

***Kaadalan* and the Politics of Resignification**

Fashion, Violence and the Body

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The song 'Mukkaala Muqabla', from the Tamil film *Kaadalan* (Loveboy), has been the biggest hit of the year, perhaps of the decade.¹ The peculiar voice of Mano has been resonating in cinema halls, living rooms, streets, and video coaches across the nation. The visual sequence of the song — which dominated various TV count-down shows such as Superhit Muqabla, BPL Oye and Philips Top Ten — is quite fantastic, even bizarre. A pastiche on spaghetti westerns, the sequence opens with the hero — his hair and beard bleached blonde — sitting on a horse with a noose around his neck and the bad guys about to shoot the horse. The heroine gallops into the frame with a gun and shoots off the rope to liberate the hero. Then begins the dance, performed with great élan by Prabhudeva. The sequence itself is a strip of narrative very much in the MTV genre, and has no apparent link to the larger narrative of the film. The song/dance sequence in Indian films has always been a relatively autonomous block, one of the requirements of the dominant form of manufacture rather than a diegetic necessity. This tendency of the song/dance sequence toward autonomy has been intensified in recent years by the competition of television and the MTV genre as well as by the market opened up by them. So elaborately orchestrated dance sequences, each representing an autonomous strip of narrative, have become an imperative for the survival of the film industry.

At first sight, therefore, the 'Mukkaala ...' dance sequence seems to instantiate this logic and respond to its imperative, its link to the filmic narrative seeming to be only a loosely metaphoric one. The hero has been in police custody undergoing elaborate torture. The heroine, whose father had ordered the confinement, embarrasses him into releasing the hero. Then follows the song/dance we described above; clearly a celebration, an expression of liberation. But why the peculiar form and 'western' theme?²

The narrative action within the song has a bizarre moment where the hero, now dancing with a hip MTV-type baggy suit, hat and shoes, has the visible parts of his body — the face, hands, ankles — shot off. And, with only a moment's pause, the garb

continues to dance, perform and signify. This moment, and this song sequence, synecdochically foregrounds both the 'theme' of the film and the complex enunciative folding or layering of its filmitude; its formal enunciative complexity placed at the service of its attempt to elaborate a cultural politics of resignification.³ As we will try to show below, almost all the song/sequences in the film do that, some more spectacularly and successfully than the others. However, before analysing the politics of resignification attempted by the film, or, rather as a prelude to it, let us repeat the synecdochic structure of the film and analyse briefly the 'Mukkaala . . .' sequence.

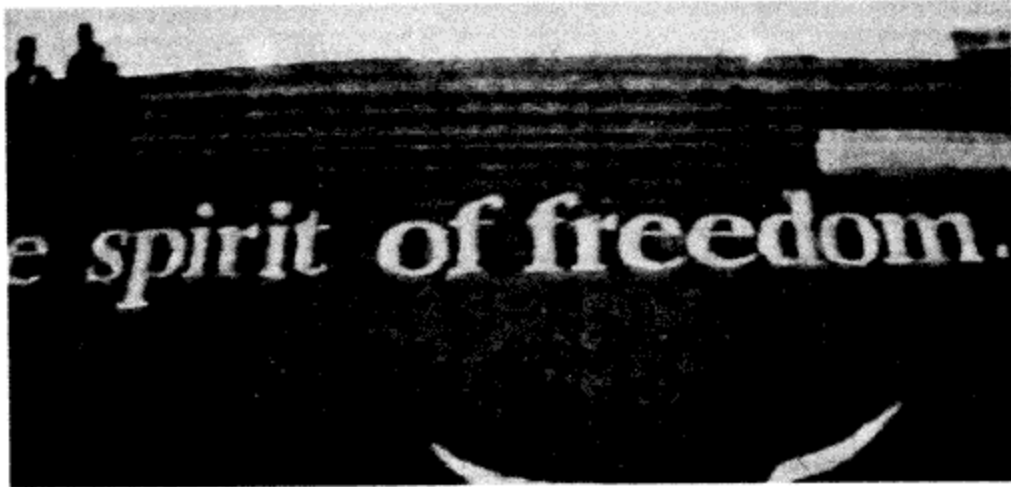
As an independent block, with its own narrative, it can be seen as competing with the MTV genre. Inserted into the film, but still taken as an autonomous block, it can be seen as the film's attempt to assert its superiority over other media and other media-genres.⁴ As an enunciation orchestrated by the film, it is also a comment on the circulation and consumption of spaghetti westerns (but we should not forget the even longer history of the fictions of Oliver Strange and Louis l'Amour) by the urban middle-class, on our ability to register that genre. We could then take it as an attempt to draw upon and comment on the perceptual habit formed by various 'foreign' elements — western novels, films, the pastiche-use of them in MTV. And the high-tech aesthetic staging of the dance to highlight Prabhudeva's stunning dancing body superimposes and resignifies the previous enunciative elements both formally and thematically. The MTV culture, as well as more generally the global televisual culture, is here and we have to negotiate it. Film as an industry has to negotiate it in order to survive; culturally we have to negotiate it, again in order to survive.

Let us for convenience use 'fashion' as a signifier for the onslaught of 'globalized' (read: americanized) culture. So the hero/Prabhudeva takes on rap, MTV, the high-tech audiovisual apparatus — but also, as we shall see, Bharatanatyam and tradition — and resignifies them. Body, then, is site of this negotiation; the source and target of violence, of stimulation. The body, that most material of signifiers, must cope, mediate, transform the various forces — globalizing economy and culture, the state and its violence, 'tradition' and its demands — that make it their target. The bizarre moment we described above — of the body dancing, performing, signifying even after the 'referent,' the material body, is destroyed — that moment registers the politics of resignification, with the body foregrounded as the site and agency of that cultural politics. The song then reconnects with the theme/form of the film; or, better still, it synecdochically rearticulates what the film attempts to enunciate: resignification as a cultural politics. But not in any simple sense only a 'cultural' politics. . . . We briefly noted above the scenes that precede the 'Mukkaala . . .' sequence. The hero is confined and tortured by the police on the orders of the state's Governor because he has fallen in love with the heroine, who is the Governor's daughter. That torture sequence too foregrounds the body in all its nakedness and vulnerability. And yet the terroristic attempt by the state to destroy his body is shown by the film to be futile.

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8 Indeed, terrorist politics — if the state's actions can be described as such — is shown to be caught in the referential illusion. Terrorism attempts to get hold of and destroy the 'reference', the materiality of body, in the hope of arresting or abolishing signification. That attempt has to fail — even if the violence it engenders wreaks havoc — in so far as reference itself is the effect of signification. Along with processing the signifier 'fashion' — which stands in for the apparatus, the institution, and the culture of television, advertising and other parts of the media industry — *Kaadalan* also processes and encrypts the political system of contemporary India and its enunciation. 'Violence' is the signifier of this system of enunciations, its institutions and practices. The film, as we shall show, represents the state and the law as attempting to arrest, block and even destroy the process of resignification that is already underway. Again body is the site and agency of political signification too. The two signifiers (violence and the body) and their complex enunciations that the film tries to represent, enfold and resignify, cross one another within the film as they do outside it. This way of putting it, however, is unsatisfactory because the film's reflexivity about its filmitude consists not merely in formal gestures but in its attempt to resignify that filmitude itself in so far as the film seeks to index the political culture in which it is embedded, namely, the political culture of Tamilnadu where the filmic idiom and filmic iconicity are inseparable from politics. A similar situation obtains in the political culture of Andhra Pradesh, where the authors of this paper live.

