uniformly signifiable, because the innermost or intimate part of this interior is signified differently. Thus, the word intimate designates a locus—within the space known as interior—which is not as accessible to signification as the other parts of the interior space. It is this locus—this opaque, intimate interior—that Miller calls extimate. Although Miller does not refer to the three-dimensional form of a torus in his explication of extimacy, the torus figure perfectly illustrates his point. Consider the following rendering of a torus:

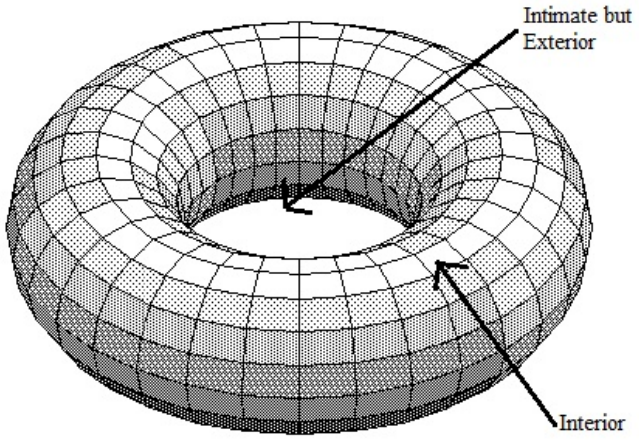

Fig. 23. The Torus

The hole at the center is spatially intimate to the surface of the torus, because without the hole, the torus will not retain is surface-shape. However, the hole—because it is empty—is not included in the surface space of the torus: it designates a space in the interior of the torus that is turned outward to that which is exterior to the torus. Moreover, the hole is not accessible to or from the surface of the torus; hence it is extimate to the torus.

With this understanding, one can properly appreciate the subsequent steps in Miller's argument, in which he first demonstrates that the space of the Freudian unconscious—which, in Lacan's theory, is the space of the Other—is extimate to the barred subject, or the subject of

desire. He goes on to argue that the space of the Other, likewise, has its extimacy: the extimacy of the Other, according to Miller, is *objet petit a*. Consider Miller's illustrations in this regard:

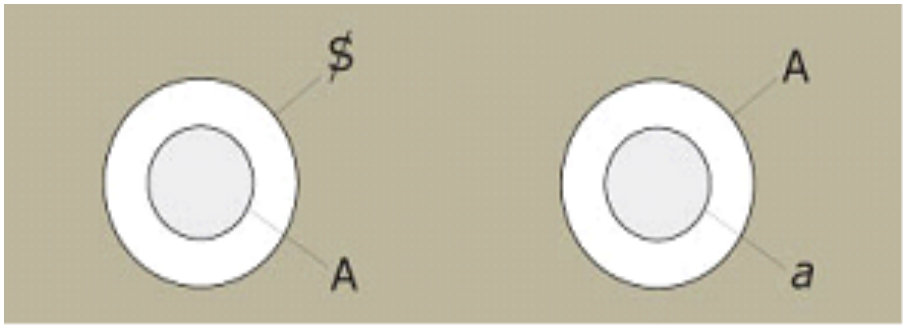

Fig. 24. Diagram of extimacy of the Subject, the Other and *Objet petit a*

To be clear, the subject is written ∃ to designate that something is barred to it—i.e. the subject, insofar as it is a subject of desire, must lack access to something. Miller argues—following Lacan—that what the subject of desire is primarily barred from is access to its unconscious. In other terms, the subject's unconscious must remain fundamentally unknown or alien to it, even though it is the unconscious that constitutes the subject as such. Similarly, Miller argues that the topological notion of extimacy can be applied to the space of the Other to reveal its extimacy—namely, *objet petit a*. Miller presents his argument regarding the extimacy of the Other in this way:

> Up to this point in our argument, we have used the concept of the Other as something obvious. Now, the question of extimacy leads us to problematize this concept, to ask the question of the alterity of the Other, i.e., of why the Other is really other. "What is the Other of the Other?" is the very simple question asked by Lacan in order to ground the alterity of the Other. The first attempt made by Lacan was to posit that the Other of the Other of the signifier was the Other of the law. This would imply the existence of a metalanguage which would be the Law, for the Law as absolute is a metalanguage. Later Lacan, thinking against

> Lacan, says on the contrary that "there is no Other of the Other," that "there is no metalanguage." [This] implies a problem in grounding the alterity of the Other. *Jouissance* is precisely what grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other. It is in its relation to *jouissance* that the Other is really Other. (78-9)

What Miller points out in this passage is crucial: if the unconscious *qua* the Other constitutes the subject via the relation of extimacy, then this relationship is spatial. Hence, as an element of this spatial relationship, the Other must also fall under the topology of space or surface. Thus, Miller asks, *if* the Other is designated a space or surface, what is its extimate constitutive core? In other words, what is alien or inaccessible in the Other? Miller's answer—at this point in his argument—is that *jouissance* is the Other's extimacy. *Jouissance* is a complex term in Lacanian psychoanalysis; however, Miller is using this term is a very specific sense in this passage. By *jouissance*, Miller indicates to an excess of particularity or alterity that marks the Other as Other. In other terms, if the Other is that which is alien, inaccessible or foreign to the subject, then it is that quality of the Other that marks it as alien, inaccessible or foreign is its *jouissance*. Topologically speaking, then, the Other can function as the Other only insofar as there is something lacking in it: a hole in its space that turns outward its interiority and makes its intimate core alien to it. The objectal form of the Other's *jouissance*, which is also its extimacy, therefore is a part or blank object. This part object is also known as *objet petit a*.

Miller goes on to elaborate the extimate relation between the Other and *objet petit a* through the following personal anecdote: Miller's class was interrupted when a student, having heard the rumor about a bomb being placed in the classroom, shouted "Bomb!" Although the bomb did not really exist, the shouting produced the same effect that the existence of a real bomb would have produced: everyone evacuated the room in panic, etc. Miller argues that the signifier "Bomb!"—since it signified an empty or absent object—functioned as *objet petit a* to produce the

desired effect of signification, in that this announcement emptied the room. In other words, when the signifier "Bomb!" was introduced in the field of signification in this precise way, the symbolic consistency of the scenario was disrupted. Conversely, Miller argues that had the student who shouted handed him a note indicating that there might be a bomb in the classroom, he would have maintained the signifying consistency, and would have emptied the room in an orderly fashion. It is Miller's claim that by shouting the word in this way, the student produced an excess of specificity—or *jouissance*—the objectal form of which was the non-presence of the bomb. In this way, the shouted word made it impossible for the subject(s) to occupy the same space as the empty object (Miller 1994, 81-2). It is from his analysis of this experience that Miller concludes his essay by arguing that *objet petit a*, as the extimate core of the Other, is incompatible with subjectivity (82). In other words, Miller claims that because the Other founds the subject through extimacy, and because *objet petit a*—as the Other's extimacy—reveals too much about the Other, the appearance of *objet petit a* destabilizes subjectivity.

Although Miller's topological analysis of extimacy provides us with valuable insight into the relationship between the subject, the Other and *objet petit a*, it cannot account for the functioning of a kind of subjectivity that is decidedly skewed. In other words, Miller's analysis does not take into account the possibility that the student who shouted "Bomb!" might have done so with the ulterior motive of emptying the classroom, knowing full well that there was no real danger as such. My argument—and *Tere Bin Laden* amply demonstrates this point—is that it is entirely possible for the subject to produce the effect of distortion in the field of the Other by creating and introducing a blank or empty object—just like Miller's "Bomb!"—which allows the subject to re-establish its locus in the field of symbolic language in an oblique way.

Section II: Without You (I am Nothing)

Tere Bin Laden (Without You, Laden/Yours, Bin Laden), directed by Abhishek Sharma, was released in 2010, closely following a group of Bollywood films that dramatize the fraught

relationship between migratory aspirations and the tense (and increasingly xenophobic) world situation after September 11. These films, such as *New York* (2009), *Kurbaan* (2009) and *My Name is Khan* (2010) center around the figure of the Indian diaspora, who—after 9/11—has to reconfigure her/his position in a supposed globalized world that made migration possible. The diasporic figure(s) in these films is shown to be caught in a liminal or dispossessed zone between expulsion and containment by the state power. Foreclosed from their legal rights and barred from their initial social positions, the diasporic figures in these films lead a secretive life, in which their goal is to reclaim recognition—often at the cost of their lives. Even though the details of this dispossessed subject's itinerary vary in each film, it is abundantly clear that the kind of subjectivity active in these films is far from a centered, coherent one. In fact, these films repeatedly highlight the ways in which subjectivity is split from within, and only becomes coherent temporarily in a domain that is beyond the purview of this putative subject.

Although *Tere Bin Laden* is similar to these films in many ways, its approach to the question of the dispossessed or unanchored subject is also significantly different. Engaging obliquely with the notion of a coherent subject, *Tere Bin Laden* underscores the ways in which such a demand for subjective consistency is fundamentally flawed. The film also shows that subjectivity (even an awry or skewed one) is precipitated only when a cipher appears in the domain of the Other. The creation and insertion of this cipher, in whose name or place the subject will appear, is the only form of intentionality that *Tere Bin Laden* entertains. This two-fold process is apparent in the plot of the film, which I shall briefly describe.

Ali Hassan, a young news reporter for a second-rate local TV channel in Karachi, Pakistan, has his heart set upon migrating to the US. Ali sees no future for dashing young talent like himself in Pakistan, and he is after the dream life in the US where he wants to become a news reporter for News America. He is the only Pakistani individual on board a flight to New York—the first plane from Pakistan to the US after the 9/11 attacks. However, during the flight, Ali's

enthusiasm for being an American newsman gets the best of him, and he rouses his co-passengers' suspicion while video recording himself saying words such as bomb, hijack and Muslim in an attempt to practice reading news for the camera. He is summarily deported upon his arrival. Not one to give up on his life-long dream of one day living in the US, Ali applies for a visa six times in seven years. Finally, his application is rejected for life because he assumed false identities and because of his prior deportation. Undeterred, Ali contacts a travel agent, who promises illegally to obtain his visa for a significant sum of money. While Ali attempts to gather money, he is sent to report on a local fair where he comes across a chicken farmer who looks very similar to Osama Bin Laden. Initially, Ali thinks that he has found the real Osama, and fantasizes that the reward from the US Government will solve his money issue. However, while spying on the Chicken farmer (Noor), Ali discovers that this is his true identity. Then he hatches a plan to dress up Noor to look like Osama and record a video message with the help of an Arabic-speaking voice artist, which he would sell for a heavy price. Eventually, the fake Osama tape is released to an Indian TV channel, and creates a massive uproar throughout the world. The US responds by escalating its military offensive in Afghanistan. A crack team of intelligence operatives is also sent to Pakistan to investigate the tape. The American investigators and their Pakistani counterparts eventually unearth the link between Ali and the tape. Meanwhile, Ali—who is no longer able to go to the US because of the high-level security alert caused by the tape he created—realizes the ramifications of his plan, and proceeds to rectify it by attempting to create another tape where Noor/Osama will declare peace with the US. Before this message is recorded, the intelligence agents find their studio, forcing Ali and his friends to hastily escape. Eventually they are caught, brought to a secret prison, where it is revealed that the tape was faked. However, the chief American intelligence officer—in order to save his face—colludes with Ali to record the Osama peace-offering tape, where Ali (as himself) plays the reporter. While his other accomplices go back to their own lives, the film ends with Ali—now a famous reporter because of his scoop—landing in New York, while a host of US reporters run after him.

Clearly, what drives the plot in *Tere Bin Laden* is Ali's thwarted desire, in the perusal of which he does not cede. However, his desire (to migrate to the US) alone is not enough to receive recognition as a subject-of-desire, as his multiple failed attempts to fool the authorities show. As long as Ali continues in his attempt to appease what he takes to be the demand of the US as his Other—one who directly determines the shape of his subjectivity—his efforts are in vain. However, the moment he discovers that this Other is, in fact, lacking—that is, there is something that the Other desires—he begins to succeed. One should not fail to notice, however, that the film does not allow Ali an iota of intentionality in creating this lack; rather, the lack predates the desire that it institutes. In other words, it is not that Ali made the US realize that they want Osama; Osama was always and already wanted by the US War on Terror. The intentionality that *Tere Bin Laden* allows Ali is in the creation of a cipher—a fake or blank object—that loosely resembles the object that the US desires. If Ali's desire drives the plot, it is the cipher that is at the core of the plot. Noor/Osama is this cipher, and must remain as such for the proper unfolding of the plot. Thus, one must ask: why does Ali's plan succeed even after the fakeness of Noor/Osama is revealed to the authorities? Ali, as a subject-of-desire, is not defined or shaped by the US in a bi-univocal correspondence. Ali comes into being as a subject in relation to the US by aligning himself with the cipher, which, in its very structure, gestures toward the Other's lack. In this way, Ali is not what the Other desires, but he is the one who holds the key to the Other's desire.The kind of subjectivity particular to Ali is, therefore, decidedly an skewed or oblique one: Ali *knows* that the fulfillment of his desire to become a diasporic subject is inherently fake, and the US authorities *know* that the Noor/Osama tapes are spurious. The subject(s) come into being in spite of this knowing misrecognition, not at the level of intentional coherence or correspondence, but precisely in the domain of representation or signification. It is this domain of language—one that holds the subject in its sway—that Jacques Lacan calls the domain of the Other, and the blank object or cipher through which the Other manifests, he calls the gaze.

Section III: The Other's Eyes (That I Do Not See)

The interrelated concepts of the Other and the gaze are central to Lacan's theory of the subject, and are developed over the entire course of his teaching. However, Lacan engages with the concept of the gaze as the principal functionary of the scopic drive, the consistency of which is held up by the Other, most extensively in his 1964 seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, specifically in the lectures entitled Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*. In these lectures, Lacan's attempt is fourfold: first, he establishes that the subject comes into being in its attempt to cover over its inaugural split; second, he points out that the subject does so by soliciting recognition in the visual field; third, he elaborates that this demand for recognition articulates itself in the visual field through the gaze, which is a manifestation of *objet petit a*; and finally, he argues that in its assumption of the gaze, the subject comes into being in the domain of the Other—i.e. in the domain of language or representation. In other words, Lacan's purpose in the lectures is to chart the itinerary of the subject from its real inauguration (birth) to its symbolic inauguration (birth as subject). This path, which precipitates what we know as the subject—i.e. the subject of desire—is not autonomous or intentional. Rather, it is constitutively dependent upon the process of signification in the network of signifiers; that is, in the domain of language. However, in order to arrive, the subject—driven by the inaugural, traumatic splitting that is birth—must misrecognize the domain of signifiers as another entity that controls it (the would-be subject), because it presumes that this entity is not haunted by a traumatic split. Hence, at this stage the (would-be) subject demands that this Other-who-has-it-all recognize its existence—i.e. validates the subject *qua* subject. However, the answer from the Other is always a blank message, in that it does not supply the (wanting-to-be) subject with recognition. This empty answer *is* the *objet petit a*, around which desire circulates to precipitate the subject. In its attempt to possess the *objet petit a*, the subject-proper comes into being by articulating its desire in the field of language. At this stage, the subject *knows* that it had misrecognized the Other as non-lacking, but it persists

in this misrecognition as that which founds its subjectivity. Primarily, Lacan argues that this journey undertaken by the subject takes place in the visual field; hence, gaze is a principal manifestation of *objet petit a*.

