

Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities

The Hindi Social Film of the 1950s as Popular Culture

□ *Ravi Vasudevan*

This article takes up the notion of the popular in relation to the Hindi commercial cinema of the 1950s. I begin by drawing upon aspects of the theoretical debate on popular culture to outline my approach. I have chosen to concentrate on formal and narrative features of the cultural product though the major preoccupation in cultural studies today is with the reception of the product. These studies have yielded valuable insights into the variety of ways in which culture is consumed, interpreted and even reordered into a new practice. But I will argue that reception studies have reintroduced the problem of the intrusion of the historian in recovering audience perception.

I will make an effort to bring the cinema audience under historical scrutiny in terms of the way cinema places the spectator through formal and narrative strategies, an experience which does not readily surface in viewers' accounts of cinema-going. My analysis will also re-examine the boundaries posed between high, mass and popular culture. These boundaries as conceptualized in the contemporary discussion of the cinema in the 1950s, signalled the institution of certain regimes of taste and distinction in aesthetic perception. But an analysis of formal features shows, on the contrary, that these boundaries were not rigid, that within the cultural product there were intersections at which elements from different systems of representation were brought together.

I do not, thereby, deny the existence of those distinctions which acquired concrete form with the emergence of an art cinema in the 1950s. It is only my suggestion that certain currents in the commercial cinema addressed rich and contradictory representational problems in a creative way, although this cultural work was necessarily bounded by the cinema's drive to hegemonize the spectator into dominant social norms. I will also argue that the commercial cinema articulated contemporary nationalist discourse in ways which both overlapped with and were dissimilar from those of the liberal intelligentsia who criticized it. This is an issue of considerable interest in

understanding the differentiated cultural history of nationalist perception in the initial years of independence.

In the literature on popular culture there has been a tendency to conceptualize it as a field of resistance to the dominant culture. A number of strategies have emerged from this premise, perhaps the most important of which has been the value attributed to interpretation.¹ Such currents have sought to undercut the sweeping dismissal of mass culture as a homogenous artefact, based on mechanical production and for 'mass' consumption. Approaches in reception studies have attempted to recover the complexity and multiplicity of viewpoints that exist within the consumption of an industrially produced culture, whether of print or audio-visual products.

There has also been a historiographical current which has looked much further back in time, to the late medieval and early modern culture of Europe, which I will draw upon to outline my own approach. The work of Peter Burke on popular forms and practices² and that of Roger Chartier on popular literature³ show that popular culture is characterized by a socially complex participation and multi-class audiences. While Burke has pointed to a mutuality of influence in elite and plebeian forms, Chartier has noted the wide range of groups — merchant, artisan, journeyman, even peasant — in the consumption of late medieval publishing.⁴

Such cultural practices and products are not hermetically sealed off from the dominant culture, though assimilation of that 'other' culture — learned, formal — may be highly idiosyncratic and transformative.⁵ It is exactly this process of transformation that is the object of studies of popular culture. Such transformations are introduced not only through the inversion of hierarchies, or the introduction of prohibited discourses in events such as the carnival,⁶ but also through shifts in the form and style of the cultural product.

Burke has shown how the cultural expression of shepherds, woodlanders and miners was related to the existential rhythms of work, environment and social life.⁷ But in dealing with the forms of popular culture in industrializing and industrialized societies we have an altogether different, more complex, hybrid and transactional object. As Chartier has noted, 'we must replace the study of cultural sets that were considered as socially pure with another point of view that recognizes each cultural form as a mixture, whose constituent parts meld together indissolubly.'⁸

The Experience of the Spectator

In placing emphasis on formal and narrative aspects of the cinema I realize I am running the risk of imposing meaning on the historical spectator, and that I also diverge from that current in the study of popular culture which insists that meaning must be constructed *primarily* by reference to how different audiences relate to the cultural product.



I do not, in the process, deny the great significance of direct accounts, whether through printed material, as in popular periodicals, or through oral testimony, in understanding what attracts an audience to a cultural product, and how it interprets and experiences that product. Such evidence is extremely important, but I would suggest that it does not, by itself, constitute an adequate rendering of cultural experience.

Problems are evident at two levels. Firstly, there is the question of how the spectator responds to systems of visual and aural address, an experience which the viewer may have difficulty in communicating. Bourdieu argues that audiences of greater and lesser educational and cultural capital exhibit different approaches to art. A highly educated audience emphasizes the form of an art work or a performance, while a less cultivated audience is more concerned with *what* is being represented.⁹ I find that this distinction, based on verbal accounts, is extremely restrictive. Surely questions of form, aesthetic pleasure and narrative logic are as operative in the context of a 'popular' audience as an elite one, even if the 'informant' does not address these areas. A social history of culture must be able to handle those areas which are not open to verification by oral testimony. Other types of verification are possible through, for example, the analysis and comparison of visual forms that are the habitual environment of a popular audience. In the Indian context one thinks of ways of seeing organized by the temple, photo-deities, popular prints and movie posters.¹⁰ In so far as popular audiences are not intellectually trained to reflect on or express the nature of their relationship to such visual forms, there is a degree of 'imposition' in such an analysis.

However, even analyses of popular culture which rely heavily on the direct articulation of subjective perception, as for example the work of Janice Radway on the experience of woman readers of romantic fiction, have proven problematic on this account. She resorts to feminist criticism of the patriarchal structures of narratives in order to situate her sample readers' viewpoint, although they do not share this way of thinking about narrative.¹¹ This is not to contest her analysis, which is a stimulating account of the experience and place of romantic fiction in the lives of female readers. But the ethnographer and cultural historian tend to intrude into the construction of reader/viewer subjectivity even while straining to do full justice to its autonomy. Perhaps we should accept that multiple transformative projects are being undertaken in this work. Not only are we engaged in shifting the focus from condescending, high cultural models, and in the process opening our own culturally conditioned tastes to a certain plurality; we are also urging a refashioning of the cultural objects and subjects we study to draw out the democratic and creative possibilities we see in them. In doing this we operate with certain utopian models against which we measure experience, while trying all the while to qualify and moderate them to a closer approximation of the historical experience.

Resistance and Accommodation

54 In charting out an approach to the study of popular culture I would also like to suggest a greater precision regarding the ideological and contestatory functions of such modes. Often there has been too simple a correlation between popular culture and modes of resistance to dominant culture.

There is a problem in identifying what constitutes dominant culture in the first place. In the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, a key concept in identifying the subordination of exploited social groups has been that of mass culture. The concept has been used to explain the basic shifts in the cultural organization and ideological suppression of the exploited in European society. Its theorists date this tendency from the time of the defeat of the 1848 revolution and the inception of the major phase of capitalist industrialization.¹² However, mass culture has never stood by itself as the only source of domination.

The high culture of modernism, which emerged as the historical 'other' of mass culture, has been the positive counterpoint cited by both left and right wing critics of mass culture. But modernism too was understood in critical theory to be susceptible to the rule of the commodity. Adorno, the main architect of the theory of culture industry, clearly suggested that the reifying and commodifying effects of capitalism left their impress upon certain modernist works, and thereby on their consumer.¹³ Commodification is then the besetting evil which cultural practice must contest, whether in mass culture or modernism.

And yet Adorno continued to valorize currents of modernist high art which escaped the taint of the commodity over low art forms.¹⁴ Certain writers who develop upon Adorno's theory of culture industry have managed to largely avoid the elitism of his approach. Andreas Huyssen notes that despite the reifying tendencies of mass culture one can detect the potential it has for a more complex order of subjectivity. Otherwise these works 'would no longer even be able to fulfil their function in the processes of ideological reproduction. Since they do preserve this use value for capital, however, they also provide a locus for struggle and subversion.'¹⁵

In the Indian context one could argue that in the 1950s high culture for the cinema existed as a series of propositions given expression only in the very restricted confines of Bengali art cinema. Commodity forms were represented in indigenous and foreign (largely American) commercial cinema. I suggest that these forms constituted the dominant culture, but that the domestic commercial cinema was the main element in this dominant formation. Critics often held Hollywood up as a model against which the failings of the Indian cinema were measured; and the cinema industry often drew upon Hollywood for formal and narrative strategies. But it was nevertheless the commercial Indian cinema which held the unassailable position in the domestic market. This does not mean that the commercial cinema is an entirely reified phenomenon. As I will show later in this article, because of the complexity of its form in particular works, and the cross-class nature of the audiences for certain

genres, the commercial cinema constituted a significant interface between the mass and the popular.