It is the burden of this essay to show how *Kaadalan* engages, and forces us to engage, in a politics of resignification that centres around the body — the caste body, the class body, and the body politic; body embedded in the modalities of class and caste, caught in and engaging with the different forms of violence. The film orchestrates very different, heterogeneous enunciative or signifying systems by spatializing the conflict or antagonism between them: MTV, saturation of the visual field of urban spaces by all kinds of objects, liberalized political spaces, traditional spaces. We hope to explore how as a film it is able to do that, and what intertextual field emerges from that orchestration. In exploring this process, we will be forced to confront or interrogate issues of politics, not merely or only of the politics of culture in our time, but more fundamentally, what can be the shape of politics in the emerging cultural economy that seems to be redrawing and covering up the economic and social dislocations caused by its own incursion. For the purposes of this essay, then, to use a predictable if convenient pun, *Kaadalan* is both a pretext and an intertext. In fact, the film stages itself as such, that is, as a pretext and an intertext for engaging in a politics of resignification, although what might surprise us are the elements or traces that make up its intertextuality, that it opens up for resignification. The very audacity of the film, however, makes all the more evident its limitations and its blindnesses (to use 'blindness' in the Paul de Manian sense, as that necessary moment which produces what he calls an 'insight') regarding certain areas, notably that of gender. We have attempted to read *Kaadalan* through certain interpretive structures



derived from our understanding of contemporary politics, notably the different strands of dalit cultural politics that have emerged in the post-Mandal years. The 'validity' of such a reading can be measured, it seems to us, only by whether or not it illuminates some facets of the present-day political scenario, and not by its 'faithfulness' to the filmic text. What we as audience bring to the theatre, which is what informs our response to the film, seems to have everything to do with a political space that has been formative for us, that has in a sense generated our questions, questions we do not leave behind us when we watch a film like *Kaadalan*.

What first strikes one about this film is its verve, energy and style. Its use of colour — each sequence is a veritable riot of colour — its use of fashion, its orchestration of violence, makes us euphoric. And this euphoria is consumerist — the film itself stages it as such. As though to make sure we don't miss this point, the first song-sequence — choreographed to showcase the dancing talent of Prabhudeva — uses a Charms cigarette hoarding with the message, 'Taste the Spirit of Freedom.' The body is the site that unites the two signifiers, 'fashion' and 'violence' — the body mediating, and being *mediatized* by, the global televisual junk through its response to the MTV culture and to the kung fu films; the body enacting tradition, the body, as we have already said, as the source and target of violence.

The trope that governs this cinema of the body is synecdoche.⁵ One could in fact argue that the film attempts the impossible — namely, to present each shot, indeed each frame, as a synecdoche (it being understood that the relationship between part and whole is reversible). This accounts, we feel, for the predominance of the spatialized shots. The two are obviously related in more than a casual sense. One implication of this being that the relationship between the shots are less important, or are subordinate to the relationship within the image. The most productive link between the synecdochic

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representation and spatialization are established in those shots in which, to put it in Deleuzian terms, the 'sheets of past' and moments or 'peaks of present' are made to inhere in the image. The film in fact aims, as we shall show, to spatialize conflicts that are temporal, this in order to heighten the intensity of the time-image and thereby to open up the past, in so far as it inheres in the present, for resignification. The spatialization and the synecdochic trope that governs it are evident most clearly in the song/dance sequences, although they structure other scenes too.

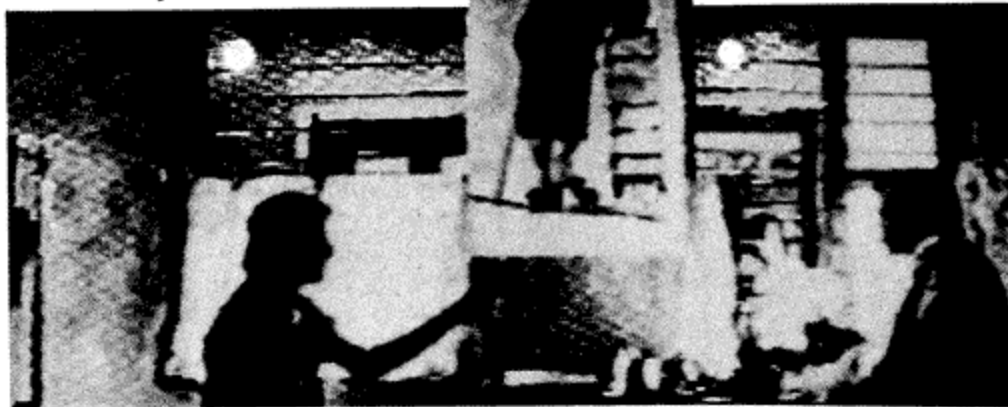
Kaadalan employs a banal plot: poor boy falls in love with rich girl, and the two negotiate a happy ending through numerous narrative twists; the main obstacle to the couple's union is the girl's father (played, coincidentally, by major modernist icon Girish Karnad), the Governor of the state who turns out to be engaging in a series of terrorist acts. The critique of the indigenist-modernist celebration of the Indian peasant begins in the very first sequence of the film, in which a farmboy wearing a dhoti and with a towel over his shoulder dives into a haystack and emerges as the suave, jeans-clad high-tech bomb-expert Malli (who is the Governor's hired hand, played with great panache by Raghuvaran). Malli proceeds to the city to set up an explosive device, disposing of a guard who tries to stop him; this device will go off in the next sequence, which introduces us to Kakarla Satyanarayana,⁶ associating the representative of the state from the beginning with violence, although his complicity, even initiative, in the acts of violence is established for the spectator only somewhat later. The Governor, therefore, appears throughout the film as the embodiment of the law. Interestingly, the film constantly represents violence as being generated *within* the established political system itself, its main agents shown as the Governor and his mercenary, or the police who capture and torture the hero. In this, *Kaadalan* differs considerably from *Roja* and *Bombay*, with which it engages in a kind of intertextual polemics, and which portray the perpetrators of violence as anti-national terrorists or communalists. The significance of such a portrayal in *Roja* and *Bombay* lies in their understanding of violence as existing outside of signification, or as disruptive of signification. Violence in this scheme is seen as senseless, outside reason or the rule of law.⁷ In *Kaadalan*, however, violence is internal to the signifying system and integral to the rule of law (in Lacanian/Zizekian terms, the obscenity of law), to the maintenance of the state, just as it is integral to the processes of liberalization and globalization which are helping to fashion the new Indian citizen-consumer. The figure of the Governor and his actions also show the links between law, state and sexuality: the state embodies the terrifying patriarchal law, the law that provokes/forbids/dissimulates violence, as well as the obscene law of enjoyment, which is the inseparable superegoic underside of the public law.⁸ The scene where the heroine Shruti, after having spent the night in the forest with the hero, is subjected to a virginity test is clearly a scene of violation, and the agency of that violation is the father, who has ordered the doctor to conduct the test just as he has ordered the torture of the hero. Shruti resists her father's obscene injunction by throwing a slimy green chemical

on his face, but eventually she is subdued and penetrated, an act portrayed in the gruesome cinematic tradition of depicting rape scenes, with only the heroine's face — up front — registering the violation.

