

**The city in cinema, and cinemas in the city: South  
City Mall and Solace<sup>1</sup>**

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While during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries Calcutta (or Kolkata) was designed as a city for primarily for the benefit of colonial regime, certain sections of the city emerged as crucial sites for political and cultural subversions at a later period. Moreover, this city changed drastically after Independence and partition, living through one of the largest immigration in South-Asia.<sup>2</sup> Endless streams of refugees 'poured' in, and as people immigrated, severe housing problems cropped up.<sup>3</sup> The Calcutta streets, which were marked with colonial stateliness, became a glaring testimony of history of immigration, cultural uprootment and economic problems in South-Asia. From the 'city of sahibs'

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<sup>1</sup> A truncated version of this has been published as 'The city in cinema, and cinemas in the city: South City Mall and Locations of Display', 2010, *Silhouette*, vol. 8, pp. 88-104. This is part of a larger project on the architectural transformations of the city, and the ways in which such changes are recorded in visual cultures.

<sup>2</sup> 2,58,000 migrants sought shelter in West Bengal after the partition in 1947. This increased by 5,90,000 people in 1948, and by 1,82,000 people in 1949. The census of 1951 put the Calcutta population as 2.7 Million. And, by 1961 the slum population was roughly about 6,50,000. Many of the refugees worked in unorganised sectors, most of which were drastically different from their traditional occupations.

<sup>3</sup> This resulted in 'encroaching', which included 'forcible occupation' of vacant lands, railway lands, footpaths and so on, by families or by groups who seized private houses, waste lands and established 'colonies' with rhetorical names like *Shaktigarh*, *Bijoygarh* etc. By 1949, there were 40 such colonies in the south-east of Calcutta. Many of these colonies were set up near Tollygunge where film studios and golf clubs occupied huge areas.

and Bengali 'intellectuals', in a short span of time Calcutta re-emerged as the 'city of refugees'. The architecture and maps altered as the south and north of Calcutta was extended (unto 24 Parganas), and re-surfaced as a central locality of sorts. During this period the lanes and the by lanes of Calcutta charted the history of political struggle.

The southern sections of the city got dotted with small factories, and lines of make shift shops and houses, which were remarkably different from the milieu of north Calcutta or the *pucca* (permanent) structures of the 'Brown sahibs'. The location discussed here, is what used to be sometime back Usha Factory in south Calcutta, on Anwar Shah Road, near the Tipu Sultan's Masjid. Usha was in fact one of the big factories in Calcutta. It was owned by Jay Engineering Works, and produced electrical consumers' articles (particularly sewing machines) since the nineteen fifties. Its labour force comprised people from neighbouring provinces, as well as refugees from Bangladesh. Usha Factory also produced a fervent trade union movement. However, in 2003 it was declared 'sick' or unprofitable, and was made defunct. It was then sold off to a real estate consortium. The factory per say was of course demolished, large water bodies or lakes filled up with rubbish, and the construction of the South City began around 2004.

While the project till date is sort of 'under-construction', on the land of this defunct factory now stands a colossal, overwhelmingly large shopping mall or the South City Mall(cum housing estate), that underlines our economic shifts from a rambling industrial condition to an arguably emergent post-industrial condition. However, this paper is not a study in economic-history or urban sociology, the approach here is interdisciplinary, as it aspires to read the transformations of our spaces and cultures, streets, memories and images, from the perspective of visual culture studies. I use images (films, photographs etc.) as a source to make meaning of Calcutta's transmutations from the colonial period to its present state. I specifically study one particular aspect of the present, the emergence of the South City Mall with multiplex cinemas. Appearing like large ship the 'South City' consists of new housing (Calcutta's tallest buildings), and is located on one hand near slums (or Muslim ghettos) on the other near Bengali Hindu middle-class houses. At a distant a single cinema (ironically named 'Navina' or New), a make-shift bazaar selling fish and vegetables, and opposite to the mall a small liquor shop -called 'Solace'- still survives.

