9 THE INDIAN EMERGENCY

Aesthetics of State Control

> A confirmed plagiarist speaks of some of the FFC's significant productions as third-rate copies of third-rate foreign films. A globe-trotting socialite whose sole claim to be a critic is her access to people and places (and who ecstacizes over Manoj Kumar's *Shor*) aids the big sharks by her learned associations. A self-confessed amateur, applauded for his bold themes, speaks of films as 'formal exercises' when they are not in his own blundering idiom. Others disguise their concern for financial return (on both 'public' and 'private' money!) in terms of mass communication. Yet another old hand at bringing humanism to the box office in outrageous costumes advises the government to nationalize cinema before it finances films which make an attempt at speaking a radical language. Utopian ideas always subvert their own declared purpose. Even in the unlikely event of nationalization, given the honesty of our bureaucrats and the socialism of our system, one can visualize what new monsters will emerge. Some of these suggestions and comments may, indeed, be well intentioned, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sift out the cinema's enemies from its friends. – Kumar Shahani (1974)

The June 1975 declaration by Indira Gandhi's government of a 'grave emergency [whereby] the security of India . . . threatened by external disturbances' justified the state's suspension of normal political processes in favour of extraordinary powers to the executive, and the arrest of her political opponents and detention of political prisoners under MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act), was a cataclysmic event in modern Indian history. While the event continues to be a subject of intense debate among historians, the foundational significance of the cinema's implication in it has been less discussed.

As with the Emergency itself, so with the film industry's involvement in it, much of the description has been typically lurid and rumour-filled (Tarlo 2003). It includes stories of how the entire Indian film industry was held to ransom by those who held power,[1]

[1] Most of these stories featured the then Information and Broadcasting Minister, Vidya Charan Shukla. D.R. Mankekar and Kamala Mankekar (1977: 81) write: 'With the vulnerable film industry [V.C.] Shukla played ducks and drakes. It was the love–hate relationship of a despot. He was in his element in the company of glamorous film stars, yet if they failed to submit to his fancies he threatened them with MISA. If a singer refused to play to Shukla's tune, his discs were banned on AIR and TV; if an actress did not submit to his demands, he had her house raided for tax evasion; if a producer failed to provide the desired entertainment, his films got stuck at the Censor. Shukla's style was to bluff, bluster and terrorize to get what he wanted.' For the 'Candy' episode, featuring a young actress studying at the Film and Television Institute of India, see 'V.C. Shukla: The Playboy Goebbels', in Thakur (1977: 65–67).

Emergency cinema. Satyajit Ray's *Pratidwandi* (Bengali, 1970) produced the most significant cinematic protagonist, Siddhartha (Dhritiman Chatterjee), of an era that began with the Naxalite movements of the late 1960s and culminated in the Emergency. (*Top, left and right*) The interview in the film, when Siddhartha states his belief that the Vietnamese people's struggle was a greater achievement for humankind than the moon-landing. (*Bottom, left to right*) Siddhartha, in a moment of fantasy, turns into Che Guevara.

how leading stars and producers were coerced into participation and endorsement of governmental propaganda, and attacked for tax-dodging (and even used, it was rumoured, to cover up the sexual excesses of corrupt power-brokers), how popular films were used to dissipate oppositional rallies,[2] and how films seen to be critical of the new power regime were vandalized.[3] The excessively harsh treatment of the film industry, especially the Bombay-based Hindi cinema, was also in those days linked to a crackdown on an offshore 'black' economy widely believed to be committed to state destabilization: 'smugglers' such as the famous Haji Mastan (the apocryphal origin of Amitabh Bachchan's character Vijay in Yash Chopra's *Deewar*, 1975[4]), Sukkur Bakhia and others associated with the early rise of a grey market sourced from West Asian ports.

There was, however, another side to the Indian state's involvement with the cinema. This chapter is less concerned with the impact of the Emergency on the film industry, than with another, related sector of filmmaking in India, also at its pinnacle: the New

[2] The reference is to the telecast of Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* (1971) in order to disrupt an opposition rally in 1977, at a time when mainstream films that had not exhausted their commercial run were not commonly telecast.

[3] This refers to the film *Kissa Kursi ka* (Amrit Nahata, 1977). This film, attempting to satirize the Emergency, was physically destroyed by Sanjay Gandhi's henchmen, and was later remade (see Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999: 432).

[4] Javed Akhtar, speaking of the context of *Deewar*, says it 'wasn't surprising that the morality of the day said that if you want justice, you had to fight for it yourself'. He tracks the specific career of the Vijay character: 'So Vijay, the hero of *Zanjeer*, reflected the thinking of the time. Two years later, the same Vijay is seen again in *Deewar*. By then he had left the police force, he had crossed the final line and become a smuggler. He wages war against the injustice he had to endure and he emerges the winner. You can see that ▶

Cinema movement, in whose history too the 1975 Emergency had a complicated presence. There may indeed be a connection between the state support of independent cinema and the vicious disciplining of the mainstream film industry: a *national* project around media control gone badly wrong.

Histories of the early 1970s, the years preceding the Emergency, commonly track a new brand of film production through its association with the Film Finance Corporation or FFC (later the National Film Development Corporation or NFDC). The FFC had of course existed for some years before it took this particular turn. Founded in 1960 with the objective of promoting and assisting the film industry by 'providing, affording or procuring finance or other facilities for the production of films of good standard', it had by then funded over fifty films, mostly unknown, but also Ray's *Charulata* (1964), *Nayak* (1966) and *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1968). It struck a completely new path, however, with a movement inaugurated by three films in 1969: Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* and Basu Chatterjee's *Sara Akash*. All three were linked to a common production context in addition to their FFC origins, not least of which was sharing the cinematographer iconic of the New Cinema, K.K. Mahajan.

By 1971, the year of the Bangladesh war, leading up to perhaps the most tumultuous years in India's recent political history,[5] this new turn had announced itself as explicitly avant garde, with the making of Mrinal Sen's Calcutta productions, Ritwik Ghatak's last great epics *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973) and *Jukti Takko aar Gappo* (1974), and Mani Kaul's first films. Not all the productions, and these included those by a generation of young independent filmmakers and most of India's best known directors of the 1970s and 80s,[6] were state-financed, although a good number were (Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, all of Kaul and Shahani, and Ghatak's *Jukti*).

The FFC's investment, however, typically spoke with a forked tongue. It included noted film experiments by important filmmakers, but was made under the guise of loans to 'producers', forcing these filmmakers to turn producers and commit to repay the loans they received with interest, and to offer collateral guarantees including mortgages on their (or their friends') houses. The attempt to market important avant-garde films *as though* they were 'industry productions', forcing an obviously successful effort at generating a New Cinema to pretend to be an effort at subsidizing the film industry, appears to be a curious form of deception, given what the FFC's

▶ the hero who had developed between 1973–75 – the Emergency was declared in India in 1975 – reflected those times. I remember in Delhi or Bombay or in Calcutta, many respectable people would boast of their great friendship with various smugglers. So in a society in which such things are acceptable, it is no wonder that such a hero was acceptable too' (Kabir 1999: 75).

[5] For the most elaborate description of those days, see Selbourne (1977). Tracing the history of the crisis to as far back as Telangana, and to a slew of political movements directly targeting the state, Selbourne mentions the many peasant agitations between the late 1940s and late 1960s, and, thereafter, the Naxalbari agitation, the 1972 mutiny in the Indian navy, the state police revolt in Uttar Pradesh and the general railway strike in May 1974. All of these were typically met by the growing presence of the paramilitary arm of centralized authority and the widespread arrest of all political opposition under MISA.