I employ the term 'mass culture' here for the way the cinema produces reifying effects on the spectator, and 'popular' for the way in which cultural products respond to changes in social needs and perceptions in fulfilling the task of ideological reproduction, holding in potential, thereby, the possibilities of radical change.

For even the most generous version of mass culture cannot envisage its forms and consumers being the main channel of radical change. Frederic Jameson's analysis of contradictions within mass culture connects social and political information to narrative structure, but without reference to the point of view of actual consumers.¹⁶ Not only is the complexity of popular reception overlooked, I think it would be reasonable to say that Andreas Huyssen's sensitive mobilization of post-modernism to break down modernist/mass culture divisions ultimately derives from a latent, 'reformed', high culture position. Thus, 'the art movements of the 1960s . . . dismantle . . . the high modernist canon . . .'; 'post-modernism . . . negotiate(s) . . . high art with . . . mass culture'; 'the historical avant-garde . . . attempt(ed) to work in the interstices of high and mass culture'.¹⁷ In terms of agency, the movement is up-down. He never seems to consider the possibility of mass culture producing a radical practice from within itself. But if we can see the mass cultural terrain as one of contestation, we can also see change taking place from within it. If utopian solutions are to be imagined, surely there must be ways of drawing upon the contestatory experience of consumers into the restructuring of cultural production.¹⁸ The notion of the mass then seems to put a straitjacket on even the most thoughtful of writers in contemporary cultural studies.

Commodification through Discourse

To turn to the commodification of high culture in India, I would argue that its problematic features arise from the way in which discourses and consumption practices appropriate its products into regimes of taste and distinction. It is when Ray, or Ghatak, or Kumar Shahani are appropriated as a *sign* of refinement and esoteric affiliation that we are in trouble. And there is no doubt that a tradition of writing, the dominant one in newspaper film criticism, has set up a hierarchy of 'taste' defined by uninterrogated notions of realism vs. fantasy, psychological representation vs. stereotyping, technical sophistication vs. shoddiness, the sensuous vs. the sensational.

In his characterization of the shift of bourgeois society from a more critically defined sphere of public life to a more homogenizing, reified one in which public tastes and opinions were equalized, Habermas noted the distinction between a 'culture-debating society' and a 'culture-consuming' one.¹⁹ He moved too easily thereafter into a counter-cultural dismissal of mass culture, and yet he identified a key issue, that of the divisions which open in capitalism between the production and consumption of intellectual work. The art cinema could be as emptied of discussion and

engagement as the commercial cinema, both merely functioning as indices of social difference. Conversely, the commercial cinema could also function as the fulcrum of debate as much, if not on the same terms, as the art cinema. Perhaps the film society will emerge as an important institution in this context.

I would then argue that tendencies towards a commodity relation to the cultural product are present in culture, high or low. But I am essentially dissatisfied with that model of culture as social distinction which detracts attention from the attractions, aesthetic/stylistic, narrative/generic, which bind spectators to different types of cinema. It is our work to draw out these aspects of spectatorship and make them potential sites of discussion.

I want to focus on certain aspects of Hindi commercial films from the 1950s to draw out the usefulness of the propositions I have made. I start with how notions of the popular are produced within a critical discussion of the cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. This discussion elevated notions of realism, psychological characterization and restrained performance and, in an unexpected fashion, was echoed in the apologies offered by commercial film-makers for their product. A dominant intellectual discourse about the cinema seemed to be well in place; at the same time, I will not call it a hegemonic discourse, as we can hardly assume that the audience for the commercial cinema accepted its terms of reference. Even the standard film magazines pandering to an English-reading middle class, *Filmindia* and *Filmfare*, do not subscribe to these criteria of judgment in a consistent way.

I will then shift to an analysis of the formal and narrative strategies of the commercial cinema in this period to suggest the ways in which diverse systems of visual representation were brought into relationship with each other. I argue that this phenomenon, together with a narrative manipulation of characters' social positions, offered a certain mobility to the spectator's imaginary identity. Finally, I will reframe the problem of popular modes of narration in relation to questions of melodrama, realism and the idiosyncratic articulation of democratic, nationalist points of view.²⁰

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS OF THE COMMERCIAL CINEMA

My basic premise about the dominant critical discussion of the cinema in this period was that it was related to the formation of an art cinema, that it addressed a (potential) art cinema audience and, in turn, was premised on a notion of social difference. The pertinent first reference here is to Ray who, when introducing his essays on cinema from the 1940s through to the 1970s, noted that the formation of the Calcutta Film Society was related 'willingly to the task of disseminating film culture amongst the intelligentsia'.²¹ In his 1948 essay on the drawbacks of the commercial film, he noted his dissatisfaction in the following way:

... once the all-important function of the cinema — e.g., movement — was grasped, the sophistication of style and content, and refinement of technique

were only a matter of time. In India it would seem that the fundamental concept of a coherent dramatic pattern existing in time was generally misunderstood.

Often by a queer process of reasoning, movement was equated with action and action with melodrama. . .²²

57

Ray was therefore outlining, for a middle-class intelligentsia, a formal opposition between the contemporary cinema with its external, melodramatic modes of fictional representation, and an ideal cinema which would develop an internalized, character-oriented 'movement' and drama. Some thirty years later Ray implied that the norms for such an ideal cinema had already been met in the west, despite periodic discoveries and changes.²³ Whatever its adequacy for explaining Ray's own work, clearly Hollywood, or a refined version of the Hollywood norm, was being projected in Ray's advice that Indian film-makers should look to the 'strong, simple unidirectional narrative' rather than 'convolutions of plot and counterplot'.²⁴

I will come back to these distinctions, especially the opposition between movement and stasis, in the next section. For the moment I will pass on to certain writings in 1957-58 of the *Indian Film Quarterly* and *Indian Film Review*, journals of the Calcutta Film Society, which are in a direct line of descent from Ray's 1948 essay. Kobita Sarkar's 'Influences on the Indian Film'²⁵ and 'Black and White'²⁶ develop, at a more literary and thematic rather than aesthetic level, the discourse set in train by Ray's essay and the release of *Pather Panchali* in 1956.

Sarkar characterizes commercial cinema in terms which have now become familiar: as theatrical, tending towards a 'markedly melodramatic strain and exacerbation of sentiment and accumulation of coincidence',²⁷ and as failing in the analysis of individual character and psychological make-up.²⁸ What may be called the disaggregated features of the commercial film, performance-foregrounding song and dance sequences, were criticized for being 'infused arbitrarily into most varieties of film with a fine disregard for their appositeness'.²⁹ These criticisms were coloured by the image of a critic dealing with an infantile culture which needed to grow up. Thus, signs of greater character complexity in post-war cinema were welcomed as more 'adult',³⁰ what she perceived to be the tedious, moralizing aspects of film narratives were opposed to a more 'mature'³¹ approach; and acting 'styles' were rejected as being more appropriate to a form considered the most child-oriented of entertainments: 'even . . . our more serious actors are frequently found cavorting in a manner more appropriate to the circus than the cinema.'³²

A negative, pejoratively defined outline of the commercial cinema emerges from these accounts. Its negative features are: a tendency to *stasis* at the level of narrative and character development; an emphasis on externality, whether of action or character representation; melodramatic (florid, excessive) sentimentality; crude or naive plot mechanisms such as coincidence; narrative dispersion through arbitrary performance sequences; and unrestrained and over-emotive acting styles.

But Kobita Sarkar saw hope yet for the commercial cinema in that thematically at least a realist element seemed to be taking shape:

58

. . . drama is provided by the conflict of the individual against social and economic encumbrance rather than by inner complexities. . . . This emphasis . . . is not to be lightly derided, for though the preoccupation with a larger framework might diminish the importance of the human character, it makes for greater social realism.³³

Evidently, that realist framework would not carry such weight with the critic unless it was given substance at the level of *mise-en-scène*. The decisive historical influence here was the International Film Festival of 1952. Sarkar argued that a certain depiction of social reality in Indian commercial films, whether through location shooting or the more 'fabricated' realism of the studio-set, reflected features of the Italian neo-realist work exhibited at the festival.³⁴

However, for this critic, these positive features, of realist observation and theme, were clearly limited by melodramatic characterization and narrative. Achievement was ultimately measured against the model of *Pather Panchali*, seen to represent a 'logical progression'³⁵ in the development of such realist imperatives.