I try to explore the heterogeneous nature of this south-Asian city, the conflicts of development and how sub-cities can

coexist. The purpose here is to draw a narrative and visual account of such global shifts, which are/were caught up with the local Left Front Government's efforts of industrialisation. I study the South City Mall in Calcutta as an economic, cultural, and visual rupture within our experiences. I analyse the overpowering nature of the mall façade, it's glazed and glassy interiors, the multiplex with reflective floor (where the new 'Bollywood' films are screened), and examine the phenomenon of 'being present and seen' in the mall. This paper tries to comment on the multiplicity of urban life, and the unprecedented contemporary developments.

### ***Once upon a time in Calcutta***

Among other things, the question of immigration is one of the most significant aspects that transformed and reproduced the city architecture. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal experienced unprecedented political shifts and movements that included Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement, followed by Civil Disobedience Movements and the different phases of the Quit India Movement. In fact, there were multiple 'trends' in the political movements of the period, like the extremists (particularly during 1928-34) the revivalists (the Hindu Mahasabha Group etc.,) along with the

Communist movement.<sup>4</sup> Caught in the cross currents of the Second World War, from 1942 onwards the Quit India Movement turned somewhat gory. Moreover, in 1943 Bengal experienced the most dreadful man-made Famine, which triggered the death of five million people, and migration of thousands of peasants to the city. As toilers turned beggars, millions of people begging on the streets of Calcutta (amidst decomposing bodies) no longer asked for rice but for the water in which it was cooked. The Famine also forced an understanding of the meaning of modern colonial forces. Indian People's Theatre Association, a left cultural outfit was setup under such conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, what came in 1946 was somewhat unforeseen by both the politicians as well as the people. Starting from Calcutta in August, 1946 the communal frenzy and blood bath engulfed both East and West Bengals, and by March, 1947 it had spread unto Punjab, leaving thousands dead (killed) and even more uprooted from their homes and cultures. While India became independent, and two nations were produced on the basis of religion, Bengal and Punjab provinces perhaps experienced world's largest forced

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<sup>4</sup> See Sarkar, Sumit, 1984, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Ltd., Delhi.

<sup>5</sup> See Bhattacharya, Malini, 1983, Jan-March, 'The IPTA in Bengal' in *Journal of Art and Ideas*, No. 2, Delhi, also Biswas, Moinak, 2002, 'The City and the Real: Chinnamul and the Left Cultural Movement in the 1940s', in Kaarsholm, Preben,(Ed.), *City Flicks, Cinema, Urban Worlds and Modernities in India and Beyond*, Occasional Paper, no.22, Roskilde University, Denmark.

migration.<sup>6</sup> Post-independence Calcutta was transformed for once and all. Calcutta was surely not built to manage an inflow of refugees of this magnitude. People encroached upon vacant lands, land besides the railway tracks, on foot paths and so on, producing what is known as *jabar dhakhal* (forcefully captured) colonies and thereby stretching the city limits particularly southwards. Throughout the political movements of 1967 (radical ultra-left youth or 'Naxalite' movement), and of 1977 when the Left Front Government eventually came to power in Bengal, these 'colonies' became a stronghold of left and radical politics. In short, the post 1947 Calcutta needs to be viewed from specific perspective.

### ***The city in cinemas***

Somewhat surprisingly while there are numerous studies on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Calcutta,<sup>7</sup> enquiries on the political history of Calcutta from the partition years to the political upheavals of the late sixties and early seventies are rare,<sup>8</sup> and are conspicuous by the absences. In this context, cinema becomes an important visual

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<sup>6</sup> Alok Bhalla (1994, 2006), Urvashi Butalia (1998), Veena Das (1990), Suvir Kaul (2001), Gyanendra Pandey (1994, 1997) and others have studied the issues of partitions with specific references to the case of Punjab.

<sup>7</sup> Most well known ones being Partha Chatterjee's (1985) and Sudipta Kaviraj's (1995) works.