[6] Several major filmmakers, such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan, John Abraham, Saeed Mirza, K. Hariharan and Mani Kaul, were also associated in this time with innovative experiments in film production, such as Gopalakrishnan's Chitralekha Film Cooperative started in 1965, Abraham's Odessa Film Collective which made his last film *Amma Ariyan* (1986), and the Yukt Film Collective which produced Kaul/Hariharan's *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1976) and Mirza's debut *Arvind Desai ki Ajeeb Dastaan* (1978) with the unique experiment of a bank loan.

mandate actually was. This confusion over its mandate caused numerous problems and much heartburn among filmmakers, and not a little embarrassment to the Corporation, as the FFC forced filmmakers who simply wanted an opportunity to make films to set up 'production houses' and turn defaulters on their loans. On its side, the FFC marketed these films as though they were its own, pocketed all the revenue it made on its 'loan' projects, and rarely made an account to its 'producers' who often suspected that their films were earning more money for the Corporation than it would admit.[7]

Why the FFC had to speak this way, and what contradictions it had to saddle, make for a complicated and extraordinary history.[8] The FFC is the saga of an Indian state initiative that supported an avant-garde practice through a massive media programme, but was in fact meant as an intervention in the *Indian film industry as a whole*. By the time it found itself funding this independent turn, its overall remit had grown considerably: by 1968 it had already expanded to control distribution and export; by 1973 it had become the channelling agency for all imported celluloid raw stock; and by 1974 (after the withdrawal of the MPEAA from the Indian market) it had started importing foreign films for local distribution. The new obligations of the Corporation were to grant loans to 'modest but off-beat films of talented and promising people in the field', and, *inter alia*, to expand on these to 'develop the film in India into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education and healthy entertainment'.[9]

The Independent Cinema: Reforming the Industry

There are a number of documents that reveal the extent and nature of the overall policy spearheaded by the FFC-driven cinema project in this time. The time is the early 1970s: Indira Gandhi has returned to power in 1971, bank nationalization has happened and there are, among fears of a widespread state intervention, rumours of the possibility of nationalization of the film industry itself. Among the more significant documents is the elaborate 1973–74 Estimates Committee Report, put together by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which begins with a note on the scale and extent of the Indian film industry as a whole. This is the largest filmmaking industry in the world. India makes over 400 films annually, has an investment of Rs 180 crore, employs over two lakh people and contri-

[7] In fact, at the time of writing, there is a looming fear that several famous films made on 'loans' that the FFC/NFDC has exploited commercially, but done nothing to protect, have been lost, with the NFDC denying responsibility for protection of negatives or prints of films it did not officially 'produce'.

[8] Arguably, this issue was an greater bone of contention than even the totalitarian policies of the government housing the institution, between the vanguard filmmakers supported by the FFC and their (to use a term from the time) 'middle-cinema' counterparts arguing for a friendlier overlap with the mainstream industry. The Estimates Committee Report (p. 25) unambiguously states: 'It should have been apparent to the management of this [Film Finance] Corporation that films are primarily a means of entertainment and unless the films financed by the Corporation provide good entertainment to the people, they will not be acceptable to the masses and would not yield return to the producers. . . . [At the same time] the Committee would like the government to consider the question of making sufficient funds available to the FFC so that the Corporation is enabled to grant loans to producers on a larger scale which could have a real impact in improving the standards of films produced in this country.'

[9] There is a curious history to the changing nature of the FFC's objectives. Originally registered in 1960 as a company under the control of the Ministry of Finance, it was meant to 'promote and assist the film industry' by offering finance for good-quality films, as well as 'own, take on lease studios, theatres, films, scripts, world copyright of films', and 'carry on in India or elsewhere the business of cinematograph and film producers, distributors, renders, importers'. In 1964 the FFC was moved to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, but the tension between the two ministries remained. In 1970 the FFC claimed that it was 'not aware of any directives issued to it by the Bureau of Public Enterprises' in 'laying down its objectives and obligations . . . as required in terms of the Ministry of Finance'. It appears that in 1971 the Information and Broadcasting Ministry had somewhat unexpectedly introduced the line of 'modest but off-beat films of talented and promising people'. The Finance Ministry's continuing control is revealed in the additional responsibility dumped on the FFC in 1973: to look after the channelization of raw films and export of film. ('Committee on Public Undertakings: 1975–76: 79th Report: Film Finance Corporation' 1976: 3–4.)

butes Rs 70 crore annually in taxes ('Estimates Committee 1973–74: Fifth Lok Sabha' 1974: 9). It is also an industry ridden with crises. Unambiguously stated, its most significant problem is financial: the lack of bank and institutional finance, forcing a 'high-risk' economy. The solution proposed is typical of the Indira Gandhi era, namely, a series of radical moves: the creation of state funds by imposing a cess of 5 paise per movie ticket for 'improving the film industry';[10] the restructuring of the FFC into a 'more practical' unit; tightening up the loan system alongside central and state governments' purchase of films to 'generate sale of prints'; the spelling out of a more entertainment-friendly funding policy, making peace overtures to a mainstream industry that had by then given up on any kind of state support; generating state investment in film exhibition: such exhibition, theatrical and televisual, to also explore dramatically new alternatives such as reviving the mobile cinema (ibid.: 42); and, even undertaking a major design challenge: to design *appropriate auditoria* 'best suited to our conditions', given the 'high cost of land and building materials' (ibid.: 41).

It is also worth detailing the dimensions of the measures proposed by national film policy for the FFC: from the need to rationalize entertainment tax (recognizing that high tax impedes the growth of cinema houses, ibid.: 34) to the need for new state policy to reform and regulate stardom in cinema.[11] Other suggestions included major investment in dubbing; a focus on regional industries and a call to develop national markets for regional productions; an emphasis on export; a reform of the censorship system; state investment into studio and laboratory equipment which would 'draw a perspective plan for the next ten to fifteen years [to] develop indigenous equipment and arrange for import of remaining equipment in a well-planned manner'. Further, a state policy for the support of the workforce including 'providing for social benefits like gratuity, provident fund, compensation and old age pension', as well as a system of demanding bank guarantees from producers to 'assure timely payment to artists and workers' (ibid.: 160).

While the intervention of the early 1970s echoed Mrs Gandhi's overall economic policy of the time, another *cinematic* history was being played out concurrently: the remnants of a considerably older set of policies around the cinema, and the remnants, also, of a major state intervention first envisaged in the early 1950s. That model, proposed by the S.K. Patil Film Inquiry Committee Report (1951: 198), too had envisaged centralized control over the film

[10] Indira Gandhi's biographer, Usha Bhagat (2005: 200), says that many of these ideas were held by her as early as 1971. Bhagat recalls that, in a meeting with writers, theatre and film people in December 1971, on the eve of the Bangladesh war, Mrs Gandhi's notes included discussions on 'a cess of 5–10 paise on film tickets; processing facilities for colour films; employment and incentives for technicians; to form a cell to discuss and formulate ideas to set up a cultural complex'.

[11] While the Estimates Committee Report of 1973–74 recognized the role of the star system, and even proposed a liberalized income-tax policy for movie stars given their short shelf-life, it simultaneously recognized the lopsided economics of a star-heavy industry and called for state-sponsored alternatives (including generating acting students from the Film and Television Institute of India) to 'this evil'. Arguably, the Shyam Benegal revolution – in the year after the Estimates Committee Report – of creating a generation of 'low-budget' stars in the Naseeruddin Shah and Smita Patil era was precisely what this Report anticipated.

industry, even calling for an amendment to the Constitution of India since it 'made no provision for Central regulation of the production of films or of the places where they are exhibited'. Fifteen years after the Patil Committee Report, a second report, this time co-authored by the Film Censor Board, echoed the recommendations that called for state participation in key areas of film production – prior approval of theme, approval of script, production, preview of film and regulation of its export ('Estimates Committee: 1967–68: Second Report, Fourth Lok Sabha' 1967: 30–31) – and took a further step in calling for industry participation in the 'voluntary pre-censorship of scripts'.