Lacan elaborates on the coordinates of the gaze by responding to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of the split between the visible and the invisible in *Le Visible et L'Invisible*. In disagreement with Merleau-Ponty's analysis, Lacan writes:

> But it is not between the invisible and the visible that we have to pass. The split that concerns us is not the distance that derives from the fact that there are forms imposed by the world towards which the intentionality of phenomenological experience directs us—hence the limits that we encounter in the experience of the visible. The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety. The eye and the gaze—this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field.[92]

Here, Lacan objects to the intentionality with which phenomenology imbue the subject. In his estimation, there is no intentionality where the subject is concerned. The gaze is not to be located in the clear distinction between the visible and the invisible as phenomenology would have it. Rather, the nature of the gaze—insofar as it is a part-object—places it in the liminal limit of experience. The gaze, Lacan argues, is related to the experiential register only as a thrust—i.e. a movement in the direction that lies beyond concrete experience. In other words, what the subject experiences in the gaze is precisely the originary lack—embodies in the castration anxiety—that founds the subject. Lacan clarifies this elusive nature of the gaze further when he writes that

92 . Jacques Lacan, "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1998) 72-3.

> In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze.[93]

One should notice the three attributes of the gaze that Lacan points to in this passage. First, the gaze determines the subject's relationship to the world insofar as vision is concerned. Second, the gaze functions at the level of signification or representation, and *not* at the level of concrete material objects. Third, the gaze is that which is always missed in the visual field; that is, the gaze is at work where the signifying consistency of the visual field fails or ruptures. In other words, the gaze is that object in the visual field which—since it resists representation—is always wanted.

The conception of the gaze as the perennially wanted object has direct bearing upon the ways in which we want to understand the manipulation of the Other's (scopic) desire in *Tere Bin Laden*. As the plot of the film reveals, the entity that is always wanted by the Other/US is Osama Bin Laden. Ali, the putative subject, does not initially realize that this lack is the key to the Other's desire. Thus, his repeated attempts to be included in the US social structure as another (ordinary) signifier—as evidenced by his efforts to Americanize himself—fail. Eventually, Ali realizes that it is Osama Bin Laden that the US wants, and delivers exactly that in the form of the first video tape, but his desire to be accepted by the US still fails. To be sure, Ali's consecutive failures would remain inexplicable if one were to apply to it the bi-univocal correspondence of the oppositional logic evident in phenomenology. The inadequacy of these two analytical schemas can be expressed in this way: Ali delivers *exactly* what (he thinks) the US would want—namely, an Americanized individual, and the tape where Osama Bin Laden directly addresses America—but nonetheless remains unsuccessful. Yet, he inexplicably succeeds when his attempts at dissimulation fails—i.e. when it is revealed to the US that he is neither Americanized, nor does

93 . Ibid.,73

he really have access to Osama Bin Laden. It is this paradox of succeeding-by-failure that the abovementioned schemas cannot explain. I propose that this paradox is resolved—a resolution that would lead us to the central question of *Tere Bin Laden*, namely, why does Ali succeed?—in Lacan's explication of the subject as a stain in the visual field through which the gaze is represented.

After pointing out the location of the gaze as the missing or wanted object in the visual domain, Lacan proceeds to demonstrate where the subject falls in this topological map. He theorizes subjectivity in relation to the gaze in two steps: first, by pointing out that the subject is solicited when an anamorphic stain appears in the field of visual representation; and second, by indicating that the subject comes into being by assuming onto itself (like a screen) the structure of this stain. To substantiate the first step, Lacan refers to Hans Holbein's painting, *The Ambassadors* (1533).

Fig. 25. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533. Oil on oak, National Gallery, London[94]

In reading this painting, Lacan argues that the anamorphic skull floating in the foreground is intrinsically linked to the advent of Cartesian subjectivity. To be sure, the skull—which is a distortion or stain in the visual field—is *not* the gaze as such in Lacan's estimation. Rather, the anamorphic figuration of the skull represents the gaze by forcing the subject to regard the painting from an oblique point of view. Thus, the skull-stain in the painting captures the subject not as an intentional being, but precisely as a skewed or awry subject. Referring to the subject's relation to the distorted skull, Lacan writes that

> [A]s subjects, we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught. […] [T]he secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the

94 . Google Art Project, www.googleartproject.com.

> magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. (Lacan 1998, 92)

It is crucial to note that the painting captures the subject—that is, precipitates that which is the subject—precisely at the moment of the subject's turning away. In other words, the subject does not arrive in a direct, centered, coherent relation with the painting; rather, the subject appears due to its failure to comprehend the painting from a centered position. This de-centering of the subject is what Lacan indicates to when he reads the skull as a reflection of nothingness. One should also note that the anamorphic skull, in its materiality, is *not* the gaze, i.e. nothingness. The distorted image is there merely to reflect the lack in the Other that the subject assumes in the place of its originary splitting. The surface of the canvas, on which the awry skull is painted, is a screen where the subject's image coincides with the (inverted) image of what the Other lacks, namely, the *objet petit a*.

Lacan further verifies that the place in which the subject appears as a sign is precisely this screen-which-contains-the-stain, which holds on either side of it the subject of representation and the gaze. This schema is presented in the following graph of the visual field:

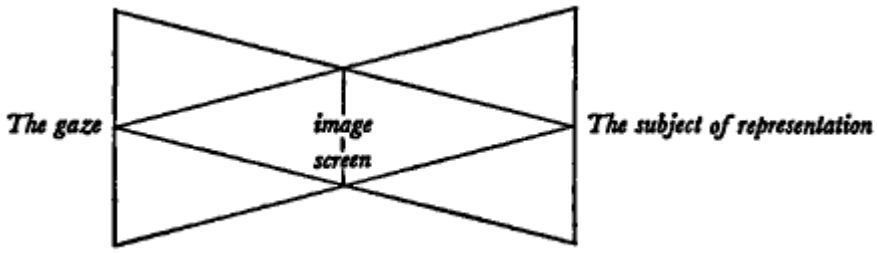

Fig. 26. Graph of the visual field[95]

To explicate this graph, Lacan recounts a personal anecdote in which he, while a taking a boat-ride on a lake, is surprised by the boatman who, pointing to a floating, gleaming sardine can says

95 . Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 106.

to Lacan: "*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*" (95). Lacan goes on to explain that the point of this statement is not that Lacan was somehow ignored; rather, the point is that insofar as the location of the gaze is occupied by something (in this case, the gleaming can), the subject cannot appear in the scene or on the screen as the subject of signification. Hence, it follows that precipitation of subjectivity does not subsist in bi-univocal correspondence with the Other. Instead, the subject is precipitated in an inverted form where something goes missing from the field of the Other. It is in this way that the subject comes into being as an inverted representation of the lost object (*objet petit a*) in the domain of (symbolic) language—that is, in the domain of the Other. It is not surprising that a mirror image of the graph shown above appears in Lacan's 1954-55 seminars on Freud's theory of the unconscious, when he explicates Freud's statement *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* in the form of Schema L.

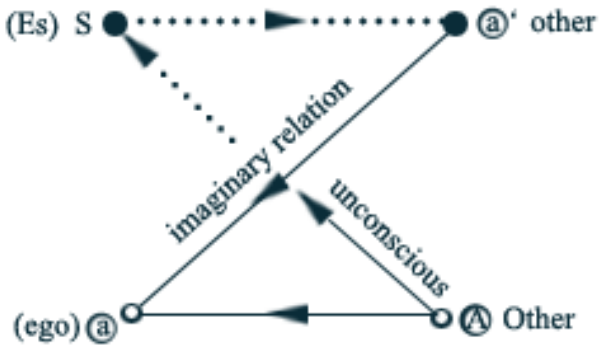

Fig. 27. Schema L[96]

Here, the subject (*Es*, or S) appears when the imaginary relation between the ego (would-be-subject) and the little other (*objet petit a*) is cut by the manifestation of the Other in the unconscious, thereby displacing the ego (supposed, centered subject) into the position of subjectivity. This is why, Lacan argues, the subject appears by assuming the image of this cut—i.e. break in signification—in the Other. In other words, the subject's appearance, at once, hides

96 . Lacan, "Introduction of the big Other," in *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1988),243.

that which is always wanted in the Other and gestures toward this wanting-ness in the Other. Thus, Lacan writes that if I [the subject] am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot (Lacan 1998, 97).

Now, if we apply this understanding of the subject as the stain on the screen that gestures toward the gaze, we will be able to better comprehend why Ali succeeds in spite of the obvious failure of his initial plan. Consider the following reworking of Schema L:

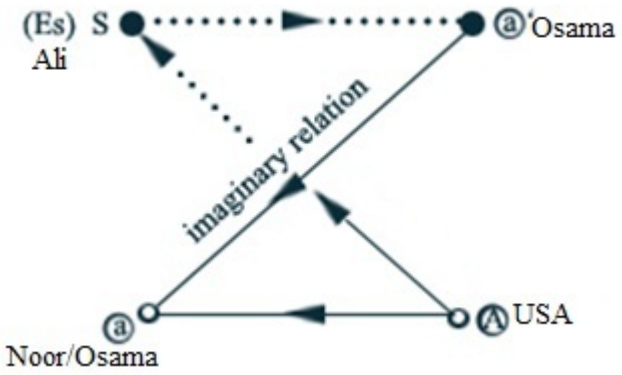

Fig. 28. Modified Schema L

As noted in the plot summary of the film, Ali's plan to find the passage money to the US by selling the video tape of Osama Bin Laden fails. Indeed, he gets the money that he needs to buy his immigration status, but this money is of no avail. This is because Ali has given *too much*: his video tape is so similar to what the US wanted, namely Osama Bin Laden, that the appearance of the tape throws the US into anxiety, as evidenced by the escalated security measures that prevents Ali from flying to the US. The video tape—structurally speaking—has closed up the gap (wanting-ness) in the Other. Thus, the only way Ali's plan can succeed is by revealing the fakeness of the first tape, and by presenting himself as the one who mediates between the wanted Osama Bin Laden and the US. This is precisely what he does in the second video tape of Noor/Osama, where the fiercely direct address of the first tape is tamed into a submissive love

letter. The crucial difference between the two tapes is that while Ali is not present in the anxiety-producing first tape, he appears in the second tape as the only reporter delivering Noor/Osama's message of peace. It is in this way that Ali succeeds by giving up the (misrecognized) role of the centered subject, and assumes the role of the intermediary stain on the screen, directly beyond which lies the empty specter of the wanted Osama Bin Laden. Of course, the film as a whole is an elaboration of Ali's trajectory in learning that insofar as he *is*, he is a decentered or awry subject. This lesson is most clearly elaborated in the title song of the film, where Ali's initial attempt(s) to immigrate to the US is represented.

Section IV: Bi-univocal Identification; or, A Good-looking Jackass

The title song of *Tere Bin Laden*, which is also the expository sequence of the film, does not spare a moment to demonstrate—in a decidedly ironic way—that attempted bi-univocal identification with one's Other does not succeed in soliciting recognition. The song-sequence, aptly titled *Ullu Da Pattha* (A Good-looking Jackass), shows on the formal register the ways in which such identification always fails. As the song title suggests, the central character of the film, Ali, behaves like a jackass, in the sense that he acts stupidly without paying any attention to the ramifications of his action. This stupidity is also Ali's history as a subject-under-misrecognition, as the song sequence shows—through rapid, rhythmic intercuts—the coordinated of his diasporic desire. At the outset of the song number, we find Ali leaving for the US on the first plane taking off from Karachi after the September 11 attacks. Ali's designation as the only Pakistani on board is declared by a news reporter covering this historic moment of reinstated transnational migration. As the song starts in the audio track, the camera—flouting the convention of establishing the main character—frames Ali's luggage as he pushes through the crowd at the airport.

Fig. 29. Screenshot from *Tere Bin Laden*[97]

But of course, in the logic of the song number, what Ali looks like is far less significant than the way in which he has decided to define himself in a direct, one-to-one correspondence with what he perceives as American-ness. The ironically exaggerated mise-en-scene of this shot undercuts precisely this logic of direct identification. At the center of the shot is Ali's luggage, drawing the viewer's attention via its color-scheme and the various signifiers that appear on it. The yellow color of the luggage is set against the dark colors that cover the rest of the shot—it stands out in its difference. Prominently visible on the surface of the luggage are the following: a message drawn in the likeness of a t-shirt slogan that says I (heart) Amreeka, and an iconic pop-culture image of a white skull with wings. We should not fail to notice what these images clearly reveal: Ali is intent on broadcasting that not only does he love America, but also he is aware of the cultural milieu of America. The signifiers on his luggage are, in way, a pre-emptory address to his Other that says: *I know what you want from me*. Noticeably, Ali's message is not coded in terms of nationalism or patriotism; it is the kitschy aspects of pop-culture that is his repository.

97 . *Tere Bin Laden*, directed by Abhishek Sharma (2010; Mumbai, India: Cinergy Studio, 2010), DVD. All subsequent screenshots are from the same source.

Moreover, this luggage-message also appeals to the supposed cultural hybridity of cosmopolitan America, where the catchphrase I (heart) X can be easily repurposed in the vernacularized form of I (heart) Amreeka. Hence, if Ali is mimicking his notion of American culture, he does so in a highly self-conscious manner. To put it in another way, Ali thinks of himself as a conscious or centered subject who is trying to appeal to its Other.

Of course, his luggage is not the only way in which Ali tries to shape himself in the likeness of the Other. The other part of his fantasy is to become a news reporter for the fictional News America. He knows that this part of his desire requires the mediation of a camera, and therefore, during the flight he vide- records himself reading news materials that would cater to an American audience. Holding a camera in his outstretched right hand, Ali reads bits of news from a newspaper in order to practice his American accent while his co-passengers begin to look at him with growing suspicion.

Fig. 30. Screenshot

In the aural background of this sequence of Ali recording himself is the song that declares Ali's stupidity. On the aural foreground, however, we hear Ali practicing variations of the American accent. Since he thinks that terrorism is at the center of American news discourse, Ali tries to say relevant words such as bomb, Muslims, terrorist, hijack etc. Unsurprisingly, the repetition of these words first makes his co-passengers suspicious and then fearful. This move in the film—one that foregrounds language in a prominent way—is standard comic bit appearing in Hollywood films such *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008). However, even as a repetition, this sequence of mistaken identity calls attention to the ways in which the synchronic sliding of the signifier can be summarily arrested via the function of the ideological quilting point. More crucial in this shot, however, is the presence of Ali's video camera. The inclusion of the camera in the act of recording in the frame of the narrative camera of *Tere Bin Laden* opens up the possibility of a distortion in the (so far) stable visual field. The camera in Ali's hand is recording something, that is, it has a point of view. The point of view of this camera is clearly not Ali's point of view, since he is the one being recorded. This leaves open the possibility of another point of view that is not yet occupied by anyone. This empty position in the visual field—which is very similar to the structure of the gaze—takes over the narrative camera's point of view in the subsequent shot; yet, this transferred point of view does not posit a viewing subject behind the hand-held camera.

