NEO DELHI: URBAN MEDIATIONS IN AN ERA OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the role ideologies play in constructing new urban spaces. In an era of intensified global interaction, cities are increasingly positioned as sites for managing and mediating processes of economic production and exchange. For recently "liberalized" economies like India, cities carry the additional burden of showcasing the desirability of "emerging markets" for global capitalist incorporation, so that urban mediation becomes a means for re-articulating the image and identity of the postcolonial city and nation. My dissertation studies the complex and ambiguous ways in which urban space and postcolonial identity are mutually transformed in practices of urban mediation, where new lines of social inclusion/exclusion and spatial division pose critical political and ethical challenges to postcolonial democratic life. I use India’s National Capital Region of Delhi, and in particular the satellite city of Gurgaon, as a case-study.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE............................................................................................................ ix

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Mapping [Old—New—Neo] Delhi ....................................................... 1
1.1 Arrival ......................................................................................... 5
1.2 Crisis.......................................................................................... 7
1.3 Arrested Development in Gurgaon ............................................. 12
1.4 Plan for the Dissertation ............................................................ 15
1.5 Lines of Flight ............................................................................. 19
1.6 On Method .................................................................................. 23

CHAPTER 2
POSTCOLONIAL CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN NEOLIBERAL INDIA

2.0 Neoliberalism in Crisis ................................................................. 27
2.1 Virtual Consensus and Liberal Democracy ............................... 31
2.2 The Narrative Discourse of Postcolonial Capitalism ............... 37
2.3 The Discursive Space of Postcolonial Identity in India .............. 42
2.4 The Partiality of Economic Reform ........................................... 48
2.5 Neoliberal Urbanism ................................................................. 53

CHAPTER 3:
VIRTUAL URBANIZATION IN GURGAON

3.0 The Global qua Urban Turn in Postcolonial India ...................... 56
3.1 Imaging Delhi ............................................................................. 63
3.2 Old Gurgaon and New Gurgaon ................................................. 68
3.3 The Peri-Urban Expansion of Delhi ............................................ 72
3.4 DLF and the Privatized Urbanization of Gurgaon .................... 76
3.5 Dual Modes of Land Acquisition in Gurgaon ........................... 82
3.6 Temporal Politics on the Frontiers of the Global Economy ........ 85

CHAPTER 4:
NEOLIBERAL URBANISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL MIDDLE CLASS

4.0 Introduction ............................................................................... 93
4.1 Gurgaon Collapsing .................................................................. 96
4.2 Mediating Modernity ................................................................ 103
4.3 I Am Gurgaon .......................................................................... 108
This dissertation explores an uncommon sense of the present in contemporary urban India. It does this not by retreating from those places, discourses and signs most commonly associated with the emergence of a "new" and "globalized" India. Rather, it pursues a political ethnography that takes place in the very heart of this India, inhabiting its novel spaces and times, interpreting its narratives of "newness" and postcolonial arrival.

The ethnography is based on ten months of research in the neoliberal boomtown of Gurgaon, a recently developed satellite city located on the southern border of India's sprawling capital of New Delhi. Gurgaon has been celebrated both nationally and internationally in recent years for attracting scores of multinational companies and being home to private consumerist townships catering to India's economic elite and its "new middle classes.” Above all, Gurgaon symbolizes India’s new global intelligibility: its represents a safe site for private investment and a suitable environment for global business. If there were a condensed space in India that could be said to signify the so-called “new India,” then Gurgaon would certainly make a common sense choice.

And yet, for all the exuberance and celebration that surrounds Gurgaon’s supposed “newness,” the dominant narrative of the city in mainstream discourse is continually split in two trajectories: one of future potential, and one of unmet expectations. As the so-called “Millenium City” of the “new India,” Gurgaon is heavily invested with desires for “first-world” affiliation and global recognition. Yet simultaneously, Gurgaon is constantly under threat of “slipping backwards” into the “third-world,” as crumbling infrastructure, rampant crime, and persistent political protest and poverty threaten its intelligibility as an urban metonym for the “new India,” and a safe climate for global business. This dissertation develops the concept of urban mediation to explore the contentious terrain of politics that opens up through contemporary re-configurations of space, image and identity in
neoliberal cities like Gurgaon. Specifically, I focus on how narratives of “newness” and postcolonial becoming are challenged in contestations over land acquisition at the rural fringes of Delhi, novel discourses of urban “renewal” within the city, residential welfare politics in elite urban enclaves, speculative practices of neoliberal architecture and urban design, and urban media—including print and tele-visual news, cinema and literature.

My findings address a persistent puzzle in the narrative of India’s recent economic liberalization, namely, the curiously uneven pace of reform over the past quarter century. Economists and political scientists alike have insisted that such gradualism is the result of political exigency and the inability on the part of the state to generate democratic consensus on neoliberal reforms (Kohli 2006, Panagariya 2010). But in the absence of such political consensus, how has reform been pursued at all? My research suggests something quite different: if neoliberal policies have been institutionalized gradually and deliberately by the Indian state, then this “cautious” approach is itself not innocent. In light of the symbolic and material role new urban spaces like Gurgaon play vis-à-vis the financial intelligibility of the “globalizing” nation, this new approach towards the urban is better understood as a strategic re-configuration of the political itself, constituting yet another means through which neoliberal economics seeks to make itself the “common sense” of our times. In projecting exclusive spaces of “newness” and global recognition (not always successfully), the urban becomes a point of mediation between the postcolonial national and the neoliberal global, where political and social life itself becomes increasingly partitioned and policed in contentious and complicated ways. This is the uncommon sense of the “new India” that this dissertation brings to the fore and critically examines.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.0 Mapping [Old—New—Neo] Delhi

I call “Neo Delhi” the transformational landscape that has resulted from neoliberalized circuits of finance and investment over the past two and half decades within the Delhi conurbation. Juxtaposed with previous incarnations of this historically rich and varied metropolis, namely Old Delhi (capital of Mughal India) and New Delhi (capital of British India), Neo Delhi is not simply the political capital of postcolonial India, it has become a key nodal point in the global network economy, attracting foreign investment and presenting a desirable “urban face” for the “new” and increasingly “globalized” India.

In an illustrated essay entitled “Mapping Delhi,” former Surveyor General of India S.M. Chadha (2005) delineates the historical geography of a triangular region nestled between the Aravalli ridge to the northwest, the Yamuna river to the east, and low-lying plains to the south. This is a dry, dusty terrain that has been “urbanized” at various times over the past three thousand years. Beginning with the ancient kingdom of Indraprastha from 1450 BC to 350 AD, Chadha maps subsequent urban settlements: the early citadels of Surajkund and Siri in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, respectively, the Islamic era of medieval fortresses and walled cities in Tughluqabad and Shahjahanabad, and finally, colonial New Delhi and its contemporary postcolonial expansions. In sum, Chadha identifies no less than 17 historically distinct “urban” settlements in what is now bureaucratically referred to as the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, the political capital of postcolonial India.
Citing Chadha’s map, I begin by focusing on what he calls the 15th, 16th and 17th cities of Delhi, because these contemporary cities today comprise three distinct, yet co-existing regimes of urbanism within the NCR. The 15th city of Delhi is called Shahjahanabad. Commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1639 and completed by 1648, this walled city originally included palaces and forts made of red sandstone and marble, with byways, alleys, courtyard mansions, mosques, seminaries, hospitals, colleges and public baths characterizing its space. The city also had lush gardens and waterways, including “canals, pools, tanks, fountains and waterfalls that helped water the city and keep it cool” (Mithal 2005, 40). Shahjahanabad functioned as political capital of Mughal India from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and survives today as a crumbling, yet thriving center for commerce, tourism and religious practice. It is widely referred to as Old Delhi (or Purana Dilli in Hindi).

The 16th city of Delhi is New Delhi, designed by British planners and architects as the political capital of colonial India at the beginning of the twentieth century. Recognizing the importance of Delhi’s central location within the Indian subcontinent, the British colonial government decided to re-locate its capital from Calcutta and began work on a brand new city in 1911. Significantly, the site for the capital was to the immediate south of Shahjahanabad, and both spatially and stylistically, the purpose of colonial New Delhi was to make the era of the British Raj continuous with the political history of India, while also underlining the superiority of the British over all previous rulers. Thus, the monumental governmental buildings designed by chief architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were deliberately constructed to heights just above that of the Lal Qila (Red Fort) and Jama Masjid, the two major architectural achievements of Shahjahanabad. The British buildings also painstakingly blended Western neo-classical principles of structure and form with
Mughal-influenced ornamentations and indigenous building materials. The result was a hybrid style of architecture that was (perhaps too) comfortably inhabited by the postcolonial political elite that inherited the institutions of the Raj after the British left in 1947. In addition, wide radial roads connected different spaces within the capital in a hexagonal pattern, allowing for lush green expanses of parks and forests within what is to this day otherwise a largely bureaucratic district. This Delhi continues to be a meticulously maintained capital district, and, unlike Old Delhi, is legally protected from re-development.

The 17th city that Chadha includes in his historical mapping of Delhi is more contemporary, comprised of postcolonial urban formations that are spatially discontinuous: expansions to the east, west and south that envelope Old and New Delhis. These settlements became home to post-partition migrants from Pakistan and elsewhere in the decades following independence. Even more recent—and left off of Chadha’s map—are the newest suburban expansions on the outskirts of the NCR: NOIDA and Gurgaon. These peri-urban formations comprise what I call—in juxtaposition to Old and New Delhis—Neo Delhi, signifying not merely the historical novelty of these urban outgrowths, but also their singular connection to neoliberal globalization (Harvey 2005). Neo Delhi—and in particular Gurgaon—will be the site of this book’s analysis.

One way to think about Old, New and Neo Delhi’s together is through the spatial and temporal juxtaposition of three coexisting urbanisms, that is, three historically different styles of spatial form. What is interesting to note in this regard is the common importation of urbanist styles from “elsewhere.” Old Delhi’s urban aesthetic was largely imported from spatial practices prevalent in Central Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly the medieval Timurid cities of
Samarkand and Herat in what is modern day Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, respectively (Mithal 2005, 38). It is in fact widely known that Shah Jahan himself was tenth in a direct line from Amir Timur—the Tamerlane of European lore. Meanwhile, New Delhi’s Garden City design was imported from England. As architect Romi Khosla notes, chief designer Edwin Lutyens was “clearly influenced by the Garden City movement,” which sought to restore a balance between built form and nature, a balance that was perceived to be under threat in an era of industrial capitalism. The influence of the Garden City ideal “was to have a profound impact on the physical planning of Delhi” (Khosla 2005, 14).

Neo Delhi’s urban regime, as we will see in the chapters ahead, is also imported from elsewhere. Yet the original site of this “elsewhere” is much more ambiguous. Variousy citing transnational styles of architecture and urban design, the site from which urban aesthetics is exported and materialized in the built spaces of Neo Delhi is a vaguely defined, global “elsewhere,” whose unfamiliarity in the surrounding landscape is precisely its economic and cultural value in neoliberal India.

A truly remarkable study, perhaps to be undertaken in the future, would attempt to map the precise ways in which these coexisting urbanisms are inter-related in the present. Such an analysis would resist the easy impulse to chart Old Delhi, New Delhi and Neo Delhi on a simple linear path of urban development and historical progress, and instead understand the ways in which Delhi’s various pasts interrupt, complicate, and haunt its present. This current study, however, will be limited to mapping only the latest of these urban regimes. While research on the history and spatial practices of Old Delhi and New Delhi has been undertaken in a variety of fruitful ways, a study of the spatial and discursive practices that produce Neo Delhi needs to be undertaken in its own right before a critical spatio-temporal analysis of
Old/New/Neo Delhi’s can be performed. This is because (to foreshadow my conclusions), Neo Delhi’s emergence as a space both juxtaposed to, yet somehow also representative of, the postcolonial nation under neoliberal economic reform is historically singular, and perhaps also indicative of new spatial emergences and mediations in other postcolonial locations. Once these new urban practices and discourses are delineated and examined in detail, a cross-analysis of coexisting urbanisms in Delhi might be more fruitfully undertaken. It may very well be the case that Neo Delhi increasingly subsumes both Old and New Delhis, as the spatial logic of neoliberal urbanism and postcolonial capitalism together reshape existing urban spaces while creating new ones from scratch.

1.1 Arrival

I landed in Neo Delhi on September 12, 2008 in order to begin a nine-month long research stay in Gurgaon. As one postcolonial capitalist writer recently described it, Gurgaon “is famous for its sleek office towers, shopping malls, multiplexes with state-of-the-art projection systems, upscale homes and condominiums, and even a world-class golf course” (Khanna 2007: 76). In the discourses of postcolonial capitalism cities like Gurgaon represent the dynamism and potential of the “new India,” portrayed as increasingly globalized and economically robust. A New York Times writer recently described Gurgaon precisely in these terms, “as a largely privately developed city and a metonym for Indian ambition.”

Such amplified, if not exuberant, descriptions arise from the relatively recent and rapid transformation Gurgaon has witnessed over the past quarter century. Once

a sleepy agricultural town surrounded by rural villages and family-owned farms, Gurgaon is now depicted as a thriving high-tech metropolis that is recognized symbolically and materially within the global economy. Yet its media-driven intelligibility is continually confronted by contrasting images of postcolonial development: political protests by farmers against forced land acquisition by the state for private developments; proliferating slums and “informal” economies emerging simultaneously with new “global” spaces; elite residents of private communities decrying inadequate public infrastructure, from electricity and sewage to road maintenance, traffic and waste management. As a space that was ostensibly designed to re-create “America” in what was otherwise decidedly “India,” these contrasting images of poverty, protest and political contestation are a haunting reminder of an India that is not so easily escaped.

This book takes a critical look at the spatial history and contemporary urban politics of Gurgaon, from its agricultural past to the private land acquisitions that made it ripe for real estate speculation and rapacious land development in the present. I study Gurgaon not because it is representative of India’s national urban scenario; rather, Gurgaon’s difference from the rest of the country is precisely what makes it so interesting and important as a case-study in postcolonial urban development. Gurgaon signals the historically unprecedented materialization of what was perhaps only an imagined possibility in postcolonial India, an unrealized potential. Gurgaon’s virtuality is precisely what sets it apart from other Indian cities and spaces, yet also what makes it the focus of intense national and international attention. This book explores the discursive and ideological gaps that arise between Gurgaon’s media-driven image and the fragmented, divided spaces that constitute its everyday lived urban space. Paradoxically, in its historical and spatial difference from the rest of the
country, Gurgaon’s neoliberal emergence sheds critical light onto some of the central ideological and discursive struggles in political contestation today in postcolonial India.

1.2 Crisis

Just a few days after my arrival in Gurgaon, on September 15, the New York-based investment bank Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, and the “global financial crisis,” as it was soon called, quickly ensued. While the event which triggered this financial crisis—Lehman’s declaration of bankruptcy—was unforeseen by most, in the months prior to September 2008 it was becoming increasingly clear that the U.S. economy was teetering on the edge of an upcoming economic recession. For nearly a year prior to my departure for India, mainstream discourses in the American media were mired in claims and counter-claims regarding the status of the U.S. economy, debating whether it was heading towards a recession or not. One day, the views of one financial “expert,” economist, or even the President himself would appear, backed up by some set of data, arguing that the US economy remained strong, that a recession would be avoided. But the very next day, it seemed, the views of someone else would be presented, using a different set of data to come to a very different conclusion about the inevitability of an economic downturn. What was striking about these mainstream capitalist debates in the U.S. was the fundamental uncertainty regarding an object of

\[\text{For background on this crisis and its structural causes from a mainstream (neoclassical) economic perspective, see Shiller 2008 and Crotty 2009. For an empirical analysis of the crisis’ impact on Asian economies (including India and China), see Fidrmuc and Korhonen (2009). For a more critical take on the crisis from the perspective of political economy, see Araghi 2008.}\]

\[\text{Examples of this debate are numerous. A few examples from either side of the debate are the following: Nutting (2006), International Business Times (2007), Wallack (2008) and CNN-Money.com (2008).}\]
quantitative measurement and statistical analysis often taken to be self-evident in its empirical coherence: the national economy.