The commercial cinema audience was evidently being measured against an ideal social subjectivity. Pointing to the gross moral oppositions and simplified conflicts of the commercial cinema, Sarkar hazarded that 'perhaps . . . this element . . . is dictated by the *type* of audience — for unless it is sophisticated enough, it is difficult for them to appreciate the significance and nuances of characterization. For a less sensitive audience, this exaggerated disparity is morally justifiable. . . .'³⁶ She went on to note that 'till there is a radical change of approach on the part of the audience . . . rather meaningless turgidity seems to be an attendant evil.'³⁷

I would suggest that there is a definite project under way here, in which the commercial cinema is seen to represent a significant failure at the level of social subjectivity. To counter this critics and film-makers began to take it upon themselves to formulate an alternative order of cinema conceptualizing a different, more sensitive, psychological, humanist and 'adult' order of personality. What is surprising, however, is that these very attitudes were also apparent in the opinions of certain commercial film-makers of the time.

In 1956, M.A. Parthasarathy, head of Gemini International, noted of the Indian commercial film that the barriers to its achievement in the western market did not spring from the constraints of language but was due to the 'method of expression . . . not only the gestures and movements of our artists, but also the entire psychological approach of the construction of scenes and themes in our films'.³⁸ Again, Parthasarathy tied the imperative of reorienting the cinema to a redefining of the character of the audience. He noted that the economic headway that would be achieved through state policies such as planning would increase the domestic demand for

films. However, in consonance with these new developments, a new type of film would have to be envisaged: 'a type which is more in line with the changes in social attitude that will go hand in hand with economic prosperity. This will mean a more realistic Indian film, where the method of telling the story is more like that of films made in the west.'³⁹ Just the year before, S.S. Vasan too had drawn out a connection between the economic situation of the audience and its viewing inclinations:

59

Film artistry is, unfortunately, compelled to compromise with the people's standards in living and life. . . . The mass audiences are generally not so well equipped to appreciate artistic subtleties. . . . The great majority of cinema audiences tend to favour melodrama and other easier forms of emotional expression. . . . The prevalent low standards in art are due, in a large measure, to our low economic standards.⁴⁰

There is an echo-chamber effect here, with the insensitivity of Sarkar's audience being reprised as the incapacity of Vasan's audience to 'appreciate artistic subtleties'. Of course, the first view is an explanation related to the need to change matters while Vasan's is an apology for why he makes the films he does.

In Vasan's and Parthasarathy's accounts an economic explanation is proffered. Once economic circumstances were altered, the citizen-spectator would be more attuned to humanist-realist cinema; exactly the terms of Kobita Sarkar's definition of her ideal spectator. Although Parthasarathy's exercise was also a prognosis about what would go down well with a foreign audience accustomed to American norms, it is possible to argue that these different views were in fact complementary and sprang from the ideology of the domestic context: that of the Nehruvian state, with its emphasis on economic transformation and a critically founded individualism.

These lines of convergence should not suggest that discussion of the cinema was entirely monolithic. In this connection, one curiosity of this period is Chidananda Das Gupta's 'In Defence of the Box Office',⁴¹ a 1958 essay which tried to envisage an adjustment of the cinema to the popular perceptions of its clientele: 'The starting point must be not one's own mind, but that of the audience.'⁴² In trying to evaluate audience dispositions, Das Gupta referred to the aesthetics of representation, the 'two-dimensional, linear quality which distinguishes almost all forms of Indian art' and the 'flatness of Indian painting, its lack of perspective'.⁴³ In his argument, 'The vast unlettered audiences of the East are yet a long way from acquiring the bourgeois prejudices. . . . It is only the urban middle class which . . . will question the distortions of the human figure in painting. . . .'⁴⁴ He believed this fact left the film-maker and artist freer to experiment with form and to rediscover his indigenous traditions.⁴⁵ Finally, he also tried to address the peculiarities of story-telling observable in the commercial film, and the significance it gives to the performative sequence.⁴⁶ The Indian audience, he argued, was oriented to an epic tradition 'which you can read from anywhere to anywhere, as long as you like . . . the Indian film audience . . .

delights more in the present than in the past or future.⁴⁷ He urged Indian film-makers to look to these traditions of narrative and aesthetics rather than rely on 'too many preconceived notions derived from the form of the film as seen in the west'.⁴⁸

60

Das Gupta was not underwriting the investment which Indian audiences made in the contemporary commercial cinema as it existed. He was pointing to the potential this audience held for experimentation with forms of representation and narrative. Thus, while folk paintings of the Krishna legend were valued, the mythological film was condemned as the very worst expression of Indian cinema.⁴⁹ 'Film moghuls', he wrote, 'have fully sensed these traits of the audience. . . . In answer they have produced Bradshaws of entertainment, vulgar in taste and low in level but appealing all the same to the man for whom it is meant.'⁵⁰ Ironically, even the realist *mise-en-scène* and thematic content, regarded by Sarkar as signs of achievement in the commercial film, are dismissed in Das Gupta's analysis for derivativeness (from the International Festival) and an essential incapacity to rise above the more conventional cinematic entertainment.⁵¹

Although Das Gupta focused in his article on the epic and formal qualities of popular traditions, his underlying emphasis appears to have been on the film-makers and intellectuals rather than the audience. Indeed, the article appears to be a case of an Indian intellectual rediscovering the traditions of his country through an abstraction, 'the audience', rather than making a radical political investment in that wider society. To suggest a pertinent contrast, the 'Third Cinema' also writes of aesthetic recovery and reinvention, but relates this project to an intense political and historical analysis of social exploitation and resistance,⁵² an engagement singularly lacking in Das Gupta's reference to the 'unlettered masses of the east'. Nevertheless, while his observations about aesthetic and narrative forms tend to be essentialist, they remain insightful in the critical context of their time.⁵³

FORMAL AND NARRATIVE ASPECTS OF THE COMMERCIAL CINEMA

I want to draw upon this contemporary discussion in so far as it registered certain dissonances within a clear-cut model of the commercial film. I consider Sarkar's pinpointing of realism as one such complication, as also Das Gupta's identification of aesthetic and narrative dispositions in the audience's mental make-up. Contrary to their point of view I suggest that these features were not exceptions to the norm but were part of a cultural form which was more complex than these contemporary critics would allow.

Modes of Representation

In the Bombay cinema of the 1950s the 'social' film, from which I take the illustrations in this article, was the genre which the industry understood to address the issues of modern life.⁵⁴ Within these films, and much more widely in the cinema of that time, a number of modes of staging and narrating story events are in evidence.

There is the iconic framing, an organization of the image in which stable meaning is achieved,⁵⁵ whether of an archaic or contemporary nature. This could range from the mythic articulations of woman, whether by herself or in relation to a man, to mythic formations stemming from contemporary iconography, such as Monroe in American culture or the Raj Kapoor-Nargis emblem of romantic love emblazoned on the RK banner.

Another arrangement is that of the tableau which, unlike the icon, presumes an underlying narrative structure: 'characters' attitudes and gestures, compositionally arranged for a moment, give, like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation.⁵⁶ The tableau represents a moment caught between past and future, 'a pregnant moment', to quote Barthes.⁵⁷ Both the iconic and tableau modes are often presented frontally, at a 180° plane to the camera and seem to verge on stasis, enclosing meaning within their frame, and ignoring the off-screen as a site of reference, potential disturbance and reorganization.⁵⁸ Perhaps this was what Ray was reacting against when he complained of the static features of the commercial film.

However, the codes of American continuity cinema are also used in the Hindi cinema of the period. These codes — the eyeline match, point-of-view shot, 'correct' screen direction, match-on-action cuts⁵⁹ — generate the illusion of spatial and temporal continuity and a systematic relation between on- and off-screen in their generation of narrative flow. In doing this they centre and re-centre the human body for our view, thus presenting us with a mirroring sense of our own bodily centrality and coherence.⁶⁰

It is this American system which has defined ways of representing character subjectivity in a 'universal', almost hegemonic sense in world cinema, and it is the absence of this which Kobita Sarkar appeared to regret in the commercial film. In fact, these codes are not absent, but they are unsystematically deployed and are often combined with the other modes of visual representation I have described.

To illustrate this combination of codes, I will analyse a segment from Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949). The story of the film details the troubles which engulf an upper-class young woman Neena (Nargis), when she risks a friendship with an attractive bachelor Dilip (Dilip Kumar), although she is engaged to another man. The particular sequence which I analyse (Figure 1), recounting Neena's birthday celebrations, begins and ends with a top-angled shot on the birthday cake (shots 1 and 9). Neena's friend Shiela lights the candles on the cake; the camera cranes down, as if paralleling Neena's movement down the hillside steps, and we see her father looking back at her as he moves foreground right. Shot 2 dissects the first, and shows Neena entering the space of the father, where she is introduced to Shanta, a family friend they have hardly met since the death of Neena's mother. The framing of this shot shows Neena standing next to her father, and in front of Shanta. Neena greets Shanta, moves on to greet a doctor and then another woman guest. At this point there is a match-on-action cut from Neena's movement of greeting in shot 2 to her touching this unnamed woman's feet in shot 3a. The woman's back remains turned to the camera.