The banality of the plot of *Kaadalan* is one of its important features. The film's deployment of the spatialized synecdochic representations subordinates the diegetic temporality to the dynamic temporality of the time-image. The unfolding of the plot takes place almost as a succession of time-images. These images are constructed around spaces or sites. Spaces of very different kinds dominate almost all the important scenes, especially those that construct a synecdochic representation of the film's themes: streets, college, dance-school, stadium, temple, forest, interiors of homes, the Governor's residence. It is at first sight puzzling why the camera frames these sites sometimes lingeringly but often relentlessly — even when an action is taking place, the background stands out in bold relief — until we realize that these are all sites of potential conflict. The only exception to this is the home/the interior of the hero, which is a place where the hero's desire and phantasy are nurtured, where his relationship with his father is presented as a bantering, playful, supportive friendship. In a sense, the father is complicit in his son's desire, as demonstrated in the 'hook' song sequence or in his urging the young man to learn classical dance in order to win the heroine's love.

It is indeed the hero's desire for his phantasy woman that sets the narrative going. The scene where that desire is first presented takes place in the hero's study, where his friend Vasant is presenting his typology of women. The camera lingers on this interior, lit in luminous yellow, reddish brown and red — in which we see a poster of Chaplin above the table, and a table-lamp shaped like an old phonogram, the lamp calling attention to its own luminosity as Vasant keeps playing with the switch. The hero outlines the phantasy features of his ideal woman; he has in fact outlined those features in his sketchbook. The framing of this shot

clearly illustrates the function of the spatialized synecdoche in heterogeneous modes of



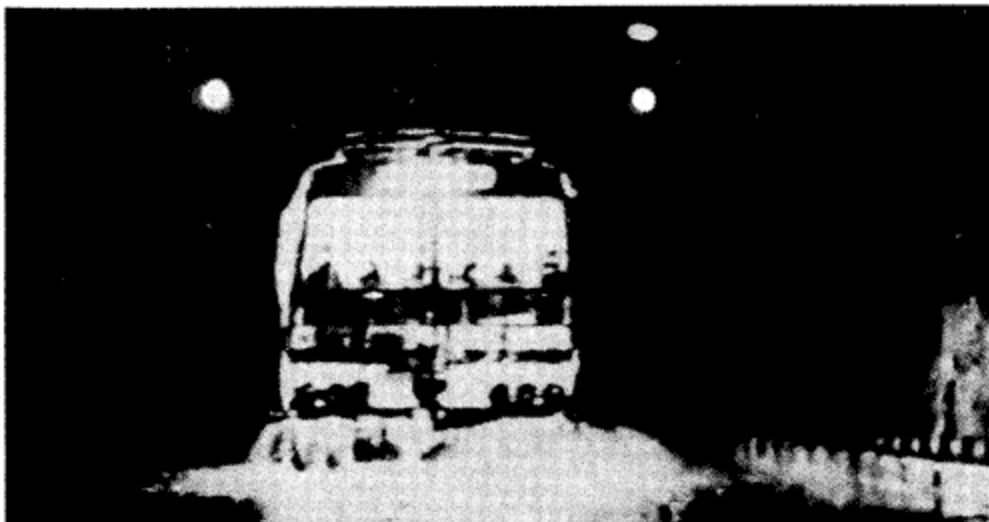
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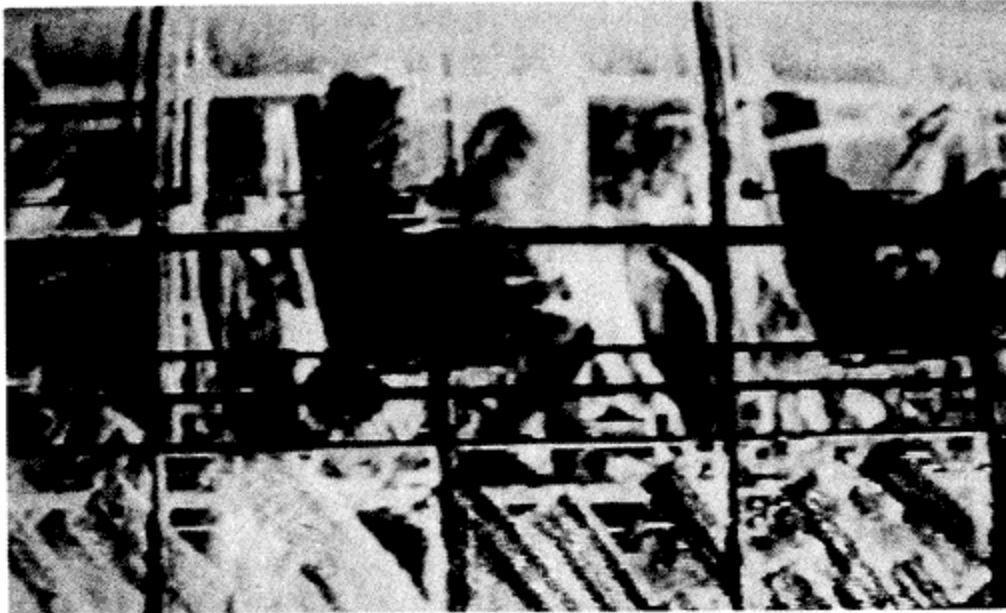
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enunciation: by setting the Chaplin-figure — the semiotic body *par excellence* in the history of cinema — in a relationship with the table-lamp shaped as a phonogram, the film both folds in the temporality of cinematic enunciation within itself and signals its own preoccupation with the semiotics of the body; and the luminosity of the phonogram signalling its restaging of the relationship between sight and sound. The auditory signifier is here subordinate to the visual signifier. So the before present in this time-image refers not obviously to the previous scene or shot but to the cinematic past; it is as though the film is audaciously returning to the bodily semiotics of the silent era with the sound and colour added, both as attitudes of the body itself.

Superimposed on this enunciation, which draws in the past of the cinema itself, is the genesis of the hero's desire or phantasy. This, then, is the real beginning of the film, although already the college has been marked as the site of conflict and political mobilization, the hero being the president of the student's union. The next site — the site of political power — is the Governor's residence, in which the hero makes his entry, accompanied by Vasant and a professor of physics from the college. And from here onwards all the spaces that the hero enters turn into sites of conflict or struggle. It is during this visit to the Governor's residence that the hero sets eyes on his phantasy figure, Shruti.

