Cinema: Reloaded

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An important component of a cultural approach to cinema is to find it in our imaginations, to read its symbolic forms and meanings, to cross-reference to the ways in which it is represented. In the era of multitasking and MUDs, cinema has undergone a revolution, if not in it's being, at least in its reception and practices of spectatorship. Cinema can no longer be clubbed under the larger narrative of Fantasy, because the very emergence of Fantasy as a commodity has changed the way it is perceived and understood. In fact, Cinema would be looked upon as a narrative that sustains the consumption of Fantasy within the new multi-plex culture within the fast growing urban metro spaces.

This paper aims to understand the hyperlinks between cinema and the cyberspace by looking at the supporting structures of the Multiplexes and Places of Loneliness (POL) in the last five years or so. In doing this, I shall also try to look upon fantasy, not as something that stays within the mind but in concrete consumable terms. The paper shall be stitched on to the narrative of the Spectator within the new cultures where the group is disseminated and replaced largely by selves stretched over many user identities and anchored on the physical notions of the individual body.

The paper is divided into four sections: The first section tries to look at the notions of Fantasy in terms of not what is produced but what is consumed. The attempt is to understand Fantasy as a consumer durable in the open markets and eventually to look at the reconfiguration of Reality (RL) with the consumption of Fantasy. In the second chapter I focus on the dislocation of the Cinema in the multi-tasking-plex culture and the blurring of the private and the public in these spaces. The focus is on the experience of going to the cinema being replaced by the experience of going to the multiplex, thus leading to a different kind of spectatorship. The third part draws from the notions of the matrix waking up to itself, borrowing from the narrative texts of <u>The 13th floor</u> and <u>The Matrix</u> and its sequels, in order to understand the anchorage of the cyberspace in the POL, where the new Cinema Spectator goes. Drawing from this discussion, the last section looks at the effects of global-cyber-capitalism on the cine-cultures in urban spaces in India. Cinema is being shaped by and is shaping spectatorship by lending itself to new forms of consumption. The effort is at understanding how the arrival of the cyberspace (cyberspace within cinema, cinema within cyberspace and the blur between the two in terms of technology, media and content) has altered the narrative of the cinema and the cine-goer to form a particular kind of hypertext available visible within the notions of Publicness in the Multiplex Culture.

1st Thread

With the synchronous development of international speculative capital and diasporic transnationalism, we can see an infinitely complex realm of cultural production, which is defined and is oriented around consumption patterns and consumer identification. To place Fantasy within this economic ground reality of accessorial consumption and its direct projection over identities, is to think of Fantasy not as something that exists in the realms of the mind but in the new shopping cultures which cater to the formation of identity, body and the Fantasy of the individual shopper. In a world where Shopolcoholism is looked upon with shining indulgence, consumption in the new shopping complexes, where the individual's Fantasy is projected in his/her consumption patterns, Fantasy no longer remains in the abstract and in the aesthetic, but becomes grounded in the material and the fashionable. It would not be erroneous to talk of want based shopping and consumption in the yuppie generations as a process of Fantasy fulfilment with one motto as its driving force: 'Enjoy!'

This consumption/Fantasy is different from the existing need-based shopping and is restricted to the POLs, which have originated to form a new notion of the Public Sphere. The case of a famous shopping arcade in Mumbai in 1998, which positioned rights of access around the possession of a cell-phone can be looked upon as the point of rupture in the narrative of consumption and shopping patterns till then. It was with the emergence of such places of apparent public consumption which came with a very clear warning on its ornate glass doors and security checks: 'Rights of admission Reserved', that Fantasy entered the arena of disposable consumer non-durables. Consumption illustrates the point that Zizek labours to make in The Plague of Fantasies; Fantasy animates and structures enjoyment while simultaneously serving a protective shield against its excesses. If all ideology needs to depend on some phantasmic background, Consumption as Fantasy is the dependence of the global liberal markets on the notions of shaping the body and self. Consumption is no longer located in free spaces and window-shopping became a passé - if you like it, you have it. There is a set of clear economic rites of initiation to these places where the consumer entered with imaginary money (the power of plastic - credit cards) and bought at will, in order to express, articulate and manifest one's identity, desires and Fantasy.