I suggest that shot 3 has the structure of an iconic representation. This woman is an unidentified, unseen figure; it is her very lack of identification which is suggestive. For the father has just mentioned the absence of the mother, the first time any reference has been made to her. Neena's introduction to an anonymous woman at this very moment can be said to reiterate and emphasize the absent figure. The woman's invitation that Neena sit next to her seems to be issued from the position of the absent mother, and is like an act of nomination: Neena is invited to enter the space of the mother.

This space is subverted by the deployment of a look away from the absent mother, to a position off-screen right (shot 3b). The iconic possibilities of the arrangement are then scattered, diffused. And yet, instead of a straightforward integration of Neena into the exchange with Dilip, the figure whom she sees off-screen, the next shot, 4, arranges a tableau against which this exchange takes on portentous dimensions. Neena and Dilip meet in the mid-ground of the frame; the father stands to the left in the background; and Shiela begins to move forward. The tableau-like characteristics of this repositioning are underlined when the next shot, 5, is not bound to shot 4 through a match-on-action cut on Shiela's movement. For, at the beginning of shot 5 she is *already stationary*, having been placed at the appropriate position, next to Neena's father. Shiela's placement with the father signals the commentary-like implications of the tableau shot. The arrangement of the frame bristles with contradictions. The look of the father at the couple indicates that they enact a spectacle of transgression. In the logic of the narrative it is Shiela, standing with the father, who should be with Dilip, while Neena should be where Shiela stands, in the space of the absent mother. However, as the narrative requires the temporary suspension of this illegitimate arrangement, the father's reprimanding look is effaced when Shiela moves towards the couple, to stand at Neena's left (shot 5b). Shiela's presence sets up a buffer, as it were, between Neena and Dilip, allowing the father to move away. The rest of the sequence follows this logic, with a series of shot-reverse-shots (shots 6-8) which do not allow the couple to be isolated again. But traces of the transgression remain in the final shot of the sequence, 9, when Dilip is positioned next to Neena, amidst the larger crowd, as she cuts the cake.

In this sequence there is a diegetic flow tracking Neena's movement, glancing off her possible iconic placement and moving on to focus her (apparent) desire. That flow is brought to a halt with the frontal tableau frame, in which society exercises a censoring gaze through the look of the father. The flow is then resumed, through the shot-reverse-shot arrangement. While this procedure makes it possible 'to implicate the spectator in the eye contacts of the actors . . . to include him or her in the mental and "physical" space of the diegesis',⁶¹ in this segment, Shiela's intrusion functions as a residual trace of the tableau's social commentary, setting up a buffer within the transgressive intimacy of the scene.

The intrusion of the tableau is quite significant in the formulation of the spectator's subjectivity. While we have shared the movement and awareness of Neena, we

Figure 1: Stills from *Andaz*



shot 1



shot 3b



shot 2



shot 4



shot 3a

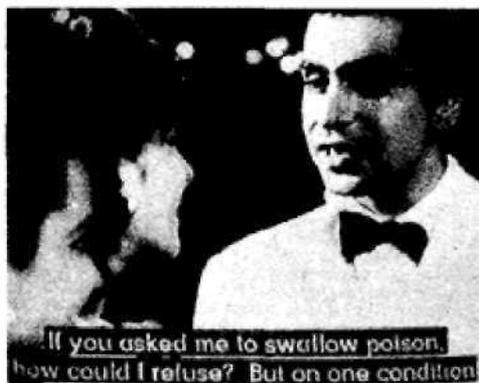


shot 5a

Figure 1: Stills from *Andaz* (contd.)



shot 5b



shot 8



shot 6



shot 9



shot 7



are suddenly asked to situate that awareness within the space of the social code. That this is represented through an integral narrative space rather than a dissected one — Neena's father's awareness could as well have been registered through a close-up — indicates that it is not through a play of individual subjectivities that we are being asked to register the space of the social code, but as a structural field with definite points of authority and notions of convention. This does not prevent us from empathizing with the 'object' position within this field, but the *address* has an encompassing, normative aspect to it which momentarily throws us out of the flow of individual awareness.

Appropriations and Transformations

It is my suggestion that this relay through different visual modes is also a rhetorical strategy which makes the cinema both attractive as something new in the field of the visual, and culturally intelligible because it incorporates a familiar visual address. I have argued elsewhere that both *Andaz's* narrative strategy and the elements of its publicity campaign were oriented to generate an image of modernity for the Indian audience.⁶² In terms of narrative strategy the film employs Barthes' 'hermeneutic code', the mechanism whereby information is deferred in order to engage spectatorial curiosity.⁶³ Although there are allusions to Neena's being involved with a man other than Dilip, these are elliptical, placing us very much within Dilip's field of knowledge, and his desire for Neena. As a number of writers have pointed out, Indian popular cinema is singularly indifferent to mechanisms of suspense and surprise;⁶⁴ the moral universe of the fiction, the figuration of guilt and innocence, is always already known. The induction of codes associated with American cinema into *Andaz* may be seen in combination with the publicity strategy used by Liberty, the cinema hall which showed *Andaz* as its inaugural film. The exhibitors drew attention to the modern projection equipment and elegant auditorium, suggesting that the viewing conditions met the standards of an audience used to viewing western films. The experience of seeing *Andaz* was therefore meant to generate a modern self-image for the audience, both in terms of narrative strategies of spectatorial engagement, and through an appropriation of the symbolic social space occupied by watching American films. And yet, at the same time, the experience would not merely reproduce that of the American film. The film uses its woman character to set limits to the image of modernity. Through her the narrative negotiates a notion of 'Indian' social codes and a larger, 'national' identity for the spectator of the film.

The controlled mobilization of American cinematic spectatorship into the commercial cinema is not untypical. The much maligned imitativeness of the Hindi film may be seen to set up a relay of appropriated and adapted narrative modes and spectatorial dispositions: as organizing premise, as in the induction of codes of continuity and character subjectivity; but also as attraction, in the sense that Tom Gunning has used the term, where narrative is less significant than an amalgam of views, sensations and performances.⁶⁵ Works of the 1950s such as *Aar Paar* (Guru Dutt,

1954), *Taxi Driver* (Chetan Anand, 1954) and *CID* (Raj Khosla, 1956), deploy bank heist and car-chase sequences, but in ways which are not properly integral to the narrative development, nor wrought with a strong rhythm of alternations.

Along with the appropriation of narrative codes and sensationalist attractions from the American cinema, the Hindi social film also appropriated elements of American genre films in structuring the imaginary social space of its narrative. In the American *film noir* of the 1940s the hero exhibits ambiguous characteristics, an ambiguity reinforced or engendered by a duplicitous woman whose attractions are explicitly sexual. As a result the heterosexual project of familial reproduction is jeopardized. As Sylvia Harvey has noted, 'the point about *film noir* . . . is that it is structured around the destruction or absence of romantic love and the family. . . .'⁶⁶ This repetitive narrative trajectory has been accompanied by stylistic features of a much more variable nature, from a constrained, distortive framing, to low-key lighting and chiaroscuro effects, these strategies being oriented to generating a sense of instability in character perception and moral situation.⁶⁷

These generic elements, which American film-viewing audiences would have been familiar with from the 1940s, are reproduced in the cycle of crime melodramas of the 1950s, particularly *Baazi* (Guru Dutt, 1951), *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951), *Aar Paar* and *CID*; but the elements are restructured into a melodramatic bipolarity, the stylistic and iconographic elements siphoned off into the world of vamp and villain, counterpointed to the realm of morality and romantic love.

The Dissolution of Social Identity

Nevertheless the hero's moral attributes are in jeopardy, and it is the narrative's work to move him through this bipolar world before recovering him under the sign of virtue, an objective often publicly and legally gained.⁶⁸ For my analysis of the popular ramifications of the commercial film narrative, what is of significance here is the way in which this melodramatic routing complicates his social identity.⁶⁹

It is the hero's very mobility between spaces, spaces of virtue (the 'mother's' domain), villainy and respectability (the 'father's' domain) which problematizes social identity. Often the street, the space of physical and social mobility, is also the space of the dissolution of social identity, or the marking out of an identity which is unstable. In *Baazi* Ranjani's villainous father spies Madan's tryst with his daughter on the street, causing him to conspire against the hero; in *Awara*, the glistening, rain-drenched streets so familiar from the American *film noir* are the site of the uprooted Raj's birth, his subsequent tormented encounter with street toughs, the place where the villain Jagga plants the seeds of criminality in his mind, and the terrain on which he is involved in car thefts, bank heist preparations and murderous assaults. The taxi-driver hero Kalu of *Aar Paar* is by definition associated with this unstable space, one which draws him unwittingly into a criminal plot. Even the respected inspector of police of *CID*, Shekhar, framed for a murder rap, loses all social anchorage and is precipitated into the street.