The very first song-sequence in the film, 'Urvasi, Urvasi . . .', demonstrates clearly both the problematic of spatialization and the synecdochic structure that governs the film. The hero, Prabhu, and his sidekick, Vasant, disguised under *burqas*, get into a Ladies' Special bus filled with girl-students. They are discovered and slapped around; then they break into 'Urvasi, Urvasi, . . . take it easy policy.' As the bus traverses the cityscape of Madras, the dancing provides the camera an opportunity to revel in its





cinemascope spatializing shots and to encompass the landmarks, such as buildings — both colonial and contemporary — and objects such as other modes of transportation, for example the bullock-cart. Halfway through the sequence, there comes about a fantastic and phantasmatic transformation: the already vivid colours and upbeat music take on a different hue and timbre, and the ordinary bus turns into a veritable post-modern one made of transparent glass. This almost phantasmagoric change is registered through the stunned faces of an old man and a child, and through the sound of a wailing voice which is distinctly middle-eastern. If we see this 'phantasi' (sic) scene as again synecdochically spatializing the different signifiers — in this case, the urban space as we have known it with its sturdy buses ('modernity') coexisting with the bullock-carts ('tradition') against colonial buildings, slums, and modern structures — we can then reinterpret what appears as phantasmagoric as precisely our perceptions of the rapid changes occurring before our eyes (or the eyes of the old man and the child), exemplified, especially in the southern cities (Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad) by the profusion of what are indeed called 'high-tech' buses, with their stylish architecture — huge inclining windshields, collapsible doors, back-engines, and pulsating colours. Even as the body is being transformed by the rhythms of rap or Michael Jackson's dancing or Jackie Chan's kung fu, and as the perceptual apparatus is assaulted, mediatized and retrained by cable TV, Hollywood films (the hero has just seen *Jurassic Park*), so is the phenomenology of objects, sights and sounds in space, a space which is itself undergoing vast mutations. The song-sequence begins with the shot of a Muslim man selling birds in cages and the sound of the *azaan*. It develops into a dance which is Prabhudeva's version of rap, and

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14 a song which is the composer A.R.Rahman's special blend of techno-pop. Each frame of the song, in its characteristic spatialized shot that foregrounds the whole frame as it were, represents what we might now feel justified in calling the mediatized body against a background (which might accurately be termed the foreground!) of 'liberalized', or 'structurally adjusted', space.

The complex hermeneutic situation that the film mobilizes through its synecdochic representational structure negotiates, not surprisingly, the dominant idioms of cinema in India. How does one characterize the institution of cinema in India? Madhava Prasad has argued persuasively that it is 'an institution that is part of the continuing struggle within India over the form of the state.'⁹ In this fundamental sense, Indian cinema is 'about' imagining the conflicts and constestation over that form as well as an attempt to shape the form itself. The dominant textual form of Indian cinema, then, is structured by the allegory of the state. The production of this form, Madhava Prasad argues further, is marked by 'the heterogeneous form of manufacture' (SCH, p. 17). That is to say, various elements in any given film tend to be more or less autonomous, for example, lyric/music, the song sequence, fight sequence, sub-plot involving comedians, etc., with the story-line itself having the status of a component, rather than being a centralizing force as in the classical Hollywood form of manufacture. With the post-independence emergence of filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and the imbrication of their filmic practice with Nehruvian nationalism,¹⁰ the 'good' Indian film, or the 'art' film comes into being in the late 1950s, funded by the state-owned Film Finance Corporation. By the 1970s, the realist film is modulated into what Madhava Prasad calls the 'developmentalist aesthetic' of the films of Shyam Benegal and others, which serve the crucial function of distancing for their urban audience the feudal set-up which is now realistically 'othered' as the rural, the folk, etc. While on the one hand, the seventies are marked by the rise of the new realist Indian cinema, the period also sees on the other hand the emergence of the avant-garde filmmakers like Kumar Shahani or Mani Kaul who innovate in terms of film-form. The two currents appear to converge in a director like Mani Ratnam in the 1990s, who combines them with the idiom of commercial cinema. Certain avant-garde techniques such as the frontality of framing seem to reappear in Mani Ratnam via his training in advertising, bearing out the validity of Andreas Huyssen's suggestion that the modernist avant-garde's formal innovations are taken up by and become part of the vocabulary of the culture industry.¹¹

One of the most remarkable things about *Kaadalan* is the major shift it negotiates in filmic idiom. This is not to say that the shift is solely accomplished by this film and none other, but only to draw attention to its achievement in working through the technical and referential possibilities of cinema itself even as it represents, or rather interprets for us, our new cultural-political landscape. In the post-independence cinema and theatre scene, we have on the one hand the modernist Benegals and Karnads who dramatize the dichotomy between upper class/caste and 'folk' (suggesting a revitalization of the

former by the latter, as in the play *Hayavadana*, or the film *Ankur*),¹² and on the other hand a figure like the popular Kannada hero Rajkumar, whose most commercially successful films (like *Bangaarada Manushya*) represent the good rustic triumphing over the villains from the city. Both sorts of films, it can now be seen, contribute to the shaping of a national(ist) aesthetic, especially in setting up the crucial opposition between urban and rural, privileging the latter in a compensatory and patronizing gesture, all the more striking since it is produced by the enormous urban technical apparatus of the movie industry. The gesture, as Madhava Prasad has argued, is a necessary one for the consolidation of the nation-state, which creates the hierarchy between modern and feudal, or urban and rural, by the act of distancing (SCH, p. 350). This hierarchy, we suggest, is one that is disturbed by a film like *Kaadalan*.

To understand the specific ways in which *Kaadalan* reorganizes the idiom of cinema in India, and popular cinema in particular, we could contrast it with the films of Mani Ratnam, the Tamil filmmaker who, especially since *Roja* (1992) and *Bombay* (1995), has contributed so significantly to the articulation of a near-hegemonic middle-class neo-nationalism. The achievement of a filmmaker like Mani Ratnam lies in his ability to draw on the representational idioms of seventies modernist–realist cinema as well as the Hindi and South Indian popular cinema, in fusing the naturalism of the former with the song-and-dance entertainment afforded by the latter, producing this fusion of idioms through a highly sophisticated technical apparatus. What emerges in Mani Ratnam’s films, therefore, is an aesthetic that is post-national-modern (that seems to revel in displaying and drawing attention to its technical virtuosity, especially in its camera-work, unlike the earlier realist cinema) and a politics of (upper caste/middle class) neo-nationalism. We shall have occasion to return to Mani Ratnam in the course of our arguments.