Fig. 31. Screenshot

The distortion of the visual field is prominent in this shot. The stabilized color-scheme of the narrative camera is no longer present. In its place, we find a blue-tinted shot, customary of the hand-held camera aesthetics. The shot is also differentiated from the previous one with the appearance of recording apparatus—i.e. the letterbox and the REC sign—of the hand-held camera. More crucially, Ali's face is severely distorted in the frame—he is simply too close to the camera. The framing and the camera angle of this shot is decidedly unprofessional, invoking in its visual style elements of a home movie. However, in this home movie no one is looking at Ali through the lens of the camera. Instead, it is the inverted return of his message to the Other that regards him in this way. To express this in a Lacanian formulation, this is what unmediated gaze looks like in the Other's domain. Naturally, Ali's face appears monstrous, distorted and threatening. In other words, this shot reveals that even though Ali thinks he is recording himself, he appears to the US in this particularly distorted way.

It is no surprise that in a subsequent shot—from the point of view of the flight attendant whom Ali approaches to return a butter knife that she had dropped with the implied hope of a

romantic liaison—Ali appears in an attacking pose. This shot continues the color-scheme and camera angle of the previous shot and in first glance looks exactly like a shot from Ali's handheld camera. Ali is still too close to the camera, leaning towards it in a particularly threatening way, wielding the butter knife. The shot, like the previous one, is blue-tinted. However, the significant difference is that there is no visual proof in this shot regarding the presence of the video camera. Its letterbox frame and the REC sign have disappeared from the frame. In effect, the unstable point of view of the video camera has taken over the stable framing of the narrative camera of *Tere Bin Laden*. This displacement of the narrative camera raises a crucial and interesting question: which space is signified in this shot? Surely this shot cannot take place in the diegetic space of the film, since the diegetic camera is no longer available. Neither is this the space that Ali's hand-held camera captured, since its traces are also not present in this shot. This also not the point of view of the flight attendant, since the narrative camera has already revealed her point of view. In whose point of view, then, Ali appears in this way? I would argue that this point of view is that of the Other who is caught in a deep anxiety, since something has appeared in the place of its lack. In other words, this is the way in which Ali appears to the US. Quite naturally, the US promptly forecloses this contingent entity that threatens the stability of its signifying system.

Fig. 32. Screenshot

Consequently, when Ali is processed by the police, the threat of his contingency is negated by signifying him with a universal signifier. At the end of a series of police headshots, where the supposed criminals hold up their identification cards, Ali appears as South Asian, while a nondescript white male holds up a card that says Peter. Ali's card is later replaced with cards that say Al Qaida, and Taliban.

Fig. 33. Screenshot

We should not fail to notice Ali's facial expression in this shot. The bulging eyes, raised eyebrows and gaped mouth with which Ali expresses his surprise, fear and uncertainty look eerily similar to the ways in which his handheld camera had captured him earlier in the plane. The crucial difference is that Ali no longer has the security of his video camera. He is being looked at by a machine that he cannot shut off, unlike his video camera. One should also notice that Ali no longer appears threatening. With his identification properly in place, he can no longer disrupt the signifying fabric of America. He has been marked as a criminal belonging to, simply, another place. In other words, now that he has been identified as a South Asian and a terrorist, he can be expelled from the US. We should also note the blood-splatter on the wall behind Ali's head in this shot. What is this if not a visual representation of the declaration that to the US, Ali is already dead?

As the song sequence continues, we find Ali back in Karachi, persistent in his desire to migrate to the US. Moreover, his methods of appealing to the US as his Other remain unchanged. He applies for visas six times—assuming a different identity each time. However, he still

functions under the misrecognition that in order to be recognized by the Other, he must define himself in direct relation to the Other. This becomes painfully evident when, for his last visa interview—following which he would banned for life—he assumes the identity of a cowboy.

Fig. 34. Screenshot

This shot, taken from the point of view of the visa interviewer (who represents the US), is quite revealing. Of course, Ali's outfit and appearance clearly reveals that he is not a cowboy. This obvious fakery aside, what is interesting in this shot is Ali's choice of identity. I would argue that Ali is not dressed up as any ordinary cowboy; he is, instead, the iconic cowboy from a Spaghetti Western. In fact, I would go so far as to say that he looks very similar to Lee Van Cleef. Again, in his appeal to the Other, Ali has missed the mark by trying to mimic too closely. In an ironic juxtaposition, Ali's headshot from his first encounter with the US appears in the frame, visible only to the interviewer. Even though Ali attempts to construct himself as an American by appealing directly to American pop-culture, what America sees in him is someone who is labeled deported.

Section V: The Other's Lack

If *Ullu Da Pattha* chronicles the attempted construction of subjectivity that misses its mark, then the second song sequence—namely, *Shor Sharabba* (Make some noise)—presents the construction of the gaze in the transformation of Noor into Osama Bin Laden. It is at this point that *Tere Bin Laden* begins to reveal that which is at its core; namely, a clear understanding of the ways in which the subject's acceptance of its de-centered nature leads to a successful manipulation of the Other's desire. Hence, this song sequence not only marks the inauguration of Ali as a skewed subject, but the sequence also shows that, in the game of desire, the crucial element that incites desire—namely, *objet petit a*—is constructed through the representational status of (symbolic) language, in the way that a text constructed.

Shor Sharabba begins after Ali has discovered the chicken farmer, Noor, who looks somewhat similar to Osama Bin Laden. In his quest for the money that he needs to buy his passage to the US, Ali decides to create a video message where Noor, dressed as Osama, would threaten the US. For this purpose, Ali recruits a make-up artist and a voice-over artist who would transform Noor into the likeness of Osama in the tape. This transformation requires the help of the others because the uniqueness of Noor's subjectivity has to be emptied out so that other signifiers (the ones that identify Osama Bin Laden) could be posited onto his empty shell. In this song sequence, the film foregrounds that Noor is eminently malleable, seemingly unperturbed by the process of his transformation and its possible ramifications. In other words, the film presents Noor as a subject that is singularly closed upon itself—that is, an entity that is not subjected to desire. Thus, Noor is blissfully unaware of the meaning of his utterances when Ali's Urdu-speaking accomplice writes his Osama-speech for him. He is also not bothered when the make-up artist dresses him up to look like Osama Bin Laden. In other words, Noor behaves like the ideal actor who can fully assume the role of another subject without puncturing the texture of this assumed subjectivity with his own.

In very prominent ways, *Shor Sharabba* declares the film's awareness of the ways in which subjectivity is constructed in cinema, specifically in Bollywood cinema. Thus, the production of the first Noor/Osama video tape mimics the steps necessary in such endeavors. Just like the standard practice of Bollywood cinema, where actors do not move beyond the parameters of the thoroughly-written script, Noor merely mouths the lines that Ali's accomplice has written for him. Similarly, Noor's own voice is dubbed over with that of the voice artist, just as in Bollywood cinema voice is added in the post-production stage. These processes, that the song sequence foregrounds, establish that the film clearly sees the symbolic connection between cinematic representation and (Cartesian) subjectivity, and does not attempt to produce itself as meta-cinema. Rather, the film carefully weaves the text of a message on behalf of the putative subject that would appear in this act of representation by appealing to the Other, whose desire is solicited or anticipated in the text of the message. A shot that appears halfway through *Shor Sharabba* clearly elucidates this point.

Fig. 35. Screenshot

This shot presents Ali's Urdu-speaking accomplice in the act of writing the script of Noor/Osama. We should not fail to notice what this shot so clearly reveals: the fact that, in cinema, subjectivity is created like a text at the level of language where proper assignation of signifiers is a matter of constant retroaction and anticipation (that is, the work of revision). We should note that the shot foregrounds pieces of paper on which the accomplice has written Noor/Osama's purported message. The whiteness of the papers dominates this shot, set against the spatial indeterminacy of the dark surroundings. Noticeably, the author is also garbed in white, almost indistinguishable from the papers that surround him. What does this mise-en-scene represent if not the fact that in the creation of a text (the purported subject's message) the author-subject must ultimately recede and become indistinguishable from the text that he allegedly wrote? Considered in this way, the outstretched arms of the accomplice reveal their significance. It is clear that this is a gesture of appeal. However, this supplication has no immediate addressee. One does not have to go too far to see that this plea is directed to the dimension of language itself, that is, to the dimension of the Other.

Just as the song sequence presents the total immersion of Ali and his accomplices in the creative process of the video message, it also allows us a brief glimpse into Noor's point of view. Noor, the cipher, is blissfully unaware of the larger picture, that is, what his transformed self would mean in the domain of the other. He is completely caught up in the immediacy of his sense-experience. As the make-up artist dresses up Noor as Osama Bin Laden, and as the setting of the video shoot is gradually populated with props that would transform him into Osama, Noor is transfixed by what is immediately in front of his eyes. Noor is unawareness of his position in the signifying chain that is being created around him. *Tere Bin Laden* reveals this discrepancy in a marvelous two-shot structure. In a shot and reverse-shot, we see how Noor appears to the camera, and how the world around him appears to Noor.

Fig. 36. Screenshot

Allow me to present three observations regarding this shot before moving on to Noor's point of view in the subsequent reverse shot. First, the whiteness of the text-in-the-process-of-writing in the previous shot is directly continued in the color of the turban that is being tied around Noor's head. In other words, he is literally being covered over by the message that would eventually transform him into the blank object Noor/Osama. Second, the elements of Noor's own unique identity—namely, his beloved chickens—appear in the backdrop; but, crucially, this scene in which Noor-the-idiot-subject belongs is cut up and put together as a collage. Quite naturally, this backdrop will be momentarily replaced with that of a world map. Third, Noor is transfixed by a new object that has entered his self-enclosed world of chickens. It is this new object that Noor intently looks at, thereby disregarding the radical transformation of the surrounding space. The following reverse shot shows what the world looks like from Noor's point of view.

Fig. 37. Screenshot

Although it is a comic moment in the film, this shot is it revealing in ways more than one. No doubt, evidently it is the make-up artist's cleavage that becomes the focal point of Noor's attention. However, the apparent sexual attraction demonstrated in this shot has significant bearing upon Noor's eventual escape from a self-enclosed subjectivity into a desiring subject. Before this moment in the film, Noor does not have an object/cause of desire and therefore is a lost or idiot subject. It is for this reason that he could be so easily transformed into the cipher that is Noor/Osama. In contrast, the insertion of the cleavage in his visual domain eventually leads Noor into the path of desire. It is not surprising that, according to Lacan, breast is a prime manifestation of *objet petit a* around which subjectivity is precipitated. Noor's escape from cipher-hood becomes evident at the conclusion of *Tere Bin Laden*, when the film depicts him—sans his tell-tale beard—as the make-up artist's life partner.

Since Noor remains a cipher until the end of the film, the song sequence proceeds with his transformation into the message of Noor/Osama, after supplying us with this brief glimpse into Noor's future. Through the narrative camera of *Tere Bin Laden*, which also coincides with

the point of view of the camera that Ali uses to shoot the video message, we see Noor completely transformed.

Fig. 38. Screenshot

In this medium shot—tightly framed so that the bizarre surroundings of the studio are not revealed—we see a close reproduction of Osama Bin Laden's numerous video messages as they appear on TV. Thus, this shot is triply mediated: what we see here is *Tere Bin Laden*'s representation of a TV screen broadcasting the tape made by Ali's camera. Of course, Noor is lost in this triple mediation, and what emerges can only be designated as Osama Bin Laden's message. Along the same line, we should not fail to notice the subtitle that reads in Iraq, Afghanistan & rest of the middle east is not extra-diegetic. That is, this subtitle is not the same as the ones in the previous shots that are added to the film in post-production. The subtitle in this shot is an essential part of the visual coding. It reveals that the message has been received by the US (and the rest of the world) and is in the process of being decoded. In other words, the message—which is in Arabic—is being translated in the Other's domain. Among all the props that mark this image as Osama's tape—i.e. the AK 47, the world map etc.—the most remarkable

is the pointed index figure of Noor/Osama. This gesture—which is highly symbolic in its indexing effect[98]—is widely circulated in the world media as Osama Bin Laden's gesture. Thus, in reproducing this gesture, *Tere Bin Laden* gestures to all the other Osama Bin Laden tapes that preceded it. This is, in effect, an inter-textual gesture. It is as if without this gesture no tape can be designated as an Osama tape. We should also take note of the expressionlessness of Noor/Osama's face. While in the previous shots Noor's confusion and fascination are writ large on his face, this triply mediates shot does not reveal his intentions. This blank face, I would argue, is the face of terror as far as the US is concerned. The image of Noor/Osama appears in the signifying system of the US as—at once—a message loaded with threat and an intention whose coordinates are unknown. Thus, this shot can be understood in relation to Lacan's conception of the anamorphic skull in Holbein's painting. The image of Noor/Osama is that which flares up or stains the symbolic universe, and the blank expression is the chasm of lack that petrifies the Other. Naturally, when the US responds to this image by escalating its offensive, we can easily read this act as an expression of anxiety through which the US tries to protect itself. It is for this reason that the appearance of this image effectively arrests the possibility of Ali's migration to the US. Therefore, it is this fierce expression of the gaze that must be dampened for the success of Ali's desire.

This is precisely what happens towards the end of the film, when the representative of US Intelligence directs the second video tape of Osama's peace offering after discovering that the first tape was faked. The double mediation of faked fakeness is clearly represented in the following shot.

98 . Is it not remarkable that in Saussurean linguistics, the pointed figure is one of the primary codes of indexicality?

Fig. 39. Screenshot

In this shot, the narrative camera of *Tere Bin Laden* captures mediation in action: we see Ali's camera recording another tape of Noor/Osama. Significantly, it is framed in a long shot, so as to reveal all the mechanics by which the Noor/Osama's message is constructed. Included in the shot are: the voice artist in the act of dubbing, the make-up artist and Ali-as-reporter mediating this exchange. Through the figure of the US intelligence representative, the US is caught overseeing this act of fake production. In order to compensate for the reduced turgidity of the first tape, the setting of this tape includes fake boulders, signifying the hilly regions of Afghanistan where Osama Bin Laden is thought to be located. Noticeably, the pointed finger of the first tape is absent in this shot, as is the radical indeterminacy of the address. The message, this time, has a particular addressee—George W. Bush—and bears a signature in the diminutive form (Binny L.). This message, in other words, is a love letter rather than the anxiety-producing representation of the gaze. The figure of Noor/Osama appears unthreatening in this message precisely because the Other has successfully enclosed this lack or gaze in its signifying chain. The threatening gaze is softened in this act of mediation, as Osama Bin Laden is posited *exactly* where he should be—in

Afghanistan, far away from the US and its allies. In other words, the signifier of Osama Bin Laden regains its status as the missing object in the signifying chain. However, the subject who emerges from this scene of mediation is Ali. Ali is effectively the screen upon which the drama between the Other and its lack is reflected. Hence, following this shot, Ali finds his way to the US quite easily—not as the subject-of-intention of his initial attempts, but as an awry subject that falls in between the Other and its lack.