It is this shaping of the self through the 'lifestyle stores' that is of interest to me, because this new self constitutes new registers of publicness. The self is no longer a spiritual experience or a realisation of the 'higher realities' of purpose or karma. The self is a phantasmagoric being that exists in the consumer patterns and is stretched over various products ranging from designer clothes to branded shoes, fashion accessories, hairdos, cosmetics, lingo, literature, cinema, cellphones, food, automobiles, travel and tourism, clubs and leisure, social awareness, parties, alternative life styles, political discussions, beverage consumption, indulgence into the dance and pub cultures the list just goes on. The self as a consumer shows the hyperspatial characteristics of belonging to various spaces simultaneously - it is for

instance easy to blend **DKNY** accessories with **FCUK** clothes, consume **Foster's** as the true Australian beer and munch on **Thai** delicacies, travel in a **Merc** and talk India on a **Nokia** phone, and still partake of a 'Patriotic' ideology in cinema and a 'liberal Swadeshi' outlook in the latest club discussions. And it is this transient self, which changes with every fad and season that defines a new era of publicness and public consumption. The New Public Sphere, to keep it anonymous for the while being, is a place of Fantasy. It is available only to consumers and is sustained through the narratives of the Cinema and the Cyberspace. This however is a point that fits into the last parts of my mosaic.

Fantasy has been traditionally looked upon as an escape. Literature, performing arts and later Cinema have always treated fantasy as a genre, a way of coping with the harsh realities of life, by a willing temporary suspension of disbelief and thus escaping the disenchanted life of the city and the market. However, I propose, that the rise of the city leads to the incorporation of Fantasy in its structure, and Fantasy now exists in the re-enchantment of the city through consumer patterns. The Fantastic and the Phantasm now collide in the city to create modern myths and legends, which belong to these urban spaces. It is interesting to draw parallels between Fantasy and its changing patterns with the changing face of Cinema and the arrival of the Cybermatrix world. Fantasy is not, in my scheme of things, an umbrella term that is constituted by several factor but is a constitutive of larger market trends and can be thus seen as creating new Public spaces to be filled in by the consumer.

Fantasy serves as the Vanishing mediator between the market and the state. Fantasy then becomes the Public Sphere where rites of initiation, access, mobilisation of resources, governance, control and realisation of self are constantly narativised and enacted, in order to create a new economic order sanctioned by the State without conflicting with its 'Welfare' status. Fantasy becomes the site where Free Choice is made synonymous with Open Markets, thus creating a consumerist citizen who partakes equally of the state and the market.

'**Q.** How Real is my Fantasy?

A. As Real as Fantastic Reality.'

2nd Thread

No matter how far removed one may be in time and conceptualisation of cinema from Phalke's first movies, his notions of Cinema as magic, as illusion, cannot be dispensed with. '…The miracle of the visual appearance of objects is sometimes caused by the play of light and shadow. This is the magic of the film maker.' The dislocation of cinema in fact seems to point more acutely towards this idea of film as illusion, supporting Fantasy in our daily experiences. In this section I try to analyse

the location of the cinema and what it has come to entail within the multiplex spectatorship patterns.

I do not, by talking of the dislocation of cinema intend to suggest that this is the first time cinema and the experience of it have undergone a shift in terms of its technology, reception and spectatorship. Indeed, a history of cinema has illustrated how the shift in the places of cinema exhibition and reception had direct links with its influence, its audience and more importantly, its production patterns. When the Nickelodeon evolved into a more systematised form of cinema exhibition, we saw the rise of what we now recognise as Hollywood. In India, however, fixed theatre screens and timings were inherited to begin with, and while the moving screens were in vogue in the smaller centres, it still did not have a direct effect on the production methods or the aspired for Industrial status of cinema. It is only with the rise of the Multiplex cultures (starting with Rajshree productions' path breaking reform of cinema houses and release of the legendary Hum Aapke Hai Kaun…! restricted to movie theatres, which had a particular kind of screen, seating comforts and sound system) that Hindi Cinema has finally undergone, what Ashish Rjadhyaksha calls the 'Bollywoodization' of cinema. This dislocation of cinema then is not, as some have proposed, the death of cinema, but actually a new avatar of cinema where in, the boundaries of the public and the private are blurred and private consumption rather than public need guides a peculiar brand of low budget hindi-hinglish movies which define the spectator in term of the Multiplex going viewer.