The 1973–74 Report revived the key Patil proposition of a Film Council which would have new *consultative*, *developmental* and *regulatory* functions. This Council would, it was proposed, work alongside a brand new institution, a National Films Corporation, which, for the first time ever, would set up state regulation over *distribution* as part of the effort to promote 'quality films'. Its functions, had the project been followed through, would have included import of foreign films, export of films to other countries, all domestic distribution and exhibition in India, and all allocation and distribution of raw materials to the film industry ('Estimates Committee 1973–74' 1974: 104). On its part the Film Council would facilitate such a state takeover of distribution, by instituting a registration process 'of all business pertaining to the production, distribution and exhibition and import and export of all films in the country'. All this so that (as the Patil Report too had wished, and in the same righteous language) the state could once and for all eliminate 'the evil effects of the existence of . . . unscrupulous producers . . . who have no background or technical knowledge or any consideration for aesthetic or artistic values of the films and whose only consideration is to make quick money' (ibid.: 110).

In hindsight, the FFC of the early 1970s was the Indian state's last cinematic hurrah; more to the point, it was the last state intervention in the cinema to be associated with its key supporter, Indira Gandhi. While the Indian state, along with other states such as Brazil (a seminal precedent for India[12]), would in a scant six years abandon celluloid in favour of television, there was evidence, even in the heyday of the FFC, of Mrs Gandhi's interest in experiments with satellite television (the SITE experiment), and it is possible that even in the mid-1970s the cinema was a declining presence

[12] Embrafilme in Brazil provides, in its complicated relationship with the Cinema Novo and its eventual compromises with television, a direct precedent and close parallels to India's media policy. The Castello Branco regime's 1966 *Instituto Nacional do Cinema* (INC) administered three major support programmes: one subsidized all national films exhibited with additional income based on box-office receipts; a second made cash awards for 'quality' films; third, a film-financing programme in which the institute administered co-productions between foreign distributors and local producers, using funds withheld from the income tax on distributors. The three INC programmes were available to all interested filmmakers and thus supported the whole production sector. This ended in 1969 with the creation of Embrafilme, intended to promote the distribution of Brazilian films in foreign markets. As early as 1970, Embrafilme began to grant low-interest loans to producers for financing film production. Between 1970 and 1979 it financed more than a quarter of the total national film production in this manner (Johnson 1989: 127). As with the FFC in India, this support was intended as a state policy to assemble all aspects of the industry under its auspices. Julianne Burton writes (1978: 56) that Embrafilme's first head, filmmaker Roberto Faria, outlined in 1970 a programme that would 'subsidize exhibitors for showing national films, and [require] the inclusion of a Brazilian-made short at every theatrical showing of a foreign film' with the mandate to 'establish "economies of scale" for the industry, unifying the interests of both producers and exhibitors, increasing the internal market and developing markets abroad'. The main targets of this export campaign were 'Latin American countries, African nations, and the Arab block'. As with the FFC during the Emergency, the two most complex aspects of Embrafilme were, first, its capacity to define a properly national film policy, taking on exhibitor capital including multinational interests; and second, the politically complex relationship of a totalitarian military dictatorship that had suspended civil rights in 1968. The parallels went further: they included efforts on the part of major Cinema Novo filmmakers like Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Carlos Diegues and Arnaldo Jabor to 'combine the cultural and the commercial by making films that speak to the Brazilian people in culturally relevant terms and are also successful at the box office', leading to a further split between what Johnson (1989: 129) calls 'independents versus concentration- ▶

compared to television. By the early 1980s India would entirely abandon the New Cinema in favour of the telecommunications package assembled via INSAT (Sanjay 1989).

While comparisons are not easy between the early 1950s, when the Patil Report was published, and the mid-1970s, when support of 'quality films' was intended to spearhead the reform of the industry as a whole, there are nevertheless similarities in the two moments in history besides direct historical links.[13] Bringing them together is of course Indira Gandhi herself, a substantial presence at both junctures, shaping India's overall media policy for almost three decades from within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. While the 1970s film policies are clearly linked to Mrs Gandhi's 1971 election victory and her return to power in 1981, the change to television, incarnated by the Special Plan for Expansion of Television (1983–84) and the birth of the 'developmental soap opera' experiment with *Hum Log* (1984–85), sponsored by Colgate–Palmolive and Nestlé,[14] launched a state media policy for the country more successfully than the 1970s film revolution ever could.[15]

'Film Polemics' in the 1970s

Inaugurating the New Cinema: Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969). (*Top left*) Utpal Dutt as the crusty bureaucrat; (*bottom, left and right*) documentary shots of student protests.

▶ ists', the former often working out of no more than an office, a desk and a telephone, and the latter attempting a more systematic production infrastructure, often by hiring the former. Finally, the arrival of television and its transformation of film policy coincides with India's own foray in that direction: the Special Plan for Expansion of Television in 1983–84 in India is sandwiched between Embrafilme's first foray into television in 1977 and the Sarney–Pimenta Commission of 1986.

[13] Furthering a comparison between these two moments – which may also help illuminate the links between the early 1950s, represented by the Patil Report, and the New Cinema of the early 1970s – Sudipta Kaviraj (1986: 1698) proposes a *political* similarity: both periods demonstrated a weakened state, and the assembly of a political coalition that was able to intervene, with global capitalist investment, directly into the state structure.

[14] Indira Gandhi's personal interest in the cinema goes back to her mid-1950s friendship with Marie Seton. Mrs Gandhi's coterie, which included Usha Bhagat, Romesh Thapar and I.K. Gujral, was apparently where the New Cinema interventions were first envisaged. Bhagat (2005) recounts some of the early influences: Satyajit Ray was a seminal presence right through, and visual artist Satish Gujral, architects Charles and Ratna Fabri and others mediated the strong modernist commitments associated with the early Nehruvianism that Mrs Gandhi would inherit. Other key markers associated with Indira Gandhi and implicating the cinema in different ways include the late 1960s experiments in space technology which would culminate, in 1984, in the famous *Hum Log* model of 'entertainment–education soap opera', directly inspired by the work of Mexican producer Miguel Sabido's *telenovela* serials *Ven Conmigo* and *Acompaòáme*, and the mediation of people like communication theorist Everett Rogers and David Poindexter of the Population Communications–International, New York. For the Latin American origins of Indian 'developmental' television, see Nariman (1993) and Singhal and Rogers (1989).

[15] INSAT 1B, launched in 1983, also inaugurated the Special Plan for the Expansion of the Television Network. The Plan claimed to be unique in the history of TV expansion, eventually installing 13 high-power and 113 low-power transmitters, linking them up to make terrestrial broadcasts available to 70 per cent of the population within a period of eighteen months (1983–84).

Politics in its time. Nilkantha Bagchi (Ghatak playing 'himself') encounters Naxalite youth and gives them a history lesson, only to be dismissed as a 'harmless', failed intellectual. Ritiwik Ghatak's *Jukti Takko aar Gappo* (Bengali, 1974).