In the schizophrenic debates that led up to Lehman Brother’s financial demise—one day optimistic, the next day pessimistic—one could glean a capitalist discourse that was haunted by its own epistemological contingencies and discursive limitations (Derrida 1994, Mitchell 1998). Moreover, the role of such a discourse was precisely performative and decidedly not referential; arguments on both the pessimistic and optimistic sides of the debate were performing the ideological work of capitalism in a time of intense uncertainty, conjuring an interpretive image of the economy that would no doubt influence and even shape the way in which economic “agents” (investors, producers, consumers) would react to it.  

This is what Jacques Derrida conceptualizes as the discursive-material process of “performative interpretation,” which he links to a “new thinking of the ideological” (1994: 51). This concept will play a key role in analyzing the discursive and material practices of postcolonial capitalism as a becoming-dominant ideology in contemporary urban India. Performative interpretation is, for Derrida, a “kind of interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets” (ibid.). The concept emerges through its juxtaposition with Marx’s well-known formulation: “Philosophers have interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (MacLellan 2000: 173, italics mine). In the post-representational era of neoliberal globalization, however, when major “economic” decisions which effect massive populations across the world are made by an elite class of apolitical technocrats and

4 Consumer confidence reports are interesting in this regard, particularly in a time of economic recession. Read the following article for an example of how consumer confidence reports in the midst of a financial panic often exacerbate the panic by shaping the behavior of investors and consumers who read, interpret and react to such reports. The economic data, which is supposed to represent a pre-given reality (consumer sentiment), actually becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that transforms the very reality it was supposed to merely re-present (AP 2008).
financiers in global capitalist institutions, devoid of any democratic accountability (Stiglitz 2002, 2007), this simple opposition between “passive” interpretation and “active” change no longer holds, or at least must be seriously questioned.

As recent critical scholarship on late-capitalism has suggested, the virtual reality that is neoliberal globalization bears witness to an abstract theoretical discourse of neoclassical economics whose virtual subjects are interpellated (i.e. recognized or hailed into being) to the extent that they cite this discourse’s abstract presuppositions and ontological assumptions in their everyday practices (interpreting and performing, for instance, the intrinsically predatory nature of human rationality, agency, and desire; the utility maximizing function of free-markets; the historical ontology of private property and individual ownership). Performing and interpreting and thus transforming their material life-worlds in their everyday lives, subjects of postcolonial capitalism become intelligible and recognizable as a part of a larger effort to re-make the material world in ways that conform to the conceptual structures of neoclassical economic theory (Aneesh 2006, Bourdieu 1999, Butler 1998, Carrier and Miller 1998, Mitchell 1998, Zizek 1989, 2010). This ontological effort on the part of capitalist economic discourse is intensified in a time of uncertainty, such as a

I draw my concept of “interpellation” from the work of Louis Althusser (1969), whose influential essay “Ideological State Apparatuses” focuses on ideological subject-formation as integral to the “reproduction of the relations of production” of capitalism. But I underline the ambivalence of interpellation, supplying performative interpretation from Derrida (1994: 51) as a way of highlighting the contingent nature of interpellation, how every interpellation occurs between an ideological performance and an interpretation of that performance. I would argue that it is in the gap that opens up between performance and interpretation that the transformational (virtual) power of ideology is prefigured. But what is also prefigured through a concept of performative interpretation is the fundamental contingency (what Derrida calls hauntology) that is part of the structure of every hegemonic ideology.
financial crisis, particularly one that was dramatized so apocalyptically as a veritable *existential crisis* for the global project of neoliberalism.6

In the first month of my research stay, I found that similar interpretive discourses were at work in India, but here the schizophrenic and haunted economic debate had an important postcolonial twist, a different economy of ghosts. India was (and still is), after all, in the midst of an unprecedented economic expansion, thanks to economic reform and liberalization, which, according to the dominant economic narrative, freed up the long repressed “animal spirits” of postcolonial capitalism and produced robust economic growth over the past quarter century. This accelerated growth was, of course, in stark contrast to the dreaded “Hindu rate of growth,” in which postcolonial socialism7 (a combination of state-led development, import-substitution and internally regulated production) hindered national economic growth for nearly four decades. In India the question that was debated *ad nauseam* in the major newspapers in the weeks and months following Lehman Brothers’ declaration

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6 See for instance, Faiola (2008), who pointed out just weeks after Lehman Brother’s collapse, “The worst financial crisis since the Great Depression is claiming another casualty: American-style capitalism.”

7 The term “postcolonial socialism” is not descriptive as much as it is analytic. India’s economy prior to liberalization was a mixed economy, incorporating socialist techniques of regulating production and managing distribution within an economy that nonetheless allowed private producers to produce with relative autonomy from the state. Moreover, as a significant collection of research has demonstrated recently, there were several episodic periods of “liberalization” in the Indian economy prior to 1991’s structural adjustment reforms (Denoon 1998, Kohli 2004, 2006, Panagariya 2008). These were usually in response to sudden crises like food shortages due to droughts, oil price-rises abroad, or finally, in 1991, a balance of payments crisis that threatened the country’s supply of foreign exchange. But whereas short-term and highly selective liberal reforms implemented in response to previous crises were momentary and lacked sustained support from any significant political party, the 1991 crisis, postcolonial capitalists argue, was different because it heralded a larger *structural* adjustment, at the behest of the IMF and World Bank. This *economic* imposition (and corrective) is articulated as a *necessity*, and it is with the “necessary event” of the balance-of-payments crisis, at once discursive and material, that India’s economic transformation proceeds. Within the discourse of postcolonial capitalism, which will be further analyzed in Chapter One, this transformation meant that the “Hindu rate of growth,” associated with postcolonial socialism, ended and postcolonial capitalism emerged to replace it. Thus the concept of postcolonial socialism is meant to help us conceptualize the imagined temporal rupture represented in the advent of economic reforms in the early 1990s and the subsequent “liberalization” of the Indian economy. Postcolonial socialism becomes a discursive effect of the narrative of postcolonial capitalism, which defines the temporality of the present (capitalist growth) in opposition to an othered-past (socialist stagnation).
of bankruptcy (and my nearly simultaneous arrival in the country) was whether or not India’s once protected economy, now liberalized and increasingly exposed to the vicissitudes of global financial exchange, would be adversely impacted by an economic crisis that had started in “the west.” While some argued that India’s financial system retained a sufficient degree of protection and autonomy from the crumbling global financial architecture, thanks to socialist-era regulations on banking and finance, others argued that India would indeed pay the price for its increased immersion within the global economy.\(^8\)

While in America, the discourse of capitalism was haunted by the epistemological contingency of “the national economy” as a spatio-discursive production,\(^9\) in India this discourse was haunted by an additional, postcolonial, specter: the perceived extent to which the national economy itself was incorporated and recognized within “the global.” As we will see, this degree of global incorporation and recognition is not simply an empirical matter, subject to quantitative measurement and calculation; it is also a deeply ontological one. As a postcolonial nation, India’s relationship with the imagined terrain of the global\(^10\) has

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\(^8\) Once again, examples are numerous, but here are just a few from both the optimistic and pessimistic sides of the debate: Economic Times (2007), Financial Express (2008), Economic Times (2008), and AIII (2008).

\(^9\) In his brilliant essay “Fixing the Economy,” Timothy Mitchell (1998) presents a genealogy of the modern conception of “national economy” in the United States, tracing its relatively recent emergence as a self-identical and distinct sphere of social life, subject to quantitative measurement and calculated intervention. Part of what I am arguing is that in neoliberal India, the economy is “fixed” not only through econometrics and economic policy, but also through narrative strategies and spatial practices. In the “new India,” the economy is increasingly empowered as a space of social activity valuable in its own right, and most importantly, divided from “the political” and other social spheres, which are marked by their relative inefficiency and inadequacy. Adjoining this postcolonial capitalist narrative, as we will see, are the spatial practices of neoliberal urbanism, which material spaces that are designed to let the economy function in its own fixated and fetishistic way, divorced from politics and the rest of “India.”

\(^10\) Within other postcolonial lexicons the global might fall under the sign of the international, the foreign, the modern, with significant differences implied in each sign. Indeed, each of these differences is in itself singular and uniquely ambivalent in the postcolonial context. See Krishna (2011), for good examples of the ambivalent presence of “the international” in postcolonial literature in India.
been marked by ambivalence and uncertainty from its colonial inception (Bhabha 1994, Chakrabarty 2000, Chatterjee 1993, Krishna 2011, Muppidi 2004, Nandy 1983, Prakash 1999, Spivak 1999). This complex and unstable relationship has intimately shaped the way in which postcolonial capitalism as a discourse narrates the present. This ambivalent relationship would be played out in the anxious weeks and months following the global financial crisis.

1.3 Arrested Development in Gurgaon

In the midst of tireless and heated debates regarding the question of the financial crisis and its predicted impact in India, one could surmise at least a cursory answer by merely surveying the skyline of Gurgaon, which had mushroomed rapidly over the past decade thanks to liberalized flows of finance and investment (both foreign and domestic). This recent flood of investment enabled a rate of urban construction and development that was unprecedented in postcolonial India (Searle 2010). When I first arrived in September, the place was busily animated with the ubiquitous presence of cranes, excavators and other tools for construction. These monstrous machines were clearing ground for new real estate: upcoming commercial, industrial, and residential projects assembled one steel beam at a time. Where structures stood half-built, giant billboards were positioned in front of them, projecting an anticipated urban future of pristine gated communities and condominiums, lush green office parks, and futuristic shopping malls.

But the billboards for future real estate that were ubiquitous in Gurgaon were also noteworthy for what they left out of their visual narrations: the workers who built the city and whose absence from these simulations was a sure sign of their temporal transience and ontological insecurity within this new urban imaginary. This erasure
through simulacra starkly contradicted the actuality of the present. For in these spaces what were most immediately noticeable were the never-ending lines of construction workers who had migrated in the tens of thousands from across rural India. Every morning these workers could be seen with their yellow hardhats marching to construction sites, physically building the “new India” during the day while sleeping in improvised shanties at night. This was an economically transient, necessarily abstract supply of workers whose temporality of impermanence in the urban landscape was both integral to, yet simultaneously excluded from, the spatial imaginaries visualized on the real estate billboards.

All these images and signs in Gurgaon’s transformational urban landscape—cranes, billboards, workers—underlined a temporality of anticipation and future arrival, a city that was itself a “work in progress.” These signs embodied nothing less than the promise and potential of postcolonial capitalism to build a new India right on top of the old, in projections of images and actualized spaces that were strikingly visual and spectacular in their emergence.

But such visually resplendent urban imaginaries were also radically unstable, haunted by a contingency that was virtually always there, but which only manifested itself after the event of the financial crisis. For by the winter of late-2008, these signs of newness and progress in the urbanizing terrain took on a very different affective register. In the immediate weeks after the crisis began, foreign investors panicked and collectively withdrew nearly $12 billion from the country’s stock markets, with much of this investment tied in to real estate development (Tharoor 2009, Searle 2010). As globally mobile finance fled for ostensibly safer grounds (Lewis 2008),

11 See Schindler (2007) for an excellent ethnographic description of “new socio-spatial formations in Gurgaon,” including slums that house construction works in the shadows of new high rise buildings.
once well-capitalized real estate builders found themselves suddenly and unexpectedly strapped for cash, and the hyper-development of futurist Gurgaon ground to a nearly complete halt. Everyone, it seemed, was hedging their once certain bets on the future by abandoning their projects in the Millennium City (as Gurgaon is often called in the English-language press). A city that was still only half-built seemed to be aborted in mid-birth.

It was in this context that my research proceeded. The financial crisis had effectively interrupted Gurgaon’s exuberant narrative of hyper-development and global recognition as an “emerging market,” creating an un-timely space from which to pause and ask questions anew. What were the stakes (ontological and financial) involved in the metonymic project of the “new urban India”? What did it mean for a “new” India to emerge through a spatial and temporal erasure of the “old”? How was this emergence mediated through temporalities of finance, real estate speculation and profiteering, narrated with relentlessly optimistic and euphoric depictions of global recognition and postcolonial achievement? How did Gurgaon’s own troubled history of spatial transformation and hyper-development, to be examined in subsequent chapters ahead, shed light on an urban imaginary that was itself haunted by what it excluded from its exuberant images and narrative discourses, the various and socially complex conditions that, in fact, made its narrative of urban transformation possible? Finally, what challenges do these haunted discourses and spaces pose for democratic political life in neoliberal India?

12 Some would say that the practices of greedy real estate developers and builders, along with land-hungry governments, were the major culprit, as a vast “ponzi scheme” was revealed to be at work when the flow of finance ran dry. In Chapter Three I relate the story of one group of wealthy residents in Gurgaon who organize to bring attention to and criticize such schemes.

13 Here I should make my intellectual and political commitments clear. I am inspired, on the one hand by the ethical critiques of “development” as fundamentally undemocratic by two stalwart figures: Ashis Nandy and Rajni Kothari. There are surely others who take up this mantle of critique in India,
This book will seek to answer the questions raised above. The chapters to follow will take a look at the various *mediations* (discourse, space, class, movement, images) that place the urban as a performative interpretation between the (neoliberal) global and the (postcolonial) national, transforming both terms in the process of *urban mediation*. This book maps the different ways in which national and transnational identities in an era of neoliberal globalization are increasingly articulated through new configurations and discourses of urban space. In order to develop this model of urban mediation, two novel concepts will be introduced and developed: postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal urbanism. Once developed, the two concepts will be used to analyze the spatial and discursive practices that produce Gurgaon as *Neo* Delhi, an urban mediation of the neoliberal and postcolonial present.

**1.4 Plan for the Dissertation**

The dissertation begins with the concept of “postcolonial capitalism” in Chapter One, arguing that postcolonial capitalism serves as a structuring principle for a narrative discourse that mediates the value and intelligibility of the neoliberal present in Gurgaon in particular and India in general. This discourse’s mediations are oriented towards securing *virtual* consensus on neoliberal economic reforms in India, a kind of consensus that is necessary to conjure in the face of increasing and multiple contestations against neoliberal processes in both rural and urban India. I contextualize such a consensus-seeking politics in the larger framework of liberal

but Nandy and Kothari are singular in their ability to render both the social injustices and the psychological seductions of what they call “the dominant discourse of development.” See Nandy 2002 for a recent example of this work, or Kothari 1993 for a less recent but equally prescient one. I am inspired, on the other hand, by critical theorists (particularly Jacques Ranciere) who perceive in liberal democracy a rather *undemocratic* politics of consensus, one that produces the *effect* of political agreement and consent (i.e. hegemony) through de-limiting available fields of political contestation and negotiation (I conceptualize this as the distribution of political value and intelligibility). These inspirational thinkers and the way they influence my theoretical and ethical arguments in this book will become clear in the chapters of this book.
democracy, which I argue partitions and de-politicizes the spaces of the political in order to paradoxically render a virtual consensus. Such a virtual, de-politicized consensus is achieved in neoliberal India through the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism, which I argue does two things: first, it forges a distinction between the “old” India of a quasi-socialist and economically inefficient past, and a “new” India of capitalist growth and market-driven efficiency; second, it conjures a virtual subject who becomes a normative model (through metonymic substitution) for the nation: the Indian middle class. Postcolonial capitalism secures the intelligibility of the present by marking its radical departure from the past, and normalizes the entrepreneurial figure of the “rising middle class” to mediate this historical transition, positing the latter as a becoming-universal subject in whose name the various economic and social transformations entailed with postcolonial capitalism are pursued.

If postcolonial capitalism is defined as a discursive strategy that attempts to secure the narrative intelligibility of the present (as virtual consensus), then this discourse is augmented by a set of spatial practices and stratagems called “neoliberal urbanism,” which I introduce and analyze in Chapter Two by presenting the spatial history of Gurgaon’s rapid and uneven rural-to-urban transformation. A disaggregated collection of farmlands and rural villages just a quarter century ago, I argue that Gurgaon is the most vivid example of neoliberal urbanism’s transformational potential in India, primarily because Gurgaon is essentially a neoliberal city built from scratch, written over the palimpsest of an historically different economic and social imaginary. Through an uneven a process of hyper-development, characterized by aggressive land acquisition and conversion from agricultural to commercial, industrial and residential space, I analyze the disjunctive
temporalities of urban development that are at play on the rural frontiers of the global economy. Far from homogenizing space, neoliberal urbanism instead proliferates differences into the landscape through its disjunctive and fragmented spatializations.