<sup>8</sup> See Chatterjee, Joya, 1994, *Bengal Divided, Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*, (South Asian Studies 57), Cambridge University Press, UK.

evidence of the changing cityscapes. For instance, *Chinnamul* (*Rootless*, Nemaï Ghosh, 1951) was an IPTA collective production that addressed the 'gaze' of the immigrant, who entered the city from far off villages to 'lay claim to the reality and the time in question' (Moinak Biswas, 2002, p. 29). Often this film is regarded as the sole cinematic document of partition and immigration. It begins with a voice-over speaking about the Muslim peasants and Hindu professionals who lived happily by the river and in a leisurely pace, shows the workers. Then through an evocative montage, juxtaposing shots of waves and storm with a lamp going off, and people being misled by their leaders, and by dissolving a shot of a knife onto it, the fear and trauma of partition is created. While the masses remain somewhat unsure of the meaning and implications of Independence and partition, in one of the most striking moments of the film an old lady clutches a bamboo pillar of her house and cries endlessly, '*Jaamu na, Jaamu na, Jaamu na, Jaamu na,...*' (Won't go). Yet, families eventually migrate to Calcutta leaving behind their homes and land, and as filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak would put it by abandoning an entire 'landscape', to traverse onto unknown territories and a new cityscape. As they enter Sealdah station to quote Moinak Biswas (2002, p.34):

[T]he top angle shot of the maze of tracks and the low angle shots of the platform shades-has almost a dream-like[nightmarish?] quality as a new reality dawns on the characters, as it invades the

film's frame.... Post-independence Calcutta would be shaped through them.

After a series of difficulties the family of the protagonist (Srikanta) would go on to live in a mansion they capture along with other families. The film ends with the death of Srikanta's pregnant wife after the birth of their son. It also has extensive shots of the beautiful city intercepted with the 'gaze of the refugee' (Srikanta) looking for his wife and family. However, partition perhaps also meant a new beginning through violence and pain, as the young boy of the family looks at the picturesque city from their terrace, and is marvelled by its scenic qualities.

Ritwik Ghatak in his essay on 'Film Making' writes about this 'lost landscape', and the 'lost faces' and the 'lost language'<sup>9</sup>. He insists with partition 'words/language and images are lost' forever. Moreover, we have lost an 'entire way of being'. Therefore, he craves for an imaginary re-union. In *Komal Gandhar* (*E-flat*, 1961), he brings up these issues and creates a thematic triad, which deal with problems of re-union of the individuals<sup>10</sup>,

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<sup>9</sup> From *Chitrabikshan* (Bengali), 1984, no. 18, 1-2; also see Ghatak's writings published in *Cinema and I* (1987), and *Rows and Rows of Fences*, 2000, Seagull, Calcutta.

<sup>10</sup> Apparently, this film also negotiates Ghatak's personal relationships with IPTA and his wife.



of theatre groups,<sup>11</sup> and of two nations. In a particular scene, when the two rival theatre groups come close for a play (Kalidas's *Shakuntala*) and go to Lalgola for rehearsals, Bhrigu (the protagonist) and Anasua look across the river and point towards their lost homes. They stand on an out of use railway track, which until the recent past was the bridge between the two Bengals. 'What use to be sign of union has now become the mark of division', says Ghatak. The camera tracks uneasily over these lost tracks, until the screen turns black and we hear a screeching sound. Ghatak uses multiple sound tracks and songs (marriage song, boatmen's song, IPTA songs etc.) to reinstate the theme of unification. Like the thematic, the camera in his film searches for a lost territory. It pans over tall grass and bleached-out sky, in frenzy, like a madman looking for his lost object. The *E-flat* musical note is used to describe the beauty of the lost terrain.

In Mrinal Sen's films<sup>12</sup>, the post-colonial, the post-partition, ravaged city, with refugees, beggars, street dogs, footpaths, dustbins, hi-drains etc., re-emerge with a certain kind of vitality. The beginning Sen's of *Interview* (1970) show these emergent spaces; or even its last sequence, deploys fast cuts and

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<sup>11</sup> See Sudhi Pradhan (Ed.), 1979, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936-1947)*, pp. 294-304, on the rifts within the front.