Clearly, a film like *Kaadalan* is made possible by the techno-aesthetic space created by the Mani Ratnam team, but it seems to signal a different set of political possibilities. Most importantly, these possibilities have to do with the way in which an urban popular culture, mediated by a global televisual culture but implicitly marked as dalit, is contrasted time and again in the film with the upper class/caste cultural space. This contrast, we argue, displaces on the one hand the modernist opposition of ‘folk’ to upper caste which has been so culturally thematic in India, and on the other hand creates the possibility for the imbrication, and resignification, of dalit and upper caste cultural spaces. The congruence of dalit and the urban popular points here, it would seem, to the unmistakable modernity of urban dalit cultural politics today, a recognition of which should confound attempts to relegate caste to the immutable realm of ‘tradition’. Coming as it does after Mani Ratnam’s political melodrama, *Roja*, and as it were coming into the signifying space created by him, *Kaadalan* nevertheless overturns Mani Ratnam’s neo-nationalism and transforms his space and modes of signification. What, then, could we describe as the specific ‘work’ of *Kaadalan*? It consists of bringing together the

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signifying systems of fashion and violence in a sustained exploration of the body as both site and signifier of a larger process of resignification that is underway in the space of contemporary politics.

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Violence, therefore, is seen as part of the signifying process narrativized by the film, rather than something that cannot be represented. Thus, the contemporary despair about the inability to represent, expressed in particular with regard to communalism or 'communal riots' (these phenomena being an index of the 'senselessness' of our time), and manifested not only in filmic practice but in areas such as historiography, is nowhere to be found in *Kaadalan*, which explicitly thematizes the body as the very site on which violence of different kinds can be represented. The neo-modernist, which includes the left as well as the liberal response today, outrage (we almost hear the voice of Conrad/Kurtz saying 'The horror, the horror') at the unutterability of violence — more often than not coded as 'communal' violence — detracts attention, it seems to us, from two crucial contemporary forms of violence that *Kaadalan* is able to address, and negotiate: around the question of caste, and the question of liberalization/globalization. Importantly, therefore, violence also gets resignified here. Not only does the film do this, it actually inscribes on the bodies of its protagonists the intersections of these two questions. And the inscription, we would like to suggest, is made possible by the film's refusal of a 'natural' body, by its holding apart of body as referent from body as signifier, by its dramatization of the processes by which the body signifies. The most striking illustration of this refusal is in the 'Mukkaala Muqabla' song sequence which we have already analysed, where the hero's face, hands and ankles are shot away but he (or more accurately, his clothes) can continue to dance.

Kaadalan's ability to draw attention to its modes of enunciation shows the filmmaker's awareness that the cinematic process of signification, as Christian Metz would have it, is reflexive rather than deictic.¹³ Here, too, this film is markedly different from those made by Mani Ratnam, who shortcircuits the signified by collapsing the referent and the signifier in such a way as to naturalize his protagonists. Nowhere is this more clearly seen, and nowhere more explicitly comparable, as in Mani Ratnam's production of the consumer-citizen (*Geetanjali, Roja*) or of the patriot-lover (*Roja, Bombay*). As argued elsewhere, these films present their protagonists precisely in their 'garb' as consumers, so that they appear to us as 'real' and 'natural', the historical processes that fed into their formation becoming invisible in the asserted and assertive contemporaneity of the filmic narrative.¹⁴ The techno-aesthetic in Mani Ratnam thus contributes to the reification of social life. The process of signification is given fixity so that the suturing effect can come about more effectively. One of the attractions of Mani Ratnam's films for the urban middle-classes — yuppies — is precisely those 'cinematic moments' and diegesis that resemble Hollywood realist melodramas, as for example in the deployment of the newsroom, the TV, and the newspaper in *Roja* and *Bombay*.

In contrast, *Kaadalan* deploys a striking self-reflexivity. Even while presenting to

us the euphoria of consumerism, as in the 'Take it easy, Urvasi' song sequence, the film points to the explicit fashioning of the new consumer by staging the song like an advertisement, and posing its protagonists against advertising hoardings. Where Mani Ratnam's films naturalize upper caste, middle class privilege, *Kaadalan* renders the markers of such privilege mobile, making them available for interrogation and resignification. One example of such mobility is the wearing of blue jeans by the hero's sidekick Vasant (played by the comedian Vadivelu); the film focusses on Vasant's jeans during the 'Urvasi' song, part of the significance of this apparel being that Vasant is wearing his jeans on top of a 'traditional' loincloth, a matter of great humiliation for him when the Governor's security guards make him strip to establish that he is not hiding anything under his trousers.¹⁵ Blue jeans before the era of liberalization in India have been a marker of westernized modernity and a privilege of upper class-caste youth, and part of the present-day transformation of the South Indian urban landscape can be seen in the appropriation of blue denim by young lower caste-class men. The male dalit body is fashioned in the film as a 'modern' body, and our attention is sought to be drawn to the process of its fashioning. In contrast, the modern body in Mani Ratnam's films is naturalized as the middle class, upper caste body (the body of the actor Arvind Swamy in *Roja* and *Bombay*, for instance, where one sees the convergence of the MTV body and the anti-Mandal body), whereas in *Kaadalan* this naturalness is prised apart, and the MTV body is foregrounded as the actor Prabhudeva's dalit body. In a short sequence on the beach where Prabhu and his friends are talking about Shruti, one of the young men says to Prabhu that the (upper-caste) heroine will not be interested in him because he doesn't look like Mani Ratnam's hero Arvind Swamy. Towards the end of the film, there



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is a moment of wicked humour when the dark-complexioned, slender and bearded Prabhu in dark glasses and baseball cap is passed off to the villagers (by Shruti's grandparents who are trying to reunite the lovers against their son the Governor's wishes) as the fair, plump, clean-shaven archetypal South Indian film hero of the sixties N.T. Rama Rao, whose film *Lava-Kusha* is then shown to them by Vasant posing as a producer.



One area the film fails to problematize, or make available for major resignification, is that of gender. It is almost as though the film's destabilization of the male markers of caste-class privilege centrally depend on the representation of the upper class-caste woman. As cinematic desired object, the body of the actress Nagma, who plays Shruti, signals the characteristics (light skin, brownish hair, light eyes, well-nourished arms and legs) of the typical Hindi-movie heroine. One of the tasks of the film seems to be to present the dalit male as culturally desirable to the upper caste woman, a process in which the dalit woman as romantic partner becomes quite invisible. She can appear only parodically, as in Vasant's drag attire during the *peta*-rap sequence when he pretends to be a shy village maiden; or appear (as in the motorbike chase sequence) in her cotton sari as the bearer of rustic ethnicity, only to have her sari appropriated by the heroine who exchanges for it her denim skirt. Clearly, *Kaadalan* like the Mani Ratnam films is a post-Mandal phenomenon, but whereas the latter produce the effect of what we may call after Madhava Prasad class-caste endogamy, this film sets out to resignify the upper caste, anti-Mandal, anti-dalit woman so that her antagonism turns into acceptance, even romantic love. We use 'anti-Mandal' as a shorthand term to refer to the sort of middle class, upper caste female subjectivity that emerged during the anti-Mandal agitation of

1990. It was a subjectivity that formed itself in opposition to the dalit male who was the pro-reservationist imaged as taking away the jobs of the upper caste men who were the rightful partners of the women of their class-caste. We see Shruti in *Kaadalan* as the anti-Mandalite college girl who is the visual representation of the women who took to the streets against the Mandal Commission's recommendations. Although there may be no direct mention of Mandal in *Kaadalan*, in our opinion the film cannot be read without the interpretive frame of caste politics that has thrown up some of the most significant political questions of our time.¹⁶