This is a drama of downward social mobility. Most of the characters identified here originate in respectable middle-class families. But the upheaval in the hero's circumstances is never so irreversible as to prevent the recovery of his virtue and of the possibilities of social renewal. Very rarely does the transformation of identity extend as far as a specifically working-class moment in the trajectory of loss. Loss and uprootment are contained by a moral opposition between the proper middle-class image of respected householdership and its other, the thief, who batters on that which is not his.⁷⁰ Narratives state and complicate these oppositions, suggesting how a respectable position is anchored in illicit gain, a bigoted social exclusiveness and, repeatedly, as a basic aspect of narrative structure, how its strictures and exclusions articulate an oedipal contest, a problem of generational transaction, between 'father' and 'son'.

The Narrative of the Family: Conflict and Closure

The family is the remarkable symbolic, if not literal, locus of the narrative's organization of both conflict and resolution. At its centre lies the iconic presence of the mother, stable in her virtue and her place, a moral orientation for her son but also a figuration of the past; for the space of the mother must give way to the changes introduced by the shift of authority from father to son. The family binds the son back into its space, securing him from the perils of the social void by restoring his name, his right to an inheritance and his social place. But it is a transformed family, one over which he must now exercise authority. The nucleated space of this new formation often emerges under the benign agency of the law, suggesting a complicity between state and personality in the development of a new society.

There is a remarkable instance of the mother's iconic presence, the kind of gravitational pull she exercises over the narrative's progression, and indeed over the very process of narration, in a sequence from *Awara*. This sequence again provides us with an example of the interplay between the iconic and continuity modes of visual representation (Figure 2).

Raj, who has been working for the bandit Jagga, without his mother Leela's knowledge, returns home. His look is arrested by a photograph of his childhood friend, Rita (shot 1). Feeling that the photograph's 'look' upbraids him for his moral duplicity, he turns the photo to the wall (shot 2b), but Leela turns it over again (shot 4b). Raj declares that childhood friends can never be recovered (shot 4c) and leaves the house for an assignation with Jagga (shot 5). Leela, unpacking for Raj, is shocked to find a gun in his case (shots 7a, 7b). The camera tracks in from Leela (shot 8a) to the photograph (8b), and there is a dissolve which takes us to a cabaret performer (8c) dancing before Jagga and his gang. At the end of two short sequences, that of the dance performance witnessed by Jagga, Raj and the gang, and that relating to a discussion between Jagga and Raj, we return to Leela as she now turns the photograph to the wall (shots 9a, 9b, 9c).

The crucial feature of this sequence is of how the look of the female figure is

relayed between the mother and the photographic image of Rita and how, quite unusually, this relay is used to elaborate the sequence as a macro-sequence, one which authorizes a moral perspective on the sequences in between.

68

The mother is the original repository of this moral look: the Rita-image reiterates or 'doubles' her function. Shot 3 shows how the look which Raj evades in shot 2 returns in his mother's look at him. Two looks focus on the hero then, and the reinstatement of Leela's recovers the other for Leela turns the photograph up again (shot 4b). The reframing which follows Raj's movement blocks our view of Leela, and Raj's body blocks Rita's photograph (shot 4c). Raj's trajectory in shot 4c therefore erases both female figures from our view, because he is about to enter an immoral terrain, that of the villain and vamp. With Raj's movement out of frame, the photograph regains possession of this space (shot 4d), but through a combination of character movement right and camera movement left Leela now blocks Rita's image (shot 4e). The mother's involuntary effacement of the photograph's idealized moral view foreshadows her knowledge of what Raj's 'business' actually is, with her discovery of the gun in shot 7. The dissolve of the Rita-image onto the 'tainted' dancer in shot 8c suggests that the image seems to 'look' and see its 'other', and, mirrored in that 'other', the figure of the male subject who should ideally be constituted within its own moral gaze.⁷¹

The completion of this circuit of looking two sequences later, with the return to the photograph in shot 9, indicates that the photo-icon has participated in a remarkable macro-narration. Aligned in Raj's perception to a moral gaze whose scrutiny he cannot bear, the photograph's 'gaze' oversees the transgressive sexual and criminal instances of the sequences in between. Leela then turns this 'gaze' away from such scenes, as if it may from now on only oversee the moral renewal of the protagonist; and this, indeed, is how it functions throughout the rest of the film.⁷²

Young Rita's photograph is without depth, pure surface, a frozen moment of the past which, ironically, also represents a future state of grace for the protagonist. But it does not represent Rita, a figure whose narrative functions are bound up, from her introduction into the film, with sexuality. It represents, in fact, a time of innocence, before the advent of the oedipal contest with the father and the drives of desire and of aggression. In this invocation of a past moment in the psychic trajectory of the subject, there is a strong correspondence between the image and the mother. And, indeed, the sequence plays upon the interchangeability of the gaze of image and mother, the latter reintroducing its look, substituting for it, and associating her censure with its withdrawal.⁷³

But that authoritative moral function must be displaced, or at least subordinated, before the onward trajectory — which is also, of course, one of return — whereby Raj will recover his familial identity. This is an objective in which the character Rita will be decisive. The mother, the still centre of the narrative, must be moved, her place dissolved and her functions eliminated or transferred to the appropriate figure of the heroine.

Figure 2: Stills from *Awara*



shot 1



shot 4a



shot 2



shot 4b

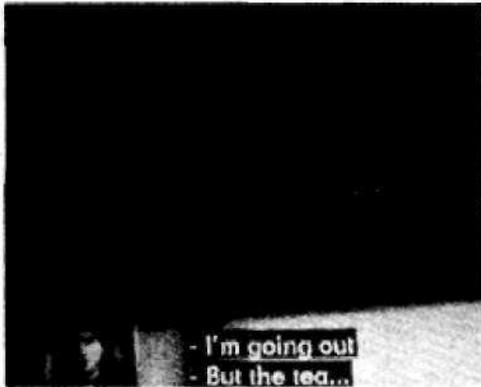


shot 3



shot 4c

Figure 2: Stills from *Awara* (contd.)



shot 4d



shot 6



shot 4e



shot 7a



shot 5



shot 7b

Figure 2: Stills from *Awara* (contd.)



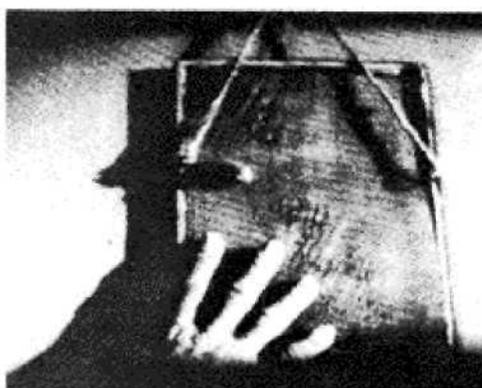
shot 8a



shot 9a



shot 8b



shot 9b



shot 8c



shot 9c

The mixture of codes, generic and sensational elements, and a narrative undermining of social identity makes the social film of the 1950s an imaginary space in which a popular audience of mixed social background were offered a rather fluid system of signs, modes of address and social positions.

Industry observers had their particular explanation for this mixture. They believed that the 'social', initially conceived of as a conventionally middle-class genre, had become an omnibus form in which different social groups were being catered to by different elements of the film. One observer noted that, whereas in the 1930s dramatic and story values appealed to the middle and upper middle classes, and stunts and action dramas appealed to workers, in the 1950s 'a new type of social realism also came to occupy the screen. Actions, thrills, magic and stunts were introduced into the stories to attract the masses.'⁷⁴

I would like to suggest, however, that the different modes do not necessarily correspond, by some reductionist sociological aesthetic, to particular social segments of the audience. Aesthetically, continuity codes mingle with, give way to and even take over the functions of codes more widely observable in the visual culture of society. An iconic construction is often observable in the arrangement of the new bearer of patriarchal authority in the story; and point-of-view structures formulated in a classical Hollywood way are used to shore up this quite 'traditional' framing.⁷⁵ Conversely, the tableau framing, while in some sense communicating an ordered, socially coded view for the audience, does not necessarily determine their perception of the narrative situation. In this sense, it is difficult to separate out 'traditional' from 'modern' address, or to suggest that such addresses correspond to distinct audiences. Even the sensational action sequences can hardly be regarded as attractive only to a lower class audience. I have argued elsewhere that a *masculine* culture was being addressed through such elements, one not restricted by class, and perhaps contributive to a new, more sharply differentiated sexual image for the male subject.⁷⁶

However, there is a strong tendency to subordinate movement and vision toward a stable organization of meaning, in an iconic articulation. This has a parallel in the way in which the narrative reorganizes the family so as to secure a stable position for the middle-class hero. To my mind, this feature brings the complexities of the popular cultural form into alignment with a certain normalizing discourse and hegemonic closure.