Mainstream Cinema (to distinguish it from the State sponsored cinema identified often as 'Art' or 'Parallel' or 'Meaningful' Cinema), like all mainstream popular art forms has often been looked upon with great suspicion as being status quoist and regressive. Many have blamed mainstream cinema of being orthodox, conventional and often propagandist. However, these are debates that stay only within the context of the narrative plot structures of movies. Cinema, more so with mainstream cinema than parallel cinema, has always had the political edge of being a leveller - Just like in the Shakespearean age when the prince and the pauper could both, for the same fee, partake of the same entertainment under the same roof. Apart from the Cine-politics argument that Madhav Prasad forwarded in the case of Telugu cinema, Cinema, in its reception and also in its mosaic structure has so far been successful in creating the category of a Spectator who is not discriminated against on the basis of his/her difference. While there have been arguments about how certain cinema is offensive to people with a 'difference', that is not for here. Let it suffice to say, that excess has always been a trademark feature of most Hindi cinema (also regional theatre to a large extent) and it is this very excess within cinema that has the political edge of disarming the spectators into a solidarity of purpose and entertainment.

However, the experience of the cinema within the multiplex is more complex, if not complicated. It is indeed of interest to notice how the experience of the cinema is only a small part of going to the multiplex itself. Enter the arena of the multiplex and everything from the colours to the architecture, the people who are already physically occupying the place to the people who are expected, the plush foyers and

the fountain pepsi, the music that blares and the products on sale, the cafés and the MNC run food stalls, gaming parlous and bowling alleys, the exorbitant prices on the menu card or the high rates of tickets (in some cases, even the entry fee which is later redeemed in the goods purchased / movies watched) define a very marked spectator group with a certain age and class markers. Large glass doors, huge halls with ceiling opening to the sky, the feeling of opulence and well being, the escalators with their uniformed chaperons, the exclusive use of the latest in the 'hap' lingo, and the overpowering billboards inviting you - almost forcing you to buy - buy as much as you can, can be an intimidating experience for one not used to it, or not belonging to the group that it is intended for. The right to enter a movie theatre, hovers uneasily around the large guarded doors of a multiplex with its fancy warnings (*Rights of Admission Reserved, Please pass through the metal detector to enter, Outside food not allowed, Please Smoking only in the Smoking zone*,) but is clearly no longer there. It is no longer just a pay-per-view of cinema- going to the movies is now just a part of going to fulfil fantasies. Before and after the movie, shopping, eating, 'hanging out' are expected and legitimate activities to be performed. If Hollywood made buttered popcorn and fountain cola a prerequisite, the new Multiplexes have made shopping and buying prerequisites for cinema experiences. And the goods available for consumption are no longer just film paraphernalia - though they are available in plenty as well - but anything and everything that gives rise to the whole new phenomenon of 'identity shopping' or 'lifestyle shopping.'

This gives a new definition to the spectators of cinema. The spectator coming to a multiplex to watch a movie is a consumer as well as a spectator. The main reason for coming to the multiplex is not just watching the movie but to see and be seen, to buy and be bought, to consume and be consumed, keeping in line with the POL culture. It is OK to come alone in order to find new people and groups, to extend relationships and networks. Cinema becomes a site of consumption - ideology, entertainment, stars, fan clubs, clothes, accessories, food, coffee, people, relationship - all are consummated on the narrative of 'going to the movies'. This new consumerist spectatorship forms a New Public Sphere, which defines the spectator through his/her consumption and gives him/her a sense of belonging. This New Public Sphere that the multiplexes give rise to, are as dogmatic, rigid, selective and heteronymous as any other idea of a counter public sphere. Consumerism and State find mediation in the multiplexes through the being of Cinema.

Nickelodeon

The consumerist spectator also falls into place with the corporationalisation of cinema and the deliberate placing of the cinema within the market rather than the domains of artistic pleasure value. Cinema, in these terms, becomes a medium of luring the spectator to sustain the open markets and the global cash flow. Cinema is stitched into the agenda of the privatised market segments and becomes a structure that, through the enhancement of fantasy, opens up new arenas for the market to develop.