Section VI: A Doubly-deceptive Disclaimer

My purpose in reading *Tere Bin Laden* as a film that insists on the primacy of double-deception in the interplay between the triad of the subject, its Other and the gaze is the following: I want to show that *Tere Bin Laden* is keenly aware of cinema's potential to deconstruct the notion of centered (Cartesian) subjectivity. This film fulfills this goal by underscoring the futility of a-symbolic, direct and bi-univocal identification. The form of subjectivity that this film offers is one that is aware of its inaugural misrecognition, and therefore manipulates the Other's desire to find a signifying position for itself from where it can articulate its own desire in an oblique and ironic way. Naturally, this notion of de-centered subjectivity demands that *Tere Bin Laden* unfolds at that level of symbolic language where the possibility of the failure of signification is always and already included. That is, this film is eminently aware that in symbolic domain, one can dissimulate by letting on that one is, in fact, *dissimulating*. Allow me to conclude this chapter by substantiating this claim by presenting in order of appearance the two disclaimer slides that precede the film.

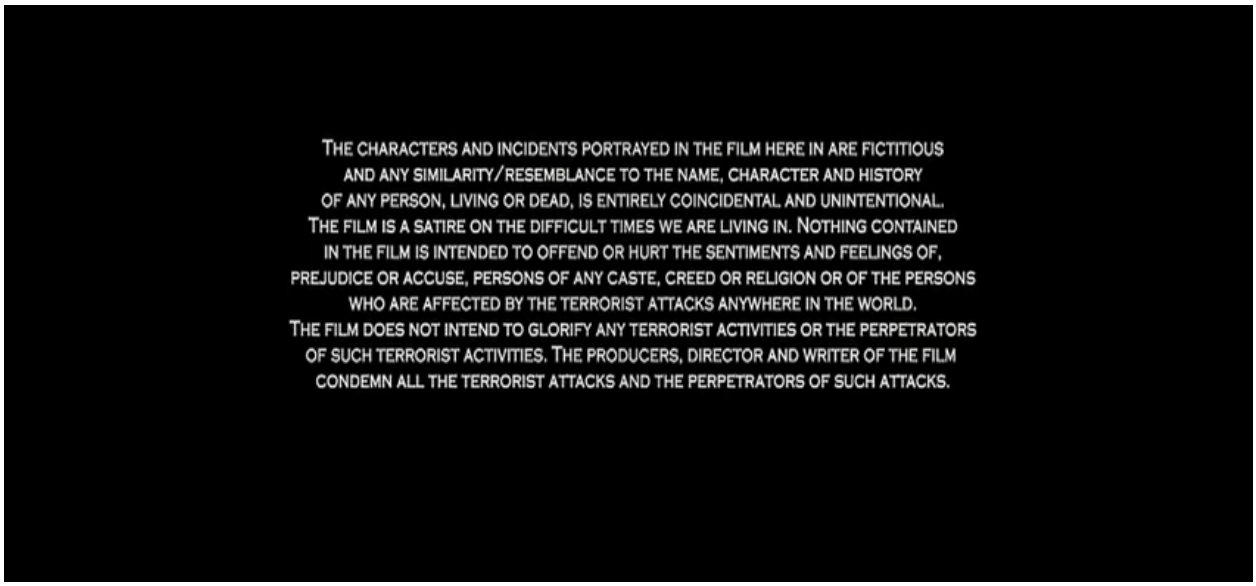

Fig. 40. Screenshot

As a standard practice, such disclaimers appear before most fictional or narrative films. However, this disclaimer, I would argue, performs its function in a particularly tongue-in-cheek way. The first sentence is typical; however, it is remarkable irony inherent in the second sentence that makes this disclaimer truly significant. It identifies itself as belonging to the genre of satire, and in so doing releases itself from the traumatic dimension of truth. Through this excuse of satire does this film not arrive uncomfortably close to the truth about Osama Bin Laden, in that he was, *in fact*, hiding in plain sight in Pakistan? It is somewhat of a general consensus in the international media community that one does not approach truth about Osama Bin Laden. In other words, one must lie or dissimulate where the topic of international terrorism is concerned. *Tere Bin Laden*, however, lies about this dissimulation itself, and in so doing reveals the truth. The second disclaimer slide calls attention to the *modus operandi* of *Tere Bin Laden*: namely, such double-deception occurs at the level of inter-textuality.

Fig. 41. Screenshot

The words *Kukduk Pencho*, uttered by a rooster (the subtitle of the film identifies it as a cock) in the general direction of Noor/Osama, indeed sound a lot like a common Hindi expletive. This trivial information aside, what this slide does is the remarkable work of a film-text reading itself. By announcing in this slide that it does not want to offend anyone with these words and by invoking an obscure reference as an apology for this expression, the slide effectively compels the viewer to look for this moment of offense in this film. What is this if not a bold declaration of the forthcoming self-conscious and inter-textual language game?

CHAPTER IV

THE SUBJECT AND THE OBJECT VOICE

Section I: Sound and Voice in Cinema

The previous chapters of this dissertation have elaborated on the ways in which the subject, whose arrival is supposed in and as a function of the intersection or interference of the synchronic and the diachronic axes of signification. So far, I have discussed the subject's arrival in relation to the interferences or disturbances in the process of signification in terms of temporality, spatiality and visuality. However, these dimensions of the subject's skewed relation to signification are relevant insofar as they run through spectatorial experience. Since such an assumed spectatorial position is necessary in the analysis of the subject's split-being, the experience of cinema provides a way to think about the structure of the subject who is supposed in the disturbance of signification. However, one prominent experiential register that this dissertation has not addressed so far is that of aurality. Hence, examining the subject's relation to signification in terms of aurality is the overall purpose of this chapter. Specifically, this chapter offers a two-fold argument: 1) that one factor in the subject's arrival is aurality—i.e. the domain of sound, which is constituted of audible and inaudible elements alike; and 2) that the subject's appearance is predicated upon distortions or disturbances in this domain, whereby the signification of sound remains only partially completed. The first part of the argument suggests that *seeing oneself look* alone is not sufficient as the basis for subjectivity—there must

also be the condition of *hearing oneself speak*. Similarly, the second part of the argument proposes that just as *seeing oneself look* becomes possible only when an empty object is introduced as a distortion of disturbance in the field of vision, in the same way, *hearing oneself speak* becomes possible only when another manifestation of the empty object disturbs the supposed consistency of the field of audition or hearing. The former model of the empty object—as the previous chapters have established through Lacan—is the gaze; in the same vein, the latter expression of the empty object is voice. The gaze is a form of the Lacanian *objet petit a* in the visual field, and thus should be properly called object gaze; likewise, voice is a form of *objet petit a* in the aural field, and thus should be properly called object voice. Thus, the question at the heart of this chapter is this: what is the subject's topological relation to object voice?

It is not surprising that one of the best ways to examine the spectator-subject's—or, more properly speaking, the auditor-subject's—relation to aurality is through the study of cinema. After all, cinema is the audio-visual medium *par excellence*, and audition plays a significant role in one's experience of cinema. Naturally, film theorists have examined the role of aurality in cinema from the very beginning of sound cinema. For instance, Rudolf Arnheim, in his book *Film as Art*, suggests that the incorporation of sound takes away from the artistic or aesthetic quality of cinema, since the conjugation of image and sound turns cinema "nearer to nature" and therefore away from its artistic potential.[99] He further argues in "Film and Reality" that "only after one has known talkies is the lack of sound conspicuous in a silent film."[100] Arnheim's strongest criticism of sound cinema appears in "A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film." In this essay, Arnheim argues that sound cinema is formally unstable because two mediums of art—

99 . Rudolf Arnheim, "The Making of a Film," in *Film as Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957 [1933]), 75.

100 . Arnheim, "Film and Reality," 33.

namely, sound and image—which should be autonomous, compete for the spectators' attention.[101] More specifically, he identifies speech as that which is utterly incompatible with the expression of the image. Arnheim writes:

> The two elements whose rivalry the motion picture cannot reconcile are, of course, image and speech. It *is* a surprising rivalry, if we remember that in daily life talk rarely keeps us from seeing, or seeing from listening. But as soon as we sit in front of the movie screen we notice such disturbances. Probably we react differently because we are not used to finding in the image of the real world the kind of formal precision that in the work of art presents—by means of the sensory data—the subject and its qualities in a clear-cut, expressive way.[102]

To be clear, Arnheim criticizes the incorporation of sound because it makes cinema too close to real life, and it is his estimation that art needs to be autonomous from what he calls "daily life." However, the central part of his charge against cinema-sound is that it causes a split in the spectator's experiential register, and that this split appears as a disturbance of sensory comprehension. In other words, on the one hand, the incorporation of sound disturbs the signifying consistency of the filmic image, and on the other hand, the presence of the image distorts the coherence of the aural domain. This disturbance is particular to cinema, Arnheim argues, because—unlike daily life, where one forecloses such disturbance of the sensory registers—cinema presents the sensory data with a high degree of formal precision.

It is noteworthy that Arnheim's examination of sound in cinema takes place with the inception of sound technology in cinema. However, as sound technology became more formalized and integrated into the practice of film-making, such consideration of aurality was

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101 . Arnheim, "A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film," 199.

102 . Ibid., 200.

gradually replaced by a developing interest in the mechanics of sound design and production in cinema. This new line of inquiry about cinema sound was taken up by film scholars such as André Bazin in 1967 and Christian Metz in 1980. Bazin—in his essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema"—argues that the introduction of sound technology has given cinema the capability to reveal the contours of reality in a more extensive way. Addressing the concerns that preceding film theorists—such as Arnheim—had about film-sound, Bazin writes that

> By 1928 the silent film had reached its artistic peak. The despair of its elite as they witnessed the dismantling of this ideal city, while it may not have been justified, is at least understandable. As they followed their chosen aesthetic path it seemed to them that the cinema had developed into an art most perfectly accommodated to the "exquisite embarrassment" of silence and that the realism that sound would bring cou1d only mean a surrender to chaos. In point of fact, now that sound has given proof that it came not to destroy but to fulfill the Old Testament of the cinema, we may most properly ask if the technical revolution created by the sound track was in any sense an aesthetic revolution.[103]

Bazin goes on to argue that the incorporation of sound in cinema made visible two "opposing trends" in film-making—namely, "directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality."[104] Of course, it is Bazin's contention that the purpose of cinema is not to create art for art's sake, but to reveal—via the arsenal of stylistic elements of cinema—that which the spectator cannot normally grasp about reality. Hence, Bazin writes:

> Undoubtedly, the talkie sounded the knell of a certain aesthetic of the language of film, but only wherever it had turned its back on its vocation in the service of

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103 . André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What is Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005 [1967]), 23.

104 . Ibid., 24.

> realism. The sound film nevertheless did preserve the essentials of montage, namely discontinuous description and the dramatic analysis of action. What it turned its back on was metaphor and symbol.[105]

Thus, according to Bazin, the use of sound allows cinema to describe and analyze action, rather than provide metaphors and symbols with which reality is approximated. From this, Bazin concludes that with the incorporation of sound cinema has truly fulfilled its potential, and thus the "film-maker is no longer the competitor of the painter and the playwright, he is, at last, the equal of the novelist" (Bazin 2005 [1967], 40).

Bazin's study points out the ways in which the incorporation of sound enhances cinema's capability to describe and analyze the material-objective world. However, it was Christian Metz who sought to establish the autonomy of sound in the domain of the object: thus, for Metz, film-sound should be thought of as an aural *object*, separate from the visual object or source that corresponds to this sound.[106] Metz points out that although sound has its distinct objective presence, the identification and description of the aural object requires another—usually visual—object as the source of this sound. Metz writes:

> When I have recognized a "floor lamp" and can name it, the identification is completed and all that I could add would be adjectival in nature. But, on the contrary, if I have distinctly and consciously heard a "lapping" or a "whistling", I only have the feeling of a first identification, of a still incomplete recognition. This impression disappears only when I recognize that it was the lapping of a river, or the whistling of the wind in the trees.[107]

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105 . Ibid., 38-39.

106 . Christian Metz, "Aural Objects," *Yale French Studies* no. 60 (1980): 27.

107 . Ibid., 25.

Metz argues that the recognition and description of sound appears to be incomplete—as opposed to the sense of completion that the visual object provides—because the "subject-predicate structure" of the "Western philosophic tradition" rigidly distinguishes between "the primary qualities that determine the list of objects (substances) and the secondary qualities which correspond to attributes applicable to these objects."[108] Thus, Metz argues that in the Western philosophic tradition, the attributes or qualities of the aural object are considered tertiary to the attributes of the visual. Metz goes on to point out that the assumed tertiary nature of the aural object leads film theory to posit the problematic notion of off-screen sound. According to Metz, the notion of off-screen sound, and by extension off-screen voice, is flawed because

> We tend to forget that a sound in itself is never "off": either it is audible or it doesn't exist. When it exists, it could not possibly be situated within the interior of the rectangle or outside of it, since the nature of sounds is to diffuse themselves more or less into the entire surrounding space: sound is simultaneously "in" the screen, in front, behind, around, and throughout the entire movie theater. (Metz 1980, 29)

To be clear, Metz' analysis gives sound or the aural object primacy over the visual object: while the representation of the visual object is limited within the two-dimensional surface of the screen, the aural object undergoes "no appreciable loss in relation to the corresponding sound in the real world" (27). This leads Metz to claim that "nothing distinguishes a gun shot heard in a film from a gun shot heard on the street" (27). Of course, Metz is interested in the aural object because the assumed fullness of the aural experience strengthens his project of ideological analysis of cinema. According to Metz, the examination of the aural object shows that

108 . Ibid., 27.

> the perceptual object is a [socially] constructed unity [of] the conditions of possibility of the lived, the structures of production which create the lived and are abolished in it, which simultaneously find in it the site of their manifestation and their negation: the objective determinants of subjective feeling. (32)

Metz' interest in the ideological dimension of the aural object is an excellent example of the ways in which early Lacanian film theory engaged with the question of sound in cinema. Just as the gaze was considered to be the way in which the subject identifies with the misrecognized fullness of its specular image, the aural object offers a false immediacy or directness of experience. Thus, even though it cannot directly express the experience of sound without taking recourse in symbolic language, the subject falsely believes that such direct access is possible. Given that early Lacanian film theorists—and Metz is a prominent member of this group—were deeply invested in ideological analysis as a way to dispel the false or Imaginary plentitude that cinema promises the subject, it is understandable why Metz wants to examine the ways in which the experience of sound is ideologically constructed as the aural object that suffers no loss in its representation in cinema. Thus, Metz' goal is to study the aural object following early Lacanian film scholars' interpretation of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage: a stage in the subject's development in which the subject identifies with its specular image which has the false appearance of fullness.

This interpretation of Lacan's notion of the mirror stage—an interpretation that contemporary Lacanian scholars have sought to rectify—is applied to the study of film-sound by Kaja Silverman. In her book, *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman argues that even though film theorists have amply examined the "construction of woman as the object of the male gaze … it has somehow escaped theoretical attention that sexual difference is the effect of dominant cinema's *sound* regime as well as its visual regime, and that the female *voice* is as relentlessly

held to normative representations and functions."[109] Silverman's goal in this book is to provide an ideological analysis of the ways in which the male subject in cinema is identified with the—albeit false—sense of presence or fullness that voice provides, while the female subject's voice is presented as partial or incomplete. In this way, Silverman considers the aural domain of cinema as akin to the Imaginary visual domain of the Lacanian mirror stage. Silverman's psychoanalytic interpretation of voice as a category of sound holds a significant place in the theorization of film-sound following Lacan's conception of voice as *objet petit a*.