REDEFINING THE POPULAR: MELODRAMA AND REALISM

The formal complexities of the 1950s social film had, in a sense, been acknowledged in Kobita Sarkar's and Chidananda Das Gupta's pronouncements on its narrative and stylistic features. But they insisted on seeing these elements as constrained or unrealized. By subjecting the cinema to a certain purist criticism, they failed to grasp the complexity of popular forms such as melodrama. Recent work shows that, along with stereotypical, morally bipolar characters, melodramatic narratives have been known to deploy narration through the awareness of a single character.⁷⁷ Further, as



Peter Brooks has noted, melodrama as a form has, from the nineteenth century, been associated with realism.⁷⁸

In changing the way in which fiction organizes meaning, melodrama marks the transition from the prevalence of sacred and hierarchical notions to a post-sacred situation in which the sacred is striven for but meaning comes increasingly to reside in the personality.⁷⁹ The terrain of the personality is a social and familial matrix in which the reality of everyday life becomes an inevitable reference point. In the Hindi social film such a *mise-en-scène* is vividly in evidence. Whatever the degree of fabrication, the street scene of the 1940s and 1950s is animated by the activity of newspaper hawkers, vegetable peddlers, construction workers, mechanics, urchins and shoe-shine boys, petty thieves, pedestrians going about their business. Vehicles — cycles, trucks, cars, trolleys, buses, and significant places — railway stations, cafes, the red light area, are also deployed in the semantics of the street and of movement. Above all there is, the street lamp, signifier of both street and of night and therefore of a physical, social and sexual drive.⁸⁰

But the melodramatic narrative's invocation of the 'real' is merely one level of its work. As Brooks notes, melodrama uses

the things and gestures of the real world, of social life, as kinds of metaphors that refer us to the realm of spiritual reality and latent moral meanings. Things cease to be merely themselves, gestures cease to be merely tokens of social intercourse whose meaning is assigned by a social code; they become the vehicles of metaphors whose tenor suggests another kind of reality.⁸¹

Routing itself through the 'real', melodrama then penetrates to repressed features of the psychic life and into the type of family dramas I have referred to. Certain dramaturgical features, such as that of coincidence, are central to this process of making meaning, especially for relaying the significance of the social level to the audience. For coincidence insistently anchors figures who have a definite social function to relationships of an intimate and often familial, generational order.⁸² In this sense cinematic narratives address the spectator in psychic terms, mirroring the most primal conflicts and desires and refracting all other levels of experience through that prism.

The conceptual separation of melodrama from realism which occurred through the formation of bourgeois canons of high art in late nineteenth-century Europe and America⁸³ was echoed in the discourses on popular commercial cinema of late 1940s and 1950s India. This strand of criticism, associated with the formation of the art cinema in Bengal, could not comprehend the peculiarities of a form which had its own complex mechanisms of articulation. In the process the critics contributed to an obfuscating hierarchization of culture with which we are still contending.

The Popular Cultural Politics of the Social Film

74

As a result of this obfuscation, perhaps we have not quite understood the particular political articulation of the popular cinema of the 1950s. Nationalist discourses of that time about social justice and the formation of a new personality were then routed through familiar, if modified, cultural and narrational reference points. These were family dramas, iconic and tableau modes of representation. I would suggest that the cinema of that time communicated a popular democratic perception which worked through some of the rationalist and egalitarian approaches of the liberal-radical intelligentsia, but on its own terms. Of popular modes of representation and thought in late medieval Europe, Ginzburg has suggested that they 'recall a series of motifs worked out by humanistically educated heretical groups'. But such representations are original, they were not derivative from a high rationalist culture. He thus urges that despite divergences of form and articulation (e.g., literate/oral) he is investigating 'a unified culture within which it was impossible to make clear-cut distinctions'.⁶⁴ Mutualities of influence and features of common participation break down simplistic notions of cultural difference and hierarchization. When the intelligentsia started firmly associating popular forms with 'the common people', such stances were related to an active process of their dissociation from forms in which they had previously participated.⁶⁵

However, once these distinctions are crystallized, it would be foolhardy not to pinpoint the ideological implications of the formal and narrational distinctions which emerge between art and commercial cinema; peculiarities which are quite central to the ways in which perceptions of change find expression in popular forms. I will not go into this at length, but both the deployment of the icon, and the narrative transaction around generational conflict, are centrally founded on the manipulation of woman. In particular, with rare exceptions, such a manipulation actively divests women characters of the modern, professional attributes which they exhibit, placing them as objects of exchange within the generational transaction. Further, the social film of the 1950s also tends to split the woman in terms of the figuration of her desire. Legitimate figures are held close to patriarchal hearth and *diktat* in terms of narrative space and symbolic articulation, and a more overt sexuality is displaced to another figure.⁶⁶

Having said this, perhaps we should conclude by remembering that the art cinema is perfectly capable of such a subordination of women characters. This is so of the way Ray's *Ganashatru* (1989), for example, reduces the woman to 'moral voice' and sexually threatened figure. Of course, psychological nuance and realist acting styles are evidently meant to prevent such a reduction of character to narrative function. However, not only does the commercial cinema exhibit such acting styles, as in the work of Nutan (for example, in *Sujata*, Bimal Roy, 1959, and *Bandini*, Bimal Roy, 1963); perhaps, as in song sequences such as 'Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo' in *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957) and 'O, Majhi' in *Bandini*, it has richer resources to express a desiring and divided subjectivity than naturalist canons would allow for.

I would like to thank Radhika Singha for her comments on this article, and Mike Allen for the photographs.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

75

1. Colin MacCabe (ed.), *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, is representative of approaches based on popular culture as a form of resistance in which the meaning of the product is largely predicated on audience interpretation.
2. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Temple Smith, London, 1978.
3. Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representation*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1988; 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France', in Steven L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, 1984, pp. 229-33.
4. Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation', op. cit., pp. 231, 238.
5. 'Cultural consumption, whether popular or not, is at the same time a form of production, which creates ways of using that cannot be limited to the intentions of those who produce.' Ibid., p. 234.
6. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968. For a critical discussion of Bakhtin's separation of high and low culture, in which the semantics of popular, inversionary forms are seen to come from elite culture, see Aron Gurevich, "'High" and "Low": The Medieval Grotesque', in Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, translated by Janos M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
7. Peter Burke, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
8. Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation', op. cit., p. 233.
9. 'Popular taste applies the schemes of the ethos, which pertain in the ordinary circumstances of life, to legitimate works of art, and so performs a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life. . . . On the other hand, the inheritors of academic and cultural capital are characterized by a kind of seeing for its own sake, 'the detachment of the pure gaze (which) cannot be dissociated from a general disposition towards the world which is the paradoxical product of conditioning by negative economic necessities — a life of ease. . . . Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984, p. 5.
10. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Addressing the Spectator of Indian Commercial Cinema: Visual Culture, Narrative Economy and Off-Screen Discourse in the Hindi Social Film of the 1940s and 1950s', forthcoming occasional paper, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
11. Janice A. Radway, 'Reading Is Not Eating: Mass Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological and Political Consequences of a Metaphor', *Book Research Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Fall 1986, pp. 7-29.
12. Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner', in Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986, pp. 16-18.
13. Ibid., pp. 34-42. Frederic Jameson has defined reifying and commodifying effects in the following way: 'The theory of reification . . . describes the way in which, under capitalism, the older traditional models of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and "taylorized", analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency, and essentially reconstructed along the lines of differentiation between means and ends.' The pre-condition for this reification is the abridgement of differences between activities, their unique qualities and ends under the 'universal exchange value of money', of commodification. See 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', *Social Text* 1 (1), Winter 1979, pp. 130, 131. The developed mode of the classical Hollywood cinema represents very well the way a cultural commodity can acquire reifying characteristics, in this case