> And that was a terrible time for Calcutta. 1970–71. I was arrested. There were killings and murders around every other corner. I could hardly step out of the house. It was the worst of times for the country and yet, the best of times for me to carry out experiments like this. – Mrinal Sen (2003: 66)

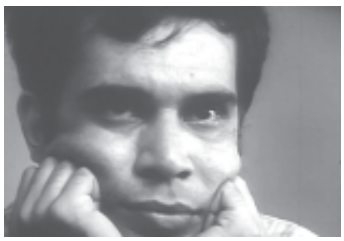
> Chorus:
> She managed to keep the price index firmly in her hand
> She fixed the productivity of agricultural land . . .
> Foreign aid statistics showed no fresh reduction
> Beggars were subjected to intensive legal action
> Ten new committees were hatched
> Five delegations dispatched
> Two committees established
> Seven commissioners dismissed
> Tweny-five new grants-in-aid
> A hundred and sixty three promises made
> Far more oration
> But less opposition
> Yet plenty of dissatisfaction managed to appear
> Her majesty Queen Vijaya's successful first year
> – Vijay Tendulkar (1975: 81–82), from the Marathi play *Dambadweepcha Mukabala*, a folk satire on the Emergency

Political debates, in the social sciences as much as in the arts, focusing on the years leading up to the Emergency crackdown and on the '19 months of terror' are numerous. As Rajni Kothari (1988: 273–74) influentially argues, this period saw the rise of a substantial political opposition to the Indira Gandhi government, drawn, for the first time since independence, from the peasantry, the lower castes and tribes, and other special-interest formations. This heterogeneous opposition was ranged against a centralizing anti-democratic tendency, represented by a 'small but powerful, educated, urban middle class controlling major economic, technological and financial institutions and in full command over the policy process and the decision-making framework'. Other debates have been around the systemic transformation in governance mechanisms that Indira Gandhi wrought, first within the Congress Party – generating coalition arrangements to her advantage – later by engendering a systemic crisis within the political economy, and still later through assembling a configuration of power at the cost of the basic structures of India's democracy (Kaviraj 1986). For most analysts, and for film-

makers, artists and writers, the prominent issues dominating the debates have been state violence and the human rights situation.

Among the most extensively discussed aspects of state violence in the pre-Emergency context was, of course, the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s in West Bengal and northern Andhra Pradesh, which spread thereafter to its most visible location among the students of Calcutta (Basu 2000; Ray 1988; Sen, Panda and Lahiri 1978; Singh 1995). Between late 1970 and mid-1971, student uprisings that began with attacks on statues of nationalist leaders saw clashes with the police and an escalation of violence. At least 4,000 young Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) supporters were killed (the official record was 1,783) in police crackdowns under the colonial Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act of 1936 (replaced in 1970 by the Prevention of Violent Activities Bill), even as 'police informers, scabs, professional assassins and various other sorts of bodyguards of private property stalked around bullying the citizens . . . streets were littered with bodies of young men riddled with bullets' (Bannerjee 1980: 224–81).

The Naxalite movement would profoundly affect the New Cinema in India. A great number of cultural productions, from films to plays, novels, songs, poetry and art, were made in this time, dedicated to making a record of this epoch. Much of this work engaged in significant ways with the key political issues of the day, and included films made within the movement itself (independent documentary films by Anand Patwardhan, Tapan Bose, Gautam Ghose and Utpalendu Chakraborty[16]), as well as productions addressing the movement from the perspective of a fragmented left (Ghatak's *Jukti Takko aar Gappo*, 1974; Kumar Shahani's *Tarang*, 1984) or investigating the collapse of civil society in Calcutta (Satyajit Ray's *Pratidwandi*, 1970, and his savagely critical *Jana Aranya*, 1975, set very much within the Naxalite ferment, and also Buddhadeb Dasgupta's later *Dooratwa*, 1978, and *Neem Annapurna*, 1979[17]). Other crucial engagements with the politics of the Emergency were playwright and film scenarist Vijay Tendulkar's allegorical investigations into state power. His *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972) and *Dambadweepcha Mukabala* (1975), allegorizing the Emergency, as well as his film scripts such as for Jabbar Patel's *Saamna* (1975), and other important screenplays (Shyam Benegal's *Nishant* and Nihalani's *Aakrosh*, 1980), drew directly from the Telangana-based, CPI(ML)-derived political commentaries of the time. Perhaps the most significant political debates of the day emerged in the context of the Calcutta



Dhritiman Chatterjee continues his Siddhartha persona in Mrinal Sen's *Padatik* (Bengali, 1973). The unnamed Naxalite political activist is forced to take shelter in the upper-class home of an advertising executive.

[16] See Anand Patwardhan's M.A. thesis, 'Guerrilla Cinema: Underground and in Exile', submitted to McGill University, Montreal, excerpted in *Deep Focus*, January 1989 (Patwardhan 1989).

[17] See John Hood (1998: 10–12) for a chronicle of Dasgupta's involvement with the Naxalite movement.

Metro Cinema's release of Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta '71* (1972), which we shall visit later in this chapter. That film's thematic concerns were virtually overshadowed by the production history of the film: an unintended record of numerous marginal details vital to a chronicle of the Calcutta upsurge.

Set against the grim political context of this time and the growing regime of totalitarianism is of course the unparallelled state support – whatever its conditionalities and fine print – being extended to an independent, and indeed politically vocal, cinema, and to some of India's most significant film experiments. Support from totalitarian states for critical celluloid experimentation is not unfamiliar to the New Cinema worldwide, and there were, by this time, familiar vanguard strategies with which to deal with this contradiction,[18] as we see in several Indian films' disconcertingly direct links with Latin America: the overt quotation in Mani Kaul *et al.*'s *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1976) to Rocha's *Antonio Das Môrtes* (1969), and the explicit evocation of the Argentinian *La hora de los hornos* (1967) in Saeed Mirza's *Arvind Desai ki Ajeeb Dastaan* (1978). I suggest that the radical practice that emerged from such a politically compromised location had *formal* consequences as much as *political* ones; that the formal detours carried out in this time (which were often far more contentious than the political issues of the day) were contextualized by a less available aspect of state policy that had also to do with totalitarian regimes. It is to this that I turn as a continuation of my 'cinema-effect' argument.

Given the overheated and furious polemics within an early 1970s left riven by ideological dissension, some of these arguments were, as would be expected, appropriately political in nature: an example being the *Frontier* debates surrounding *Calcutta '71* and *Padatik* (1973), addressing the nature of reality represented in these films and the ideological positions held by their makers.[19] The issues discussed included state censorship, arguably the dominant issue of the Emergency, but, perhaps surprisingly, such overtly political issues were few and far between. Instead, an entirely different dimension was evident in the debates between filmmakers, critics and numerous interested participants of the time arguing passionately around the New Cinema, especially on the role of the independent cinema at this historic juncture. Some of these debates intruded into the ethics of receiving state support,[20] bringing to the cinema the various left positions on the subject that were being far more vociferously discussed in literature.[21] However, most New Cinema dis-

[18] We have already mentioned Cinema Novo and the Brazilian military regime in the Castello Branco years, as well as the Argentinian Third Cinema under Peron. The most recent example, coinciding with the Emergency, is that of independent British cinema in Thatcherite Britain. Peter Wollen (2006: 30–31) says: 'The Thatcher years provoked a long-delayed efflorescence of British film, still largely unrecognized in Britain itself. It can be seen, I believe, as a British New Wave, coming long after the New Wave had crumbled away in most other European countries. . . . Independent filmmakers of the 1980s reacted strongly against the effects of Thatcherism. They responded to the imposition of market criteria in every sector of society, to political authoritarianism, to the two nations project of Thatcherism and to the leading role of the City.'

[19] See the *Frontier* debate on *Calcutta '71* (1972) featuring economist Ashok Rudra and film critic Samik Bandyopadhyay, reproduced in Basu and Dasgupta (1992: 65–73).

[20] In a typical argument, in 1973 an anonymous filmgoer exchanged letters in the pro-CPI(ML) *Frontier* with Mrinal Sen over his *Padatik*, seen as critical of the ML activists. The filmgoer wanted to know why Sen chose to 'deliberately hide a part of the real picture in his film which supposedly goes against the ruling class, given [that he has received] financial assistance by the Film Finance Corporation and Dena Bank. Have these organizations become anti-establishment overnight?' Sen's reply to this was to ask why *Frontier* publishes the central government advertising 'against all kinds of violence' when, according to the filmgoer, the CPI(ML) cadres 'were definitely not cannon fodder' (Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 79, 85).