The illusion of the cinema structurates the fantasy fulfilment of the spectator, thus creating the Consumerist Spectator. And to add to this is the domain of the cyberspace and its interactions with cinema in order to add Hallucination to the already existing realms of Fantasy and Illusion. It is hallucination that introduces the spectator into the notions of free choice, the transience of the experience and the addictive repetitive value of the experience.

3rd Thread

The dual globalisation of Bollywood is synchronous with the configuration of the cyberspace, wherein cinema becomes a multifaceted, multilayered and a segmented place in real time (vis-à-vis RL). The notion of the cyberspace as a space of 'consensual hallucination' leads to the more complex being of the Matrix - the inescapable. The Matrix can be understood as a transphysical experience of the body and the self, anchored within the physical reality of the body and the self, but manifested only in terms of a hallucination. The Subject within a matrix is in a flux of non-matter, thus spreading him/herself over multiple user identities (as in MUD or MOO chat rooms), multiple fractured identities (as in the case of belonging to various, often conflicting forums/cyberclubs), multiple personas (as in cybergames and other interface communities) and also on different levels of hallucinative reality.

Such a cyberpatial being (What Haraway in her Manifesto calls the Cyborg) refers only to a particular brand of Netrozen who lives in the dream world that they create and can be no longer dissociated from their Netropolis. However, it is necessary to see the percolations of the cyberspace within the 'lay' people who are not 'nudists on a night shift' or 'Neo' ala Mr. Anderson in their conception of the self. The cyborg is a way of self-projection and identification, which not many would subscribe to, and yet there are, as Gibson pointed out, 'billions of legitimate users' who experience the cyberspace embedded within their reality. David Bell points out the interactions with the cyberspace in the mechanisms of a hyperactivated self in several practices of urban survival - 'taking Viagra, or (engagement) with a pacemaker, or riding a bike, or withdrawing cash from an ATM, or acting out their fantasies as Lara Croft in the latest Tomb Raider game or as a Nato bomber pilot blitzing Kosovo, or anyone watching footage from Kosovo live on the late-night news…' To this I add the experience of the multiplex- the going to the cinema in a multiplex can indeed be identified as a cyberspatial experience, and while it might not be only a hyppereal experience similar to say what Neo had in The Matrix or the waking up of the creator to the matrix-like simulation status of his own 'Reality' in The 13th Floor, or even to the experience of seeing what I believe, in the out-of-space encounters with aliens that Amie manages to conjure for a fuddled USA intelligence in Steven Spielberg presents Taken, it is indeed a way of exploring the technocultural productions of life and our way of dealing with the phenomenon of 'Intimate Machines.'

Technosociality as a phenomenon produces specific changes in what Foucault calls

the domains of Life, Labour and Language. The construction of the technospaces has resulted in several ruptures and continuities within the existing social order. The political economies of Cyberculture lead to new envisioning of the relations of the first and third world, to the rise of new local articulations with forms of global capital based on high technology and to the transformation of the labour process by the capitalisation of nature and the creation of value worldwide. The concentration of specialised skilled labour in the metro spaces, the mushrooming of outsourcing and service sector labour, the rise of virtual job spaces on the cyberspace and the insulated isolated lifestyles of the jet hopping yuppie have all destabilised the established forms of community bonding that existed even within the 'modern' city spaces.

The new age cyberzen is no longer born into community relationships but actively seeks to form communities according to his/her inclinations. This has given rise to what has popularly come to be known as 'Cultures of loneliness.' The rise of the cafeterias especially after MNCs like Barista or even the national counterparts like Café Coffee Day (CCD) have taken over the existing Irani restaurants in Mumbai, 'Laaris' in Ahmedabad, is a signifier of arrival of a particular kind of lifestyle that has taken over the cyberzen.