In the evocative phrasing of two critical architects, “Gurgaon emerged from the latest phase of modernization serviced so adeptly by [private real estate developers]… accommodating a middle-class flight from the city, and from the newly urbanized rural masses” (Martin and Baxi 2007: 116). Chapter Three examines the spatial and discursive practices of the virtual subjects of Gurgaon’s neoliberal transformation: the ambiguous group called the “Indian middle class.” In this chapter I explore the colonial origins of this class, and argue that the middle class has historically served a privileged role of interpreters and mediators of colonial and postcolonial modernities. In the era of neoliberal urbanism, however, the postcolonial middle class is newly empowered to separate themselves as a class from their diverse others while simultaneously and paradoxically claiming representative status vis-à-vis the nation. Focusing primarily on scenes of middle class protest in Gurgaon, this chapter explores the contrasts and contradictions of elite urban politics in neoliberal India.

New forms of transnational architecture and spatial design in Gurgaon are key constitutive parts of neoliberal urbanism. Design becomes political when it partitions the spaces of everyday city life, creating abstract “economic” zones that are socially and spatially divorced from their local surroundings through architectural means. In their actualization, they achieve in physical form the very same discursive abstractions of neoliberal economic theory. Chapter Four looks at the de-territorializing relationship between neoliberal finance, which exerts an increasingly powerful presence in the Indian economy, and the urban architecture of real estate.
speculation, studying not only their causal connection but the ways in which architecture gives intelligibility to a new economic imaginary performed through neoliberal economic theory. It then maps the shift in contemporary approaches to architecture and urban design in India (embodied in my concept of neoliberal urbanism) onto a larger shift in the temporal imaginary of the postcolonial nation. Both urban space and identity, I argue, are increasingly de-territorialized as they become mediations between the neoliberal global and the postcolonial national.

The twin concepts of postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal urbanism help us map novel experiences in contemporary India. The politics of experience, however, is equally mediated through movement, through encounters and avoidances in everyday spatial negotiations. Chapter Five looks at urban transportation in Gurgaon and Delhi, namely by focusing on the growing phenomenon of automobility, or the increasing turn towards individual (private) over collective (public) modes of transportation. I explore the ways in which movement itself becomes a mediation of urban experience that intensifies the divisions of social and political life in postcolonial India.

Chapter Six takes a broader view of these spatial and discursive transformations by exploring the philosophical and embodied relationship between globalization and the concept of the simulacrum, arguing that any analysis of postcolonial capitalism or neoliberal urbanism in contemporary India must constantly keep a critical (and cinematic) eye on the transformational potential of otherwise hegemonic ideas such as the global, the urban, and the modern, producing critical encounters and experiences with the uncommon sense that underlies these dominant discourses. It is in this way that many of the urban mediations I analyze in this book, which work ideologically to translate the nation into the global and vice versa, also open the door to counter-translations, counter-interpretations, and counter-
performances. These lines of flight appear variously throughout this book. In the next section, I supply a guide for the interested reader.

1.5 Lines of Flight

The theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari propose a rhizomatic praxis of critical engagement with complex social realities and analytical concepts. What this entails is a non-linear, multi-dimensional look at the relationships and inter-connections amongst objects, subjects and discourses, rather than studying these said objects, subjects, discourses on their own or in isolation. This relational ontology of the assemblage is connected to a specific politics, one of immanence. More specifically, Deleuze and Guattari see in every social structure, in every legal or discursive order, every State and every society, a recalcitrant resistance that is only discernable from within the productive social machine itself. This immanent resistance to power is articulated in their concept of lines of flight, which proposes to understand relationships amongst heterogeneous elements as multiplicities that gain traction, intensity, and duration at certain times, while falling loose and re-forming into alternative intensities and assemblages at other times. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). Lines of flight connect ordered social worlds to their heterogeneous and chaotic others. More profoundly, lines of flight push us to think the relationality or nonrelationality that exists between assemblages that differ not merely in degree, but in kind.

One way of reading this book is through the various lines of flight that emerge in different chapters and reveal how subject-object-discourse arrangements are always
already available to re-arrangement, so that new subjects, objects and discourses may arise. What follows in this section can be thought of as a guide for the reader to construct new arguments and insights from the various multiplicities and assemblages presented and analyzed in the different chapters to follow. In the conclusion I return to these lines of flight in order to push them beyond the thematic concerns of this book project, to future, as yet virtual interventions.

The Virtual—This line is most important because lines of flight are first of all what connect actualized assemblages to virtual ones, that is, the possible or potential re-arrangements and re-distributions that are immanent (even if unrealized) in every assemblage. For Deluzerze, events have a two-fold structure; they are at once actual and virtual. As Shapiro puts it, “events have a virtual structure that is never captured in any particular determination” (1999: 21). The possibilities or potentials of a situation exceed its actuality, or what is immediately present to the “common” senses of a subject. To argue that there is always something virtual that is unseen yet felt, unarticulated yet thought, is central to the case studies I undertake in the chapters that follow. There is a virtual consensus regarding economic reforms in India, for instance, that postcolonial capitalism continually attempts to actualize through its narrative discourse. This line is pursued in Chapter One but takes flight in Chapter Three in the everyday lives of middle class subjects in one particular gated community in Gurgaon.

In Chapter Two, land itself is conceptualized as virtual in a specifically temporal sense, a sense that is virtual today but will ostensibly become real in the future. This temporality of futurity is central to the future-oriented discourse and subjectivity of postcolonial capitalism and the spatial practices and imaginaries
constitutive of neoliberal urbanism. In Chapter Six, I argue that globalization can itself be conceptualized as a virtual reality, or a complex social reality whose virtuality does not diminish its affective hold on its subjects in neoliberal India. For my purposes, virtual politics brings together ideas of temporality, subjectivity, narrative and experience.

**Mobility**—As metaphor and embodied experience, movement and mobility are key lines of flight that mark the contingent relationship between class position and subjectivity in late-capitalism. As a mode of experience, movement brings experiential worlds together while creating new divisions at the levels of speed and access. It is the micropolitics of mobility that is virtual, since one never knows what or who one will come across in the movements, commutes, encounters and avoidances of the everyday. Chapter Five explores this mode of experience in the phenomenon of automobility, analyzing car-centric urbanism in Gurgaon and neighboring Delhi from an uncommon, critical perspective.

But movement is also a powerful narrative strategy, a way of articulating progress and development, of narrating historical change. In this respect, neoliberal India becomes intelligible through discursive movements, transformations from old to new, rural to urban, third- to first-world, local to global, etc. This narrational aspect of movement is explored in Chapter One, yet drives the argument in Chapters Three, Four and Five as well, where movement itself becomes a medium of postcolonial modernity.

Thus mobility is both metaphorical (upward-class mobility) and physical (movement across space). It is the relationship between the two, how geographical movement augments, gives shape to, but also at times contradicts social mobility, that
most interests me. Consider the rural-to-urban migrant, for instance, who comes to the city from far away for economic opportunity only to find new forms of spatial confinement and economic exclusion within neoliberal urban space. This scenario is presented in Chapter Five through a recent novel that launches an immanent critique of postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal urbanism in Gurgaon. Consider too the other inhabitant of this ambiguous urban space, the urban-to-rural elite resident of Gurgaon, who flees the city for the suburbs of Gurgaon, itself built upon erstwhile farmland. Such contradictory yet socially intersecting displacements are movements that are explored and analyzed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Four, however, it is revealed that for elite classes spatial mobility is also at times rendered redundant, as new gated communities, special economic zones, and shopping malls produce totalizing architectural experiences that paradoxically make it unnecessary for inhabitants to ever have to leave the built environment.

Postcoloniality—Building off the initial argument present in Chapter One regarding postcolonial capitalism, Chapter Three suggests that the Indian middle class is haunted by a peculiarly postcolonial prerogative, an impossible desire for recognition from the Other (Fanon 1952). In the context of neoliberal India, this Other is the global. To seek global recognition through economic reform and liberalization is to seek inclusion into an imagined community from which one has been historically excluded. What marks the impossibility of such imagined (discursive) inclusion is precisely the same thing that marks the impossibility of any subject’s given desire: “it is constantly after what it does not really want, and is always wanting what it cannot finally have. Desire thus signifies a domain of irreparable contradiction” (Butler 1989: 198). This contradiction is an immensely productive one, however, shaping a
discourse of postcolonial recognition and global belonging that produces spatial violence in the name of presenting an intelligible and recognizable urban face to the global economy.

In the anxious preparations for the 2010 Common Wealth Games in Delhi, when international and domestic media attention alike was singularly focused on the Delhi government’s seeming inability to create “world-class” infrastructure for the international sporting event, Commonwealth Games Organizing Committee secretary Lalit Bhanot stated quite frankly that Indians simply had different standards of infrastructure and amenities than the West. In baldly pointing out this postcolonial difference, Bhanot’s most virulent critics were not Westerners, but rather elite and transnational Indians, for whom such difference has been the very obstacle that persistently bars global recognition and inclusion for India. This line of flight marks both the discursive power of the discourse of postcolonial capitalism, which desires, above all, global recognition for the “new India,” as well as the spatial practices that are the means for achieving such recognition. These spatial practices are examined in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five, in the fields of land acquisition and urban infrastructural development, middle class residential politics, architecture and urban design, and urban transportation.

There are other lines of flight that are at work in this book. In the conclusion I revisit some of these and pursue them towards future, as yet virtual interventions in the politics of neoliberal India.

1.6 On Method

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14 See, for instance: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/keyword/commonwealth/recent/5
Early on in my research stay in the Delhi area, I presented initial findings at a conference called “Economic Formations in an Era of Neoliberal Globalization.” The conference was held at Delhi University and was organized by scholars of history, sociology, political science and economics who were decidedly Marxist in their methodological approaches to globalization. Many of the papers were concerned with the mode of production debates of the 1970s and 1980s, which argued whether or not India constituted a “feudal” mode of production or if it had graduated to a properly “capitalist” mode of production. The paper I presented departed from this debate and its methodological (and epistemological) assumptions. The title of my paper was “The Virtual Economy in Neoliberal India,” and it presented some of the material that opens up this introductory chapter, namely the ambivalent discourse of capitalism that was haunted by epistemological and ontological instabilities at the dawn of the 2008 financial crisis.

Not surprisingly, I had to deal with many questions and concerns from the audience following my presentation, and in order to clarify where I was coming from theoretically and methodologically, I offered a distinction I had heard Michael J. Shapiro once put forth in a seminar, drawing on the work of Jean Baudrillard (1991). While Marxist political economists were concerned with classifying and analyzing different modes of production, deciding whether they were capitalist or not, how they mobilized (and exploited) labor, produced commodities, and distributed surplus accumulation, my concern was with studying capitalism primarily as a mode of *seduction*. I was more interested in the post-Althusserian questions of how capitalist subjects and practices were rendered intelligible through ideology and discourse, and more importantly, what the ontological limits of capitalism were in terms of such ideological reproduction and subjection. I was interested in studying capitalism as an
(ambivalently) distributed form of social and political experience, one in which desire and imagination played as big a part in shaping perceptions, experiences and subjectivities as economic interests and material conditions.

In order to study this in India, I began to look at mainstream and popular texts, both fiction and non-fiction, print, everyday objects, tele-visual and spatial media, exploring the discursive practices and material conditions that made them popularly intelligible, but also searching for an *uncommon sense* that formed the constitutive outside of everyday discourses of power. I collected an archive of newspaper and magazine clippings from English-language newspapers and magazines, as well as more critical magazines, journals and books. And I tried to figure out the contours of debate about contemporary experiences of economic transformation in an era of globalization and intensified urbanization. How did these intensities gain intelligibility? How was good sense and common intelligibility itself an ideological struggle and contested site of power?

I augmented my admittedly presentist archive of everyday life in New Delhi and Gurgaon (in the aftermath of the global financial crisis) with over thirty qualitative and ethnographic interviews with architects and urban planners, bureaucrats, academics, middle class residents and service workers in gated communities, journalists, bankers, financiers, and more. My concern in these interviews was with the ways in which different segments of the urban population narrated their experiences of economic change, their expectations and anticipations of the future, their perceptions of the past and present. In addition, I frequently engaged in everyday informal conversations with people who lived and worked in Gurgaon and Delhi, who had their own views on the ways in which India was changing, their own narratives which rendered the intelligibility and value of the present.
In this book, I draw variously on literature from postcolonial theory, urban studies, economic, political, and cultural theory, including studies in film, media and literature. I refrain from a single comprehensive literature review here because my literatures are poly-centric and multidisciplinary. I broadly deal with the intersection of urbanization and globalization, but these terms are themselves heterogeneous and require a multi-dimensional perspective from an engaged and versatile critic. In the chapters that follow I both review and draw upon many theoretical and empirical works that come from diverse genres of academic and non-academic expression in order to illuminate the multi-dimensional, virtual politics of neoliberal India in one particular site.

Any errors or misinterpretations of these are mine alone.
CHAPTER 2. POSTCOLONIAL CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN NEOLIBERAL INDIA

Under the name democracy, what is being implicated and denounced is politics itself.
-Jacque Ranciere, Hatred of Democracy

2.0 Neoliberalism in Crisis

Just one year after my book research had concluded, I returned to India to “close the gaps” in my data. Upon my arrival in Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, I came across a recent issue of Newsweek International (December 2009). This special issue was a sustained reflection on the global financial crisis, now one year removed from the initial hysteria and panic over the event. Quite tellingly, the issue was entitled “Is That All?” The question was written in bold white letters across a solid black background.

In a manner befitting the performative discourse of neoliberalism, the magazine was attempting to interpret the state of the world while simultaneously imposing a very specific conceptual frame on the same. The magazine featured articles contributed by some of the most notable neoliberal writers in the world, economists, philosophers, and technocrats alike performing and interpreting a globally hegemonic discursive reality: Francis Fukuyama, Robert Rubin, Robert Shiller, among others. Moreover, the titles of the various articles made obvious what the aim of the entire ideological performance was: “History is Still Over: How Capitalism Survived the Crisis” was Fukuyama’s contribution, while Rubin’s was titled “Back on Track: How to Keep Globalization Working.” Most interesting for me was an article written by Shashi Tharoor, titled “No Retreat: India Keeps Going Global,” which I will get to shortly.
The magazine and its articles constituted a collective effort of performative interpretation “from above” that sought to transform the very thing it interpreted (the economic state of the world post-crisis). The issue’s editor, Fareed Zakaria unwittingly stated this much in his introductory note when he pointed out that, “The return to confidence is itself a very powerful economic force” (2009: 9). Indeed, the magazine itself constituted a discursive materialization of such “economic force” by presenting arguments, interpretations and analyses that would ostensibly make jittery investors and ontologically uncertain capitalists more confident. Moreover, the magazine’s circulation in transnational “public” spaces throughout the global economy (in this case, Indira Gandhi International Airport), as well as the magazine’s internal distribution of discourses, images and signs within its pages, aimed to reassure readers that the global project of neoliberal globalization—and the considerable financial and ontological stakes invested into this project—remained safe.

If various “western” authors in the magazine were busy conjuring forth a stable image of the global in which capitalism still safely and confidently reigned, despite the financial turbulence and uncertainty of the previous year, Tharoor’s article was characterized by a particularly postcolonial prerogative: securing the intelligibility of the postcolonial nation in front of an ostensibly global (capitalist) audience. Tharoor, a prominent Indian writer and now a national politician, explained “how India avoided turning inward” after the financial crisis, reassuring his readers that the country would continue unabated with its program of economic reform and liberalization initiated roughly two decades before. He noted that in the immediate aftermath of Lehman Brother’s bankruptcy and the turbulent shockwaves that reverberated around the world’s financial markets, proponents of neoliberal reform
“were indeed pushed on the defensive by the crisis. The Indian stock markets dropped, foreign investors pulled out, and trade fell. But the country recovered quickly. In part that’s because it is much less dependent than most on global trade and capital” (2009: 33).