[21] Perhaps the most strident position at this time was that of noted Marathi writer Durga Bhagwat, who asked writers to boycott all state awards on pain of social excommunication. She started an independent trust to give awards in lieu of the state.

cussions on dominant political topics remained, it appears in hindsight, relatively marginal, and, in turn, few of the political films of Sen, Dasgupta or Benegal suffered political persecution. And so, several of the most vociferous film polemics of the era appeared, mysteriously, to bypass the overdetermined political issues of the day, instead preferring – as they argued over the nature of the state as a film-producing entity – to reprise European positions over realism. The entrenched European warfare between the De Sica and Rossellini camps, for instance, re-enacted in the Godard versus Truffaut divide in France, would take the form of opposing Ritwik Ghatak to Satyajit Ray – eventually Marxism's opposition to Humanism in Bengal. Such a divide would come to be widely comprehensible to an Indian arts practice united politically in its opposition to the Emergency, but deeply alienated, across theatre, dance, visual art, music and film, over the faultlines of realism.

Disablement and Delegitimization: Aesthetics and Film Policy

> A fierce little bush war is going on in the Indian film world. The surface provocation is the activating of the National Film Development Corporation. . . . The struggle for the control of the Board of Directors is presently between the mainstream commercial cinema and the self-styled (I use the term not in the pejorative, but strictly objective sense) makers of 'good cinema'. . . . The groups under the umbrella of 'parallel cinema' were never homogeneous or even friendly to each other. Broadly, they can be divided into 'root and branch' filmmakers and 'gradual change' filmmakers. The groups showed all the classic symptoms of schismatic warfare. – Iqbal Masud (1980)

> We in India would be wise not to ignore the implications of this overall pattern. I am thinking particularly of the young iconoclasts who hope to find that 2 or 2½ lakhs of rupees for the non-conformist masterpiece they have been dreaming of. I should have thought that such a sum of money would be a heavy burden for an artist to carry for any length of time. I am glad the Film Finance Corporation have taken the stand that they have; and it is because they have done so that it now devolves on the film makers to bear in mind certain limitations they have to face, the 'conventions' even they have to follow. – Satyajit Ray (1976: 92)

> Before you dream of Bresson, get yourself a Malraux ministry. . . . As you plan your films, make absolutely sure you are going to make no mistakes. The process of trial and error was available only to pioneers, it is not meant for you. In fact, before you get behind a camera, make sure you are a genius. – Bikram Singh (1972)

By the mid-1970s, most of the independent cinema was ranged in united opposition to the Emergency. Even the mainstream film industry, forced to succumb to the 'Shukla mafia', made some commercially successful critiques of state power (the best known instance being Gulzar's *Aandhi*, 1975, released during the Emergency), and joined the post-1977 publishing boom in making numerous New Cinema-derived films in various languages on Emergency-derived political issues. There was therefore, arguably, a broad left–liberal political consensus – but it was by no means extended to a consensus over either state policy on the cinema or the aesthetic consequences of such policy, where extreme dissensions remained. There emerged a whole set of aggressive film polemics, less directed towards political differences (although they did occasionally inherit larger antagonisms drawn from a splintered left) and more to the 'real' problem at hand. I am referring to the battlelines drawn *within* the New Indian Cinema, between an avant garde and what later came to be known as the 'middle cinema' – the category selected for funding support after 1976 by a 'more practical' and industry-friendly FFC.

These dissensions over how to comprehend the role of the independent filmmaker within national film policy, between what Latin American terminology would have described as the second (the independent art-house) and third cinema – the last even more complicatedly splitting into two kinds of third cinema, an avant garde and a political documentary cinema – loosely and insufficiently mapped on to the divide between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left. Many of the debates took place in the mainstream media (notably the pro-New Cinema *Filmfare*, edited by former FFC Chairman B.K. Karanjia, a key figure in the FFC's independent turn[22]) and in periodicals published by the film society movement, which was then at its height (the Calcutta-based Cine Central and Cine Society, Bombay societies like Film Forum and Screen Unit, and the Bangalore and Chennai Film Societies), as also in journals emerging from that movement: *Close-Up*, *Cinema India International*, *Cinema-Vision India*, *Cinema in India*, *Splice*, *Deep Focus*, etc. Most of the aesthetic explorations of this time, for exam-

[22] See, for example, Karanjia's editorial, 'The FFC: Certain Misconceptions' (*Filmfare*, 24 September 1971). Writing in the issue immediately preceding Ray's 'An Indian New Wave?' attack, Karanjia was at pains to argue that it was not true that FFC productions did poorly, providing the evidence of Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, Kantilal Rathod's celebrated Gujarati *Kanku* (1969), Amit Moitra's Oriya film *Adina Megha* (1970) and Basu Chatterjee's *Sara Akash*, all of which did well at the box office. Further, he wrote that it was not true that the FFC was anti-film industry, or that it was sustaining financial losses (apparently that year it had made a profit of Rs 50,000).

ple Adoor Gopalakrishnan's (1983) or Buddhadeb Dasgupta's (1991) writings, substantially functioned within the parameters of state policy that the New Cinema was meant to spearhead. Indeed many of them were adddressed *to* the state, and to a state machinery that appeared at the time willing to listen and able to implement policies recommended by New Cinema practitioners.

This battle, spanning economics, politics and aesthetics, both thickened and complicated the political issues of its time. The task before us now is to find the links between the immediacy of political crises arising from the Emergency, and the often abstruse issues of aesthetic form debated within a broader context of Indian modernism, Europe and Third Cinema.[23] I am referring to what was possibly the most spectacular moment in the film polemics of the 1970s, the outbreak of hostilities involving Satyajit Ray (whose role as a vigorous polemicist has remained a relatively less known aspect of his work, barring his much-quoted, stinging 1971 attack on the New Indian Cinema) and a number of filmmakers (crucially, in Ray's instance, his contemporary Mrinal Sen) and writers, and, perhaps most importantly if indirectly, Kumar Shahani's work in the 1970s and 80s. It is to these that I now turn.

Kumar Shahani's essays do, on occasion, directly address political issues, for example, the ones later (1986) anthologized in *Framework* ('The Media Police', 1978; 'Politics and Ideology: The Foundation of Bazaar Realism', 1982; 'Cinema and Politics', 1986). Most of them, however, seek to establish, for perhaps the first time in India, an explicit aesthetic agenda for an avant-garde filmmaking practice, in tandem with similar debates taking place in theatre, literature and the visual arts of the time.[24] While the concept of an avant garde was then not widely known in India, its key characteristics – a fundamental opposition to cinematic realism, and in particular to dramatic naturalism – had considerable relevance to this moment.[25] Shahani's position was influential in this time, as its leading chronicler, Geeta Kapur (2000), has shown. His opposition was to the tendency, within state film policy, towards what he considered a cultural populism, often with tacit support from the parliamentary left, under an overall 'mass-media' rubric. Such populism targeted what was for him primarily a 'soft' cathartic realism of the kind exemplified by Shyam Benegal of the mid-1970s. Shahani belonged to and supported an alternative lineage, represented by his mentor Ritwik Ghatak and by the filmmakers he drew attention to in his explorations of 'epic' structuring: Miklos Jansco (see Shahani

[23] See, as a flavour of these times, the 'Cinema in Developing Countries' symposium organized by the Indian Institute of Mass Communications and Directorate of Film Festivals on 9–11 January 1979, in connection with the Seventh International Film Festival of India, framed around 'observations' by a panel consisting of Ousmane Sambene, Mrinal Sen, Ben Barka, B.K. Karanjia and Miguel Littin.