Silverman's argument about the female voice in cinema, in *The Acoustic Mirror*, is vast in scope. However, I will engage with only her interpretation of voice as *objet petit a.* Silverman's explication of voice in cinema set the tone for the subsequent psychoanalytic examinations of sound in cinema in the same way that Laura Mulvey's interpretation set the tone for the discussion of the gaze in cinema. Even though a significant number of contemporary Lacanian film theorists have sought to revise Mulvey's analysis of the gaze, no such concerted effort exists regarding the revision of Silverman's interpretation of voice as *objet petit a*. The only contemporary film theorist who has engaged with the notion of voice following Lacan is Mladen Dolar—the following sections of this chapter will present Dolar's argument at length. Since Dolar engages with Silverman only marginally—he mentions Silverman twice in his two-hundred and thirteen page book, *A Voice and Nothing More*—I will provide a brief summary of Silverman's account of voice as *objet petit a*.

In *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman points out that film theory relies upon the psychoanalytic notions of castration, fetishism and disavowal to account for the fact that underlying the spectators' experience of cinema is always a sense of loss, in the sense that cinema presents the spectator with an image of the objective world, while no object is actually available

109 . Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: IUP, 1988), viii.

to the spectator. This sense of loss of the object, Silverman argues, is also a loss of and in the subject. Silverman writes:

> The history of the subject who rediscovers him-or herself within cinema unfolds through a series of "splittings" or divisions, many of which turn on the object. Indeed, the case can be even more forcefully stated: These splittings or divisions produce both subject and object, constituting the one in opposition to the other. The child's entry into the symbolic order is made only at considerable cost, not merely through the loss of numerous "parts" of itself, which are relegated to the status of objects, but through the sacrifice of its own being.[110]

Clearly, what Silverman is referring to in this passage is Lacan's conception of the mirror stage, which supposedly marks the subject's entry into the symbolic order or the domain of ideology. The loss felt by the spectator of cinema is compared to the loss or sacrifice that the subject undergoes in the mirror stage. Of course, Silverman is correct in pointing out that in Lacanian psychoanalysis the subject of the symbolic order is always a split subject. However, the oppositional logic between the subject and the object—a logic that, for Silverman, *constitutes* both the subject and the object—is far more problematic. Silverman argues that the objects which are produced as a result of the splitting—and Silverman calls them "part objects"—are numerous parts *of* the subject, which the subject must sacrifice—i.e. give up—in order to enter the symbolic order. This would mean that the part objects initially *belong* to the subject; it is only when these parts are lost to the subject that they become objects. Naturally, Silverman concludes that the production of the part objects is a kind of relegation or degradation. However, when Silverman identifies voice—specifically, maternal voice—as a manifestation of this degraded, part object, her misreading of the mirror stage and the subject's relation to *objet petit a* becomes apparent.

110 . Ibid., 6.

In her attempt to explain why the part objects are foundational to the subject of the symbolic order, Silverman directly invokes Lacan's notion of *objet petit a.* She writes:

> The child's as yet unsteady grasp of its own boundaries becomes firmer with the severance of various objects it previously experienced as parts of itself—the breast, the feces, the mother's voice, a loved blanket. However, these objects retain their aura of presence even after they have absented themselves, and are consequently described by Lacan as *objets petits autres* (objects with only a little "otherness"). Since these objects are carved out of the subject's own flesh, they attest with unusual force to the terms under which the subject enters the symbolic—to the divisions through which it acquires its identity, divisions which constitute the world of objects out of the subject's own self. Although its full impact will not be felt until later, with the entry into language and the Oedipal matrix, the partitioning off of the part objects from the infant subject is experienced as a castration.[111]

Silverman takes exceptional liberty in adapting Lacan's example of *objet petit a*: for Lacan, *objet petit a* is a topological structure or an empty object—rather than material objects, such as the mother's voice or a loved blanket. However, in Silverman's interpretation, *objet petit a* loses its structural emptiness and becomes concrete, material objects that once belonged to the subject. In Lacan's formulation, the *objet petit a* is *precisely* what the subject never had and never will have. The *objet petit a* signifies that no matter how much or how many different material objects is had by the subject, something always remains unattained. The discussion of the various manifestations of *objet petit a* in "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" clearly demonstrates how Silverman's interpretation of *objet petit a* deviates from Lacan's formulation. In this essay, Lacan introduces the graph of desire, which clearly shows that the

111 . Ibid., 7.

objet petit a is always inaccessible to the subject—not because it is an object which the subject has lost, but because *objet petit a* indicates the incomplete or partial nature of the process of signification. Lacan elaborates the nature of the *objet petit a* with the following examples:

> The objects [the *objet petit a*] described by analytic theory [are]: the mamilla, faeces, the phallus (imaginary object), the urinary flow. (An unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice—the nothing.) For is it not obvious that this feature, this partial feature, rightly emphasized in objects, is applicable not because these objects are part of a total object, the body, but because they represent only partially the function that produces them?[112]

The graph of desire shows that the *objet petit a* is produced as a function of the process of signification. Thus when Lacan says that the *objet petit a* is partial because "they represent only partially the function that produces them," he means that the process of signification or the signifying chain never reaches completion. Because the signifying chain remains incomplete, the process of signification produces a remainder or a left-over: this remainder is the *objet petit a*. As a remainder of the structural operation of signification, the *objet petit a* can only signify the partial or incomplete nature of the signifying chain. Thus, contrary to Silverman's interpretation, *objet petit a* cannot signify the various objects that the subject previously experienced as parts of itself. When the subject experiences an object as its former part, that object is already signified: i.e. in order to experience something as *absent*, one must first experience it as *present*. However, according to Lacan, *objet petit a* is never fully present to the subject.

The difference between Silverman and Lacan becomes more prominent when one compares their discussion of the salient features of *objet petit a*. For Silverman, the various manifestations of the *objet petit a* retain an aura of presence even though the subject experiences

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112 . Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 2001), 241.

these objects as *former* parts of itself. Silverman argues that the subject experiences the *objet petit a* as fragments of its own, formerly whole, self. In this way, Silverman claims that the fragmentation caused by *objet petit a* compels the subject to create the world of objects in the image of its own lost wholeness. In contrast, Lacan points out that the crucial feature of *objet petit a* is that it has no specular image or corresponding object in the material world. Lacan writes, referring to the *objet petit a*: "These objects have one common feature in my elaboration of them—they have no specular image, or, in other words, alterity. It is to this object that cannot be grasped in the mirror that the specular image lends its clothes" (Lacan 2001, 241). Thus, when the subject can be said to experience *objet petit a*, the result is not felt as a loss; rather, the manifestation of *objet petit a* in the experiential register is the production of desire. In contrast to Lacan's view that the *objet petit a* is an object that designates what never belongs on the side of the subject, Silverman sees *objet petit a* as belonging to the subject. It is this misconception regarding the structure of *objet petit a* that leads Silverman to argue that voice in cinema functions as a lost aural object to which the subject once had full access.

In contrast to the designation of voice as a material object which once belonged to the subject, I argue in this chapter that voice is best understood as the object-cause of desire in the aural domain. I argue that object voice or voice as *objet petit a* is foundational to the subject, because it seductively appears—in the form of a slight disturbance—as the constitutive disjunction between the visual and the aural register of cinema. I substantiate my argument through the analysis of three Bollywood films—namely, *Alam Ara* (1931), *Abhimaan* (1973), and *Sholay* (1975)—in which voice appears as the object-cause of desire that propels the narratives. My attempt in this chapter is twofold: 1) to point out specific stylistic elements of cinema-sound in Bollywood; 2) to theorize the relationship between the lack of audio-visual synchrony and the precipitation of a skewed form of subjectivity.

Section II: Between the Voice and the Face

Mladen Dolar's study of the topology of voice as it appears in the aural experiential register of the human subject opens with an anecdote of the Italian soldiers who, upon receiving a vocal command from their leader to attack, fail to respond appropriately. More significantly, the soldiers remain transfixed, bound in a profoundly appreciative veneration of the sound of their commander's voice: *Che bella voce!* is their response to the chief's command. It appears that the soldiers fail to receive and decode the linguistic message—in other words, the meaning—of the chief's command because the beauty of the commander's voice captures them in its aura. The point of this anecdote, for Dolar, is not whether the commander's voice was really beautiful. The crucial point of the story is that the soldiers acknowledge the beauty—that particular sonic quality, which appears to be aesthetically appealing—of the commander's voice *at the cost of* acknowledging the meaning of the message that the voice carries.[113]

One can be cynical about the soldiers' act of replacing the message or meaning of the voice with its particular sonic quality, and say that the soldiers knew only too well what the vocal command meant. As stereotypical, cowardly Italian soldiers, they chose to pretend incomprehension because that would have necessitated their engagement in combat. Not prepared to do so, the soldiers acted as if the sonic quality and the message of the command are two distinct entities, among which, *only* the sonic entity of the command is worth acknowledging. Conversely, one can also appreciate the soldiers' (in) action as a function of the culture to which they belong: after all, they are *Italian* soldiers, who are culturally mandated—through opera—to acknowledge and enjoy the aesthetic appeal of the sonic qualities of voice. No matter which stereotype of Italians—cowards or aesthetes—one wishes to subscribe to, one point becomes

113 . Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 3.

amply clear from this anecdote: meaning and aesthetic enjoyment may not be perfect bedfellows insofar as voice is concerned.

Although the disjunction between meaning and aesthetic enjoyment *apropos* the aural entity may be specific to the Italian soldiers' anecdote, one should not fail to note the two terms in this disjunction: voice and meaning. While the soldiers disregard the meaning of the command, what they appreciate is the voice that carries the meaning. In this sense, Dolar argues, what the soldiers appreciate as *che bella voce* is the medium, which is the voice.[114]. At the other end of this disjunction is the meaning of the chief's command, which,—had the soldiers acknowledged their understanding of it—would have prevented the aesthetically pleasing voice from appearing to the soldiers. Although Dolar, following the anecdote, places voice and meaning at two mutually exclusive loci, he points to a third level where voice is an "object voice which does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning, and does not solidify in an object of fetish reverence, but an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation."[115]

My point in recalling anecdote about the Italian soldiers leading up to Dolar's introduction of a third level in which voice belongs, is to lay the conceptual groundwork for a discussion of the role voice in the third level—i.e. object voice—plays in the experience of cinema. Object voice functions neither as the imperceptible medium that is eclipsed by the meaning that it carries, nor does it function as an object of aesthetic pleasure that has no connection whatsoever with meaning. Rather, existing in the third level, voice *qua* object voice seduces the viewer-subject by introducing a disturbance—a bar, a veil that prevents immediate access—in the subject's experiential domain. In other words, object voice in cinema seduces precisely because it does not allow the subject to have full access to the audio-visual experience

114 . Ibid.

115 . Ibid., 4.

that cinema promises. In this sense, object voice in cinema is neither merely an instance of aesthetically pleasing sound *sans* meaning, nor is it the seamless juxtaposition of sound and its source leading to a flawless understanding of the specific meaning of the sound. A third possibility, I propose, exists: object voice occupies that locus *apropos* the viewer-subject's relation to cinematic pleasure, which is never fully integrated in the subject's experiential domain. In other words, where object voice is concerned, the viewer is presented with the possibility of a partial failure of experience. Extending Dolar's formulation of object voice as a disturbance, I will argue that the partial failure that object voice posits in the experiential domain of the viewer is at the very core of the seductive power of mainstream cinema. More specifically, the seduction of mainstream cinema subsists in neither the sound of beautiful voice nor the visual representation of beautiful face individually, nor does it subsist in the perfect synchrony of the face and the voice; rather, the pleasure of cinema comes into being, via object voice, when the visual and the aural registers are *slightly* mismatched. More specifically, this essay neither is an attempt to theorize cinema-sound *per se*, nor is it an attempt to examine the visual aspect(s) of cinema; rather, at its core, this essay is an attempt to interrogate and theorize the complex role voice *qua* object voice plays in our engagement with cinema.

Section III: In the Rear View Mirror

It is crucial to understand clearly the exact nature of object voice before launching into a discussion of its seductive function in specific Hindi films. Let us consider, at this point, the specifics of Dolar's formulation of object voice as an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation. Several features of object voice become apparent in this statement: object voice is—an object, a blind spot in the aural register, and a disturbance. In order to recognize the topography of our engagement with cinema vis-à-vis object voice, one needs to explore the three features of object voice at length.

One could easily fail to recognize in this formulation the specific sense in which Dolar considers voice as an object. Object voice, in this sense, is always beyond the reach of the subject. Therefore, object voice, as such, introduces a blind spot, a disturbance in the subject's experiential domain: it always exists as a remainder of the structural operation through which the subject attempts to constitute itself as a subject-in-the-act-of-knowing. Dolar addresses the specific logic, which points to the status of object voice as a remainder or leftover in the following way:

> There is the signifying chain, reduced to its minimal features, which yields, as a result or as a leftover, the voice. It looks as though there is a reversal: the voice is not taken as a hypothetical or mythical origin that the analysis would have to break down into distinctive traits, not as a diffuse substance to be reduced to structure, a raw material to be tamed into phonemes, but, rather, the opposite—it stands at the outcome of the structural operation. (Dolar 2006, 35)

Here, Dolar refers to Jacques Lacan's formulation of the graph of desire in "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire." It is crucial to understand the precise sense in which Dolar designates to voice the status of a leftover object.