Tharoor highlights the relative autonomy of India’s economy with respect to the global, compared with other Asian economies, and cites this as one reason that the Indian economy escaped largely unscathed from the financial crisis: “India relies on external trade for about 20 percent of its GDP versus 75 percent in China; India’s large and robust internal market accounts for the rest. Indians continued producing goods and services for other Indians, and that kept the economy humming” (ibid.).

Notwithstanding the credit Tharoor seems to give here to India’s self-sufficient internal markets and industries, which, for better or for worse, are usually associated with or blamed on the quasi-socialist policies of pre-reform India (what I have been calling for analytic purposes “postcolonial socialism”), the author paradoxically argues that India’s relative autonomy from the global financial crisis actually demonstrates that, “The cause of economic liberalization remains safe in India” (ibid.). Given his capitalist audience, Tharoor has a hard time giving too much credence to India’s postcolonial socialist ideology of economic self-sufficiency, whose roots trace back to a pre-reform era with a decidedly different political economic imaginary at work. As I will show in more detail later in the chapter, the very idea of making India into a self-sufficient economy, free from exploitative relations with foreign capital and international finance and trade, was part of a larger political legacy of anti-imperial nationalism (Muppidi 2004, Nayyar 1998, Varma 1998). But the self-sufficient “internal market” that kept India’s economy “humming” in a time of crisis becomes unintelligible as such within Tharoor’s
postcolonial capitalist discourse, largely because this same self-sufficient economy is normally discursively associated with the dreaded “Hindu rate of growth” and the presumed economic failures of postcolonial socialism.

“India was less affected by the crisis than the rest of the world,” Tharoor goes on to argue, “not because it was isolated but because its capitalist fundamentals are strong” (ibid.), seemingly contradicting his early praise for India’s relative economic isolation from global finance capitalism. But such contradictions are pushed to the side as Tharoor delivers a more forceful message to the world:

India will not return to the economics of nationalism, which equated political independence with economic self-sufficiency and so relegated us to chronic poverty and mediocrity. Instead of retreating from the world, India is advancing with more confidence than ever. (ibid.)

Confidence is indeed a powerful economic force, one that is both discursive and material. What is important to note is the narrative strategy mobilized in order to conjure a particular image of India as confidently proceeding with the economics of globalism over nationalism. For the virtual global audience of postcolonial capitalism’s performative discourse, an image of the nation proceeding confidently towards further economic liberalization and reform becomes interpreted in a way that brings immediate material consequences: it potentially gives confidence to global investors who themselves are continuously interpreting the Indian economy for its temporal signs and economic indicators, and acting on these interpretations, with dramatic transformative effects on socio-economic life, particularly in the neoliberal city.

While postcolonial capitalism is outwardly concerned with projecting an image of confidence to the global, with respect to the nation the key term is not so much confidence but consensus. But the two scalar formulas (“national consensus” and “global confidence”) are related. For it is by reassuring the global audience that
the majority of Indians peacefully consent to neoliberal reform, that they won’t “rock the boat” and threaten investments, that India as an economic space and an “emerging market” wins the confidence of investors. Here the issue of democracy becomes a double-edged sword (Ranciere 2006). Democracy becomes a medium for establishing national consent and gaining global recognition, particularly from the liberal democratic West, but it is also what always already haunts the status of such recognition. In an era of postcolonial capitalism, democracy becomes a site of intense ambivalence as neoliberal reform becomes enacted not so much through a process of democratic consensus, but through what many have called “liberalization by stealth,” which circumvents democratic politics altogether and becomes actualized in a de-politicized space outside the domain of electoral contestation and public debate (both critics and supporters of liberalization in India agree on this idea of “liberalization by stealth,” see respectively Bardhan 1999 and Kohli 2006, on the one hand, and Panagariya 2008 and Sachs et. al. 1999, on the other). This de-politicized space is rendered as “economic,” as it is partitioned from the political through an aesthetic politics of experience that, as we will see in the chapters ahead, works both spatially and discursively.

In this chapter, rather than characterizing such a politics as “liberalization by stealth,” I conceptualize it as a temporal politics of “virtual consensus,” a consensus that is virtual today but will ostensibly become actualized in the future. This temporal, future-oriented politics is mediated, interpreted and performed by a narrative discourse I call postcolonial capitalism.

2.1 Virtual Consensus and Liberal Democracy
Postcolonial capitalists in India like to boast about the strength and endurance of Indian democracy over the course of its post-independence history, in stark contrast to India’s chief economic rival in Asia: China. Nandan Nilekani, an exemplary performer of postcolonial capitalist interpretations of the “new India,” proudly notes, for example, that on the eve of its sixtieth anniversary of independence, “India was praised around the world as a rare and heartening example of an Asian country where democracy has thrived, and as a nation that has managed both political unity and high rates of growth” (Nilekani 2009: 141). This advocacy of democracy is arguably instrumental\footnote{By characterizing someone like Nilekani’s advocacy of democracy as “instrumental,” my meaning is not that Nilekani is cynical in his appreciation for democracy, but rather that the name of democracy (Ranciere 2006) performs an ideological work that in many ways exceeds one’s ethical attachments to democracy as a principle of legitimate governance. The name of democracy becomes instrumental towards managing and mediating economic reform, as we will see in this and the subsequent chapters of the book.}; it is key to securing the intelligibility of India in front of an ostensibly global audience, as well as projecting an image of neoliberal economic reform that is legitimated through democratic consensus.

Such an image of high growth (due to reforms) with democratic consensus is rather embattled, however. For one thing, ruling governments in India in the past two decades have been reluctant to position economic reforms as a central part of their political platforms, and have fared rather poorly in recent national and regional elections when they have done so (Suri 2004). Indeed, even mainstream (neoclassical) economists point out that in the context of post-liberalization India, “It would be an awful mistake to interpret the turn towards economic reforms as a sign of vigorous mass support for them.” (Sachs et. al. 1999, xiv). Moreover, it is far from clear that the majority of Indians have even been aware of economic reforms at election times, to say nothing of their tacit or explicit consent to these. A recent study revealed that knowledge of reforms was highly correlated with class and occupation.
Whereas roughly half of “white collar” workers polled throughout the country in 2004 (sample size 8133) had heard about economic reforms, amongst agricultural and manual laborers (i.e. the large majority of the working population), only one-sixth had ever even heard of them (Kumar 2004).

Postcolonial capitalists turn to metonymic substitution and narrative projection in the midst of such an ideological gap in representations, conjuring a virtual consensus that either speaks for the so-called “masses,” or otherwise projects a future time in which democratic consensus for reforms will arrive, once the benefits of such reforms unfold and are experienced over time. For instance, Sachs argues that with respect to generating a consensus for reforms, “The challenge…is simply that the reformers must produce a political language and rhetoric aimed at creating a mass constituency for reforms; show how reforms can make life better for the masses, not simply for the middle class and the rich” (1999: xiv). Democratic politics is instrumentally utilized to provide a legitimating rhetoric for reforms, which themselves will generate a “better life” for the demos in the future. But the actual content of the reforms in the present is itself de-politicized as a result of the temporal displacement implied in virtual consensus: it is the rhetoric of reforms, and not the policies themselves, that must be consented to in the present.

This implicit divorcing of the economic and the political and the future and the present is actually one of the founding precepts of liberal democracy, which I argue works by partitioning the domain of the political through the strategy of virtual consensus. This consensus is not so much about finding agreement and commonality amongst diverse political interests and subjectivities, but rather partitioning and separating what is politically and democratically contestable (what is “commonly” considered political) from what is decidedly un-political and non-negotiable (i.e. the
“economic” content of reforms). The politics of liberal democracy thus conjures a virtual consensus, namely by imposing strict conditions of intelligibility vis-à-vis the domain of the political itself.

This partitioning of the political and its conditions of intelligibility is inherent to the contractual theory of “democratic” liberalism. The British political philosopher John Locke wrote in his famous Second Treatise of Government that, “The liberty of man, in society, is to be under no other legislative power, but that established, by consent, in the common-wealth; nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislative shall enact, according to the trust put in it” (1980: 17). The principle of consent does two things for Locke. First, it both naturalizes and de-politicizes individual private property, since what is being consented to in the transition from the “state of nature” to “political society” is the collective sacrifice of perfect freedom (that is, the negative freedom of the “state of nature” in which “the partiality and violence of men” reigns without constraint and constantly threatens any notions of individual propriety and ownership [1980: 12]). Perfect freedom is sacrificed for the relative freedom of political society in a “common”-wealth, in which individual property is protected through the “consensual” subjection of individuals to a legislative body, i.e. legitimate government. The perfect freedom of the state of nature guarantees for Locke that such subjection to relative freedom and private property in political society is itself consensual (immanent to the founding of political society) and not imposed by some transcendental power or authority (a monarchy or God).

The second thing that the principle of consensus does for Locke’s model of liberal democracy is perhaps even more insidious than the virtual consent given to private property. For, we could ask, what about those who do not own property,
which as we could imagine, would have been the vast majority of people living in the midst of Locke’s political society in the seventeenth century? Why would they consent to protecting private property that they do not even have? For Locke, such non-propertied people would simply not count as political citizens. It was thus no accidental omission that Locke’s political society and the consensus that it presumed to have amongst its citizens precluded the consent of non-property holders: women, slaves, serfs, and the like.

A prior division between property owners and non-property owners thus already radically partitions the political society that Locke argues “freely” consents to private property. No one saw this de-politicizing limitation in liberalism as clearly as its most trenchant critic, Karl Marx. In his early work Marx critiqued the way in which liberal democracy, far from universalizing the political in the name of participatory and consensual government, radically re-distributes the space of the political itself, in effect policing and de-limiting what is thinkable and what is possible within the framework of liberal democratic politics. Appropriately enough, Marx uses private property as an example of liberalism’s severely partitioned and de-limited rendering of the political.

Marx addresses the seemingly radical abolition of property requirements to participate in democratic elections in the middle of the nineteenth century. “The state as state annuls private property, for example, as soon as man declares in a political manner that private property is abolished, as soon as he abolishes the requirement of a property qualification for active and passive participation at elections, as has happened in many North American states” (McLellan 2000: 52). Is this not a corrective to the limitation in the liberalism of someone like Locke, described above? “Is private property not abolished ideally speaking when the non-owner has become
the lawgiver for the owner” (*ibid.*)? In answering his own question, Marx underlines the way in which private property and the socio-economic power it generates, far from being abolished through the expansion of the electorate, is instead merely de-politicized, that is, placed outside the realm of legitimate contestation.

And yet the political annulment of private property has not only not abolished private property, it actually presupposes it. The state does away with difference in birth, class, education, and profession in its own manner when it declares birth, class, education, and profession to be unpolitical differences, when it summons every member of the people to an equal participation in popular sovereignty without taking the differences into consideration… Nevertheless, the state still allows private property, education, and profession to have an effect in their own manner, that is as private property, as education, as profession, and make their particular natures felt. Far from abolishing these factual differences, its existence rests on them as a presupposition; it only feels itself to be a political state and asserts its universality by opposition to these elements. (*ibid.*)

In this way, the politics that consensual governance enacts is itself de-politicizing of the various fields that might serve to challenge such a consensus (i.e. inequalities in property, education, profession, race, gender, etc.). Such a paradox is captured in Marx’s well-known formulation of liberalism: as a ruling ideology in which individuals are politically free and yet socially (and economically) unfree. My argument is that liberalism’s consensual politics works precisely through such a partitioning logic, separating the political from the social, the economic, and so on.

Marx effectively critiques what Jacque Ranciere describes a century and half later as the aesthetic politics of “consensus” in western liberal democracies. Consensus is not so much about an agreement amongst the politically heterogeneous statements, interests and opinions of freely thinking subjects that find something *in common*, it is rather a delimitation of what precisely counts as a politically intelligible statement, interest, or opinion, to the radical exclusion of what is considered politically unintelligible, un-political, or otherwise de-politicized. Consensus enacts what Ranciere calls a “politics of aesthetics,” or
the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (Ranciere 2004: 13)

The politics of aesthetics reveals a form of power that establishes the discursive and spatial conditions for securing a virtual consensus on liberal democracy, namely through a deliberate policing of the fields of political intelligibility and experience that Marx critiques in liberalism. The realm of everyday politics as a form of experience becomes partitioned itself between what is intelligible as political and what is rendered as decidedly un-political. For Ranciere, consensus naturalizes such divisions in everyday life by pretending “to verify only what everyone can see by adjusting two propositions on the state of the world: one which says that we are finally at peace [i.e. consensus], and the other which announces the condition of this peace: the recognition that there is only what there is” (Ranciere 2006: 8).

### 2.2 The Narrative Discourse of Postcolonial Capitalism

The narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism works in a homologous fashion to that of liberal democracy in Locke, it *polices* the field of political contestation by delimiting the space and intelligibility of the political and naturalizing this delimitation.

The international information technology (IT) entrepreneur Nandan Nilekani is one of the most visible and articulate practitioners of what I am calling postcolonial capitalism in neoliberal India. In practicing such a discourse, he both performs and interprets a virtual *consensus* that renders the legitimacy of postcolonial capitalism within an ostensibly democratic framework. This *consensus* operates through two
inter-related discursive strategies. First, there is a narrative strategy that articulates the present through its irreducible difference from the past (unproblematically partitioning the “new” India from the “old” India), all in order to conjure the virtual form of a future present (an image of the future rendered within the grammatical syntax of the present). This is a narrative that operates as a regulating ideal, a policing of what is perceptible in the present, remembered from the past, and desired in the future. Second, and related to this narrative strategy, is the privileging of an emergent normative citizen-subject of the “new” India: the Indian entrepreneur as becoming-universal figure of the discourse of postcolonial capitalism. This universalizing strategy serves as a metonymic substitution in which a specific part (the entrepreneur cum middle class subject) comes to stand in for the whole (the nation). It is through both of these discursive strategies, narrative and metonymy, that a virtual consensus becomes actualized in the present.

Nilekani’s internationally best-selling book, Imagining India: the Idea of a Renewed Nation (2009), puts into practice the main discursive strategies of postcolonial capitalism: narrating a break with the past (the “old” India) that becomes the condition of possibility for re-imagining the future (the “new” India), and conjuring the temporal subject who consents to this historical transition: the Indian entrepreneur.

Nilekani begins by characterizing the “new” India as “throwing off the shackles of a half-century of low aspirations and failed economic ideas imposed from above and replacing them with its own energy and boundless aspiration” (xi). Nilekani paints a rather grim picture of the “old” India, describing the pre-reform decades of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, as a time of “India’s most violent
movements and mobocracy,” including extremist violence and militancy (2009: 65),\(^{16}\) where “a tottering economy had turned India into an angry, seething nation” (66). These were, for Nilekani, unmistakably “cold, dark years for Indian business” (67).

Nilekani is not alone in characterizing pre-reform India in such “dark” terms. Such a rendering of the past as marked by low aspirations and failed economic policies is also articulated by neoclassical economists such as Arvind Panagariya (2008), who characterizes this India as a series of “economic failures” (51), the “strangulation of industry” (59), and an overall “growth debacle” (75). Jagdish Bhagwati, another neoclassical economist and staunch proponent of economic reforms and liberalization in India, uses less dramatic language in similarly condemning the pre-reform decades of the Indian economy, pointing to the “abysmal growth prior to reforms,” which had to do with “knee-jerk intervention by the government” in the economy and “massive expansion of the public sector…with predictable inefficiencies that multiplied through the economy” (Bhagwati 2010).

“Many Indians believed in these [postcolonial socialist] ideas then,” Nilekani points out, “few of us believe them now” (2010: 7).