The new spectator is also such a cyberzen, constantly compromising and connecting between RL and VR. The multiplex becomes a site where the RL and the VR are not at loggerheads but actually sustain each other, each through the consumption of the other. The postbiological cyberspatial experience of the self gets translated into the disposable clothes, environmental friendly fashion accessories, the feeling of comfort in an asynchronous architecture that plays with disharmonious colours and structures, the close proximity with machines- escalators, electronic Ids, swipe card machines, gaming parlours, listening posts and juke boxes, cybercafes and cinema - brings the cyberzen spectator as close to VR in RL as possible. Also, the complete disembodiment within the cyberspace, as Anne Balsamo points out, leads to a craving for the 'hyperactivated' body in RL. The body, toned by steroids, sculpted by the machines in a gym, cased in designer clothes and cosmetics becomes a way of fulfilling the cyberspace fantasy of realising the body within the given spaces.

Moreover, just like the cyberspace, consumption becomes an act of personal and communal belonging. The user within any cyberspace experience cannot but help consuming of the space and a similar effect takes place within these multiplexes. It is the arrival of the consumerist spectator who is ready to partake of all that comes his way - also cinema, as a part of the package deal. Cinema as popular leisure activity has been perhaps replaced by TV, which is now the essential 'time-pass' in urban houses. As the new ad base line for Philips India points out, 'Staying Home was never better.' However, going to the cinema, especially in the multiplexes is a ritual, a way of living, a pattern of sustaining one's own ideas of the self and the society. Cinema has become a site where the consumer identifies with texts and narratives of illusion, hallucination and fantasy, all converging into one. Cinema is no longer just an assimilation of reality onto an opulent screen. It has become a medium of

simulation, where the imagined and the fantasised lives and aspirations of the consumerist spectator are structured in order to offer a multi-media experience of VR within RL. Just as the multiplex becomes a confluence of these three within the physical reality of the city, 'Multiplex Movies' perhaps also feature a similar structure. With 'City Cinema' clearly coming up, only for the multiplex or similar theatre spaces occupying audiences, the blurring of consumption of goods, experience of the cyberspace and the wish fulfilment through identification with the stars has been easy within the narrative texts of these movies. It would be a fruitful effort to look at the phenomenon of multiplex movies and 'crossover cinema' and study the audiences that consume, sustain, simulate and consume these movies. That however is an area outside the scope of this inquiry.

4th Thread

The cinema can thus be looked upon as a culture - 'an activity, a set of values and practices, undertaken by particular people who live particular lives in particular settings and try to make sense of them, to reach particular goals, solve particular problems, express particular sentiments' and the Multiplex can be identified as a place where the relation between ideas and their institutional settings can be traced.

The Multiplex mutates the logic of transnational capitalism - domination, expansion, incorporation and consumerism. The question to ask is, how this alters the notions of cinema as a public sphere (counter, alternative, constitutive or otherwise) and what would it entail to look upon the multiplex cine culture as a realm of the public. In the face of the new consumerist spectator, what are the registers of the public that the Multiplex has to offer and how do we fit it in the notions of the city?

Within the structural reality of the city, the Public has always been a space between the State and the Market - in terms of its access, rites of initiation, rights and bestowed sense of belonging, governance and change. This new form of public sphere however, only recognises the state in a salutary fashion, fashioning a lifestyle and people that are completely at the mercy of the market. The spectator consumes all that is provided in rustling plastic and mass-produced aesthetics. Fantasy, Illusion and Hallucination become prerequisites of an open market and thus gain entry into the state controlled development of the city through this apparently 'Public' arena of the Multiplex.

The earlier notions of nationhood, the self as a citizen and the pan-Indianness that Hindi Cinema was identified with have changed in order to not only identify the new Consumer-Spectator-Citizen, but also to fashion him/her. The new spectator is a global citi/cyberzen and the Public Sphere, at least in case of the Multiplex culture, is no longer a state sponsored or state supporting space. With the Bollywoodization of Hindi Cinema, the technocultural industry has taken over the intervening and

mediatory position that the State had in the resolution of the conflicts of urban spaces, which offer, a democratic welfare capitalism in their structures. As the narrative context of the cinema moves away from the earlier feudal-melodrama theme and explores the individual within the urban spaces without falsifying it with the lens of Realism and in fact blowing it out of proportions with in-your-face billboards and sets, a whole new age of spectatorship and cinema experience is being ushered in. Digitalisation, pay-per-view video, streaming online cinema and machinistic duplications have also changed the way we receive and experience cinema from what it originally was. The multi-cine interface needs to be clawed at a little deeper to look at the way movies are produced, packaged, conceived, consumed and remembered.