In Lacan's formulation of desire, the object occupies a very specific locus: the object is what the subject does not possess, and therefore it is something that initiates the subject's desire. It might appear that the object, which the subject does not possess, is a finite object, which the subject looks for to fulfill his desire. However, Lacan also points out elsewhere that satisfaction of desire does not subsist in its conclusion: desire, Lacan points out, is the desire for desire.[116] The subject remains satisfied as a subject of desire insofar as desire, *per se*, remains possible. However, if the object—one that the subject apparently looks for—becomes available to the

116 . Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 723.

subject, then the subject's desire comes to a conclusion. Thus, as a condition of satisfaction of the subject's desire *as such*, the object cannot be materially available to the subject. The object, in this sense, is always to be missed by the subject: *apropos* the subject's desire, the object must always remain non-material, unavailable as a finite object. Insofar as the Lacanian object remains beyond the subject's access, it keeps the possibility of desire *qua* desire for something else alive. In its very structure, the Lacanian object, via its unavailability to the subject, holds the promise of a beyond, which appears to the subject as the locus of plentitude—complete satisfaction of its desire—which is never fully actualized. As the Lacanian object prevents the subject from reaching this locus of plentitude, it gestures to the possibility of something that the subject did not *quite* get. In this structure, the Lacanian object appears to the subject as that which is always-to-be-had. What the Lacanian object offers the subject is an intensely luring promise: the possibility that if the subject had access to the always-to-be-had object, the subject's desire would be fulfilled. In this sense, the Lacanian object is what the subject can never fully possess: it is always left out of the equation as a remainder, or a leftover. Therefore, if the structural operation that Dolar refers to is understood in terms of the logic of desire, the object—which, in this case, is voice—must remain beyond the subject's access. In this sense, object voice—insofar as it does not terminate the structural operation of desire by becoming fully available to the subject—is also a leftover. However, the question that remains unanswered at this point is that if object voice is an object in the precise Lacanian sense, what plentiful beyond it promises to the subject *if the subject had access to it.*

In order to investigate the exact nature of the promissory beyond that object voice offers to the subject, one needs to recall the second feature of object voice that Dolar points out: object voice is a blind spot in the aural register. In terms of the Italian soldiers' anecdote, object voice appears when the commander's call fails to invoke any response from the soldiers: as if the soldiers did not hear—and therefore did not understand—what the commander ordered them to

do. This moment of apparent aural failure prevents the soldiers from the possibility of fully understanding the command and acting accordingly. What the soldiers avoid in this scenario is the declaration that they are in full cognition of the commander's call: they feign misrecognition. Interestingly, Lacan speaks to the role of misrecognition in the constitution of the subject *in the act of knowing itself* when he formulates the graph of desire that Dolar uses to define object voice. Lacan writes:

> Here arises the ambiguity of a misrecognizing that is essential to knowing myself. For, in this rear view, all the subject can be sure of is the anticipated image—which he had caught of himself in his mirror—coming to meet him.[117]

In this passage, Lacan refers to that vector in the graph of desire, which Dolar chooses not to address; i.e. the line that represents the movement that produces the subject *qua* subject of self-knowledge. This vector takes the subject through that line in the graph of desire which yields, as a result or as a leftover, the voice (Dolar 2006, 35). Therefore, voice—or more specifically, object voice—as a leftover, produces the subject in the act of knowing itself: although the act of knowing is fundamentally a misrecognition. In order to explain why misrecognition is essential to the subject's self-knowledge, Lacan posits the schema of the subject's anticipated image captured in the rear view. The subject's image in the mirror refers to Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage as a formative juncture of the subject's unconscious—but that is not our point of inquiry at this moment. Consider instead, the specific locus of the image vis-à-vis the subject: the self-image is something that the subject is never fully cognizant of. Although the subject's encounter with the image is always in the past—denoted by Lacan's rear view metaphor—in the sense that the image has already appeared in the subject's experiential domain, something is always left over in that encounter. The subject's cognition of the image, in this sense, is never complete: the

117 . Ibid., 684.

subject's encounter with the image is always irrevocably in the past, and *not* in the present. In other words, the subject never *possesses* the image fully: while the subject's encounter with the image *has already taken place*, the subject continues to expect that it will be able to fully possess the image *in future*. The self-image, for the subject, is always *to-be-had*. This recognition, on the part of the subject, that there exists—albeit in future—a locus where the self-image will be fully available is therefore a fundamental misrecognition: the subject's encounter with the self-image is always a missed encounter.

If it appears strange that Lacan describes a visual missed encounter while formulating the role of object voice in the constitution of the subject *in the act of knowing*, for clarification one needs to look no further than Dolar's definition of object voice: it is a blind spot in the aural register. In what sense does voice *qua* object voice indicate a disjunction between the visual (blind spot) and the aural register? It is precisely because the blind spot in the visual register and voice are both objects in the specific Lacanian sense: they are, what Lacan calls, *objets petit a.* In terms of desire, *objet petit a* is that promissory object which, insofar as it remains beyond the subject's immediate access, makes desire possible for the subject. Thus the other name for *objet petit a* is object/cause of desire. However, if object voice is an instance of *objet petit a*—and therefore remains beyond the subject's immediate access—what does it cause, or make possible, for the subject? The answer to this question leads us to the heart of Lacan's formulation of *objet petit a*, via Dolar's definition of object voice as a disturbance. Insofar as object voice appears to the subject as a disturbance, the subject finds itself in a situation in which sonic or aural component of sound does not fully coincide with the source of the sound, leading to a lack in the subject's comprehension of the sound *qua* meaningful sound. However, precisely because object voice prevents the complete juxtaposition of sound with its source, it prompts the subject to attempt to bridge the gap between the sound and its source, and thereby make comprehension possible. In other words, object voice—as an instance of *objet petit a*—insofar as it remains

beyond the aural register of the subject, makes meaningful hearing possible. Thus object voice, when it appears as the fissure between the aural and the visual register of cinema, makes enjoyment possible for the viewer. In this sense, object voice is at the constitutive core of cinematic enjoyment.

Section IV: The Conjeevaram Incident

An interesting example of the crucial role object voice plays in cinematic enjoyment appears in Neepa Majumdar's study of sound in Indian cinema. Majumdar writes, quoting from T. S. Mahadeo:

> In Conjeevaram the talkie people were beaten to the draw by a showman who, at his 'talkie display', hid interpreter, harmonium, female singer, all behind the screen. But the trick discovered, chairs were broken, screen torn. A justifiably suspicious audience was only asked to pay for admission after the Select Pictures party showed them the real thing.[118]

Majumdar argues that this incident points up to the unique cinema-viewing practice of the Indian populace with regard to sound cinema, in that for early sound film audiences, audio realism was understood not in terms of a sound quality that effaced its technological underpinnings, but rather in terms of the verifiable and visible marvels of sound technology, no matter how reduced their actual audio experience might be. While Majumdar's argument quite significantly points out that the cinema-viewer can have varying degrees of lines of established tolerance with regard to sound-image synchrony, it fails to take into account a more radical significance of the incident. I will argue, extending Majumdar's observation, that the cinema-viewers at Conjeevaram were responding violently *not* because the aural domain of the film show was diminished in any way

118 . Neepa Majumdar, "Beyond the Song Sequence: Theorizing Sound in Indian Cinema," in *The Continuum Companion to Sound in Film and Visual Media*, ed. Graeme Harper (New York: Continuum, 2009).

by the live music; they became violent precisely because the live music took away from them the unique seductive appeal of cinema. Consider the timing of the audience's violent behavior: they smashed chairs after the trick was discovered. What else did they lose but the trick itself—the pleasure that cinema offers by withholding full access to the source of sound? I will argue that what the audience lost in this case was the object voice *qua objet petit a*, which *only* the trick could offer.

Although Hugh Manon interrogates the role of trick as a constitutive element of cinematic pleasure in slightly different terms—his critical engagement with the cinematic trick considers it as *trompe-l'oeil*, a visual trickery—it will be fruitful for us to take into account Manon's formulation of the cinematic trick. Manon defines the trick as an inherently reflexive strategy that seduces audiences precisely by making them aware that they are being fooled.[119] The crucial distinction being made here is between being tricked and being fooled. While being fooled, Manon argues, involves deception in the first degree, being tricked requires a double-layered deception, where an apparent failure in the process of deception hints at the presence of something original or truthful beyond the manifest ruse. Insofar as the trick discloses to subject that, there's more to it than meets the eye by calling attention to the fact that deception is taking place, the subject is presented with possibility that beyond the apparent fakery there must exist something genuine. This promissory locus where the genuine is hiding, instigates the subject's attempt to find the truth, leading to the subject's enjoyable engagement. In this sense, the trick—a calculated failure of deception—functions as the Lacanian object: it is the *objet petit a* that makes the subject's enjoyment possible.

In the light of Manon's formulation of the cinematic trick, one could argue that, while the Conjeevaram incident by no means represents the totality of Indian cinema-viewing audience, it

119 . Hugh Manon, "Seeing Through Seeing Through: The *Trompe l'Oeil* Effect and Bodily Difference in the Cinema of Tod Browning," *Framework* 47, no.1 (2006): 61.

does point to the fact that in sound cinema, a partial failure in sound's fidelity to the moving image constitutes the unique, seductive pleasure for the viewer. My point in referring to this somewhat obscure incident is to indicate the radically important role object voice plays the experience of cinema: The lack of sound-image synchrony in Hindi cinema unabashedly declares to the audience that deception is taking place. By making the deception manifest, Hindi cinema captures the audience through the cinematic trick, whereby the inherently fake juxtaposition of sound and image is recognized as such, leading the audience to the possibility that something real must exist beyond the ruse.

Section V: All Talking, All Singing, All Dancing

A foundational example of the use of object voice, in the form of the cinematic trick, in Hindi cinema appears in the first full-length sound (talkie) film, *Alam Ara* (1931) that was advertised as all talking, singing, dancing. Corey K. Creekmur, pointing to *Alam Ara*, argues that while *The Jazz Singer* (1927) had already suggested that the future American cinema might *often* be musical, *Alama Ara* effectively demanded that the Indian cinema should *always* be so[120]. Creekmur's claim with regard to *Alam Ara*—while it might appear too broad, too much of a sweeping generalization—is quite significant to my argument. By unabashedly declaring that its focus does not lie with the reality of the cinema narrative, *Alam Ara* foregrounds its fidelity to object voice in all its dys-synchronous effects in cinema. In this sense, *Alama Ara*'s unique tagline—All Talking Singing Dancing—deserves a closer and more critical consideration. Consider the signifiers in the tagline individually, as well as in relation to each other. While All lends an all-pervasive presence to Talking Singing Dancing, at the same time it calls attention to the fact that *Alam Ara* is *nothing else but* Talking Singing Dancing. The signifier of totality, All,

120 . Corey K Creekmur, "Picturizing American Cinema," in *Soundtrack Available (*Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001), 378.

does not make any claim vis-à-vis the truth of the film: the tagline does not claim that *Alam Ara* is an entirely true story.

While Talking primariliy forgrounds the technological marvel of sound cinema, it also calls attention to the fact that talking, *as such*, takes place in the movie. No effort is taken to connect the talking with the characters that will engage in the act of talking, indicating a blatant disregard for complete sound-image synchrony. In the same vein, Singing and Dancing, while constitutively related to each other, are in no way connected with the filmic diegesis: they exist as somewhat autonomous entities. It appears as though the Talking Singing Dancing, rather than being ancillary to the filmic reality, is the cause for the audience's engagement with *Alam Ara*. How else can one understand this frank admission of fakeness but as an inherently reflexive strategy that seduces audiences precisely by making them aware that they are being fooled—i.e. the cinematic trick?

Alam Ara's engagement with the cinematic trick is not only limited to its posters. Trickery is also at work in terms of the narrative that *Alam Ara* follows. Filmed at a historical juncture when India was struggling with the colonial rule of the British Empire—while other performative art forms, such as *Jatra* (vernacular theatre), never failed to comment, however obliquely, on the current political condition of the country—*Alam Ara* narrates the mythical story involving Kings, Queens, numerous failed love-plots, revenge and retribution. The apparent lack of attempt to place the cinematic narrative in any context with the present time not only allowed *Alam Ara* to engage in a mythical-historical spectacle, but more importantly, the mythical-historical mode allowed for the insertion of numerous song and dance numbers. The bold refusal to engage with its time places *Alam Ara* decidedly in an irrevocable past-ness: it hails the audience from that locus which is always already unavailable for the audience. However, *Alam Ara*'s interpellation proved to be immensely seductive for the audience, *neither* because it offered an interesting story, *nor* because of the technological marvel of speaking, on-screen human

bodies. The audience saw through the first level of deception, identified the storyline as predictable, and noticed that while the sound-image synchrony was syllable perfect, the sound production was somewhat patchy (*Times of India*). However, by allowing the audience to discover the inherent fakery of cinema as such, *Alam Ara* plays the cinematic trick on them. It is as if *Alam Ara* boldly declares, "You sit there expecting entertainment, and I will give you entertainment and *nothing but.*" Insofar as the audience is able to identify the entertainment of cinema as such, the cinematic trick hooks the audience with the lure of something genuine, something true that exists in the promissory locus beyond the clearly visible ruse. This promise of a beyond, which appears to hold the key to the audience-subject's full enjoyment, is never actualized, nor does the viewer subject wish for the promise to deliver. As in the Conjeevaram incident, it is the trick that the audience finds enjoyable; in fact, when the trick is missing, the viewer's enjoyment is—often violently—prohibited. In this sense, the somewhat patchy sound production, the decidedly arcane, boldly fantastic plotline, and manifestly foregrounded Talking Singing Dancing of *Alam Ara* function as the Lacanian *objet petit a*: they act as disturbances/partial failure in the viewer's experience of the film, and thereby make enjoyment possible.

Slavoj Žižek formulates object voice in talking films—in terms of the Lacanian *objet petit a*—as a partial failure in the sound-image synchrony. Žižek writes:

> when we're talking, whatever we say is an answer to a primordial address by the Other—we're always already addressed, but this address is blank, it cannot be pinpointed to a specific agent, but is a kind of empty a priori, the formal condition of possibility of our speaking.[121]

121 . Slavoj Žižek, "I Hear You With My Eyes; or, The Invisible Master," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996), 90.

The blank address, sound *sans* a specific agent that Žižek refers to can be understood as a failure in the aural register. It is precisely when hearing fails—the aurality becomes blank—that one encounters object voice. However, the subject's encounter with object voice is by no means analogous to the encounter with other, finite objects. As Lacan's formulation of the *objet petit a* points out, the subject encounters it precisely as a blank: the encounter is always already a missed encounter. It is in this sense that Žižek formulates object voice as the formal 'condition of possibility' of our speaking. Žižek, referring to Lacan, further clarifies the foundational position of object voice *qua* object/cause of desire in engendering the subject's experience of reality in the following way:

> the consistency of our experience of reality depends on the exclusion of what he calls the *objet petit a* from it: in order for us to have normal access to reality, something must be excluded, primordially repressed. In psychosis, this exclusion is undone: the object (in this case, the gaze or voice) is *included* in reality, the outcome of which, of course, is the disintegration of our sense of reality, the loss of reality.[122]

Crucial to our understanding of this statement is the significance of the phrase, our experience of reality. For Lacan, the exclusion of the *objet petit a* from the subject's experiential domain is the ultimate proof that reality—insofar as it is experienced by the subject—is engendered by a misrecognizing that is essential to knowing myself. This misrecognition that full access to the object/cause of desire *will be* possible is fundamental to the subject's enjoyment. In other words, if *objet petit a* becomes available, then the subject loses the cause of desire, leading to the loss of enjoyment: this logic operates in the Conjeevaram incident. In this way, object voice, as the disjunction between the visual and the aural registers in cinema, engenders the viewer's

122 . Ibid., 91.

enjoyment *not* in the form of a successful juxtaposition of sound and image, but as a failure. This is precisely what Žižek means when he says, "what is the effect of adding a soundtrack to silent film? The exact opposite of the expected naturalization, that is, of an even more realistic imitation of life."[123] This *de*-naturalization in sound cinema, or the missed encounter between sound and its source, is analogous to the subject's relation to the *objet petit a*, which Žižek formulates as "that which can never be attained … is always missed; all we can do is encircle it."[124] The *objet petit a* is therefore *not* the finite object after which the subject runs; rather, it is the infinite structure that frames—as a closed set—*all* the possible finite objects after which the subject might run. Insofar as the *objet petit a* holds the infinite number of (infinitely repeatable) finite objects within its frame, it lures the subject with the possibility or promise of complete satisfaction—although the *objet petit a* always remains, autonomously, beyond the finite objects. In this sense, object voice *qua* the *objet petit a* is always autonomous: it is always disconnected from its visual source, and *as such*, is at the core of the pleasure of cinema.