\(^{16}\) One would be justified in wondering how Nilekani would conceptualize “extremist violence and militancy” in the growing Naxalite movement that is contemporaneous with neoliberalization (Roy 2010). Although, one would also do well to remember that the discourse of postcolonial capitalism, with its virtual politics of temporal projection and consensus, might explain the problem of the Naxals quite easily: as a rural group that has thus far been excluded from the benefits of economic reforms, and for whom the liberalization of the agricultural sector in the long-run would surely quell such antipathy towards liberalization. See, for instance, how Sachs et. al. distinguish between short-term costs and long-term benefits in order to discursively include even those groups currently pitted against liberalization: “Indeed, if India’s reforms fail to deliver mass welfare before long, a political backlash against India’s continuing liberalization and globalization cannot be ruled out…Otherwise, because of political reasons, deeper reforms such as privatization, a change in labour laws, dereservation of the small industrial sector and a greater deregulation of agricultural section—all of which are desirable and will almost certainly make reforms better serve the masses in the long run—may be either too slowly implemented, or may come later than sooner. The sooner they are put in place, the greater is likely to be the impact of reforms on mass welfare” (2000: xiv, italics mine). Within this projective temporal model, politics mediates the short-term strategies of liberalization while economics takes cares of the long run benefits.
While Panagariya’s and Bhagwati’s analyses point to specific state policies that failed to spark economic growth and development in India prior to reforms, the major concern of Nilekani is not policies of governance, *per se*, but rather “ideas” that reflect a larger political culture and its ideological disposition towards the economic (and in particular towards business and entrepreneurship). Because his political goal is to discursively render this ideological transformation in terms of its (virtual) consensus amongst the masses of Indian people, Nilekani’s narrative is explicitly inclusive of a wide range of experiences that he associates with liberalization and the “new” India:

These experiences gained wide acceptance because a wide swathe of people across the country had experiences different from what they had been told and taught to expect. People who had been steeped in Indian-language schools one day found their advancement thwarted as they encountered the English barrier. The construction worker who viewed technology and computers with suspicion found his mobile phone with its ten-rupee recharge indispensable in getting his next job. The Indian engineer who parlayed his education for a job in Silicon Valley experienced the promise of globalization. And the Dalit farm worker who had long been sidelined in economic opportunity began to discover that he too could use his growing political voice to bring about more inclusive politics. (32)

The Indian-language student, construction worker, engineer, and Dalit farm worker are united in Nilekani’s narrative through the *experience* of change and their active agency (entrepreneurship) in this change.

By rendering the diversity and inequality of Indian society in terms of this virtual consensus, which mediates a wide range of different economic experiences within the “new” India, Nilekani implicitly outlines the normative subject of India’s economic transformation: the Indian entrepreneur. Thus, Nilekani argues that the emergence of the entrepreneur, as both an aspirational figure and an empowered agent, can be linked to a transformation in the culture of Indian politics before and after reforms. Misguided by the Nehruvian socialist ethos which produced the
policies Panagariya and Bhagwati criticize above, Nilekani argues that, “The political attitude toward India’s entrepreneurs used to be irredeemably hostile, especially through the 1960s and 1970s—the perception of businessmen was that of ‘devious capitalists’ and Indian industry was a favorite target for populist political rhetoric” (57). But in the “new” India, the entrepreneur has emerged as an increasingly respectable and aspirational, if not normative, citizen-subject of the renewed nation. In a chapter entitled “From Rejection to Open Arms: The Entrepreneur in India,” Nilekani argues that “the story of India’s rise has clearly been this story of the Indian entrepreneur, who after a long, painful period in shackles has been allowed to come out into the sun” (58).

It is this new position for Indian business, personified in the capitalist entrepreneur as a respected figure in public life and political culture, that signals, for Nilekani, the unlimited potential of the “new” India. Under Nilekani’s postcolonial capitalist gaze, people as diverse as investment bankers, farmers, slum dwellers, and school teachers are potential entrepreneurs when they take matters into their own hands and make concrete steps to improve their economic futures. The decidedly “economic” agency of individual entrepreneurs supplements the decreasing “political” agency of the structurally-adjusted and neoliberalized state, where the demise of public services and social welfare institutions that were designed to address the radical inequality of Indian society has been well-documented (Fernandes 2006, Harriss 2006, Khilnani 2007, Kohli 2006, Kothari 1993, Mani 2008, Nandy 2002, Roy 2010, Waquar 2007, Varma 2004). The discursive figure of the entrepreneur thus takes on a legitimating role as chief “problem solver” in the stead of a

17 Another international postcolonial capitalist writer, Gurcharan Das (2004), similarly privileges this ostensibly “new” middle class “respectability” vis a vis not merely the nation, but the world.
contracting developmentalist state increasingly perceived as inefficient and overextended in neoliberal and postcolonial capitalist discourses. This is all for the better, Nilekani suggests, for as more “entrepreneurs focus on India’s problems a whole new force of change is becoming possible” (75).

2.3 The Discursive Space of Postcolonial Identity in India

Liberalization, or economic reforms imposed on states (usually at the behest of the international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) is often portrayed in dominant discourses of development as a practical necessity for producing sustained (and historically accelerated) economic growth while simultaneously reducing poverty (Bhagwati 2010, Panagariya 2008, Sachs et al. 1998, Sengupta and Neogi 2009, Sachs 2008). Such a one-to-one correlation between economic growth and poverty reduction is one of the most persuasive temporal arguments offered by the narrative of postcolonial capitalism, effectively guaranteeing virtual consensus by deferring the turbulence of the present (painful restructuring in the short-term) to the promise of the future (sustained economic growth in long-term). But this argument depends not only on a temporal division between present and future, short-term and long-term, but also on a stark separation between the economic and the political, whereby, “an understanding of the contemporary world as one where the economic prevails over the political is the dominant perspective of many who support the continued 'liberalization' of the Indian economy” (Muppidi 2004: 31). Thus, in order to conjure a virtual consensus, the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalismforegrounds the economic domain (consisting of markets, entrepreneurs, but also optimism and anticipation) at the
expense of the political (the postcolonial state and its bureaucratic inefficiencies, but also the messy politics of a multi-dimensional democratic polity).

But this idealized partitioning of the economic and the political has faced intense resistance in postcolonial India, according to Himadeep Muppidi, who argues that, far from constituting an “unpolitical” domain of technical decision-making, as Marx argues in his deconstruction of the politics of liberal democracy above, “the debate on India’s economic liberalization has rarely been confined to technical issues. It has quite often strayed, even among the economists, into questions about the nature of the Indian self, and about the desirable relation to the rest of the world, particularly the West” (2004: 33). In other words, economics has consistently been understood through (and subordinated to) political discourses that render the nation intelligible as an imagined postcolonial community.

Most prominently, fears of neo-colonialism and the loss of economic sovereignty to foreign forces have marked the counter-arguments to liberal reform in India throughout its postcolonial period, expressing an historically produced and institutionalized social imaginary that often frames issues of globalization, economic liberalization, and national development in very particular ways. More often than not, these ostensibly “economic” matters become manifestly political in terms of the intelligibility effects that govern how they are perceived and experienced in the present. So that as much as the economists wanted to frame the issue of reform in purely technical terms “the negotiation of the various meanings of liberalization has taken place on the terrain of the nature of the Indian state, Indian culture, Indian people, or Indian capital. Far from coming into its own, economics has been consistently subordinated to the social meanings of the Indian nation” (2004: 37).
This failure on the part of economics to come into its own has to do, more specifically, with the historical foundations of the Indian national identity and the ambivalent nature of the nationalist elite that was constitutive of the anti-colonial resistance against the British colonizers: “the nationalist movement had to struggle—through contestatory social claims—to establish viable and persuasive articulations that differentiated the Indian nation (the Self) from the British Empire (the Other)” (2004: 38). Within the struggle for national self-definition, the articulation of a postcolonial identity was forged within the boundary constraints of two perceived threats to the postcolonial Self: “against a territorially outside Other,” on the one hand, which referred to the colonizing British, but also against “premodern India,” the colonized masses from which the nationalist elite were themselves relatively estranged, but which nevertheless needed to be incorporated into the anti-colonial struggle.\footnote{An anguishing tale of colonial alienation comes from the narratives and testimonies of Frantz Fanon (1952), who in \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} refers to this pre-colonial boundary as “the jungle” that haunts the educated colonized subject, trapped in the “cosmic myth” of Negritude. A more cynical take on this alienation in the context of the anti-colonial nationalist movement in India is provided by Varma (1998), where it becomes clear that a virtual consensus for “independence” was established in part through the instrumentalized use of Gandhi and “the masses” for rendering the elite nationalist movement a populist (and thus historically legitimate) movement.}

Thus “\textit{external colonialism} and \textit{internal premodernity} were the defining boundaries of the nationalist imagining of India” (2004: 42). The ambivalence of this in-between-ness was due in large part to the unique nature of the nationalist elite themselves, who were indebted to Western education and culture, but were simultaneously critical of Western colonial rule in India. This nationalist elite was “characterized by a strongly ambivalent identity-logic: a strong articulation of repugnance and a repudiation of the colonizer, but also its mimicry” (2004: 43). Giving themselves the task of policing “the border between the colonizer and the...
colonized, the Westerner and the Indian, the insider and the outsider…[the nationalist elite] also reproduced themselves and their social powers…The social identity of the postcolonial was reproduced by a matching of mimicry with mockery” (2004: 44).

The ambivalent identity-logic of mimicry and mockery with respect to the colonizing West manifested itself politically in the post-independence period through the Indian state’s economic ideology. The state policy of self-reliance, Muppidi argues, “as an economic practice, was the historical manifestation of this ambivalence” (2004: 45). Self-reliance was characterized by three major features: modernization, nationalization and endogenization. The first of these, modernization, constituted “the moment of mimicry” (2004: 46) of the West. By recognizing the need to modernize what they themselves considered a “backwards” and “underdeveloped” country, the postcolonial elite were acquiescing to what they understood to be “the ways of the world,” whether over-coded as “western” or “colonial” or not. But in order to balance this sense of mimicry with a matching repudiation and an assertion of difference from the colonial or western model, nationalization and endogenization “were explicitly aimed at reducing the national economy’s dependence on external Others” (2004: 46). This provided a sense of Self-security and identity which guaranteed that, even though India would still be playing by Western rules, “catching up,” as it were, with the rest of the world economically, they would do so on their own terms, without allowing for the possibility of re-colonization. For Muppidi, the need to maintain this balance of mimicry and mockery was central to the viability of the postcolonial national imaginary, and as he argues, “the overall meanings of self-reliance did not alter significantly until the beginning of economic restructuring in 1991” (2004: 47).
In analyzing the ways in which the postcolonial Indian nation pursued its economic course based on a historically-instituted imaginary and a socially produced identity, Muppidi goes on to argue that any restructuring of the state-policy of self-reliance would have had to negotiate with the existing social meanings, identities and imaginations productive of this sense of national Self. Any economic decisions had to “make sense,” or be rendered as politically intelligible, within the existing social imaginary and its constitutive identity-logics. In this regard, the economic reforms of 1991 marked a radical disjuncture with the existing social imaginary of postcolonial India. Proponents of the reforms called for “a greater hospitality toward private foreign capital…for a changed definition of historically institutionalized meanings of Indian ‘self-reliance’” (2004: 32-33). In making their argument, proponents (whom I have broadly called postcolonial capitalists) appealed to the “economic realities” of the situation, pointing out that the rate of economic growth needed to combat the growing problems of poverty and underdevelopment could only be achieved with additional financial resources, resources that the nation (the Self) was increasingly unable to provide. The case was made in a vocabulary that was intelligible to the national imaginary, but with altered meanings: “Self reliance, they [argued], should be understood not as minimizing the nation’s reliance on others in the world but as the generation of an internal capacity to pay for what one secures from the outside” (2004: 33). In other words, the Self that was constitutive of the policy of self-reliance would need to gain more confidence in dealing with the outside world, to see it not as a threat, but rather as an opportunity.

The redefinition of the postcolonial Self that was invoked by pro-reform arguments were meant to assure the nation that, even though the Other was being invited within domestic space, this did not constitute a threat to the Self’s sovereignty.
In making this argument, what the pro-reformers were implying was that the national Self needed more confidence, and needed to become more competitive in the world. Political economist Atul Kohli confirms that in pursuing this change of economic course, “the Indian state was responding to a sharply changed world and, in the process, attempting to establish a new social contract with Indian business: we will continue to put our full weight behind you, but you, in turn, must become more competitive” (2006: 1361). For Nilekani, his own field of expertise, the domestic IT sector, “served as the Trojan horse through which globalization entered the Indian economy and gained acceptance” (2009: 123), showing to the rest of the nation how India could potentially compete globally.

Most crucially, as Muppidi’s analysis shows, at the level of the social imaginary productive of postcolonial identity, “the danger posed by the Other [i.e., globalization, foreign capital] predominantly threatens a part that can be divorced from the Self—inefficient industry. Such a divorce, in fact, is seen as only strengthening the Self” (Muppidi 2004: 53). Muppidi finds that “in advancing social claims about the positive effects of inviting the Other into the national economic space…[policy makers were] actually rearticulating the dominant narrative of the national, postcolonial Self” (2004: 53). In making this claim, the Other was also understood differently, “not as colonial (and hence exploitative and dominating of the Self) but as beneficial to the Self” (2004: 53). Thus, in the context of economic liberalization and the debates sparked by the perceived necessity of reform, both Self and Other were refashioned dramatically, but in ways that attempted to negotiate the postcolonial national imaginary and the social claims and identities that were productive of it. But as Muppidi points out, this imaginative refashioning failed in many ways to produce a national consensus for reforms, largely because the pro-
reformers, in refashioning existing ideas of Self and its relations to the Other, could not successfully produce intelligible claims within the discursive circuits constitutive of the postcolonial imaginary. Within the discourse of the most committed postcolonial capitalists (Bhagwati 2010, Nilekani 2009, Panagariya 2008, Sachs, et al 1999, for instance), this lack of explicit democratic consensus regarding reforms becomes a haunting reminder of a lingering threat that must be conjured away continually through the discursive strategies of narration and metonym outlined in the previous section. As I have argued, instead of a democratic consensus regarding reforms, what we have in India today is a virtual consensus, one that is performed and interpreted through discourses and spatial practices. If we have spent this chapter analyzing the discursive aspect of these mediations, which produce virtual consensus, the remaining chapters of this book will focus more closely on the spatial practices of mediation.

2.4 The Partiality of Economic Reform

We might at this point pause to ask, however: if economic arguments for neoliberalization failed to interpellate a consenting public for reforms, if economics failed in coming into its own as an autonomous domain of social knowledge and intervention, then how has the Indian state been able to pursue a course of economic reforms at all? Muppidi’s explanation is as brief as it is partial, and he only addresses this question at the end of his analysis: “If economic liberalization has been possible in India, it is primarily because of and through the ambiguous but increasingly powerful and postcolonial identities of the NRI [Non-Resident Indian]” (2004: 56). The NRI, or the person of Indian origin living abroad, “can be seen as the new postcolonials. The NRIs are neither Self nor Other, but both Self and Other” (2004:
Often times living in the West, but remaining “true” to cultural notions of “Indianness,” the NRIs seem to demonstrate the success of the Indian Self in a global setting, in a manner similar to how Nilekani articulates the IT sector as a “Trojan horse” above. Thus “the difficult problem of getting the modern West in without losing premodern India has been partially resolved through the bodies of the NRIs…The economic success and cultural obduracy of the NRIs in the modern West is read as proof of India’s potential success in dealing with Western forces” (2004: 56).

How convincing is Muppidi’s explanation? My argument is that the figure of the NRI is a crucial piece to the puzzle of economic reforms in India, but does not suffice by itself to explain the larger social transformations entailed with liberalization. First of all, before evaluating the NRI in terms of its status in the postcolonial imaginary (this will be pursued in Chapter Four through new practices of “transnational” architecture and urban design in Gurgaon), we need to recognize that, if economic reforms have been implemented, their implementation has been partial, and in many respects, modest. Clamorous talk of a “new” India notwithstanding, political economists located on both sides of the reform debate seem to recognize the partiality of economic reform in India. As Atul Kohli points out in his critique of the economic reforms, “The ‘big bang’ rhetoric of a dramatic policy shift aside, India’s economic policies during the 1990s altered only incrementally” (2006: 1363). And on the other side, neoclassical economists find that “There has been an absence of ideological thrust in India’s reform programme, which is arguably one of the causes behind the moderate speed of post-1991 reforms” (Sachs, et. al. 1999: 19). This absence of “ideological thrust” supports Muppidi’s argument that the discourses which have espoused the reforms have in many ways remained unintelligible within
the historical constraints of the Indian social imaginary. As Pranab Bardhan argues, “there have been a great deal of piecemeal reforms, without causing massive political confrontations, through a political process of diffusing the resistance on the part of the vested interests in various ways. Like the stealth bomber, reform in India has largely avoided the political radar screen” (Bardhan 1999: 7).