<sup>12</sup> See Mukhopadhyay, Deepankar, 1995, *The Maverick Maestro, Mrinal Sen*, Indus (An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers), New Delhi.

juxtaposes shots of city toilers, bazaars, bridges etc., with the smiling face of the protagonist. Alternatively, in *Calcutta 71*(1972), the young political activist is shown running through the Calcutta by lanes. These images are then compared with images of Bangladesh, and Vietnam War. His famous documentary style is evident in these films as he uses photographs from newspapers etc. Sen's 'progressive' background forces him to locate national and local politics within the larger international politics and bloodshed. In fact, he uses various forms, like the mime or uses the sound of radio and other location sounds to make meaning of contemporary conditions. As opposed to several films on Calcutta (including recent international productions like *Namesake*,2006), which repeatedly show Calcutta as an old colonial town with a lost world grandeur, or several other popular films which are predominantly shot within the studios, some of the films of the period actually show the political vitality and the emergent cityscapes.

### ***The city in a new light***

The Indian nation-state had strong socialist inclinations and public sector investments were enforced during the Nehruvian era, even when it safeguarded the interests of the petty capitalists.

Moreover, after the Left Front Government was elected to power in Bengal in 1977, one of its key successes became the land reform programmes and a populist mobilisation of the working class people. Amidst such socialist aspirations were significant shifts in the economic policies of both Congress Government at the centre<sup>13</sup>, and Left government in the province. In Calcutta for instance, the stretch from Jadavpur to Garia, was dotted with small-scale factories like Bengal Lamp, Sulekha (ink) factory, Dabur etc., which have now all become defunct, and are in the process of becoming housing complexes with shopping malls.<sup>14</sup> While this paper is not a study in economic-history of Bengal, nonetheless, it is crucial for visual culture studies to understand the ramifications such social change.

David Harvey<sup>15</sup> writes how a neoliberal state 'surrenders to the global market', and favours 'governance by elites'. While, India

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<sup>13</sup>The present Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, (who was earlier the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India) during his tenure, as Finance Minister in the early nineties was instrumental in implementing neo-liberal policies and opening its door for the MNCs.

<sup>14</sup> The eastern part of Calcutta now referred to as the 'New Town' can truly be studied as the emergent 'Global' Calcutta, where housing estates, flyovers are cropping up, and wide meandering roads(for new cars)crisscross the area which were earlier agricultural low land.

<sup>15</sup> From *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2005, OUP. He suggests (2005, p.78):

[t]he period in which the neoliberal state has become hegemonic has also been the period in which the concept of civil society...has become central to the formulation of oppositional politics. The Gramscian idea of the state as a unity of political and civil society gives way to the idea of civil society as a centre of opposition, if not an alternative, to the state.

is not neoliberal 'state' per say, nevertheless, its neoliberal aspirations and shifts are self-evident. For example, in the recent past while the Government in Bengal tried to set-up chemical hubs (in association with Multinational companies) in the villages of Medinipur,<sup>16</sup> a forceful resistance came primarily from the civil society, just as the peasants fought against land acquisition. The role of local media in this context (in forming public opinion), is worth examining. It is in such frameworks of uneven geographical developments I wish to analyse the spatial meaning of global cultures.

Appadurai (1990)<sup>17</sup> has written about *ethnoscapes* (spaces produced through inflow of people, like immigrants etc.), *technoscapes* (inflow of technology etc.), *finanscapes* (flow of global capital etc.), *mediascapes* (the 'repertoires of images and information'), and *ideoscapes* (ideological shifts connected to western world-views), as he wrote about the Global/Local dichotomy. However, it also important study the *cityscape* or *the structural changes* that occur when immigration happens, or the physical shifts that take place (with globalisation of economy and culture) when flyovers, multi-storeyed buildings, or shopping malls are built by erasing

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<sup>16</sup> Medinipur District in Bengal experienced manifold violence, since early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the Quit India Movement turned bloody and involved capturing of the police stations etc. In this struggle, a 73 old peasant widow (Matangini Hazra) was shot as she kept the flag floating. Two weeks later a cyclone damaged 50% of the crop and almost 70,000 cattle along with 4000 people. And, again in 1943 it was one of the worst affected places and thus became the imaginary Aminpur of Nabanna (1944, an IPTA Production).