- systematic codes to bind the spectator into its operations. See, in particular, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, Routledge, London, 1985, 1988; Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Cinema*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991; Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space-Frame-Narrative*, British Film Institute, 1990, especially Section III: 'The Continuity System'.
14. Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse', op. cit., pp. 41-42.
 15. Ibid., p. 22. Jameson also urges that we see 'mass culture not as empty transaction or "mere" false consciousness, but rather as a transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies which must then have some effective presence in the mass cultural text in order subsequently to be "managed" or "repressed".' Frederic Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', op. cit., p. 141.
 16. Jameson's analysis of *Jaws* and *The Godfather* draws on questions of class and ethnicity, but in a highly impressionistic, if also suggestive, way. Ibid., pp. 142-48.
 17. 'Mass Culture as Woman', in Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, op. cit., pp. 59-60.
 18. Janice Radway, op. cit., pp. 26-27. For recent stimulating essays which underline the importance of fan or consumer reworking of a product through practice, see Henry Jenkins, 'If I Could Speak With Your Sound': Fan Music, Textual Proximity, and Liminal Identification'; and Lynn Spiegel, 'Communicating With the Dead: Elvis as Medium', in *Camera Obscura*, 23, Special Issue on Popular Culture and Reception Studies, pp. 149-75 and 176-205.
 19. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger, Polity Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 159-75.
 20. I will not be analysing the place of performance sequences in this article, although they are central to an understanding of the popular aspects of the commercial film. For a preliminary attempt to evaluate their status, cf. Ravi Vasudevan, 'The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema: Notes on Film History, Narrative and Performance', *Screen*, 30 (3), 1989, pp. 29-50.
 21. Satyajit Ray, *Our Films, Their Films*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976, 'Introduction', p. 6.
 22. Satyajit Ray, 'What Is Wrong With Indian Films?', in *ibid.*, p. 21.
 23. 'Introduction', *ibid.*, p. 13.
 24. 'What Is Wrong With Indian Films?', *ibid.*, p. 23.
 25. *Indian Film Quarterly*, January-March 1957, pp. 9-14.
 26. *Indian Film Review*, December 1958, pp. 6-11.
 27. Kobita Sarkar, 'Influences on the Indian Film', *Indian Film Quarterly*, op. cit., p. 10. Marie Seton also remarked that the commercial film 'never entirely freed itself from the influence of the theatre. . . .' 'National Idiom in Film Technique', in *Indian Talkie, 1931-56*, Film Federation of India, Bombay, 1956, p. 58.
 28. Kobita Sarkar, 'Influences', op. cit., p. 10; ' . . . the greatest potential weakness of our cinema is the general lack of characterization . . .', Kobita Sarkar, 'Black and White', op. cit., p. 6.
 29. Kobita Sarkar, 'Influences', op. cit., p. 13.
 30. Kobita Sarkar, 'Black and White', op. cit., p. 6.
 31. Ibid., p. 7.
 32. Ibid., p. 8.
 33. Kobita Sarkar, 'Influences', op. cit., p. 10.
 34. Ibid., p. 12.
 35. Ibid., p. 12.
 36. Kobita Sarkar, 'Black and White', op. cit., p. 7.
 37. Kobita Sarkar, 'Influences', op. cit., p. 13. Kobita Sarkar allows the occasional flicker of doubt about absolute standards of taste in art: '(The Indian film) is derided by the more sophisticated largely because they have accepted more sophisticated standards of judgment. As it is not yet possible to set any absolute values as to what constitutes good cinema, perhaps it is rash to pass final judgment.' See 'Influences', op. cit., p. 14.



38. M.A. Parthasarathy, 'India in the Film Map of the World', *Indian Talkie* 1931-56, p. 66.
39. *Ibid.*
40. R.M. Roy (ed.), *Film Seminar Report*, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1956, pp. 29-30.
41. *Indian Film Review*, January 1958, pp. 9-14.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Jim Pineš and Paul Willemen (eds.), *Questions of Third Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1989.
53. These references are quite unelaborated, and the study of Indian cinema has only recently started investigating these issues seriously. Cf. Geeta Kapur, 'Mythic Material in Indian Cinema', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 14-15, 1987, pp. 79-107; Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology', *ibid.*, pp. 47-78, and 'Neo-traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India', *Framework*, 32-33, 1987, pp. 20-67.
54. To quote a contemporary publicity release, a social film was 'based not on historical tales, but on life as it is lived at the present time'. *Bombay Chronicle*, 27 October 1951, p. 3.
55. I draw upon Geeta Kapur's usage here: 'an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which moreover they achieve stasis'. 'Mythic Material in Indian Cinema', *op. cit.*, p. 82.
56. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, 1976; repr. Columbia University Press, New York, 1985, p. 48. Brooks here relates the tableau to the moral aspects of melodramatic *mise-en-scène*. For further discussion of melodrama, see below, under sub-heads 'Redefining the Popular: Melodrama and Realism'. The tableau form in cinema was likely to have been influenced by the Indian urban theatre, which in turn was influenced by British theatrical melodrama of the nineteenth century. For a further discussion of this, cf. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Errant Males and the Divided Woman: Melodrama and Sexual Difference in the Hindi Social Film of the 1950s', Ph.D., University of East Anglia, 1991, Chapter One.
57. Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in *Image, Music, Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1982, p. 70.
58. As Barthes notes of the tableau, it is 'a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view . . . (it) is intellectual, it has something to say (something moral, social) but it also says it knows how this must be done.' *Ibid.*
59. For an outline of the classical system, see Kristin Thompson, 'The Formulation of the Classical Style, 1909-28', in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pp. 155-240.
60. Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', in Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, Macmillan, London, 1981, p. 30.
61. Noel Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, Scholar Press, London, 1979, p. 158.
62. The following analysis of *Andaz* is derived from my paper, 'Nation and Gender in *Andaz*', presented at the Department of English, Miranda House, Delhi University, December 1990, and discussed with the Women's Studies Group, Delhi University, January 1991.
63. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1975.
64. Ashish Nandy, 'The Hindi Film: Ideology and First Principles', *India International Center Quarterly*, 8 (1), 1981, pp. 89-96; Rosie Thomas, 'Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity', *Screen*, 26 (3-4), 1985,

- pp. 116–32; Ravi Vasudevan, 'The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema', op. cit.
65. Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8 (3–4), 1986, pp. 63–70.
 66. Sylvia Harvey, 'Woman's Place: The Absent Family of *Film Noir*', in E. Anne Kaplan (ed.), *Women in Film Noir*, British Film Institute, London, 1980, pp. 22–34 (25).
 67. For a summary of analyses of *film noir* in terms of narrative structure, sexual economy and stylistic features, see David Bordwell's remarks in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, op. cit., p. 76.
 68. This is characteristic of the way melodrama moves between familial and public registers. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 31–32; and below, under sub-head 'Redefining the Popular: Melodrama and Realism'.
 69. The following analysis of relations between family and society in narrative structure is summarized from Ravi Vasudevan, 'Family, Class and Nation in the Hindi Social Film of the 1950s', paper presented at the seminar on 'Nation and Narrative', Department of English, Miranda House, Delhi University, April 1992; and 'Errant Males and the Divided Woman', op. cit., Chapter Three.
 70. Ravi Vasudevan, 'The Cultural Space of a Film Narrative: Interpreting *Kismet* (Bombay Talkies, 1943)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 28 (2), April–June 1991, pp. 171–85.
 71. The apparently paradoxical phenomenon of an image which has power is quite a common one within Hindu visual culture. Lawrence Babb has noted that whether the gods are represented as idols in the temple or the domestic space, or in the more pervasive phenomenon of photographs, the devotees desire the *darsan* (sight) of the God or religious preceptor (guru), a sight 'he grants to his devotees as a sign of his favour and grace'. Babb emphasizes that this is a question not only of the devotee seeing but being seen; and that such a constitution of the devotional subject may afford him not only the grace and favour of the deity, but may also empower him. Lawrence A. Babb, 'Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 37 (4), 1981, pp. 47–64. The subordinate position of the devotee in this relation has also been emphasized by Diana Eck: the deity 'gives *darsan*' (*darsan dena*), the people 'take *darsan*' (*darsan lena*) and so 'seeing' in this religious sense is not an act initiated by the worshipper. Diana L. Eck, *Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Anima Books, Chambersburg, Pa., 1981, p. 5. Raj's evasion of this visual field stems from his transgression of its moral boundaries.
 72. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Errant Males and the Divided Woman', op. cit., p. 114.
 73. There is a fetishistic aspect to the photograph here, a disavowal of lack in the psychoanalytical sense; but the lack involved or feared here is not that of the phallus, but that of the mother. As Kaja Silverman has noted: 'the equation of woman with lack (is) a secondary construction, one which covers over earlier sacrifices . . . the loss of the object is also a castration . . . the male subject is already structured by absence prior to the moment at which he registers anatomical difference.' Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988, pp. 14–15.
- In this sense the photograph in *Awara* bears distinctly fetishistic features, covering over as it does a masculine lack of the maternal. In narrational terms, too, in the opposition between photo-icon and cinematic movement, the invocation of the photograph has the fetishistic aspect of denying movement, and thereby loss, and seeking a return to stasis. As Gilles Deleuze has noted, the fetish in this case is a 'frozen, arrested, two-dimensional image, a photograph to which one returns repeatedly to exorcise the dangerous consequences of movement, the harmful discoveries that result from exploration. . . .' Gilles Deleuze, *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation*, translated by Jean McNeill, Faber and Faber, London, 1971, p. 28.
74. 'The Hindi Film', op. cit., p. 81.
 75. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Family, Class and Nation', op. cit., and 'Errant Males and the Divided Woman', op. cit., especially Chapter Two, in the analysis of *Devdas* (Bimal Roy, 1956) and *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957).
 76. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Glancing off reality: contemporary cinema and mass culture in India', in *Cinemaya*, 16, Summer 1992, pp. 4–9.