Section VI: Basanti, what is your name?

To facilitate our understanding of the structural autonomy of object voice as the core of sound cinema's unique seductive appeal, let us jump, somewhat abruptly, to the first Indian cinema made with stereophonic sound recording—G.P. Sippy and Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975).[125] An extremely popular film in India, *Sholay* narrates the violent story of a righteous police officer's revenge against a notorious bandit. Although the revenge plot in *Sholay* stages the familiar good-against-evil trope, it becomes clear, early in the film, that the ethics of the good-

123 . Ibid., 92.

124 . Zizek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 4.

125 . *Sholay* is also the first Indian cinema shot in 70mm. In its time, *Sholay* was an impressive spectacle, even in terms of technology. Interestingly, *Sholay* did not employ its cutting-edge technology to enhance audio-visual realism. Instead, the technological *tour de force* is used to confer autonomous entity to the image track and the sound track *separately*. No effort is taken, I believe quite consciously, to bridge the gap between the aural and visual.

against-evil trope is problematic. The police officer, Thakur, employs two petty criminals—Jay and Veeru—to take revenge against the formidable bandit, Gabbar, on his behalf. The criminal duo arrives in the village, where Thakur is the patriarchal landowner, to launch a battle against Gabbar. When Veeru and Jay arrive at the village, they are greeted by a female *tangawali*—the driver of a horse-drawn cart—Basanti. Basanti's unique screen presence is bound up in the endless talking that she engages in, *in spite of* the very different responses she receives from each of her passengers: while Jay's vexation is clearly visible, Veeru is profoundly seduced, *not* by Basanti's physical beauty, *but* by her endless talking. Infact, at the end of the ride, a clearly besotted Veeru declares to his partner, *Kya pyaari baatein karti hain!* (How beautifully she speaks!)—a sentiment that Jay clearly does not share. During the *tanga* ride, as Basanti continues to talk, without paying any attention[126] to either Jay's cynicism or Veeru's infatuation, it becomes clear that her enunciation is not directed at the two men at all. The men *only* provide her with an occasion to engage in all talking; it does not matter to her whether they respond to her speech or not. At one point, a visibly irritated Jay asks Basanti—*after* she had identified herself as Basanti—"Basanti, what is your name?"

My point in referring to this somewhat comedic moment in *Sholay* has a crucial bearing on how sound is used in the film. The inherent paradox in Jay's statement brings to the foreground the disjunction between sound and meaning, rendering Basanti's speech-act essentially meaningless. In other words, even though—and *precisely because*—Basanti engages in endles talking*qua* talking, both Veeru and Jay fail to hear it: they encounter the sonic medium of Basanti's speech-act. Veeru and Jay's response to Basanti's talking is evidently analogous to the soldiers' reaction to the commander's voice in the Italian soldiers' anecdote: in both the instances, the listener-subject is caught up in the particular sonic quality of the sound *at the cost*

126 . For the most part, during the ride, Basanti does not even look at her passengers, although Veeru tries his best to catch her eye. To be seen by her, for Veeru, would guarantee that he, and no one else, is the addressee of Basanti's speech-act. However, this affirmation is precisely what Basanti holds back from Veeru.

of comprehending the meaning of the message that the voice carries. However, there is also a significant difference between the Italian soldiers' response and the response of Veeru and Jay to the beautiful voice. While the soldiers are transfixed in the aura of the beautiful voice, Veeru and Jay regard Basanti's voice as an obstacle, which, *if they could overcome*, would render Basanti's speech meaningful for them. Again, Veeru and Jay has unique positionalities vis-à-vis Basanti's voice as an obstacle. Veeru actively attempts to catch Basanti's attention so that he becomes the sole addressee of her enunciations, and therefore gains full access to the beauty that Basanti's voice holds. Jay, who is more cynical, is clearly after the truth of Basanti's identity—which he believes is hidden beyond the endless sound that constitutes Basanti's speech—by asking her to reveal her symbolic identification, *inspite of* her already-declared name. What Veeru and Jay—and along with them, the audience—encounter here is the cinematic trick, in accordance with Manon's formulation of the trick as an inherently reflexive strategy that seduces audiences precisely by making them aware that they are being fooled. Let us recall then the exact nature of the cinematic trick: in this sense, what else is the trick but object voice *qua* the Lacanian *objet petit a*? Insofar as the subject (Veeru, Jay, and the audience) sees through the primary flaw (the endless sound of Basanti's speech), the trick captures the subject by promising a locus beyond the apparent flaw, where meaning and/or beauty is perfectly juxtaposed with aural object. The subject is profoundly lured in this economy because object voice, following the seductive logic of the *objet petit a*, initiates the subject in the immensely satisfying path of desire. Therefore, it does not appear surprising when later in the film, object voice, in the form of an autonomous entity—disconnected from it visual source—plays a significant role in the way the romance between Veeru and Basanti plays out.

In his attempt to win Basanti's love, Veeru hides himself behind a statue of a deity in a local temple as Basanti arrives there to engage in her daily worship. From this hidden locus, Veeru speaks in the (fake) disembodied voice of god that commands Basanti to fall in love with

Veeru. Although Basanti is well aware of the unique aural quality of Veeru's voice, it appears that she initially fails to realize that the disembodied voice of god belongs to Veeru in reality. However, after a few moments of confusion, with the help of Jay, Basanti discovers Veeru, hidden behind the statute, speaking to her in the voice of god. Although Basanti appears to be annoyed, and initially rejects Veeru's amorous advances, it becomes clear in her body language that her interest is now aroused. Precisely through the structure of a trick, Veeru is able to draw basanti's attention, and now can proceed to become the sole addressee of her *pyaari baatein* (beautiful speech). The crucial point here is not that Basanti begins to reciprocate Veeru's love *because* god's voice has commanded her to do so; she does so precisely because Veeru's use of the trick, in the form of disembodied voice has given her the occasion to engage in the satisfying game of finding *something more* beyond the disembodied voice. It is precisely this promise of *something more* beyond what immediately meets the senses that seduces the subject: the lure does not subsist in realism—the sonic quality of Veeru's/god's voice—but in the act of hiding itself.

Let us recall—to understand how the obstacle itself lures the subject—a story that Lacan introduces in his 1964 seminar, "The Line and Light." In this seminar, while formulating the co-ordinates of the gaze as the *objet petit a*, Lacan tells the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios. As the story goes, Zeuxis and Parrhasios, two accomplished artists, engaged in a competition where Zeuxis painted a bunch of grapes, so lifelike that they duped even birds. However, Parrhasios triumphed over his friend by painting on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him said, *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it*[127]. Parrhasios's success is not painting a veil that appears to be real, however. What he succeeds to do is present his friend with the *representation* of the veil, which, in its very structure, indicates the possibility of a beyond. Zeuxis's enjoyment of the painted veil—which is the proof of Parrhasios's success—is caused by the structure of impossibility posited by the veil, not by its realism. Insofar as the

127 . Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 103.

painted veil—*as such*—withholds, Zeuxis can engage in a satisfying game of positing, via his fantasy, *something more* in the place that the veil indicates to in its beyond. In this sense, the painted veil is analogous to the Lacanian *objet petit a*: the object/cause of desire. A minuter—yet radically crucial—distinction needs to be made in the context of this story: Zeuxis's enjoyment of the painted veil does not subsist in a purely visual pleasure; his enjoyment also draws from the aural experiential register. In other words, Zeuxis would not have enjoyment, had he not been able to capture the structural impossibility of the painted veil via speech. When Zeuxis asks his friend to reveal what lies beyond the painted veil, he is fully aware that—in terms of his friend's painting—there is nothing beyond the veil. Nonetheless, he proceeds to ask the question *precisely because* the answer is blank: there is nothing there. In this sense, what lures Zeuxis is not only object gaze, but also object voice—a failure in the field of vision, as well as a blank spot in the aural register—in the form of a blank answer coming to meet him from the painting. In this way, one could understand the validity of Žižek's formulation of object voice as a gap in the field of the visible (Žižek 1996, 92-3).

Object voice, as a disjunction between the visual and the aural registers, appears in a more sinister form in *Sholay* via the character of the bandit, Gabbar. In the scene where Gabbar appears in the filmic diegesis for the first time, the disembodied sound of his voice plays a significant role. In this scene, Gabbar walks on a block of stone, his boots making emphatic clicking noise, as he talks to the members of his gang. The gang members are transfixed by his voice, even before his face appears in the visual domain. However, even before Gabbar utters a single word, the audience hears his maniacal laughter. As the gang members visibly cringe in the presence of this—so far—disembodied voice, the audience's attention is called to the fact that Gabbar's power does not lie with his physical prowess so much as it lies with what he withholds. In the following moments of this scene, Gabbar shoots three of his gang members immediately after he assures them that their life will be spared. The shooting scenario plays out in the

following way: Gabbar, in order to be just with the three gang members, takes out three bullets from his six-shooter revolver, spins the bullet chamber, and proceeds to shoot at the three bandits one by one. This set-up follows the logic of the Russian roulette, by turning chance into an act of ethics—what Gabbar calls *insaafi* (justice). Although the bandit characters show tension in their facial expression, the audience is well aware—at least after the revolver does not kill the second bandit—that the scene is being staged, quite self-consciously, as a set piece vis-à-vis the Spaghetti Western genre. The audience, in this sense, sees through the self-referential ruse of the Russian roulette scenario, and following the conventions of the genre, expects to hear resounding gunshots and see three dead bodies after the three blank shots. The film, *quite specifically*, delivers this promise: Gabbar shoots the bandits *exactly* at the conventional moment. However, because the audience has already experienced an overload of both sound (Gabbar's shouts) and silence (the dull click of the revolver indicating that everything else is silent), the deadly pistol shot sounds profoundly unimpressive. Following the amplified—too perfect—representation of the generic set-piece of the bandits' Russian roulette, the audience expects the pistol sound to be equally generic, pistol sound. What they get instead is a low amplitude, low reverb sound, coupled with the visual representation of the pistol firing and killing the bandits. Faced with this disturbance in the audio-visual domain, the audience pauses to consider whether the sound of the gunshot is real. Insofar as the film is able to engage the audience in this guessing game, it succeeds in seducing the subject: the film performs the cinematic trick on the audience. In effect, this sonic disturbance in the viewer's audio-visual experience acts as object voice by pointing to the gap in the audience's visual experiential domain: a gap that the viewer-subject then attempts to fill up, by trying to harmonize the visual elements with the clearly mismatched, autonomous, sonic entity.

Section VII: Song for the Self, Sung for the Other

A particularly apt example of an autonomous sonic entity can be found in the form of the song sequence of mainstream Hindi cinema. Most Hindi films add songs sung by vocal artists to the on-screen lip-syncing of the actor(s) in post-synchronized dubbing. As in the case of *Alam Ara*, the song sequence is usually the *raison d'être* for filmmaking in Hindi cinema. The songs, as well as the singers of such film-songs, have an autonomous existence beyond the scope of cinema. While the entertainment quotient of the song sequence is quite high on its own, it would be a mistake to overlook the symbiotic relationship between cinema and the song sequence in terms of entertainment. While cinema draws in the crowd through the popular appeal of the song sequence, the song sequence gains popularity as film-songs. In other words, when the audience encounters such songs outside of cinema, they encounter the film-songs *as such*: film-song is always referential to the cinema in which it belongs. The key to the immense popularity of film-songs in the domain of Hindi cinema is not whether the songs sound beautiful; the songs gain popularity only insofar as the audience is able to engage, via the song sequence, in a referential framework where the song sequence gestures to the filmic space, and the film refers to the songs. Thus, the audience's encounter with the song sequence is never complete in itself: the song sequence always gestures to something else that escapes the operation. If the song sequence and the cinema always exist as an infinitely repeatable referential structure, the topology of the song sequence itself follows the seductive logic of the cinematic trick. The audience of Hindi cinema and Hindi film-songs is always well aware that, in the song sequence within the filmic space, the aural element (i.e. the singer's voice) does not belong to the visual element (i.e. the actor's face). Thus, the song sequence manifestly plays out what Žižek calls an unbridgeable gap that separates forever a human body from its voice. By boldly declaring that the audio-visual representation of an actor singing a song is, in fact, inherently fake, Hindi cinema initiates a guessing game where the audience is presented with the promise *qua* promise of something else—beyond the apparent

deception—that must be genuine. This lure of the genuine object—one that is never actualized—proves to be profoundly seductive for the audience. In this sense, the seduction of the song sequence in Hindi cinema subsists in the autonomous existence of the voice *qua* object voice: it is, to an extent, what Michel Chion calls an acousmatic voice, a voice without a body.

Michel Chion addresses this disembodied voice in his formulation of the acousmatic voice with regard to sound in cinema. Chion's interests lie with the human voice—more specifically, with that form of (human) voice in cinema, which is neither entirely inside nor clearly outside of the audience's audio-visual experiential domain.[128] In other words, Chion seeks to theorize the ontology of voice as that particular sonic event which does not *fully* coincide with the representation of the cause of the sonic event in the visual domain. Borrowing from Pierre Schaeffer, Chion uses the word acousmatic to signify the partial status—in the experiential field of the human subject—of the voice that is *neither entirely inside nor clearly outside*. Although it might appear, *prima facie*, that Chion's formulation insists on the placement of the acousmatic voice within the aural register *only*, it soon becomes clear that Chion's conceptualization of the acousmatic voice engages the aural register with the visual register. However, the nature of this engagement—and consequently the ontological status of the acousmatic voice—is deeply problematic, as Chion's definition of the complete acousmêtre points out: the one who is not-yet-seen, but who remains liable to appear in the visual field at any moment.[129] The acousmatic voice, according to this formulation, is what stages an *aural* missed encounter in the *visual* domain: it is a point in the field of vision that has yet to reveal itself to the subject.

Although Chion's definition of the acousmatic voice might appear to be analogous with Žižek's formulation of object voice as that which points toward a gap in the field of the visible,

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128 . Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 4.

129 . Ibid., 21.

there exists a crucial difference between the two that makes Chion's formulation deeply problematic. Chion's definition of the complete acousmêtre demands that there is no manifest juxtaposition between the aural and the visual registers. However, in the example of the song sequence of Hindi cinema, it is evident that *even though* the aural and visual registers are diegetically juxtaposed (that is to say, within the filmic diegesis, the actor is *supposed* to sing the song), the viewer immediately identifies this juxtaposition as fake. Curiously, this fake juxtaposition, rather than making the voice *de-acousmatic*, lends objectal autonomy to the aurality of the song sequence. In fact, following the logic of the cinematic trick, one can argue that *precisely because* the aural and the visual registers are juxtaposed in the song sequence, there arises a gap—a disturbance in Dolar's sense—in the audience's experiential domain, that lures the audience by inviting them to fill up (overcome) this breach. In this way, the gap itself—the veil in Lacan's sense—addresses the viewer-subject *qua* subject-of-knowledge. In other words, the gap allows the subject to come into being as subject-of-knowledge. Reconsider Žižek's formulation—previously invoked in this chapter to clarify the empty, or blank structure of object voice—of the gap as a blank *address*:

> it is as if, when we're talking whatever we say is an answer to a primordial address by the Other—we're always already addressed, but this *address* is blank, *it cannot be pinpointed to a specific agent*, but is a kind of *empty a priori*, *the formal condition of possibility of our speaking*. (Žižek 1996, 90-1)

It is crucial that the Other's address remains blank, not directed to a specific subject. In its blankness, the Other's address draws out, as it were, my speech. Because the address is also not directed to any specific subject, I can respond to the Other, *as if* the address is directed at me. In this sense, the blank address—object voice—is the formal condition upon which I am able to speak. Thus, one could arrive at a formula of the audience's enjoyment vis-à-vis the song

sequence: the audience enjoys the song sequence only insofar she recognizes that the actor is, *in fact*, not singing the song only for herself.