Bardhan also argues that “public enthusiasm for reforms is largely confined to the upper classes and the media in English—say, the top decile or so in the income structure, which for some reason is called the ‘middle class’ in India”’ (Bardhan 1999: 19). This “middle” class will be evaluated at length in Chapter Three. For now it is important to merely underline the partiality of reforms, as well as the limitations to any kind of consensus on reforms. For neoclassical economists like Sachs et. al., this divorce between “elite” reforms and “mass” reforms is a relatively benign process, with reforms affecting only “elite welfare,” while leaving “the masses relatively untouched.” Atul Kohli’s more critical account of this aspect of the reforms, namely the divorcing or partitioning of the Self between elite and mass sectors, differs in its tonality, as well as in the political implications it raises: “liberalizing reforms were pushed forward by a narrow coalition, and an element of ‘stealth’ clearly characterized the politics of economic liberalization, aimed at circumventing nationalist and popular opposition” (2006: 1363). For Kohli, this “stealth” on the part of a “narrow coalition” raises troubling political questions about the legitimacy of an Indian state that is increasingly becoming a “two-track democracy, in which the common people are only needed at the time of elections, and then it is best that they all go home, forget politics, and let the ‘rational’ elite quietly run a pro-business show” (2006: 1369).
Indeed, the contrast between these two explanations for the partiality of reforms is significant for an understanding of the narrative politics of postcolonial capitalism. What was understood, by Sachs et al. and many other postcolonial capitalist economists who advocate the further liberalization of the Indian economy, as simply “the less risky and relatively safer reforms” (1999: 23), was for someone like Kohli (and Bardhan) a much more surreptitious, indeed “stealthy” procedure that is indicative of a more general class-based partitioning of the Indian nation. What is implied in this contrast is something that Muppidi’s analysis does not bring up explicitly, but which we can begin to think about in light of the partiality of economic reforms. If the discourse of economic reforms failed to interpellate a consensual audience because it could not rearticulate the ambivalent identity-logic of the postcolonial Self, that is, mimicry matched with mockery, then this failure itself is illuminating in several respects. For one thing, the pro-reformers attempted to articulate a refashioned sense of Self, one that was willing to let go of “inefficient” parts of the nation, namely inefficient industries and public sectors of the economy, in order to pursue more entrenched relations with the Other. But if inefficient industries were so willingly divorced from the existing sense of national Self, then couldn’t “inefficient people” be as well? Is this jump so radical to make, especially on the part of a postcolonial elite who have always defined themselves, at one level, against the “premodern” masses constitutive of the majority of Indians?

Ashis Nandy articulates a related sense of Self-partitioning that seems characteristic of the ways in which economic reforms have been pursued in India. It is the Indian middle class especially who actively practice this partitioning logic, seemingly abandoning the nation in favor of the increased enjoyment of foreign

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19 This will be further explored in Chapter 3 on the postcolonial Indian middle class.
products and life-styles made available through economic liberalization. Read how

Nandy frames this partitioning as both a spatial and temporal re-negotiation of Self:

In this century, we too have mastered the art of looking at large sections of humanity as obsolete and redundant. These sections seem to us to be anachronistically sleepwalking through our times, when they should be safely ensconced in the pages of history. Such communities should not trouble us morally, we believe, by pretending to be a part of the contemporary world and relevant to human futures. It is an important part of that belief that the idea of underdevelopment has redefined many communities as only collections of the poor and the oppressed. We talk of indigenous peoples, tribes or Dalits as if they had no pasts, no myths, no legends and no transmittable systems of knowledge; as if their grandparents never told them any stories, nor did their parents sing them any lullabies. We steal their pasts paradoxically to push them into the past. To speak on behalf of the poor and the oppressed has become a major ego defense against hearing their voices and taking into account their ideas about their own suffering. (2002: 117)

In framing the relationship of the Indian middle class to the poor masses as one mediated by “ego defense,” Nandy’s analysis becomes amenable to Muppidi’s framework for understanding the transformed identity of the postcolonial Self. The fundamental alienation from the masses is one major constitutive element of this essentially classed Self. Seeking to negotiate the ambivalence between external colonialism and internal premodernity, the Indian ruling elite and the middle class in many ways has remained aloof with respect to the masses and their ways of life. If anything, economic liberalization has intensified this ambivalence, especially in terms of the partiality of liberalization and the ways in which this partiality has been explicitly class-based, effecting primarily “elite” circles. Sankaran Krishna furthers this line when he argues

that the Indian middle class often sees itself as living amongst, but not with, the majority of its fellow citizens. The self-imposed distance between the middle class and the ‘masses’ sometimes partakes of a genocidal impulse, as is indexed in many milieus—everyday expressions of desire for a country with a smaller population…urban planning schemes that fantasize bypassing slums through freeways, subways, hovercrafts and helicopters—but is more often indicated by a simple wish for the masses to simply, magically, disappear. (2006: 2327)
The fantasy of extermination is doubled by a middle class desire for flight, for an “elsewhere” in the midst of an overpopulated and underdeveloped India. Indeed, this is where we can draw a connection between the partiality of economic reforms, and the re-constituted symbolic and material space of the urban in postcolonial capitalist India.

2.5 Neoliberal Urbanism

If liberalization has been pursued in India, it has been through two simultaneous and inter-related strategies. One is the discursive strategy articulated above which analytically separates the economic from the political, privileging the former to the detriment of the latter. But as we have seen, because of India’s inherited postcolonial social imaginary, in which economic rationales and arguments are consistently subordinated to the political meanings of the nation as a socially imaged community, this discursive strategy has been augmented by more surreptitious partitioning strategies. As Muppidi’s analysis reveals above, the postcolonial nation itself becomes partitioned between its efficient and inefficient sectors, with the former rendered capable of competing in global markets and depicted as the primary beneficiaries of neoliberal economic reform. This part of India becomes the collective subject of what I have been calling virtual consensus, where a vaguely construed category called “Indian middle class” becomes projected as the normalized subject of economic transition in otherwise turbulent times.

The partitioning logic of economic reforms is further augmented by spatial strategies of what I call neoliberal urbanism. In particular, neoliberal urbanism creates spaces in which the newly partitioned sections of Indian society (those deemed economically capable for global competition, those included in the “new” India) can
function according to rational and necessarily abstract economic protocols autonomous from local political considerations and cultural contexts. Aihwa Ong has characterized such neoliberal spaces as “spaces of exception” that “have created new forms of inclusion, setting apart some citizen-subjects, and creating new spaces that enjoy extraordinary political benefits and economic gain” (2006: 5). This model of neoliberalism as exception “informs political strategies that differently regulate populations for optimal productivity, increasingly through spatial practices that engage market forces” (6). But neoliberal exceptions are not simply spatially practiced. What is more crucial to understand, and what Ong underplays in her analysis, are the narrative or temporal politics that mediate such new spatial practices, particularly in postcolonial and neoliberal cities, where the projection of a dominant experience of economic and social change becomes a political necessity. This is why neoliberal urbanism must be studied together with postcolonial capitalism, not so much because the one would be impossible without the other, but rather because in their mutual constitution of the political present we learn much about the politics of economic liberalization (neoliberalism) in India. More specifically, we can use discursive and spatial analysis to map the contemporary fragmentations in everyday political life that are anathema to the idea of democracy, to say nothing of democratic development.

To appropriate an argument put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, neoliberalism is a “discourse unlike others,” producing the self-fulfilling conditions of its own possibility. The discursive logic of neoliberalism and its concomitant economic theory is not referential, but rather performative. It does not so much describe a world that already exists, as much as it de-limits the way in which its subjects apprehend and experience the world. But that is not all; it normalizes and de-politicizes such de-
limitations, making them appear as natural as the earth, wind and sky. Bourdieu argues that neoliberalism enacts a political programme, a "utopia which, with the aid of the economic theory to which it subscribes, manages to see itself as the scientific description of reality" (1999: 94). In this way neoliberalism comes to be understood as a strategic policing of the sensible and perceptible in everyday life, a partitioning of micro-political experience itself, "a deliberatively selective apprehension of the real" (95).

What Bourdieu neglects to mention, however—and what is made clear in the postcolonial capitalist context of Gurgaon—is how this utopian theory remains haunted by the heterogeneous elements and conditions that are abstracted and conjured away from its politically partitioned present. This book will explore these haunted elements in the neoliberal spaces and times of Neo Delhi, arguing that urban politics in contemporary India are very much about mediating and managing these elements, often times violently, and often times unsuccessfully, leaving the path open to re-visions, counter-interpretations, and counter-discourses.
CHAPTER 3. VIRTUAL URBANIZATION IN GURGAON

An urban society is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future.

-Henri Lefebvre, Urban Revolution (1970)

3.0 The Global qua Urban Turn in Postcolonial India

On December 3, 2005 Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh announced the launching of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), the single largest initiative ever pursued by the postcolonial state in the urban sector, with a provision of Rs 50,000 crore (approximately $10 billion) over a period of seven years. Arguing that the initiative was aimed at improving the quality of life in cities and towns across the country, the Prime Minister stated the twin targets of the mission’s funds: urban infrastructure and the delivery of urban services. But beyond these sites of public investment, a larger purpose was articulated. “Urbanization is a relentless process,” Singh said in his speech, and “the urban economy is a bridge between the domestic economy and global economy which must be strengthened.”

In the discourse of this technocratic politician, the urban serves as a medium, a point of connection, of mutual translation (and transformation) between the global and the national.

In an overview of JNNURM published by the Government of India (GOI) under the Ministry of Urban Development (MOUD), the need to specifically address the urban sector was emphasized at the outset. “According to the 2001 census,” the overview began, “India has a population of 1027 million with approximately 28

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21 Ibid.
22 As the nation’s ostensibly top politician, Singh is paradoxically praised in postcolonial capitalist circles for his “non-politician” like concern for efficiency and growth as guiding principles for governance.
percent or 285 million people living in urban areas. As a result of liberalization policies adopted by the Government of India the share of the urban population may increase to about 40 percent of total population by the year 2021” (MOUD 2005: 3). Insofar as economic liberalization was linked causally to the growth of the urban population, so too was economic growth, as the MOUD document predicted that, based on data extrapolated from the 2001 census, by 2011 “urban areas would contribute about 65 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)” (ibid.).

In order to create conditions for such future urban expansion and economic growth, JNNURM would provide funds in the form of central government grants to urban local bodies (ULBs) for investment in urban infrastructure and service delivery. But receipt of these funds for selected cities would be contingent upon the implementation of particular urban reforms on the part of the respective ULBs. “There is a need to integrate the reform initiatives and scale up the effort to catalyze investment in urban infrastructure across States in the country” (4). Thus reform-linked grants from the GOI were to be directed towards what it determined to be financially sustainable (i.e. largely privately financed and constructed) infrastructure projects developed under the name of ULBs.23

According to the mission statement of the JNNURM, “the aim is to encourage reforms and fast-track planned development of identified cities. Focus is to be on efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/Parastatal agencies towards citizens” (5, ____________

23 This is one way of understanding the power and efficacy (for the two are one under neoliberalism) of the discourse of public-private partnerships, which really amounts to a reconfiguration of the existing distinction and relationship between the two terms, the public sphere, including all government agencies and publicly owned industries and services that operates on a not-for-profit basis, and the private sphere, which is oriented principally by the goal of profit maximization. Namely, under PPP, as the model is popularly called, principles of privatization are simply applied to the public sector, so that they either reform to compete or risk instinction.
emphasis mine). Notwithstanding the lofty goals of “efficiency,” “community participation,” and “accountability towards citizens,” however, the “fast-track” reforms and development plans of JNNURM have drawn the ire of critics, including NGOs, activists in citizen’s initiatives, and academics, who have argued that JNNURM is but a part of the larger neoliberalization of the state initiated by the Government of India in the 1990s, increasingly in alliance with global and regional capitalist institutions like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Ahmed 2008, Chamaraj 2006, Leena and Van Breukelen 2007, Naryanan and Bhatia 2007, Roy 2010, Spivak 2000).

In particular, critics have argued that JNNURM is a mechanism for ensuring the back-door privatization of essential urban services under the banner of “liberalization.” Infrastructure and urban services such as water, electricity and sanitation would be privatized while by-passing problems of democratic consensus by making the receipt of government funds (as well as foreign investment) contingent upon certain urban reforms, particularly those which foster the right economic and political conditions for what Spivak has called “electronic capitalism” (Spivak 2000). Programs like JNNURM thus embody a larger and strategic “megacity initiative,” which is designed to give “the urban a ‘proper’ access to globality via the electronic, and transforms the ‘rural’ into a metaconstitutive outside for the ‘urban.’” (2000: 169).

As the postcolonial capitalist politician Manmohan Singh articulates quite explicitly, JNNURM is about framing the urban as a bridge between the global and the national. But the balance of power between the global and the national is far from evenly distributed here. As Spivak is quick to point out, “Global electronic capitalism steps in to manage the affairs of the state as it helps build an infrastructure for its own
optimal functioning and no more” (2000: 16). The urban infrastructure that is being created for globally mobile capital (Spivak calls this the “virtual megacity,” which is created through an erasure of the rural, a point to which I will return in the conclusion of this chapter) can often immobilize the local urban economy in starkly problematic ways. The urban infrastructure that is developed for globally mobile finance thus works “on behalf of the secessionist culture of the virtual megacity” (19), for secessionist subjects (the “new” urban middle class and erstwhile elites) who increasingly live amongst, but not really with the diverse and impoverished others that surround them in everyday life (Krishna 2006). This “new” urban middle class will be contextualized within the larger history of the colonial and postcolonial “middle” class in India in the next chapter.

Kathyayini Chamaraj underlines the increasing salience of international financial institutions in India’s domestic economy and makes the connection to JNNURM explicit:

The most crucial element of JNNURM, however, is the requirement for the local bodies of megacities to raise 50% of the funds themselves and for the State governments to cough up another 15%. Only then will the 35% in the form of grants from the Centre under JNNURM be released. Considering that most municipalities prepare illusory budgets for thousands of crores each year but are never able to raise more than about 50% of it (from property taxes, loans and grants), the big question is: from where will municipalities raise their share of thousands of crores in the next seven years…The ruse appears to be to force local bodies to go with a begging bowl to International Financial Institutions to raise their share of the funds. These IFIs, such as WB, ADB, USAID, etc—who are currently the shadow players behind the mission—will, in turn, demand their pound of flesh in terms of interest on loans and further conditionalities to

24 In Chapter 5 on transportation in Delhi and Gurgaon I use the recent construction of the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway (DGE), a 30 km long elevated expressway that connects New Gurgaon to the Indira Gandhi International Airport, as a contemporary example of how the fostering of conditions for global capital to access the national economy can at the same time immobilize the local urban context. It is thus no mere coincidence that the same DGE that allows for unfettered access and mobility between the neoliberal urban enclaves of DLF City and New Gurgaon and the global space of the international airport simultaneously partitions the “existing city” (Old Gurgaon) from New Gurgaon, creating a wall of immobilizing mobility that is as much a part of the narrative of postcolonial capitalism as the exuberance and optimism towards what I called in Chapter 1 the “future-present” in the discourse of people like Nilekani.
privatize public services and give the contracts to favoured MNCs. (Chamaraj 2006)

Others have added to these criticisms, also pointing out that, notwithstanding its alleged goal to “scale-up delivery of civic amenities and provision of utilities with emphasis on universal access to the urban poor” (MOUD 2005: 5), the fine print contained within JNNURM reveals that the urban population to whom JNNURM implicitly caters largely ignores unorganized sectors of the urban economy as well as those who are informally employed and housed within cities (Narayanan and Bhatia 2007). Needless to say, such “informal populations” often comprise sizeable chunks, if not the majority of India’s largest megacities (Chatterjee 2004). Yet nowhere within the JNNURM’s overview statement, which was publicly released, did it mention putting an end to, or even slowing down, slum demolitions and forced re-settlements of slum dwellers, hawkers, and street vendors (Chamaraj 2006).