[24] An important context for some of Shahani's 1970s concerns was the conference on 'Marxism and Aesthetics', organized in Kasauli in October 1979, partially anthologized in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 8, Nos 5–6 (December 1979–January 1980).

[25] Saeed Akhtar Mirza reflects the vanguardism of the time in his claim that 'The dramatic, narrative form of the cinema is fascist by its very nature' (Mirza 1979–80: 124). See Geeta Kapur's 'Realism and Modernism: A Polemic for Present-Day Art' (Kapur 1979–80).

New aesthetic practices. Kumar Shahani draws from narratives derived from the *khayal* musical form in his experimental *Khayal Gatha* (1988). (*Left*) Baaz Bahadur (Mangal Dhillon). (*Right*) Rani Roopmati (Meeta Vasisth) shot inside the Roopmati pavilion in Mandu, Madhya Pradesh.

1978) and Andrei Tarkovsky (see Shahani 1979). As he writes:

> It is ironical, to say the least, that the cinema should continue to find its place along with radio and television among the so-called mass media. It speaks of a widespread ignorance . . . that a highly developed language should be confused with media which are primarily means of transmission. . . . In fact, unless we wish deliberately to distort matters or to practise an ideology of confused rhetoric, I propose that we drop terms like the 'mass media' and 'mass communication', much abused as they are not only in relation to the cinema but to the radio and TV transmission systems. We would thereby avoid spurious generalization and come to terms with problems of aesthetics and sociology which are relevant to the practice of the arts and to the active participation in them of individuals and classes. (Shahani 1976)

What Shahani wants is recognition for an aesthetic practice specific to film; one that in turn recognizes that film constitutes a language: 'by language is meant the juxtaposition of thematic and formal elements, arising out of a society moving towards a higher stage of organization'. An argument of considerable significance to the time was Shahani's 'Notes for an Aesthetic of Cinema Sound' (1983), where he defines a particular technical practice: a spatially non-static use of sound in film as against in musical performance. Silence, for example, would now relate to space only as analogy, whereas

in the cinema it would relate to space in movement. 'In music, it relates to the sustaining of a note, to reverberation, to absorption by the spatial enclosures, producing, transmitting, reflecting, and receiving the sound. In the cinema all this and more. In fact, the cinema may or may not relate to the spaces which produce and receive sound.' Such a distinction, he claims, provides the artist with further evidence of a basic axiom that it is 'the search for precision that yields to flexibility', and, vice versa, that 'it is the flexible language structure that . . . is meaningful'. These instances throw light on *cinephilia* – central to the avant garde – and are, Shahani says, heartening for 'every artist who wishes to place himself in a tradition' (as distinct from drawing from traditional forms) and yet wants 'to innovate, to individuate'.

Making such a cinema, however, requires its own strategies, and in a barely veiled attack, Shahani (1983) explicitly targets the proponents of a state-endorsed aesthetic of mass-media realism with tacit support from the left establishment.[26] For him, the 'only cultural intervention that is possible is indirect, sporadic, guerrilla in character'. He seeks to deflect the politically charged term 'guerrilla': it has for him 'neither the romance of secrecy nor of stylish violence'. The guerrilla tactics are to be 'those of Gautama Buddha: ask difficult questions to arrive at the simplest of answers (if any), qualitatively transformed.'

As far back as 1962, in an argument with economist Ashok Rudra in the pages of the journal *Mainstream*,[27] Satyajit Ray made known a two-level opposition to what he then dubbed a fashionable European New Wave trend. Already, by this time, he found such experimentation formally objectionable, 'avant-garde esotericism', and he singled out Alain Resnais for a particularly savage attack, calling the 'popular success of a film like *Marienbad* – by all accounts a deliberate, sustained two-hour exercise in arty obfuscation', so mysterious that 'one can only attribute it to a sudden widespread epidemic of fashionable snobbery' (Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 19). A decade later this attack clearly implicated Shahani personally, and, more generally, his call for a 'flexible language structure', something that Ray (1971: 94) caricatured as rampant improvisation, as 'being inventive at the last moment', contending that 'the person who talks of improvisation as a guiding principle in film making is more likely than not to be incapable of thinking at any time'. The formal and largely aesthetic objection was, even at that time, substantiated by the further *economic* argument that this

[26] Shahani (1983: 73–74) writes: 'There is a whole breed of fellows who have learnt to caress with a clenched fist. Or is it so new after all? History is repeating itself at an accelerated rate, to support the counsels of despair. [A]fter Telangana, reformism in the arts took over almost completely – it was thought necessary to reach the masses at any cost. We lost a whole generation of sensitive poets, writers, musicians and directors to a crass film industry devoted to easy profit. The weapons of vulgarity that our left-wing intellectuals wished to use ultimately wounded them. . . . After Naxalbari, the same trend has repeated itself. The supposed inspiration is from different quarters. The yardsticks of 'mass communication' invariably promising immediate and displaced fulfilment, are applied to social practice and social change. . . . [T]he ideas of 'mass media' have emerged from over-organization, be it political or economic, in the interests of a few against the targeted many. . . . What happens on the screen appears more real than reality itself. This has been the foundation of bazaar realism in India, flaunted by the colonially sponsored artists as regional, ethnic, socially aware and realistic cinema. [S]uch a cinema cannot ask questions. Its images are totalitarian, but the raw materials of those images, those vulgar weapons, are the ones of this earth. What we can use is the vigour, the malleability, of the raw material with which these weapons are forged.'

[27] Issues dated 3 and 17 November 1962.

experimentation was even less justified in non-western contexts with their paucity of resources. 'As long as this [New Wave] epidemic stays,' Ray predicted, 'I surmise that comparatively straightforward films (such as mine are obliged to be in the context of Indian conditions) will be found to be at a disadvantage in Europe' (Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 19).

Ray held on with some consistency to a national, even third worldist position: that working in India, and generally in impoverished, non-western conditions, placed a financial and cultural responsibility on filmmakers that required them to hold wild experimentation in check. The stakes had been sufficiently raised for him, by the early 1970s, to expand on this commitment, to provide his most elaborate statement yet on how one should 'define off-beat in the context of Indian cinema', in the essay titled 'An Indian New Wave?' (Ray 1971). He proposed a three-way criterion, more or less applicable, by his argument, to all cinema: one, the filmmaker's own 'urge for self-expression, common to all artists'; two, but tempered by an urgent critical necessity that was 'in line with the performing arts whose traditions stretched back two thousand years', namely, the 'need to establish rapport with an audience' through 'the evolution of a simple but forceful language [and] a choice of subjects with a broad appeal'; and three, the pressure of commerce. 'From the very beginning right down to the present, filmmakers have had to depend on sponsorship to provide them with the means of expression', making it necessary that they 'strike a satisfactory balance between art and commerce'. Such criteria as the need for a conventional story, for a well worked-out scenario, a modicum of craftsmanship, were not only aesthetically necessary but economically vital. Filmmakers seeking to experiment had to have a marketing plan by which to access a 'perceptive minority' and 'turn them into patrons of the proposed art theatres'. They had to have a way by which, with a large budget of Rs 2–2.5 lakh, they could be financially accountable. A critical component was the need to write scripts to ensure financial accountability, since 'writing it down beforehand cuts costs'.