The desirability of the dalit male is produced by the dress codes of globalization (Prabhu's craving for a new pair of sneakers, his trendy clothes) as well as by the male's demonstrated cultural prowess, represented by the film as his ability to dance, whether it is 'peta-rap' or Bharatanatyam. In fact, the film's focus on dance is an important component of its resignification of the body in terms of the politics of caste. Observe the representations of 'Indian classical dance', here Bharatanatyam, in the film. The heroine Shruti is urban, westernized, ostensibly deracinated. But she is shown as claiming the space of 'tradition' through her dancing skill. The depiction of her dance school, Natyalaya, bears a close resemblance to the famous Kalakshetra in Madras, suggesting *Kaadalan's* attempt to interrogate the formation of a nationalist dance tradition in the 1930s (the figure of Rukmini Devi Arundale is central here, as is the theosophist Annie Besant and the Indian National Congress) when the lower caste, devadasi dance form *sadir* was transformed into the brahminical Bharatanatyam, the practitioners of the latter inventing a suitably upper caste genealogy for the dance which then became imbricated with the nationalist conception of Indian womanhood as chaste, pure and genteel.¹⁷ Interestingly, even as this nationalist upper caste aesthetic emerges in southern India, in particular in Madras Presidency, the Self-Respect movement of Periyar Ramasamy Naicker is not only creating a space for the assertion of lower caste identities but also challenging the nationalist conception of the nation in terms of caste, region and language. It is tempting, then, to look at the contest over Bharatanatyam in *Kaadalan* as not being unrelated to these specific historical moments, as suggesting in synecdochic fashion the historical conflicts that are being rearticulated in the present. The *peta-rap* sequence is a vivid presentation of the Deleuzian time-image which spatializes temporal conflicts, and shows the past inhering in the present. The *peta rap* is introduced into the Natyalaya lessons by Vasant and Prabhu to alleviate their boredom and attract Shruti's attention. Vasant glosses it for an American student in the dance school as a combination of 'American rap' and 'our local drum'. It is indeed a combination of southern Indian 'folk' singing and globalized rap music, and Prabhu and Vasant's bawdy dance evokes astonishment, embarrassment, some participation, and finally Shruti's outraged injunction to 'Stop it!'

Like the other sites Prabhu enters, the dance school too is turned into a site of conflict when the hero arrives there in pursuit of his object of desire. This is also the site

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of past as tradition, and conflict erupts here almost immediately, between the distinctions of tradition embodied in the bodies of the dancers (especially Shruti) and the newly mediatized body which also carries with it the old lower caste-class folk impulses exemplified in the *peta-rap* sequence. The synecdochic representations of the dance-school then opens up the consensus embodied in its site as tradition to contestation and new signification. The very presence of the inappropriate bodies of Prabhu and Vasant before the signifier of tradition and its imperatives for the hero in the form of a demand from his love object that he respect tradition enables this particular representation to again synchronize the past into present conflict or antagonism. The temporality of the past as tradition is spatialized and the ground prepared for the next synecdochic representation of subsequent sites — forest ('nature') and the temple (sacred space, or tradition as eternalized present) — which now begin to draw in and explicate the conflicts marked in the earlier sites.

After the heroine has scolded Prabhu and Vasant for their display of '*peta-rap*' which she says has spoiled the sanctity of Natyalaya, Prabhu on his father's advice sets out to learn Bharatanatyam. This he does almost entirely by himself, without a guru, without entering into a long period of apprenticeship, without the obeisance to the gods that is an integral part of the classical dance tradition. And when he has mastered the dance form, he gains entry to the heavily guarded mansion of the heroine and dances for her, his footwork creating her portrait on the flour-powder he has strewn on the floor. After this display, Prabhu seems to abandon his newly learned art, for we do not see him ever dancing Bharatanatyam in the rest of the film, as if to suggest that his achievement was meant to signify not a change of heart, or a change in artistic direction for him, but rather a demystification of classical dance, a delinking of it from its gender-caste connotations in the national imaginary.

Thus the hero succeeds through the semiotic prowess of his body to respond to the imperative addressed to him through his love-object and assimilates — or more accurately perhaps, learns how to *signify* — Bharatanatyam, winning her love in the process. Now follows the escapade of the couple on Prabhu's motorbike, as they take the road to Chidambaram where Shruti and the Natyalaya students are to perform in the temple. En route, the hero and heroine are forced to spend a night in the forest. Here the hero turns out to be completely 'at home'; he deftly makes toys and dishes with leaves, rustles up a meal, teaches the heroine how to brush her teeth with a finger. Although the heroine embodies tradition, she has no links with the ways of the past; the hero, on the other hand, despite his immersion in globalized mass culture, preserves in his body the skills of a past which is still the non-contemporaneous present. The body of the woman which has always been made to bear or carry tradition and past is here resignified: the tradition she claims to practise is a tradition she has appropriated; 'nature' is not a signifier with which her body is associated. These paradoxical

inversions and displacements are foregrounded in the synecdochic representation of the night in the forest.

The dance scene in the temple never quite takes place — the Governor has marked the place for one of his 'destabilizing' terroristic bombings, which is why he had forbidden Shruti from undertaking the trip with the Natyalaya students. Informed about Shruti's escapade with Prabhu, the Governor has the temple suddenly swarming with helicopter, commandos, bomb-defusion squad and sniffer dogs. The dance is interrupted, the bomb 'found' and defused, and Prabhu's resistance brushed aside, Shruti is whisked off in the helicopter. If so far Prabhu's entry onto any site sets off a disturbance or conflict at that site, now the conflict becomes polarized: the law (public/patriarchal) on the one side, and on the other the body of Prabhu as the source/agency/target of new signification as well as the violence of the state. The temple scene then retroactively reveals the Governor's residence as a potential site of conflict — between the law — as the state as well as the patriarchal/ brahminical order — and the agencies of new political/symbolic signification (let us remember that the hero first meets the Governor as the president of the students' union); at the same time, the 'Governor's residence' shows the resistance of the existing order — sites symbolizing institutions of all sorts — to the emergence of new signification, its attempt to block or arrest any attempt to make these sites resignify.

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Although the Governor is shown as involved in a despicable conspiracy to destabilize — another synecdochic framing of a site, this time the sacred banks of the Ganges at Kashi, the Governor apparently appeasing his ancestors to the background sound of a Lata Mangeshkar devotional, but in fact conversing with a 'swami' who has given money to the Governor to precipitate destabilization. There are two ways of destabilizing a political situation — use the social power of money to arrest and silence political signification (a strategy which has obvious limitations), or destroy sites and agencies of signification, which according to the Governor, is the cheaper, safer and more effective method. In a situation where, as the Governor puts it, the Muslims are fighting the Hindus, Kannadigas are fighting the Tamils, and the harijans are fighting the brahmins, who will trace these terroristic acts of the state to the state?