Building from the argument about postcolonial capitalism developed in Chapter 1, the inclusive and consensual rhetoric of government initiatives such as JNNURM can be contrasted with the exclusions that are practiced in actuality. For instance, JNNURM envisions “community participation” in formulating “vision documents” for participating cities through City Development Plans, which were to be prepared through multi-stakeholder consultations and would identify infrastructure projects for which to seek GOI funds (MOUD: 6). But as Narayanan and Bhatia (2007) find, through increasing privatization and the enforcement of monetary charges for use of civic services, as well as an almost exclusive focus on urban “middle class” infrastructures (such as transportation networks for private car-users and development of high-end commercial spaces and spaces for tertiary-level, or producer service, industries), the urban poor are essentially left out of the planning process altogether, as well as the “vision” for the “future present” city that is implicit in the City
Development Plan. Moreover, as recent research on neoliberalization in India suggests, privatization of urban infrastructure and services is often a way of awarding contracts to most-favored multinational corporations, contradicting pretensions of “free-competition” so often associated in common sense discourses with “liberalization” (Roy 2010, Waquar 2007, 2010).

But I would add to this argument that exclusion occurs at an even broader level, namely at the level of a spatial and temporal imaginary of the urban that is a key element of the discourse of postcolonial capitalism and the narrative of the new India. For example, on the fourth anniversary of the inauguration of JNNURM, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh praised the mission for its successful focus on “basic services like water supply, sewerage, drainage, solid waste management, improvement of slums and construction of houses for the urban poor.” To these “fulfilled expectations,” however, Singh added the following: “As infrastructure struggles to keep pace with demand, urban chaos is becoming a way of life. Our cities and towns are not an acceptable face of a rapidly modernizing and developing economy.”

It is this goal of changing the “face,” or image of Indian cities and towns from chaos to something more “accepteable” for a modernizing and developing country, that enacts the politics of exclusion that this book is concerned with investigating. Indeed, as this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the spatial context for the narrative of postcolonial capitalism has become the city, and in particular, the image of the city as a metonymic substitution for the image of the “new India” in postcolonial capitalist discourses. This “new India project,” at once discursive and material, ideological and spatial, is the end to which neoliberal urbanism is directed and put to work.

The proliferation of urban images and this “urban turn” on the part of the Indian government is not unique. As urban geographer Tim Hall has argued, “since the mid-1980s a large, and apparently growing, industry has developed around the deliberate manipulation and promotion of place images, which has become an integral part of urban regeneration programs” (1998: 111). Hall links this growth of city-image promotion to the post-industrial economy that has itself been associated with neoliberal globalization (Harvey 2005). With the decline of state-led development and publicly funded investment projects due to “liberalization” and neoliberal economic reform across the globe, cities are increasingly required to attract private investment on their own (this is certainly the case for JNNURM, in which only 35% of funds are provided by the center, along with 15% from the state, with the rest of funds to be raised by cities themselves, often through grants and loans undertaken through international financial institutions, who are themselves beholden to private financial interests [Stiglitz 2002]) and are thus in competition with other cities nationally and globally. “As image assumes ever greater importance in the post-industrial economy it is becoming clearer that the actual production of urban landscapes reflects the necessity for cities to present positive images of themselves and that economic development is driven by programs of place promotion” (Hall 1998: 118). In India, these positive images serve not only an economic function in attracting private investment, but also the discursive function of redistributing the value and intelligibility of the “new India.”

JNNURM thus exemplifies the postcolonial state’s so-called “urban turn” (Prakash 2002), but the “urban” that is implicit in this turn is one that is increasingly mediated and managed through selective images and partitioned landscapes. JNNURM, with its desire to make the urban intelligible to the global and its
concomitant need to make the urban desirable to transnational finance and multinational capital, inaugurates a style of urban governance that I argue is exemplified in contemporary Delhi and its surrounding hinterland, what I am calling *Neo Delhi*.

3.1 Imaging Delhi

Perhaps no other Indian city typifies this trend towards image promotion and national projection more than the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi. In the Master Plan for Delhi-2021 (MPD 2021), the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) put forth a vision “to make Delhi a global metropolis and a world-class city” (Puri 2007:1). As the capital of a politically democratic and economically growing postcolonial nation, Delhi has been the target of “clean up” strategies pursued by state and municipal governments (often at the behest of the judiciary). Such “clean up” strategies are often designed to address “the dismal and gloomy picture of jhuggi/jhopries [slum huts] coming up regularly,” as well as other urban “eye-sores” such as street vendors and hawkers and beggars, displeasing images that are decidedly “incompatible with Delhi’s imagined world-class future” (Ghertner 2010: 8).

As critics of the master plan have abundantly pointed out, the vision of the city espoused in MPD 2021 is a vision that explicitly excludes the urban poor and their livelihoods. Critics often point out that over the past two decades Delhi has witnessed gross human rights violations in the form of slum evictions and demolitions (by one estimate, over the past ten years close to one million slum dwellers have been displaced in Delhi [Ghertner 2010: 15]), as well as the regular removal of street vendors and hawkers whose very livelihoods depend on transgressing the abstract zoning of urban land as proscribed by Delhi’s master plans (Batra 2005, Ghertner...
Postcolonial capitalists like Nandan Nilekani often criticize the futility of urban planning in India through loaded comparisons with China that betray postcolonial capitalism’s implicit *hatred of democracy*, which I described in the previous chapter. In *Imagining India* Nilekani sardonically remarks that, “The Beijing master plan is in marked contrast to the Indian versions—every building and park is exactly where it says it should be” (2009: 212). Postcolonial capitalists envy authoritarian China for its ability to produce efficient cities that operate according to their economic functions and their ability to effectively remove any perceived economic redundancies (beggars, hawkers, slum dwellers) from urban space. In the face of such postcolonial envy, they are greeted by the chaos and calamity of urban space in India. But for all their chaos and clamor, postcolonial megacities like Delhi too represent their economic functions, it is just that the economic functionality implicit in Delhi’s heterogeneous and multi-layered urban spaces is infinitely more democratic (and thus unpredictable) than postcolonial capitalism’s desire for the homogeneously imagined urban as a space of pure economic efficiency (i.e. the virtual megacity of the future-present).

In his work on Delhi’s “pirate modernity,” Ravi Sundaram argues that, in spite of postcolonial Delhi’s numerous and ambitious master plans, “Home workshops, markets, hawkers, small factories, small and large settlements of the working poor now spread all over the planned metropolis…Productive, non-legal proliferation has emerged as a defining component of the new urban crisis in India and other parts of the postcolonial world” (Sundaram 2010: 5-6). Postcolonial urbanism in cities like

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26 Of course one would be correct to point out at once that postcolonial capitalists are dependent upon the same classes of workers that are rendered “redundant” within this becoming-dominant urban imaginary. This would be just another of the multitude of ambiguities and contradictions characteristic of the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism. It is thus no mistake that neoliberal urbanism does not do away with the lower classes that clean, maintain, guard and care for new urban spaces they themselves are excluded from. It merely renders them unintelligible, hidden in plain sight, existentially removed but never too far away.
Delhi is characterized by such informal and non-legal urban proliferation, and “what has emerged right from the outset is informality’s ambivalence about the law, both in terms of housing settlements and production sites which worked through tenure rather than formal title…it is precisely this ambivalence about entering legal domains that accounted for informality’s strength” (ibid.).

But the ambivalence of the law is also a tool for the postcolonial state, increasingly in line with the discourse of postcolonial capitalism, to re-make cities on an ad hoc basis, all in the attempt to conjure a new image and identity for the city. The referents of such urban images are often vague “elsewheres” encountered sporadically through the globalized media (Ashraf 2007). As Partha Chatterjee points out, “the idea of what a city should be and look like has now been deeply influenced by this post-industrial global image everywhere among the urban middle classes in India…the intensified circulation of images of global cities through cinema, television, and the internet as well as through the Indian middle classes’ far greater access to international travel” (Chatterjee 2004: 143). Such images affect not only middle class desires for a globally recognizable and intelligible urban space in India, but also seem to guide the interventions of the postcolonial state, and particularly the judiciary branch of government (i.e. the Indian Supreme Court), which increasingly intervenes in urban planning and “renewal” through what Ghertner (2010) has provocatively called an “aesthetic mode of governance.” This is a mode of governance and a regime of legality that is very much a kind of performative interpretation, producing an interpretation of urban space that is often times explicitly at odds with the guidelines laid out in the master plans, as well as with existing legal norms. Slums that were regularized under one government might all-of-a-sudden be declared “illegal” and subject to removal by the next. Likewise, a new luxury
shopping mall might come up on land that was not zoned for commercial
development, but because of its decidedly high-quality design and world-class
appearance, it is nonetheless incorporated within the city’s development plan.
Ghertner argues that such an ambivalent mode of governance and legality works to
secure a particular image and intelligibility of the city, an aesthetic distribution of the
urban that is implicit in the vision of these master plans: “if a development project
looks ‘world-class’, then it is most often declared planned; if a settlement looks
polluting, it is sanctioned as unplanned and illegal” (Ghertner 2010: 3).

This “rule by aesthetics,” fueled by a desire to create a “world-class” and
globally recognized city, “crafts fields of intelligibility by disseminating standardized
aesthetic norms” (16), taking an idealized image of a “world-class” city from various
refracted images of other world-class cities and evaluating existing local urban
conditions on the basis of this vision. As a technology of urban governance, rule by
aesthetics implicitly acknowledges the irreducible “enmeshing of media and urban
life. The management of urban affect is through new techniques that are central to the
current discourse of power. Urban populations are equally complicit in a shifting
media anthropology of the senses” (Sundaram 2010: 7).

Sundaram emphasizes the extent to which media urbanism and piracy can often
shape urban space and experiences “from below,” empowering lower classes and
excluded subjects who disrupt legal norms and regulations by selling pirated media,
for instance, or squatting on public land and setting up “illegal”/informal networks of
services, production and exchange. This they often do as a matter of social survival.
But “media urbanism” is also driven in large part “by the urgent pressure to connect
with the global economy and attract foreign investment” (Chatterjee 2004: 144). It is
in this way that the exclusions enacted through urban-oriented and image-obsessed
development initiatives such as JNNURM occur most broadly at the level of the urban imaginary, increasingly shared by postcolonial state and elite society (India’s so-called urban “middle” classes that perhaps comprise the top 10% of the urban population) alike, actualizing the secessionist culture of the virtual megacity through discourses and spatial practices of “urban renewal.”

While useful for evaluating the way in which the law is ambivalently mobilized in order to re-shape or “renew” the existing city, both from above (state agencies and the judiciary) and below (“informal” urban settlements and economies), the idea of an aesthetic regime of urban governance and an image-centric media urbanism leaves us to wonder how such aesthetic, discursive, and visual practices would work in a new urban space like Gurgaon, a city seemingly built from scratch on a palimpsest of erstwhile rural land. In the context of such rapid rural to urban transformation, and the erasures and displacements that must occur for such a transformation to take place, such an aesthetic rule of urban governance is augmented by a temporality of anticipation and expected arrival in the urbanizing environment. This environment is virtual not only in the “shifting media anthropology of the senses” that Sundaram underlines through the concept of media urbanism, or in the “rule by aesthetics” that Ghertner proposes, but also in the explicitly temporal sense articulated by Lefebvre in this chapter’s epigraph: an urbanization that is virtual today, but that will become real in the future. In the remainder of this chapter I will explore the spatial history of the transformation of Gurgaon from a rural to urban space, guided by an image of neoliberal urbanism that I will argue is a time-image, a temporal mediation and spatial narrative of the present. But first it will be necessary to situate Gurgaon as a sprawling satellite city and suburb within the larger Delhi conurbation.
3.2 Old Gurgaon and New Gurgaon

Gurgaon’s transformation from a sleepy agricultural town with a small manufacturing industry into a booming Millennium City with high-tech producer services, scores of MNCs and IT firms, and high-end residential and consumer spaces, began in the early 1980s, with bulk-acquisitions of farmland to the south of Delhi by a handful of private real estate developers based in Delhi. In the 1990s, Gurgaon’s potential as an attractive site for the development of commercial, industrial and residential spaces was realized by these private developers, who began developing their land banks into profitable real estate. This profitability was linked to Gurgaon’s close proximity to Delhi and its international airport, but also to Haryana’s explicitly pro-business land and tax reforms in the 1980s, which attracted multinational and domestic corporations to the area. Hyper-development in New Gurgaon can be said to have begun in the late 1990s and 2000s, with the opening up of real estate markets to unprecedented levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which made possible an accelerated speed of speculative development thanks to increased flows of investment capital both domestically and from abroad.

But as we will see in this chapter, hyper-development did not affect the area equally. Rather, a New Gurgaon was created from scratch and essentially left the “existing town,” or Old Gurgaon, far behind. There is, of course, historical precedent for this kind spatial and temporal juxtaposition of old and new cities. Just as colonial New Delhi became intelligible as an urban space through its differentiation from Mughal Old Delhi in the early twentieth century (King 2004, Legg 2007), New Gurgaon gains its intelligibility as a neoliberal urban space through its stark distinction from Old Gurgaon. Gurgaon as a whole thus “comprises of a smaller ‘old town’ and a much larger ‘new Gurgaon,’ lying beyond the municipal jurisdiction,
where massive residential, commercial and industrial developments have taken place over the past two decades” (Joardar 2006: 9).

Old Gurgaon is located approximately thirty kilometers from central New Delhi and is also the namesake of the district of Gurgaon, one of twenty-one districts that comprise the north Indian state of Haryana. Both the district and the town are on the southern side of the Delhi-Haryana border. The name Gurgaon is taken from a village that was an important site in the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. That village was named after Guru Dronacharya. According to the epic, the village was given to the guru by a prince, and a temple exists to this day which commemorates the transfer. Initially the village was called Guru-gram, but later became known simply as Gurgaon, literally meaning “village of the guru.”

During the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605), the district fell under the jurisdiction of Delhi and Agra. As Mughal power gradually waned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Gurgaon in 1803 “came under British rule through the Treaty of Surji Arjungaon.” After the rebellion of 1857, the district was transferred from the North Western Provinces to Punjab, and Gurgaon town was made head-quarters of Gurgaon district. At around this time, there was a flourishing salt works industry near the village of Sultan Pur.

According to the 1910 Gurgaon District Gazetteer, compiled and published under the authority of the Punjab Government for the British Raj, Gurgaon as a district was roughly ninety percent agricultural in the beginning of the twentieth century, and its population was comprised largely of agriculturalists, artisan castes

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27 This condensed early history can be found in a more comprehensive form at the official web site of District Gurgaon, Haryana: [http://gurgaon.gov.in/history1.htm](http://gurgaon.gov.in/history1.htm). Accessed 3 December, 2009.
28 Ibid.
and peasants (Haryana District Gazetteers 1998). As stated in the Gazetteer, “The general condition of the agricultural population…may be said to be painfully dependent on the seasons; all their income comes from the land” (1998: 102). Rainfall was “uncertain” in the district, and droughts or a weak monsoon could potentially reduce entire villages in the district to poverty and starvation. Therefore irrigation and deep underground wells were commonly used to distribute often-scarce water throughout the lands (1998: 86). Cotton, barley and millet were the primary crops grown during this era. Farming was a year-round activity with an autumn harvest (called Kharif), which was carried out by men and women with wooden agricultural implements like ploughs, hoes, axes and pitchforks. According to the Gazette, “Gurgaon is essentially a district of peasant proprietors… a poor district inhabited by numerous peasant proprietors owning small holdings, hired labor is not usually employed for general agricultural operations except by those tribes whose women do not assist them in the field” (89). Under the Land Improvements and Agriculturalists’ Loans Acts of 1908, loans were given to farmers to dig wells and canals for irrigation (99), and this was seen to improve the lot of the otherwise impoverished population.