<sup>17</sup> See Featherstone, Mike (Ed.), 1999, *Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity*, Sage Publications, London.

old houses, parks, water bodies; or when neon signs, digital bill boards etc., are erected like patchworks in the blue sky. Suddenly familiar spaces, the narrow lanes, the grocer's shop across the road, the old house built by forefathers, seem to be devoured by other geometric structures. Of course, it is a matter of nostalgia, but not without a sense of history. Moreover, it may be fruitful to explore contemporary Calcutta from such perspectives.

### ***Cinemas in the city***

Located on the Prince Anwar Shah Road, 'The South City', has been described as a city within the city. At the gate of the colossal structure is the shopping mall, with an over whelming façade. Built on 31-acres of land the 35-storeyed residential buildings with high-speed elevators are the tallest buildings in Calcutta (and eastern India). Technical innovations like the use of shear walls instead of columns were required for such tall buildings because of the soil quality of Calcutta. Opposite this 'South' city, is a predominantly Hindu middle class locality (Jodhpur Park), and a little further there is a Hospital. On South City's left there is the slum-area which comprises largely Muslims. Further down, there is a College, a single theatre, a flyover

(towards the Lake), a Mosque and beyond that a cemetery. In fact, there is Mosque structure built in 1830s, and a cemetery ground within half a kilometre of South City.

The South City constructed by the Merlin Group on the grounds of the defunct Usha Company (which had about 1,600 employees), was designed by an USA based company while the 'landscape design' was done by a company based in Singapore. Besides housing eastern India's largest shopping mall, with 6 screen multiplexes, the project also includes swimming pools, school, car parks (for 800 cars) etc. in the advertisements it was described as 'an oasis in the midst of chaos'. The total investment for this project is about 70 Million Rupees, which could employ up to 10,000 people and generate 10 Millions Rupees through taxes. Non-Resident Indians have booked more than 20 percent of the flats, and the prices for the apartments are up to 5 Million Rupees. While, the Sunday, 7th September, 2003, issue of *The Economic Times*, put the South City mall as 'a shoppers' paradise,' the South City itself stands tall like a space ship amidst narrow roads, bustling slums, local bazaars and working class people. It aspires for 'life style revolution,' which would necessarily encourage widening of the roads, and construction of flyovers etc.<sup>18</sup> Briefly, it ensures most definite changes in our urban

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<sup>18</sup> See the official website of South City for further information.

geographies, by dislocating workers, factories, and local houses. For instance, my friend who lived in a three-storied house adjacent to this structure shifted elsewhere primarily being unable to cope with such violent ruptures in everyday existence. For us, who have visited her place several times in the last fifteen years and more, it's a sharp break in the stream of memories of friendly gatherings, fervent political discussions, discourses on art, history, and literature, as well as heady parties with drinks from the opposite liquor shop ironically named 'Solace'.

### ***A waterscape vanishes***

While the South City is being built for some 6 years and reaching its completion now, about four years back the construction was disrupted because of the various protests connected to issues of land, labour and a huge water body, which has apparently, been destroyed. One major case that came up regarding the South City is connected to the question of environment. A huge water body located adjacent or behind the South City, and about 1.31 acres of this water body was located within the premises of the Usha factory. By the end of 2005, *Vasundhara*, an environmental activist group, marked that a large section of the water body had vanished and the towers III and IV were being constructed on that

space. Vasundhara wrote to the Governor, the Chief Minister, to the Fishery Department, as well as to the Pollution Control Board. Thus, the Pollution Control Board ordered a probe and later the PBC committee submitted a report, which was not exactly in favour of the builders, nevertheless, the constructions within the South City premises continued. Ranu Ghosh, a cinematographer working on a project for Sarai (CSDS, Delhi) laments, how '22 species of birds and 32 species of flora around this jheel - and several species of butterflies and grasshoppers' may have vanished. Among other things, Ghosh's work (which includes an interview with an out of job labourer from the Usha factory) underlines the structural changes of our city.<sup>19</sup>