The deeper significance of this, though, is that the state is shown to have withdrawn from its function of mediating the social conflicts and political antagonisms; no longer able to control the signifying space of its sovereign territory, it is bent on destroying the 'work' (colleges, temples, hospitals) of which it was part and guardian. What may appear as the opposition animating the narrative surface of the film — terroristic state and freedom from state — is in truth a desire for reconceptualizing the polity.

After Shruti's rescue from the temple, conflict erupts at the Governor's residence: Shruti submits to but also defies the patriarchal/ political law of the father, and wants to run away with the hero. The scene in which she meets Prabhu is set in a spectacular

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stadium — presumably indexing an agonistic space regulated by fair play. The hero, confused by the events he himself has initiated, barely has time to collect himself when the commandos set upon him. There unfolds a 'spectacle' against the background of the stadium — its shapes and colours as vividly present as the hero's martial arts skills. This confrontation with the state ends with the hero finally subdued and relegated to the police torture chamber and the heroine confined to her room. The torture scene again foregrounds the body — this time as the target of torture, the state's desperate and futile attempt to reduce body to its materiality and eliminate it as the source of signification. Interestingly, both the agents of the state — the doctor who performs the virginity test on the heroine, and Prabhu's chief torturer in jail — are women, perhaps indicative of the strength of patriarchy and the rule of law, a rule that deploys women as its visible enforcers. The two parallel female figures — Prabhu's mother and Shruti's — are presented by and large as ineffectual, as having no real bond with their children. It is Prabhu's father who is the tender, loving parent (witness his bathing his adult son, dancing with him in the 'hook' song sequence, letting him cry on his shoulder), and the mother's customary role in the narrative is displaced.

Shruti forces her father to release the hero; she does this by embarrassing the Governor at a party he has hosted. This is followed by the *Mukkaala Muqabla* sequence. The next sequence takes us to the village home of the Governor in Andhra Pradesh where Shruti is put in the care of her grandparents. Again the hero and Vasant enter this space, and once again conflict surfaces, although with some unexpected turns. The grandparents, once without doubt powerful figures of traditional authority, are shown as clown-like figures; their power too has been absorbed by the state. Therefore these figures and spaces are again open to resignification; and indeed the grandparents enter into complicity with Prabhu and Shruti, taking them to ancient temple grounds (where the grandfather literally manipulates a statue to confirm the hero's love for Shruti). Once again, Prabhu's entry turns this space — the palatial ancient home, the vintage car, but in the outhouse high-tech equipment that Malli the villain uses to keep in touch with the Governor) — into one of conflict. The hero's entry into the village is orchestrated by the grandfather; Prabhu pretends to be the actor N.T. Rama Rao, and in fact a filming of NTR's old hit *Lava-Kusha* is arranged. Vasant organizes the screening, savouring his role as producer, and both we as well as the audience within the film watch the shot framing NTR as Rama enunciating the law of just rule — the just rule does not take into account pride, friendship and love, we hear him utter. This shot again draws in, enfolds and ironizes a cinematic moment within its own synecdochic enunciative space, both justice and the legality of rule having been ironically articulated through the figure of the terrorist-Governor.

It is in this ancestral village home of his lover that the hero, playing a video-game!, accidentally discovers the Governor's conspiracy. Prabhu swings into action and foils the attempted bombing of a hospital, mobilizing in the process students from the

medical college to rescue the patients. Maintaining its concern with the body with gruesome consistency, the mutilated body of the terrorist Malli electrocutes the body of the Governor; but the destruction of these bodies too cannot resolve the problem until the space occupied by them, by the law in both its aspects (obscene/punitive and respectable/benevolent), is transformed.

The hero's desire — synecdochically framed and enfolded in the temporality of cinema and media — and its trajectory then initiates the process of resignification and politicization. His love makes him enter spaces, sites and institutions that had excluded him and his entry opens up for contestation and interrogation, law, figures of authority, spaces of culture and tradition (the sites of ideological reproductions). The trope of love is drawn into processes and structures that do not remain external to it. In this *Kaadalan* explicitly positions itself against the dominant politics of piety that has come to govern the discourse of secularism: namely, how secularism of love can engender love of secularism. This piety is ultimately what a film like Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* sets out to secure.

The last scene unfolds under a hoarding with the message 'No Problems' with a freeze of the hero and heroine — a repeat shot of an earlier song sequence — in a dancing gesture. It is, it seems to us, an ironic ending, and what is being ironized is precisely the enunciative message of the advertising industry. As our analysis so far should have made clear, this ironic gesture is meant to signal a distanciation and disidentification from the signifier 'fashion', in the same way as in an earlier sequence, the hero, who is also the president of the students' union, gets his classmates to repaint the college walls which are covered over by the slogans and posters of his own election campaign. We are shown a couple of printed posters with Prabhu's face on them being torn down. And in



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a fleeting gesture, the hero himself paints over the slogan 'Vote for Prabhu'. This gesture too, one could argue, mobilizing as it does the collective energies of the students, indicates a politics of disidentification, disidentification from the politics of iconicity and the violence that it engenders. This is important because the effectivity of political signifiers depend on their ability to mobilize identification, which they do by promising unity and wholeness. The latter always prove to be temporary and phantasmatic, thereby setting in a process of disinvestment, disidentification and political paralysis. (Think of the fate of the political signifier 'socialism' or, to take a recent example, 'Ayodhya'.) 'But,' as Judith Butler asks, 'does politicization always need to overcome disidentification? What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of *misrecognition*, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?'¹⁸ That is indeed the political question that *Kaadalan* leaves us with: the hero and heroine standing under the sign — enunciated by and standing in for the forces, the apparatus, the institutions that are dominating our visual/social/political space — which says 'No Problems.' Clearly all the problems, all the political problems, begin in this disjunctive, disidentificatory space that the film has helped clear for resignification.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Kaadalan* (1994), directed by Shankar, produced by K.T. Kunjumon, music by A.R. Rahman. Dubbed into Telugu as *Premikudu* and into Hindi as *Humse Hai Muqabla*.
2. Venkatesh Chakravarthy has pointed out to us that *Kaadalan*'s 'western' sequence is in the tradition of the Tamil spaghetti westerns made by Jayasankar, for example. While acknowledging the importance of locating *Kaadalan* in a specifically Tamil cinematic history, we would also like to claim that the film's 'effects' are not confined to a Tamil space alone. *Kaadalan* circulates in Andhra Pradesh as *Premikudu*, a Telugu film. It circulates in Karnataka as a 'South Indian' or even Tamil film. [One has heard many (admittedly anecdotal) reports of Kannada audiences with no knowledge of Tamil expressing their enjoyment of *Kaadalan*.] It is now circulating in northern India as *Hamse Hai Muqabla*. Although the phenomenon of dubbed films is not new, *Kaadalan* — like the Mani Ratnam films — is creating a new space of signification which may depend on (may not be unrelated to) its feeding into or converging with local situations, whether in Andhra Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh. Friends in Trinidad, West Indies, where nearly 48 per cent of the population is of Indian origin, descended from indentured labourers, have described their delight in seeing, and their identification with, the dark-skinned protagonists in *Hamse Hai Muqabla*, who they feel look very different from the fair-complexioned actors of commercial Hindi cinema they are accustomed to viewing.
3. As Christian Metz ('The Impersonal Enunciation, or the Site of the Film', *New Literary History*, 22, 1991)