Ray's essay created something of a furore in *Filmfare*, drawing an editorial response from Bikram Singh (1972), who, arguing on behalf of younger experimental filmmakers, attacked Ray for his 'incredible' refusal 'to appreciate that some of these young filmmakers may be fighting against as great, if not greater, odds as he did when he was going around with the script of *Pather Panchali* in

hand looking for backers'.[28] Placed retrospectively in the larger context of a changing overall policy, it is worth noting the resonance of the debate, and both Shahani's and Ray's positions in it, with a more abstract problematic surfacing in a seemingly straightforward legislation. This was really one of how to 'translate' state control through the Film Finance Corporation's economic regulation into a normative function for the cinema, and it explained why the independent cinema chose to reprise the famous European–Third Cinema debate on realism, of all times, at this historical juncture.

More to the point, then, the severe difference of opinion over state policy on funding independent cinema may best be read – through the often obscure aesthetic dimensions that it also straddled – as a historically foundational difference over what sort of relationship existed between systems of control external to the functioning of cinema, and systems internal to narrative regulation. More specifically, it could be read as an argument over what meaning a condition of state-endorsed symbolic production might possibly have for a state-sponsored cinema in the charged political atmosphere of the early 1970s. It was therefore also a reinvestigation into the mechanisms of authorization and its accompanying process of disciplining the cinema-effect, which had widely been perceived as intrinsic to a realist apparatus being handed to the filmmaker by the decolonized Indian state.

For Shahani, in particular, the conventions of *objectivity* and *realism* – historically associated with nationally endorsed structures of authentication and inherently problematic for that reason – were discredited beyond use by the Emergency's perversion of this apparatus, as well as the overall dissolution of the cinema into a form of 'mass media'. Ray, on the other hand, declared his explicit support to both a particular tradition of realist filmmaking – evident in his sequel attack before the onset of the Emergency on Shahani and Mani Kaul, and, in contrast, his defence of Shyam Benegal and M.S. Sathyu ('Four and a Quarter', 1974, in Ray 1976) – and a psychological–realist textual reading of the cinema.

By the mid-1970s, notwithstanding Ray's political opposition to the Emergency itself, his aesthetic position on the cinematic text appeared to have an impact on national film policy. As the 1974 Estimates Committee Report showed, economic regulation had already expanded to include state regulation of the industry as a whole (taxation, infrastructure, tariffs on rawstock import, exhibition licensing) alongside a reformed censorship structure. The whole

[28] Singh's scathing attack, featured as a cover story in what was at the time India's leading popular film magazine, saw a further response from Ray ('Satyajit Ray Writes', *Filmfare*, 25 February 1972: 52–54), reiterating that 'I believe that the economic hazards of an incautious approach are of such magnitude that they can wipe out of existence both the FFC and the aspiring filmmakers.' A number of readers' letters followed ('Ray's Invisible "Lines"', 24 March 1972, and 'Touch of Jealousy', *Filmfare*, 21 April 1972).

was to be governed by a wider reformist agenda that sought to push the film industry in the direction of self-improvement and internal restructuring so that it could produce a 'better' cinema, more worthy of the state and more capable of incarnating the citizen as its filmgoing subject, as the Emergency would wish.

In 1976, at the height of the Emergency, came the second major report on the New Indian Cinema, bearing the obvious stamp of Ray's argument. The Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Undertakings (1975–76) was meant to address the functioning of the Film Finance Corporation. The problem before the Committee was precisely the one Ray had mentioned in 1971: independent filmmakers' inability to repay loans. At the end of March 1975, out of a total of Rs 227.24 lakh extended to finance 87 features, less than half (Rs 109.52 lakh) had been recovered, and a total of Rs 29.26 lakh had been formally written off. The Corporation was on the verge of implementing draconian measures to recover their money. An FFC representative was quoted as saying that they would now go after filmmakers in every way possible. 'We will not relent, we will follow. But if he goes completely out of business and he has no assets to declare and there is nothing to his credit' – a situation not by any means unheard of among independent filmmakers – 'naturally, the amount has to be written off' ('Committee on Public Undertakings [1975–76]: 79th Report: Film Finance Corporation' 1976: 37).

What is important to note is the perception that the financial crisis faced by the FFC could not be resolved merely in financial terms, that there was – for perhaps the first time – a clear aesthetic agenda that the state had to take on even in matters of debt recovery. Echoing Ray's proposition of quality coming together with commercial accountability (the Committee noted that 'in view of the fact that 17 out of 22 award-winning films have proved successful at the box office', it was evident that 'it should be possible to combine quality with public acceptability'), the over-riding issue was to find a way by which the FFC could maintain, at all times, as its guiding principle, the 'balanced view' that films would be both 'artistic' and have 'a reasonable prospect of being commercially successful' (ibid.: 16). To achieve this purpose, a 'check list' was prepared (ibid.: 25), which included the 'following criteria . . . for granting loans: 1. Human interest in the story; 2. Indianness in theme and approach; 3. Characters with whom the audience can identify

itself; 4. Dramatic content; and 5. Background and capability of the applicant' (ibid.: 16).

In ways that neither Ray nor Shahani could have anticipated, what we were seeing was the flipside of what had once claimed the status of an aesthetically enabling structure: the sort of symbolic production that had made the cinema something of a unique agency for such production on behalf of the state. We were now seeing forms of authenticity production, believed to be innate to the signifying capacities of the apparatus itself, enter a new and confused era, where attributes that would be widely considered basic to film could be withdrawn, erased, suppressed, made to disappear. A realism reduced to 'human interest', 'Indianness', 'identification' and 'dramatic content' was now as much a trivialization of its own historical agenda in providing what Gyanendra Pandey has called the 'biography of the emerging nation-state',[29] as it was a process of aesthetic disablement.[30]

Textual 'Inessentials' and Aesthetics of State Control

> A crow-film is a crow-film is a crow-film. – Satyajit Ray, commenting on Mrinal Sen's *Akash Kusum* (1965) in a letter to *The Statesman*, Calcutta (Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 46).

> During the 1960s and early 1970s in particular . . . Art Cinema was often defined as the 'enemy': as a bastion of 'high art' ideologies, as the kind of cinema supported by *Sight and Sound* and the critical establishment, therefore as the kind of cinema to be fought. . . . Art films tend to be marked by a stress on visual style (an engagement of the look in terms of a marked individual point of view rather than in terms of institutionalized spectacle), by a suppression of action in the Hollywood sense, by a consequent stress on character rather than plot and by an interiorization of dramatic conflict. . . . A different hierarchy is established between action and actant. Different orders of motivation sustain the relations between the two. – Steve Neale (1981)

The emphasis in Ray's position on a certain kind of motivated textual reading of the cinema was to spring, somewhat unexpectedly, into direct political relevance with Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta '71* (1972). Sen's film, which might be read in hindsight to constitute precisely a

[29] Pandey's definition (1991: 560) of 'biography' overlaps with realism here: both adopt the 'official' archive as their primary source, have to attribute a 'natural' quality to national unity, and to present a narrative in which confusions, upheavals, compromises become in various ways an 'aberration' overcome by the ultimate resolution of the state.

[30] An important consequence of this period on Ray's later work was that after his *Jana Aranya* (1975), he virtually stopped making realist films set in the contemporary scene, staying with allegorical narration (*Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, 1977) and the children's movie critiquing the Emergency *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980) for his political commentaries.

challenge to the apparatus of 'identification' with 'characters', allowing for a completely different recognition of material within its frame but outside the limits of its fiction, also opens up a strategy that some of the avant-garde filmmakers, illuminating the formal detour, undertook in the circumstances of the time.