### ***A plethora of images***

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<sup>19</sup> Ranu Ghosh writes:

In appearance, it has never matched the idyllic image that the idea of a 'jheel'[water body/Lake] conjures up in our mind. Located in the densely populated Bikramgarh area, on its west side is the cluster of garages, on one side the tall towers of South City and all around it settlements of encroachers. The jheel itself is used as a dumping ground for wastes generated by these varied settlements. Yet, Kaustav Basu, a student of environment, has spotted 22 species of birds and 32 species of flora around this jheel - and several species of butterflies and grasshoppers. Among the species of birds, at least one, according to him, is an endangered species and among the plants, he has spotted a cluster of shrubs that are rapidly vanishing from the Kolkata landscape...

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Writing about 'Culture of Display' Bella Dicks (2003, p1)<sup>20</sup>

says:

Places today have become exhibitions of themselves. Through heavy investment in architecture, art, design, exhibition space, landscaping and various kinds of redevelopment towns, cities and countryside proclaim their possession of various cultural values... These cultural values have come to be seen as a place's identity, the possession of which is key to the important task of attracting visitors. And this identity is expected to be easily accessed by those visitors or, to use a currently favoured term in urban design, to be *legible*.

While cultures of display are not new, the culture of exhibition is very specific to Europe and perhaps came to us through colonial encounters. Within our cultures, the cultures of display are perhaps performed through religious parades, which are largely very carnivalesque and subversive by nature, like the *Jele Parar Song*, where fishermen would dress up in ridiculous ways, and take out processions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to caricature the *Bhadraloks*. Alternatively, and more recently the *Durga Puja* decorations and cultures of visiting the *pandals* (make shift temples) portray emergent cultures of spectacle. However, the shifts in the present times or since 1980s show how 'visitability' and 'visibility' are also

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<sup>20</sup> From *Culture on Display, The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, Open University Press, England.

significant aspects of the planning of public spaces. For instance, the use of glass in contemporary buildings, and presence of mirrors within such interiors, and also the use of close-circuit TV within these public domains reveal the underlying problems of cultures of *seeing* and *seen*. Once we enter these spaces we become aware that we are being 'seen', and therefore, we are expected to behave in specific ways, just as we indulge in various forms of window-shopping. Technology indeed is 'at the heart of contemporary cultural display.'

Structured like a ship or whatsoever, there are 'decks' or rather various levels at the South City Mall. The centre is left vacant; and the shiny floors reflect the starry lights placed above. There are shops, and rows of shops, with mannequins, and men and 'queens'; glass windows and mirrors, as well as other reflective panels that hold up to us our idealised self-images. Then there are CCTVs and digital billboards that monitor us and play with moving images. There are also multiplexes that screen recent Bollywood films and Hollywood blockbusters that transport us to unknown zones. Often several working class families living in close proximity visit (decked up 'for the mall') this labyrinth of desire on the weekends or during festivals. These visits, which were particularly popular when the Mall was open for public in January 2008, seem to replicate cultures of visiting local fairgrounds. The variety of people and their costumes and

gestures, reminds one of reminiscent popular and sub-cultures, and which perhaps reproduced through the vibrant cultural practices of *Durga Puja* or *Ed*.

Lefebvre (1974) writing about 'social space,' insisted that '(Social) space is a (social) product'. He elaborated on the 'science of space' (underlining the physical space as well as the mental space) and highlighted how we confront 'an indefinite multitude of spaces'. He asserts (1974, p.8):<sup>21</sup>

[E]ach one plied upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global. Not to mention nature's (physical) space, of (energy) flows, and so on.