argues: 'Enunciation is the semiological act by which some part of a text talks to us about this text as an act' (p. 754). Metz rightly claims that the cinematic enunciation is reflexive rather than deictic. 'All figures of enunciation consist in metadiscursive folds of cinematic instances piled on top of each other' (p. 769). And yet Metz seems confused about how to clarify the nature of cinematic enunciation without inheriting the anthropomorphism of a linguistics of deictics. He inherits this confusion, or so it seems to us, from the linguistic monism of semiology. Gilles Deleuze, who opts for Peircean semiotics precisely to avoid this confusion, offers a diagnosis of the confusion inherited by a semiology of cinema: 'We . . . have to define, not semiology, but "semiotics", as the system of images and signs independent of language in general. When we recall that linguistics is only part of semiotics, we no longer mean, as for semiology, that there are languages without a language system, but that the language system only exists in its reaction to a *non-language-material* that it transforms. This is why utterances and narrations are not a given of visible images, but a consequence which flows from this reaction' (emphasis original). *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, (Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p. 29.

This has implications for how to read or theorize the film. The Metzian position tends to reduce the semiotic enunciation of cinema into an optics, on the one hand, and into quasi-linguistics narratology, on the other. On the former reduction, see Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, pp. 21–38.

Our approach here has been positioned against formalism: the punishing shot by shot analysis which describes the diegetic movement, the different kind of shots, editing, etc. — which is an attempt to recontain the political, antagonistic meaning. This formalism is then supplemented by running around with a tape-recorder (or high tech video-audio equipment) in search of audience response (under the new and exalted name of the study of the public sphere). It would be unfortunate indeed if the impasses of narratology in literary studies were to be replicated in film theory. We prefer Deleuze's conception of film-theory as 'interference', rather than as 'application'. See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 280.

4. See Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetics*, British Film Institute, London, 1992.
5. Deleuze's remarks (*Cinema 2*, pp. 188–203, 276) on the cinema of the body and its link to time-image — the image that presents time directly as distinct from the movement-image which presents it indirectly — are especially illuminating in this context: 'But there is another pole to the body, to mount a camera on the body, takes on a different sense: it is no longer a matter of following and trailing everyday body, but of making it pass through a ceremony, of introducing it into a glass cage or a crystal, of imposing a carnival or a masquerade on it which makes it into a grotesque body, but also brings out of it a gracious and glorious body. . . .' (p. 190).
 The attitude of the body is like a time-image, the one which puts the before and after in the body, the series of time. . . .' (p. 195) ' . . . there are now only attitudes of bodies, corporeal postures forming series, and a gest which connects them together as limit' (p. 276).
6. The name is an unmistakably Telugu one, and is common to both the Tamil and Telugu versions of the film. In the Tamil version, the Telugu Governor who is trying to destabilize the state is an obvious reference to how the ruling AIADMK, to which producer Kunjumon is close, sees the Telugu Governor of Tamilnadu, Channa Reddy.
7. See for example Gyanendra Pandey, 'In Defence of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, Vol. XXVI, 11–12, March 1991, pp. 559–72.
8. On the two sides of the law, see Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, Verso, London, 1994, ch. 3.
9. Madhava Prasad, 'The State and Culture: Hindi Cinema in the Passive Revolution', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1994, p. 3. Henceforth cited in the text as SCH.

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10. See the articles on Ray by Geeta Kapur, 'Cultural Creativity in the First Decade: The Example of Satyajit Ray' (pp. 17-49), and Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Satyajit Ray, Ray's Films, and Ray-movie' (pp. 7-16), in *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos. 23-24, January 1993.
11. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, 1986, p. 170.
12. The 'folk' emerges in nationalist modernism, however, processed through an upper caste, urban aesthetic.
13. See Metz, 'The Impersonal Enunciation'.
14. See Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Cinema, Femininity and the Economy of Consumption', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 43, 1991.
15. In this scene, Vasant, who is part of a delegation that has gone to invite the Governor to participate in a college-day function, is wearing dress trousers and shirt, and a tie.
16. Taking issue with our use of the Mandal interpretive frame, Venkatesh Chakravarthy argues that since Shankar is the director of *Gentleman*, which preceded *Kaadalan* and is an explicitly anti-Mandal film, there is not much difference between the ideological horizons of Mani Ratnam's films and Shankar's. We hope that our analysis of the politics of resignification in *Kaadalan* has been able to make a case for this difference. To read the film solely in terms of the auteur's intention and ideological predispositions may severely limit our understanding of what we have called the 'effects' or 'work' of *Kaadalan*.
17. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, 'Empire, Nation and Literary Text', in Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir and Vivek Dhareshwar (eds.), *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1993. Also the unpublished research of Srividya Natarajan, Department of English, University of Hyderabad.
18. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 219. The question of politicizing disidentification, raised so sharply by Judith Butler, is an important one in contemporary India. The dominant assumption is that political mobilization requires identification with a political signifier. That may well be so. We need to problematize this requirement, and not only in the case where disidentification has set in. Take, for example, the recent 'Addressing Gandhi' exhibition organized by SAHMAT to commemorate Gandhi's birth anniversary. The intent obviously was to mobilize secular forces under the political signifier 'Gandhi: the father of the nation'. The address, paintings, drawings etc., on a postcard by artists, typically carried a message of shame and guilt (we are not worthy of you); of betrayal (we have betrayed your heritage); of helplessness (if only you were here); nostalgia for history (yours was the time). Clearly the address to the father had the function of shoring up the name of the father by repentant and helpless children. A politics of piety, in short. In this attempt to remobilize a political signifier, to seek identification with it, to rearticulate it as law, there were not many critical engagements with what this political signifier means today. There certainly was no attempt to comment on the disidentification expressed for example by the Bahujan Samaj Party vis-à-vis this political signifier. The point of our questioning is not to say that we need to identify with the BSP in order to understand their disidentification with Gandhi, but to ask: what is the nature of this politics of piety which is unwilling to understand and interrogate the attempt by the BSP to and reposition and resignify 'Gandhi'? We have been saying that an intense resignification is underway in our politics and culture. The BSP is clearly engaged in such a politics of resignification. Apart from their attempt to distantiate 'Gandhi', they recently attempted to mobilize 'Periyar' in Uttar Pradesh. Whether we wish to approve of this or not or identify with it or not, it is not difficult to recognize the audacity and creativity of an act that tries to resignify 'Periyar' (anti-Gandhi, anti-brahmin, even anti-Hindi, self-respector) in the political milieu of Uttar Pradesh. A cultural politics, such as 'Addressing Gandhi', that ignores this in favour of a politics of piety, that refuses to engage with this process of resignification, clearly positions itself in a certain way, as the inheritor of a certain strand of 'tradition' as well as politics. There is without doubt a larger political allegory here, which we hope to explore elsewhere.