An interesting example of Hindi cinema that utilizes, as its theme, the deep problem of the singer-actor singing for herself, is *Abhimaan* (1973). In this popular family drama, one finds Subir Kumar, a popular male singer who performs music onstage, and records songs for a living. Subir Kumar is not self-conscious about his musical stardom—he enjoys singing for his audience. In this sense, a character in the film says, Subir's music is *geet*: song performance for others. Eventually, Subir meets a village belle, Uma, who, as a classically trained singer, sings only for herself. In this sense, the same character in the film claims, her music is *sangeet*: song sung for the self. Subir is charmed by the intensity of Uma's personality, proposes to her, and marries her eventually. However, the way Subir's proposal plays out is quite unique. Rather than admitting that he will miss him once he goes away, Subir makes Uma confess that she will miss him. Following Uma's disclosure, Subir presses Uma to declare the reason for which she will miss him; Uma does not say anything at all. Uma's silence, which appears to be a resounding declaration of her love for Subir, allows Subir to constitute himself as the sole addressee or recipient of Uma's love. In this way, Subir is able to institute himself—as the *only other* audience—within the narcissistic structure of Uma's *sangeet*. However, what Subir introduces in Uma's song for the self is the Other: after all Subir's relationship to music is always already mediated by the Other in the form of his audience.

Trouble in Subir and Uma's marriage ensues following Subir's attempt to establish his wife as a performing and recording singer. Since Uma's music is essentially a song for the self—*apropos* which, Subir is the *only* audience—she sings for Subir, while Subir continues to sing for the audience. In a scene where Subir and Uma records a song together, Uma does not take her eyes off Subir, who keeps looking at the sound recordists for direction. The paramount importance of this moment becomes clear later in the movie, when Subir discontinues his

performing and recording career, due to a wane in his popularity—popularity that Uma now enjoys. The crucial point in this scenario is not that Uma and Subir sings differently, or that one sings better than the other: their dissimilarity subsists in the radically different ways in which they relate to their audience. While Subir's songs take into account—while performing or recording—the audience *as such*, they are not addressed to any specific member of the audience. Thus, each member of the audience can relate to Subir's songs *as if* the songs were addressed to them. Significantly, Subir's songs are most popular as recorded songs: songs, which—although they always exist in reference to Subir as the singer—have an autonomous aural entity apart from the corporeal presence of Subir. The audience of Subir's songs finds the gap that exists between Subir as the star singer, and his recorded songs immensely seductive because each of them find themselves addressed by the gap. Therefore, as is evident in one particular scene in *Abhimaan*, Subir's audience members try to call up Subir—right after one of his songs is played in the radio—to get to know the real Subir: they attempt to access the real man beyond the beautiful songs. In contrast, Uma's songs—before she met Subir—were directed only to herself. Afterwards, when she attempts to record a song with Subir, the only audience that exists for her is Subir: the audience, *as such*, is always excluded from her songs. Even when she records a solo song number, she continues to look away from the glass window in the recording booth that is a stand-in for the audience. Therefore, it does not appear surprising that when Subir refuses to listen to Uma's songs—played on the radio—Uma does not only stop singing, but she also stops speaking. Uma's song for the self cannot structurally withstand being sung for the Other.

While *Abhimaan* plays out the structural difference between the song that takes into account its audience as a constitutive element of its performance (*geet*) and its opposite (*sangeet*), the viewer is keenly aware of a deception taking place. The viewer of *Abhimaan* knows only too well that in fact neither Subir, nor Uma is singing: as actors, they are lip-syncing to vocal artists whom the audience can also identify. However, precisely at the point in which the viewer exposes

the simple deception, *Abhimaan* captures them via the cinematic trick. The discovery of the deception gestures to the presence of something genuine beyond the apparent fakery. This promissory locus where the genuine is hiding, instigates the subject's attempt to find the truth, leading to the subject's enjoyable engagement with the film. In this way, *Abhimaan*, quite self-consciously, draws attention to the constitutive gap that the song sequence of Hindi cinema introduces in the viewer's experience of the audio-visual domain of cinema. As a gap—a disturbance according to Dolar's formulation—the song sequence functions as the voice *qua objet petit a*, and promises the viewer a locus of imaginary plentitude—beyond the apparent failure—that will guarantee the viewer's unbarred access to truth. In this sense, the ubiquitous song sequence, as an instance of object voice, holds an extraordinarily significant place in shaping the viewer's enjoyment vis-à-vis popular cinema.

Section VIII: Gyrating Bodies

Through the discussion of some examples of mainstream Hindi cinema, I have pointed out the ways in which cinematic pleasure is always brought into being as a function of object voice *qua* the Lacanian *objet petit a*. Hindi cinema, in its popular form, never endeavors to achieve complete audio-visual synchrony—although technology to do so is entirely available in multi-million dollar Bollywood cinema industry. In fact, mainstream Hindi cinema succeeds by steadfastly refusing to engage in high-fidelity aesthetics in terms of the formal aspects of cinema, as well as in terms of content. By emphatically staging the song sequence *as such*, by unabashedly dubbing the actors' dialogues in post-synchronized sound editing, by boldly using the same vocal artist for lip-syncing actors of any age and any vocal quality, Hindi cinema blatantly declares its ulterior motive to the viewers. Since the viewer expects entertainment, Hindi cinema forthrightly declares, it will provide the viewers with entertainment and *nothing but*. Thus, the entertainment that Hindi cinema offers is always self-consciously entertaining. Therein lies the hook of mainstream Hindi cinema—the cinematic trick that appeals to the viewer-subject

on a fundamental level. In this way, at its core, Hindi cinema captures the way in which the Lacanian object/cause of desire is constitutive of the subject *qua* symbolic subject of desire. Thus, mainstream Hindi cinema—rather than aiming for more realism—heightened, over the years, the ways in which the disjunction between the aural and the visual registers seduces the viewer-subject.

A case in point is a particular development of the song sequence, known currently as item numbers. These item numbers are essentially song sequences within the film—often without any diegetic connection to the narrative—to which lithe actors gyrate, while exposing their bodies to the limits of censorship. In many cases, the actors dancing to these song numbers do not appear in the diegesis either before or after the item number. The item numbers, following the logic of the song sequence, prove to be the *raison d'être* for making the films in which they appear. Although the seductive appeal of the item numbers remains structurally similar to the cinematic trick, I would argue that they indicate an inconceivably bold development along the same lines. While encountering the item number, the viewer is abundantly aware—more so than in the case of the song sequence—that it is impossible to sing such intricately aspirated songs while gyrating so wildly. In fact, the item number does not even attempt to show the so-called singing actor's face, concentrating instead on the deeply sexualized visual representation of the actor's body. Crucially, the item number does not discriminate between genders in this representation: male and female actors alike are sexualized in item numbers. In doing so, the item number captures the viewer on a more fundamental level: it appeals to the viewer's desire for what is prohibited. The *quasi*-pornographic visual representation of the actors' (usually female) bodies that accompany the item numbers allow the viewer to engage with the obscene *qua* off-scene: if the item numbers make what is prohibited accessible, it does so precisely by calling attention to the representational status of the bodies, as well as of the singing voices that accompany the bodies disjunctively. The

viewer, faced with the gyrating bodies, and throbbing, pulsating songs—two elements that never quite come together—falls deeply in love with cinema.

CONCLUSION

LACANIAN FILM THEORY BEYOND THE SYMBOLIC AND THE REAL

This dissertation discussed the trajectory of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the field of film theory. Even though Lacanian film theory was prominently influential in the 1960s and 1970s, currently it has almost disappeared from the field of film and media studies. Early Lacanian theorists established numerous methods for the analysis of film, such as Apparatus theory, Feminist film theory, Suture theory, Marxist film theory, to name a few. However, in its current state, Lacanian film theory is severely marginalized, as evidenced by the limited number of books and journal articles devoted to this approach. Moreover, this endeavor is undertaken by only a handful of scholars. These contemporary Lacanian scholars—such as, Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, Todd McGowan, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, Lee Edelman—remain dedicated to the Lacanian field, but are rarely included in the so-called mainstream of film studies. The validity of Lacanian theory has been challenged in numerous ways. For instance, Gender theorists and Feminist film theorists have pointed out that Lacanian psychoanalysis is patriarchal in nature. Similarly, proponents of historical-materialist analysis of film have argued that the subject or the spectator invoked in Lacanian film theory is not historically verifiable. Proponents of Post-Theory have criticized Lacanian film theory on the grounds that this model of thinking about film works to affirm certain a priori concepts or assumptions—rather than testing such hypothesis—whereby films become mere examples and not an avenue to produce new and verifiable

knowledge. In other words, Post-Theorists accuse Lacanian film theory for the lack of scientific rigor in its methodologies.

However, contemporary Lacanian film theorists have attempted re-establish the significance of their discipline by pointing out that the early version of Lacanian film theory overemphasized Lacan's arguments regarding the ways in which subjectivity is completely determined by the Symbolic and the Imaginary order. In contrast, contemporary Lacanian theorists argue—through Lacan's notion of the Real—that the Symbolic order is not flawless. They argue that subjectivity is best understood as a result of the failure or partialness of the Symbolic order. Thus, the key term in contemporary Lacanian film theory is the Real, which designates the point at which the alleged consistency of the Symbolic order breaks down. For contemporary Lacanians, the notion of the gaze is one prominent way to think about the appearance of the Real in the Symbolic order. While early Lacanians theorized the gaze as the way in which the spectator-subject identifies with the image on the screen, contemporary Lacanians define gaze as the point at which the purported smoothness of the subject's perception of the image is interrupted. Thus, contemporary Lacanians claim that one can provide a more accurate analysis of spectatorship through this revised notion of the gaze as a manifestation of the Real in the Symbolic order. Similarly, a limited number of Lacanian film scholars have attempted to reformulate the notion of voice as the interruption of the aural domain of cinema. The common theme that runs through both early and contemporary Lacanian film theory is this: the subject has no agency. For early Lacanians, it was the Symbolic order that wielded complete control over the subject. For contemporary Lacanians, it is the Real—manifested in the Symbolic order as part objects, such as the gaze and the voice—that renders the subject powerless.

In this dissertation I have argued that the subject comes into being in relation to failures or disturbances that are inherent in the functioning of the Symbolic order. As a result, the subject comes into being not as a mere puppet of the Other; rather, the subject comes into being by

manipulating the inconsistencies in the field of the Other. Of course, the subject manipulates the Other because it desires to come into being—albeit retroactively—as a subject; or, more properly speaking, the subject manipulates the Other because it *desires*. Thus, in this process, the subject is also manipulated or lured by something that it sees as lacking, missing or inconsistent in the Other: essentially, a gap in the Other that *only* the subject can fill, and thereby can come into being. Thus, the subject in my formulation is a skewed subject: one that undoubtedly exists in relation to an Other, but one whose relation to this Other is off-kilter. Thus, my interpretation of subjectivity draws on the contemporary Lacanians' discussion of the ways in which the Real interrupts the smooth functioning of the Symbolic order. However, my analysis of subjectivity departs from that of the contemporary Lacanians in one significant way: while they suggest that the Real is a category of experience which renders the subject powerless, I argue that that it is possible to conceive of a kind of subjectivity that comes into being via an oblique relationship with the space of signification, by recognizing the Real *qua objet petit a* as that which is lacking in the Other, and then by manipulating the Other to reveal its lack.

I propose this re-thinking of the subject's agency through the analysis of seven Bollywood films. This choice is guided by two primary concerns: first, much of my conception of culture is mediated by my experience with Bollywood films; that is, these are the film that I grew up watching, and therefore I relate to these films beyond the conscious, analytical level; and second, in my experience, Bollywood films seem to solicit the kind of spectatorial identification with which early Lacanian film theorists extensively engaged, whereby the rupturing of narrative and stylistic signification—such as, the prolific use of song-and-dance numbers that break up the narrative—is included in the process of signification as a routine. Moreover, the seven Bollywood films that I discuss demonstrate a kind of subjectivity that actively manipulates the domain of the Other to reveal its inconsistencies. Thus, these films challenge the contemporary Lacanians'

notion that the subject lacks agency in relation to the Real. In other words, these films allow me to push Lacanian concepts to their limit.

The conjunction of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Bollywood cinema, in my view, is eminently fruitful for the future of a psychoanalytic film theory. Bollywood cinema challenges the analytical schema of Lacanian psychoanalysis, as the discussion of the films in this dissertation shows. As a result, Bollywood cinema broadens the scope of Lacanian film theory. By analyzing Bollywood films, Lacanian film theory can reclaim its relevance in film studies—not because Bollywood films affirm the already-established notions of Lacanian psychoanalysis, but because the inherent oddness of Bollywood compels Lacanian psychoanalysis to constantly revise its model of film-analysis.

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VITA

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Scope and Method of Study: This dissertation studies the rise and fall of Lacanian film theory from the 1960s to the present. After discussing the charges brought against Lacanian film theory from schools of thought as varied as Post-Theory, Analytical Philosophy and Gender Studies, this dissertation engages with the contemporary Lacanian theory's turn to the Real as a response to these criticisms. Drawing on the notion of topology from the clinical side of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this dissertation finally proposes an original intervention in the field of Lacanian film theory. Through the analysis of seven Bollywood films, this dissertation argues that it is possible to conceive of a kind of skewed subjectivity that comes into being via an oblique relationship with the space of signification, by recognizing the Real *qua objet petit a* as that which is lacking in the Other, and then by manipulating the Other to reveal its lack.

Findings and Conclusions: This dissertation argues that in theorizing about cinema, there is way to rethink the question of subjectivity without taking recourse in the ideas of spectatorship and identification. In contrast to early Lacanian film theory that sees the relationship between the subject and its Other as overdetermined and as a result, does not see any possibility of the subject's autonomy, this dissertation argues that the subject comes into being in relation to failures or disturbances that are inherent in the functioning of the symbolic order. As a result, the subject comes into being not as a mere puppet of the Other; rather, the subject comes into being by manipulating the inconsistencies in the field of the Other. At the same time, this dissertation challenges the contemporary Lacanians' claim about the absolute ascendancy of the Real as a category of experience over which the subject has no control. In contrast, this dissertation sees the Real as much more closely aligned with the structure of *objet petit a*, which can be understood as an object that appears to the subject as empty or missing. Just as the subject never really experiences *objet petit a* as a concrete object, in the same way, the Real is that which is missing from the subject's experiential domain. Finally, this dissertation proposes a reversal of the claim that there is no subject without the Real and argues that there is no Real without the subject, and that there is no subject without *objet petit a*.

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