In response to this, Harvey (1979)<sup>22</sup> had written about 'Social Justice and the City,' and had theorised problems of geography and 'ghetto formation.' Interestingly, while globalisation tries to repress such spaces (the ghetto for instance) in its attempt to form a shopping mall, or a multiplex cinema perhaps, this 'many-spaces' or whatever is rarely a space of total control. Sometimes, as we have seen in the case of the South City mall the

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<sup>21</sup> From *The Production of Space* (Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), Blackwell, UK/USA.

<sup>22</sup> See *Social Justice and the City*, Edward Arnold, London.

repressed return with great vibrancy to lay its claim on this 'space-ship,' that has 'landed' in their locality.

The neo-liberal economic policies of the Indian Government are projected through the interconnections between the spatial transformations of urban spaces, inflow of multinational investments and the shifts in everyday living, and consumption habits. Certainly, there is an unprecedented boom in land and property business and associated fields. The upwardly mobile neo middle-class (specifically the double income group), their spending abilities, and desires seem to have played a crucial role in the ways in which big cities are changing, and in the construction of housing complexes, shopping malls, and multiplex cinemas. The growth of multiplexes is of course connected to the new economic policies that encourage new middle class lifestyles. To quote (Fernandes, 2004, p. 2415)<sup>23</sup>:

The growing cultural visibility of the new Indian middle class marks the emergence of a wider national political culture in liberalising India. This visibility represents a shift from older ideologies of state socialism to a political culture that is centred on a middleclass-based culture of consumption. Middleclass consumers represent the cultural symbols of a nation

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<sup>23</sup> See Fernandes, Leela (2004) 'The Politics of Forgetting: Class Politics, State Power and the Restructuring of Urban Space in India', in *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 12, pp.2415-2430.

that has opened its borders to consumer goods that were unavailable during earlier decades of state-controlled markets.

Therefore, within the framework of urban developments and emergent consumption economy, new leisure systems grow for the urban middle class. For instance, the Housing complexes and shopping malls also include Multiplex cinemas to increase 'footfalls' in a shopping mall. Moreover, the policies to permit the multiplexes to deploy 'dynamic ticket pricing' posit the multiplexes in an advantageous position compared to the single theatre with blurred projections, unclear sound, seats with bugs, dirty toilets and stale popcorns.<sup>24</sup> Arguably, multiplexes are producing new kinds of cinema cultures and cinematic forms within the 'Bollywood'.

Partha Chatterjee (2004)<sup>25</sup> writes about urban structures and cultures of Calcutta, from the 1950s and 1960s, and the nature of its growth through the 1970s and 1980s. Further, he describes (2004, p. 145) how in the (imagined) post-industrial, global, 'Bourgeois' metropolis, "globally urban, consumer lifestyle and aesthetic will take root. There will be segregated and exclusive spaces for shops, restaurants, arts, and entertainment..." Of

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<sup>24</sup> I must thank Ardrian M. Athique for letting read his draft paper on multiplex cinemas.

<sup>25</sup> In *The Politics of the Governed, Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Permanent Black, New Delhi.

course, he hopes that, our social conditions will 'corrupt' such cities, which then will be 'impure' and 'inefficient'. In point of fact, this last section of the paper, looks into the 'corrupted' nature of the South City, which so self-evidently aspires to be a global pad.

### ***Solace survives***

In 'Of Other Spaces' Foucault<sup>26</sup> criticizes our reading of histories predominantly through the temporal axis, and emphasises on our need to 'notice space', and understand that it is not a 'homogenous and empty space' but 'the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself a heterogeneous space'. Foucault proposes the concept of Heterotopias (as opposed to Homotopias or even Utopias), and writes about the various principles like the strangeness of 'cemetery', multiplicity of theatre (perhaps cinemas as well), he links heterotopias with 'slices of time', like the museum or it's opposite the fairground, as well as brothels and colonies etc. Finally he writes, '[t]he ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionages take the place of adventure, and police take the place of pirates.' In a sense, the South City mall is

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<sup>26</sup> See- <http://www.foucault.info./documents/heteroTopia/>

Foucault's ship, or at least it is located on a 'fairground' which entails middle class apartments, as well as local shops, bazaar, mad men, dirty huts, old Mosques, college, and cemeteries.