In defining what he called the 'comparatively straightforward film' that he was compelled by his circumstances to make, Ray clearly included the compulsions of a responsible spectatorial textuality. Not only had the film to be straightforward, but also its reading. Such *negative textuality* – or the clear marker of what a film does not mean, what a text does not include – was in profuse evidence in the 1962 *Mainstream* debate, which included not just the Indian cinema but also disputes over Rene Clair, Bergman and Fellini. Ray disputed Ashok Rudra's position on *Cabiria*'s (*Le Notti di Cabiria,* 1957) 'philosophical slant in the direction of [modern man's] despair' by asking, what is 'so modern, thematically, about a prostitute seeking love and sympathy and finding disillusionment?' Ray's animosity to textual overinterpretation would, over the years, lead to acrimonious bickering over *Shatranj ke Khiladi*'s (1977) historical accuracy and the interpretation of what a certain thematic detail 'meant' in *Shakha Proshakha* (1990).[31] It however found the clearest expression in his stern, publicly expressed disapproval of Mrinal Sen's films of the late 1960s: the 'modish narrative devices' in his *Akash Kusum* (1965) and *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) (Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 38). Likening *Akash Kusum*'s use of 'contemporary' representational devices to the fable of the crow who dresses in peacock's plumes – the origin of his dismissive phrase 'crow-film' – Ray spoke of *Bhuvan Shome* as something that 'looks a bit like its French counterpart, but is essentially old-fashioned and Indian beneath its trendy habit' (Ray 1976: 99). The argument was to get at the narrative core of the film, ridding it of the plumage. So *Bhuvan Shome* was no more than a story of 'Big Bad Bureaucrat reformed by Rustic Belle', and, if so, such a story could equally and plausibly be told in 'a simple but forceful language' shorn of decorative excess.

Such a production of negative textuality was demonstrated, for Ray, by Godard of all people, in whose narrative discontinuities Ray proposed a reiteration of his own principle of what is 'essential' to the story and what is not:

> Film grammar tells us that essentials should be stressed, and enumerates the various audio-visual ways of doing so; but what if a

[31] This kind of literary–textual interpretation hit probably its lowest point in his dispute with Chidananda Das Gupta over *Shakha Proshakha* (1990), over whether the father dies or doesn't die in the film. Ray wrote, attacking Das Gupta's review of the film, that 'Das Gupta must be the only viewer in the subcontinent who believes that the father had a second heart attack and dies at the end of the film inspite of obvious verbal and visual evidence to the contrary. It is almost embarrassing to have to spell it out for Das Gupta; but what happens in fact is that the father turns to the mad – and therefore incorruptible – son for solace.' Das Gupta's rejoinder was: 'Given Ray's tradition of understatement, if the wild fluctuations of heartbeat on the ECG monitor, the pronouncement of shanti shanti shanti, do not indicate imminent, if not instantaneous, demise, what would? The doctor spelling it out in words? Let me assure Ray that I was not the only one to walk away from the film thinking that his hero had reached the end of the road with his shanti shanti shanti.' (See Basu and Dasgupta 1992: 163–66.)

> director has a totally new angle on what is essential and what is not? In the scene just described (from *Masculin–Feminin*), what has been established beyond dispute is that a boy and a girl met in a restaurant and talked. What they said is, to Godard, inessential. It is also established that while they sat talking a woman murdered a man (Husband? Lover? – inessential) within their sight. (Ray 1976: 88)

As it happened, in the very year of Ray's essay, cinematic marginalia, or what we might now name, after Ray, 'textually inessential' matter, acquired some political importance in Mrinal Sen's *Calcutta '71* – released in 1972 but filmed (a vital fact) from 1969. Through the late 1960s Sen had experimented, in various ways, with avant-garde techniques adapted from the *nouvelle vague*. In *Interview* (1970), for example, a celebrated sequence inside a tram begins with a passenger spotting a photograph of the movie star Ranjit Mullick, as Mullick himself, playing the protagonist, stands by. Then, in a long address to the audience, Mullick draws attention to the film being shot, even as we see the cinematographer K.K. Mahajan, and also the other people present, especially Karuna Bandyopadhyay (whom Mullick further introduces through an excerpt from her celebrated role in *Pather Panchali*, 1955). Throughout *Interview*, the fiction is intercut with documentary footage of street agitations.

(*Facing page and this page*) The tram sequence in Mrinal Sen's *Interview* (Bengali, 1970)













The interruptive recordings of political action in *Calcutta '71*, then, had an aesthetic continuity with what Sen had been doing for some years. Beginning with shots of street action in the present, it goes back in time to tell a series of five stories – three from different historical moments in the past and two set in the present time – to put forth a set of political arguments about poverty and historical consciousness, as told by two protagonists. The last two include a great deal of documentary footage of Calcutta streets, processions and violent clashes. Some of this footage, or textual 'excess', was to spill over and develop a radically new meaning at the brief release of the film at the Metro Cinema at Chowringhee – an occasion for student activists to meet and for the police to keep the theatre under surveillance, as many of the street scenes provided unexpected evidence of people in the crowd who had later disappeared or been killed in police encounters. Sen himself, who had officially begun shooting the film only in September 1971, recalls how the shooting date became a major issue with students who glimpsed friends they knew had been killed well before then, on screen. He had to acknowl-

Shots of street action: *Calcutta '71* (Mrinal Sen, Bengali, 1972)

edge that he had used street footage he had been shooting from 1969. 'Young boys like this would keep coming back. People with their family and their friends. They would watch [the film] over and over again, just for another glimpse of their friend' (Sen 2003: 67). Such viewing of the film with the sort of detail that went beyond any form of textually contained attention, also brought to the fore the accidental suddenness of the production aspect of textual data, drawing attention to the political emphasis on the marginal or the inessential that a number of independent filmmakers, with very different perspectives, sought to foreground in films of the 1970s.[32]

Marginalia and Realism: A Last Word

My argument now seeks to move towards a variant of what I have discussed as the cinema's tendency for creating 'excess': sometimes even a transnationalized variant (such as the Franco–Latin Ameri-

[32] Indeed this was precisely the aspect that Reinhard Hauff (1987) foregrounded in his interpretation of the film.

can impact on the Sen of this entire period) of what I talked about earlier as the spillover into political zones existing beyond the limits of authorized state operation. In contrast to Sen's own unexpected stumbling upon this aspect of the spillover – outside the film's fiction on to a documentary record of its time, a temporal dimension acquired by our diegetic subset of an overall audio-visual record – I shall, over this book, try to locate a further variant of the textual symbolic with the somewhat more organized thematic eruptions in Gautam Ghose's first film, *Maabhoomi* (1979), and thereby further explore the ties that bind the cinematic *objectif* to the self-image of the modern nation-state. Also, I shall reinvestigate, with Mani Kaul, the question of whether cultural formations not possessing a tradition of objectivity – not only in the Renaissance sense, but also in the more ordinary, if democratically pressing, need to appropriately capture a reality 'out there', a reality that can be captured as through a lens – can apprehend their 'object' in any way other than through such proliferating symbolic marginalia.

I suggest that under the broad rubric of the avant garde, a particular sort of mechanism was put in place in the 1970s involving the frame and a specific symbolic relationship with the framed object, which fundamentally destabilized an identity-based involvement with spectatorial address and firmly replaced this with a substantially symbolic production system. Such a system, I hope to demonstrate through the work of artist Bhupen Khakhar, also enabled cultural transactions that were central to the form of the post-colonial state as much in post-war Europe as in many parts of the 'third world', in precisely the period Aijaz Ahmad names 'between 1945 and 1975'. Further exploring these transactions, I would like to investigate a rarely debated aspect of aesthetic state control: where such control was sought through a process of selective disabling, a *de*legitimizing, of the very apparatus of realism production – a contamination of pristine (or, as we earlier had it, 'edenic') diegetic space – as narrative structuring itself appeared unachievable on key historic occasions. I shall suggest that, on many occasions, an aesthetic debacle ensued within many sectors of independent film/art production, and that our detour was also on such occasions a survival strategy, both formal and institutional. I shall therefore also open up an avant-garde response, and new locations for working out the problem of what I have called the statist 'restrictive reading'.