77. Rick Altman, 'Dickens, Griffith and Film Theory Today', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (2), Spring 1989, pp. 321-59.
78. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, op. cit., Chapter One.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
80. The street lamp is also a recurrent, metonymic element in songbook illustrations and movie posters of this period. The National Film Archives of India, Pune, has a substantial collection of both.
81. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, op. cit., p. 9.
82. Coincidence also has an important temporal function: 'the apparently arbitrary separation and coincidental reunion of characters is actually motivated by the narrative requiring a certain time to lapse. These durations are related to the evolution of a set of substitutable functions (whether between characters, or within a character) in which the timing of the substitution depends on the exhaustion of one figure, and the maturation and acquisition of lacking functions in another.' Vasudevan, 'The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema', op. cit.
83. Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film*, British Film Institute, London, 1987, pp. 33-36.
84. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1976, pp. xxii-xxiii.
85. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, op. cit., p. 27.
86. Ravi Vasudevan, 'Family, Class and Nation', op. cit.; 'Errant Males and the Divided Woman', op. cit., especially pp. 86-89, 169-70.

APPENDIX I

Figure 1: Neena's birthday — analysis of a sequence from *Andaz*

<i>Narrative description</i>	<i>Camera angle</i>	<i>Camera distance</i>	<i>Camera movement</i>	<i>Character movement</i>	<i>Character placement and direction of look</i>
1. Shiela lights candles on the birthday cake; Neena comes down hillside; her father sees her coming.	↓	mcu ls	cranes up, moves back	Neena comes down; moves around in background left of shot, accepting congratulations; her father moves towards foreground right.	Shiela, Neena and father are composed amongst the others; the father looks back to Neena as he moves forward.
2. Father introduces Neena to Shanta, whom they've hardly seen since the passing away of Neena's mother. Neena also greets the doctor, and then approaches another woman...	↑	ms		Neena enters frame left and moves from left to right, greeting the elders.	The three figures Neena greets have their backs to the camera, though Shanta can be seen in profile; the father is standing.
3a, 3b. Neena greets the third elder, 'auntie'. The woman asks Neena to sit with her.	↑	cu	tilt down to accommodate Neena's feet-touching movement	Neena touches woman's feet.	Woman with back to the camera; as she asks Neena to sit, Neena sees something off-screen right and starts moving...

Figure 1 (contd)

<i>Narrative description</i>	<i>Camera angle</i>	<i>Camera distance</i>	<i>Camera movement</i>	<i>Character movement</i>	<i>Character placement and direction of look</i>
4. Neena goes to meet Dilip	↑	ls		Neena meets Dilip, who emerges at foreground right, in mid-frame; from background right Shiela turns and moves forward; yet in the next shot...	The father, who is observable stationary at background left, and Shiela, who is moving, look on as Dilip and Neena meet.
5a, 5b. As Dilip and Neena talk, Shiela comes up to join them.	↑	ms		Shiela is stationary, next to the father, then moves up to Dilip and Neena; the father moves out of sight, right.	Shiela and the father's look onto Neena and Dilip is dispersed, Shiela joining them, the father moving off.
6. Shiela, Neena and Dilip engage in banter; Dilip gives Neena a flower as a present.	↑	mcu			Three shot, left to right, Shiela, Neena and Dilip
7. Neena says she would like Dilip to accompany Shiela's dance with a song.	↑	cu			Two shot, left to right, of Shiela and Neena, looking off-screen right at Dilip.
8. Dilip agrees, as long as Neena stands next to him while he sings.	↑	mcu			Three shot, left to right, of Shiela, Neena and Dilip.
9. Neena cuts the cake, to general applause.	↓	ls	crane-up	the father approaches cake, the others gather around.	Dilip stands next to Neena as she cuts the cake.

ls = long shot; ms = medium shot; cu = close-up; prefix 'm' = medium

APPENDIX II

Figure 2: Analysis of a sequence from *Awara*

<i>Narrative description</i>	<i>Camera angle</i>	<i>Camera distance</i>	<i>Camera movement</i>	<i>Character movement</i>	<i>Character placement and direction of look</i>
1. Raj sees something	↑	ms	slight track-in	Raj opens bag, takes out coat, is suddenly arrested in movement	as he sees something off-screen right.
2. Raj sees Rita's photo and feels it scrutinizes his dishonesty.	↑	mls ms cu	track in to photo	Raj enters from frame right to look at the photo; he turns it to the wall.	Raj's face is fixed in profile at frame left looking at Rita's photo.
3. Leela asks why he turned the photo.	↑	ms		Leela moves towards off-right.	Leela, alone, is centred in the frame of the kitchen door; she looks off-screen right and moves there.
4a, 4b. Raj says he feels her eyes penetrating him. Leela says, why doesn't he say it makes him feel sad because it reminds him of childhood days; she asks why he doesn't search for Rita.	↑	mls ms	track-in to follow Leela's movement	Leela moves towards photo and turns it face up.	Leela is at frame left as camera tracks in. Raj is stationary, back to the camera, at frame right; after turning the photo, Leela turns to look at Raj.

Figure 2 (contd)

<i>Narrative description</i>	<i>Camera angle</i>	<i>Camera distance</i>	<i>Camera movement</i>	<i>Character movement</i>	<i>Character placement and direction of look</i>
4c. Raj says that childhood days and friends never return.	↑	cu	pan to reframe Raj	Raj whips on coat and then goes off-screen right.	Raj whips coat on and is isolated from Leela and the photo by reframing; he looks off-screen left (to Leela) before going off-screen right.
4d, 4e. Leela says, what about the tea?	↑	mls (photo) cu (Leela)	pan left to meet Leela's movement	Leela moves into sight.	Raj's exit leaves screen occupied, at bottom left, by Rita's photo; the mother's body is barely framed next to it; with the character movement and reframing Leela, looking off-screen right, blocks the photo.
5. Raj says to leave the tea, he has to see a friend.	↑	ms mls (Raj)		Raj moves out out through the the first door en route to the main one.	Raj, with his back to the camera, moves out in a frame centred way.
6. Leela: what a silly boy!	↑	cu			Framing of Leela looking off screen right, as at the last framing of shot 4.

Figure 2 (contd)

<i>Narrative description</i>	<i>Camera angle</i>	<i>Camera distance</i>	<i>Camera movement</i>	<i>Character movement</i>	<i>Character placement and direction of look</i>
7a. Leela unpacks Raj's bag and discovers the gun	↑	mls	pan left to right following Leela to bag; then track in to gun	Leela moves left to right.	Leela, initially at frame left, is kept there through camera movement; she looks into the suitcase; we lose sight of her as camera tracks in to what she sees.
7b.	↑	cu			
8a. Leela is shocked by the discovery.	↑	ms	pan left and then	Leela turns her her face.	Leela is looking off-screen left at the end of her turn; the
8b.	↑	mls	track in to		track in blocks her and centres
8c.	↑	ms	photo		the photo.
9a. Leela turns the photograph to the wall.	↑	cu	track out, blocking	Leela turns photo to the wall.	Reframing from photograph to Leela, who looks off-screen
9b.	↑		photo and		right.
9c.	↑	ms	framing Leela		

ls = long shot; ms = medium shot; cu = close-up; prefix 'm' = medium