A recent Bengali film *Herbert* (Suman Mukhopadhyay, 2006)<sup>27</sup> seems to address the shifts within the Calcutta cityscape, and acknowledge the heterogeneity of our urban landscapes. *Herbert*, is a story of an under-educated orphan who is a failure of sorts, but eventually becomes successful as he learns to talk to ghosts, and becomes a revolutionary through a series of unintentional events. *Herbert* chooses locations of north Calcutta, the old wrecked houses, railways tracks, river ways where signs of modernity (like the dish antenna) leave a stain. More recently, *Sthaniya Sambaad* (by Moinak Biswas and Arjun Gourisaria, 2010) tries to produce a historical trajectory of this development and violent changes. Referring back to Ghatak, and shooting in south Calcutta Biswas and Gourisaria show the everydayness of refugee live, and its vitality despite the under-developments. Using a language (*bangal bhasa*) that is lost in transition, the film produces a cinematic language that is new and relevant.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> An adaptation of a contemporary classic written by Nabarun Bhattacharya, 1993. Mukhopadhyay's recent film *Mahanagar @ Kolkata* (2010) dealing with three short inter-connected stories, also shows the city underbelly and the ways in which it negotiates the emergent housing estates in and around the 'By-pass' area.

<sup>28</sup> Biswas, Moinak, in 'Changing Scenes', 2009, published in *Sarai Reader 08: Fear*, writes about the political meaning of such changes. He also mentions recent Bengali films like *MLA Fatakesto* (2006), *Minister Fatakesto* (2007) and

Within these frameworks, the mall may be seen as the 'populist insertion into the city fabric'. Jameson (1984)<sup>29</sup> would describe a place like the South City mall as a 'new total space' that 'corresponds a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hyper-crowd'. Nevertheless, this space is a space of everyday negotiations, where besides the obvious environmental and structural ruptures the complex is also causing water, electricity and traffic problems for the neighbourhood. Moreover, while the gigantic ship with sweet perfumed air and pleasant music draws us in; and as the ever burgeoning middle-class armed with credit cards head towards the mall, the outside, which it aspires to cut off, or ignore and repress, returns like the 'real' leaving its marks on the glossy glass skin of the mall.

The heterotopias Foucault talks about is not about a harmonious coexistence of the odds. In this/our case, different worlds are posited next to each other through a history of violence, rupture and tussle. If the Global *imaginaire* tries to suppress and

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*Tulkalam* (2007) where issues of land acquisition play a crucial role in producing a distorted narrative of socio-political change.

<sup>29</sup> See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 2006, Duke University, Durham (first published in 1984 as "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in *New Left Review*, Vol.146, pp.53-92).



dominate the local, sometimes this hierarchy is destroyed as sub-cultures (like *melas*, or loud programmes at the street corners etc.), and sub-spaces (like the local bazaar, and cemetery etc.) come flooding back with unpredictable dynamism. Moreover, a huge labour force that resides in the neighbouring colonies seem seize their rights to enter such spaces by joining in as sales persons in the numerous shops and restaurants. It is no longer about horizontal positioning of different of places and practices, but rather a vertical placement of diverse layers constantly fighting each other out.

Finally, it may be fruitful to use Michel de Certeau (1984, p.91-110) from *The Practice of Everyday Life* where he describes how 'walking' in the city re-produces its own topography. 'They walk...they are walkers...,' he insists. '[W]hose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an "urban text" they write...'. He reads such walking as 'speech acts' as walking 'creates a mobile *organicity* [emphasis added] in the environment, a sequence of phatic *topoi*.' Indeed, as a huge number of 'non-buying' working class families queue up on the weekends to mark their presence, and enter elitist power zones; one can hear their footsteps whispering as it were, as they leave footprints on middle-class aspirations.

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