Largely agricultural over the colonial period, the district was “industrially backwards” until independence in 1947 (Wadhan 2007: 19). But even after independence, Gurgaon remained predominantly an agricultural district, and throughout the first decades of independence the existing town of Gurgaon continued to serve as a district headquarters with a small local bureaucracy and manufacturing sector.

Historically a dry land in which only certain crops could grow (such as cotton and millet), the state of Haryana in the 1960s was one of those targeted by the Indian
government during the so-called “Green Revolution,” in which new high-yield seeds, pesticides and fertilizers from the West were introduced along with new irrigation systems and farming implements like tractors, pumpsets, thrashers, combines, and tillers (Ajay 2008: 3). These technologies allowed for the increased production of food grains such as wheat and rice in places where it would have been impossible to grow them before. As a part of this revolution in agricultural productivity, in the 1970s the Gurgaon canal project was developed to provide irrigation to over three hundred thousand acres of land in the district. Gurgaon was thus primarily agricultural, although in the 1970s a few large manufacturing units were set up, some at the behest of higher-ups in the central government in New Delhi.29

In the early 1980s, “Gurgaon came under limelight in international print media due mainly to the capitalist developments transpiring within and around the city and massive land acquisitions on the Gurgaon-Delhi road” (Wahdhan 2007, 150-151). Over the next two and half decades further acquisitions and development around this road (now the elevated Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway, also known as Delhi-Jaipur Highway, as well as National Highway 8 [NH8]) would eventually lead to the construction of the various phases of DLF City, which we will look at closely later in the chapter, along with other private mini-cities and townships created by developers like Unitech, Ansals, Reliance, Bestec, and others, that together constitute the fragmentary urbanized spaces of New Gurgaon.

29 Most notable amongst these was Maruti Suzuki, set up at the behest of Indira Gandhi’s son Sanjay in the mid 1970s, though production of cars from this unit in Gurgaon did not commence until after the latter had already died.
3.3 The Peri-Urban Expansion of Delhi

Gurgaon’s rapid development over the past quarter century is in one sense a result of national strategies to address rapid population growth in India’s largest cities. Even though there was no official plan in the Delhi Master Plan of 1982 for making Gurgaon into a satellite city (since Gurgaon was outside the planning jurisdiction of the Delhi Development Authority, which could only plan for development within the National Capital Territory), it in effect has become one today both because of its strategic location and because of a policy regarding urbanization that was already in place by the 1960s and 1970s. This strategy entailed “the extension of the city into newer outlying areas, rather than one of fixing up the old city” (Shaw 2004, 34), and was implemented on the outskirts of a variety of urban areas. Extension of the city meant the construction of new ring towns and satellite cities on the peripheries of the metropolis.

This urban strategy of creating new towns and satellite cities on the peripheries of existing metropolises was a widely-adopted means to control “the growth of the largest metropolitan cities and thereby slow down the rate of urbanization.” (Shaw 2004, 25-26). Urban population in India nearly quadrupled in four decades from 62 million in 1951 to 217 million in 1991 and 285 million in 2001. In 1961, the annual rate of population growth in cities was 2.34 percent, and picked up to 3.21 percent in 1971, accelerating to 3.83 percent in the mid-1970s, the highest point reached in the last century (Sivaramakrishnan, Kundu and Singh 2005, 27). At this time, planning experts and policy makers widely predicted even greater acceleration over subsequent decades, with the specter of “hyper-urbanization” in the largest cities due to massive and sustained rural-to-urban migration.
Delhi’s National Capital Territory (NCT), now the second largest urban agglomeration in India (after Greater Mumbai), has been a major locus of this acceleration in urban population growth in India. The construction of New Delhi as the capital of the British Indian Empire was itself an exercise in creating an entirely new city from scratch, and it provided the initial impetus for the area’s demographic growth (Khosla 2005). From 1911, when construction on New Delhi began, to 1947, the time of India’s independence from the British, the population of Delhi grew from 238,000 to 696,000 (Dupont 2000, 229). At independence Delhi’s population instantaneously doubled as a result of partition, with the arrival of close to half a million refugees from western Punjab and Sindh. Following this initial influx of migration, the trend continued throughout the postcolonial decades, albeit at a slower pace. As the political capital of India, but also as a major bureaucratic, commercial, and industrial center, postcolonial Delhi attracted both blue collar and white-collar (as well as no-collar) workers from all over the country, and net migration into the city has accounted for as much as 60% of total population growth per annum (Dupont 2000, 235). By 1951, Delhi had an annual population growth rate of 7.5 percent, a level that has not been reached since. But even after 1951, Delhi’s population growth has been steady and robust: 5.1 percent per year from 1951 to 1961, and 4.5 percent from 1961 to 1981 (Dupont 2000, 231). In terms of absolute numbers, from 1970 to 1990, the population of Delhi grew from around 3.5 million to 8.6 million inhabitants. Estimates for Delhi’s current population surpass 12 million.

This massive demographic expansion in Delhi has coincided with a spatial expansion towards the city’s peripheries, revealing “the effective appeal of the capital’s rural hinterlands to migrants coming from other states, and to those city dwellers who choose to leave the Delhi urban agglomeration in search of less
congested and/or cheaper places to live” (Dupont 2000, 231). Indeed, the advent of New Gurgaon in the erstwhile agricultural lands to the south of NCT can be seen as a continuation of the “urban conquest of outer Delhi” by the city’s “urban rich,” which Anita Soni’s research has detailed with respect to the Mehrauli countryside in the south of Delhi (Soni 2000, 75).

The twin processes of demographic and spatial expansion in Delhi thus led to the development of ring towns and satellite cities to the west, south, and east of the city, as “the geographical location of Delhi in the Gangetic plain, and, moreover, the absence of any significant physical barrier to the progress of urbanization favoured multi-directional urban expansion” (Dupont 2000, 229-230). While much of this expansion happened in an unplanned, half-hazard way, there were some planned sub-cities that were especially designed to absorb the surplus population of central Delhi. The Rohini project in the north-western part of the National Capital Territory (NCT) was launched in 1982, while the Dwarka-Papankala project in the south-western region was launched in 1988 and has now become the largest residential area in the NCT. These projects, both the offspring of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), were designed to absorb close to one million inhabitants each and are today middle class residential hubs. Other ring or satellite towns on the peripheries of Delhi include Ghaziabad and Faridabad, both located outside of the NCT but later incorporated within the larger National Capital Region (NCR), like Gurgaon is today. Faridabad, located in southern Haryana and just to the east of Gurgaon, has seen rapid industrial and demographic growth since the mid-1990s as a result of its proximity to south Delhi. Ghaziabad too has witnessed similar expansion, and is a planned industrial city located in the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh.
Also located in UP is New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, or NOIDA, as it is more commonly called. NOIDA was founded in 1976 with the express purpose of spreading urbanization (especially industry) towards the south-western periphery of Delhi (Shaw 2004, 32). NOIDA has come to popular media attention for its success in attracting multinational corporations in its office spaces, producing high-end malls in its commercial zones, and luxury residences as well. NOIDA has a unified urban local body that manages and plans its development, Noida Area Development Authority.

But of all of Delhi’s ring towns and satellite cities, Gurgaon stands out in terms of its hype as a “world class” urban space in India. The popular Indian magazine Business Today, for instance, promoted Gurgaon as its “top ranked city in the ‘Life at Work’ category but also the overall best city to live and work in” in 2009.30 Particularly in India, but also increasingly in the international press, Gurgaon is widely celebrated for its high-tech industries, including its computer software firms, business process outsourcing (BPO) call centers, Fortune 500 companies, as well as numerous shopping malls and high rise luxury residential towers.

But unlike NOIDA, Dwarka and Rohini, Delhi’s other ring/satellite towns, Gurgaon was not the result of an explicit urban planning strategy by a government agency to spread Delhi’s urban population out geographically. In fact, as we will see, municipal planning has tended to lag behind private real estate development in Gurgaon, much to the frustration of Gurgaon’s elite clients and citizens who work,

live, or shop in the city.\textsuperscript{31} Gurgaon’s first official master plan was not even created until 2007, after a good two decades of largely unplanned or privately planned urbanization.

3.4 DLF and the Privatized Urbanization of Gurgaon

In 1979, the Haryana government partitioned the existing district of Gurgaon, separating it from what became the district of Faridabad to its immediate east. Of the two resulting districts, Faridabad had a much higher level of industrialization, namely in the industrial town of Faridabad, while the re-constituted Gurgaon district was less densely populated, holding only the small town of Gurgaon and dozens of rural villages adjoining small to medium plots of farmland in the surrounding areas.

Throughout the decade of the 1980s, these large tracts of land were acquired variously by well-capitalized private developers, who negotiated directly with farmers in order to buy the latter’s holdings and develop large land banks of potentially profitable real estate. Of these private developers, none has been more central to the story of New Gurgaon than Delhi Land and Finance, or DLF.

DLF was founded in 1946 by Chaudhary Raghvendra Singh, a civil servant who turned to real estate just before India’s independence. DLF found initial success building speculative mass housing in farm lands just south of postcolonial New Delhi, for the huge influx of refugees that came to Delhi from Western Punjab and Sindh.

From the beginning, Singh persuaded farmers in the rural peripheries of the capital “to

\textsuperscript{31} This frustration and the reactions it has provoked in Gurgaon’s elite residents will be the topic of the next chapter. But for some sense of the everyday frustrations faced by the secessionist class, see “Inside Gate, India’s Good Life; Outside, the Servants’ Slums - NYTimes.com,” http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/09/world/asia/09gated.html.
hand over their land on the promise of future payment, borrowed money to develop residential neighborhoods and then sold at considerable profit to the influx of newcomers [refugees].”

As a part of the larger “urban conquest” of postcolonial Delhi’s southern periphery (Soni 2005), DLF built numerous townships in Delhi throughout the forties and fifties, including what are today some of the posh and elite neighborhoods of south Delhi, such as South Extension, Greater Kailash, and Hauz Khas. DLF’s private conquest of south Delhi came to an early end in 1957, however, when through central government fiat, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) came into existence and assumed monopoly control over all land development in the city. Private builders and speculators like DLF were effectively shut out of the market, and had to look elsewhere for real estate gold.

In the aftermath of the DDA’s state monopolization of Delhi’s real estate market, DLF ventured into other pursuits, including manufacturing electric motors and automotive batteries. By the second half the 1970s, however, it was becoming clear that these were dead-end ventures, and other business strategies were explored. In 1979, Chaudhary Raghvendra Singh’s son-in-law Kushal Pal (K.P.) Singh took over as Managing Director of DLF’s real estate business. Coinciding rather fortuitously with this transition was the bifurcation of the erstwhile Gurgaon district into Faridabad and Guragon, the latter having a “rural” designation in government books because of its relatively low population density. Having a “rural” designation meant that the villages and farmland in the area did not necessitate an Urban Local Body (ULB), or a municipal, third-tier government (Debroy and Bhandari 2009, 19) of its own. The farmlands were instead governed from Haryana’s capital city of

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Chandigarh, located some 300 km to the north. Gurgaon Municipal Council did exist but its jurisdiction only covered the small town of (now Old) Gurgaon.

Rural classification and the lack of a local municipal authority it entailed (parodied quite comically in Dibakar Banerjee’s 2006 film Khosla ka Ghosla) caught the eye of the businessman K.P. Singh, who saw the relatively barren and ungoverned frontier lands of Gurgaon as a virtual land bank for future real estate developments. With the absence of a local authority to institute “countervailing checks on arbitrary conversions of village land to urban areas,” Gurgaon was put on a path of urban development (and high profitability for Singh) without any urban governance authority to mediate large land transfers (Debroy and Bhandaryi 2009, 16).

But state laws in Haryana in the late 1970s posed more of a hurdle to K.P. Singh’s dream of speculating on Gurgaon’s vast rural land than any local administrators. By spring of 1981, DLF under Singh’s head had only managed to acquire 40 acres of farmland in Gurgaon, having failed to convince state-level agencies to de-regulate the land market by loosening restrictions on private land acquisition and land-use conversion. In 1975 the Haryana state government had passed the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas (HDRUA) Act, which was administered from Chandigarh and was designed to “regulate the use of land in order to prevent ill-planned and haphazard urbanization in or around towns in the State of Haryana” (1975, 3). The act established a legal framework in which owners of land could apply for licenses to develop said land into a colony, or “an area of land divided or proposed to be divided into plots or flats for residential, commercial, industrial purposes” (1975, 4). But for someone like K.P. Singh, HDRUA was a bureaucratic hurdle that slowed down the pace of land acquisition that was required for his vision of realizing speculative profits off of the Gurgaon land.
In the midst of his increasingly frustrated efforts to acquire land in Gurgaon, Singh claims in an interview he had a fortuitous encounter in a local village. The driver of an overheating Jeep stopped to request some water.

The supplicant was Rajiv Gandhi, son of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and soon to be India’s leader himself: “Rajiv Gandhi was like a ray of hope for India,” says Singh, who hit it off with the political scion and was later repaid for it when Gandhi pushed the Haryana state government to ease commercial-development restrictions on farmland. “It didn’t take me any time to convince him, frankly,” Singh say. “We found that we were on the same wavelength very quickly.” Their two-hour conversation that day as Gandhi’s car cooled, says Singh, was “the birth of the entire urban-development policy of India today.”

Whether or not the story went down exactly like Singh tells it, Rajiv Gandhi’s intervention in Haryana’s land policy was certainly impactful, as Haryana soon after became “the first state in India that allowed the entry of private developers in real estate” (Debroy and Bhandari 2009, 16). And Singh is also only slightly exaggerating when he calls this the birth of “the entire urban-development policy of India today,” as Haryana’s easing of restrictions on land development was but a harbinger of similar changes in other Indian states, namely the deregulation of private Indian enterprises in real estate and other industries throughout the 1980s, often associated with Rajiv Gandhi’s foresight in shifting the country’s economy in the direction of private sector production (Kohli 2006).

Haryana government’s change in attitude towards private real estate development enabled DLF and other companies like Ansals and Unitech, among others, “to assemble lands from the market through negotiations [with farmers] and develop these to build residential colonies” in Gurgaon (Joardar 2006, 10). The ability to negotiate directly with farmers for land transfers at market rates, without

33 “Soldier of Fortune - 60 Years of Independence - TIME.”
needing to go through a governmental intermediary, was a central enabling condition for the rapid speed of land acquisition. Many farmers in Gurgaon were lured into selling their lands by lucrative cash offers from well-funded developers like DLF, which offered seductive compensations that were “generally three or four times higher than the compensation paid by the public agencies for land acquisition” (Joardar 2006, 11). Many local farmers in the villages around Gurgaon “got-rich-quick” by selling their lands and readily displayed their new spending power through conspicuous objects of consumption. As a recent study of land transfers between private developers and local farmers in Gurgaon found, “companies licensed to develop residential areas approached the locals directly, offering a few crores (Rs 10,000,000) for each acre. It didn’t take long for fancy, colorful houses to dot the villages lanes, and for new-acquired vehicles to bring them alive” (Varghese 2009). Indeed many more reports of newly rich farmers showcasing their wealth and buying up mansions in Gurgaon have surfaced in recent years.\(^{34}\)

More recently, land acquisition has been the site of increasing tension in Gurgaon and elsewhere in India (Levien 2011), and farmers’ protests against land acquisition for Special Economic Zones and other neoliberal projects for the “common good” are becoming more and more common, as we will see later in this chapter. But unlike the parastatal agencies which acquire land for these “public” projects, K.P. Singh faced little resistance initially from farmers who sold him the lands that he eventually turned into DLF City in New Gurgaon. Like his father-in-law in the years surrounding India’s partition, K.P. Singh was particularly adept at negotiating directly with the farmers, as one account of the latter’s story tells it:

Over 15 years Singh assembled the Gurgaon holdings, starting with 40 acres that his father-in-law still held. The surrounding families had an average landholding of 4 to 5 acres, with half a dozen relatives sharing the title. To win their trust, he attended weddings, mediated family disputes, helped out during illnesses.

"I became part of each family, almost like an elder brother," he recalls. Singh lobbied hard to get the farmland reclassified as "nonagricultural" and managed to obtain licenses for developing it.35

Before long, Singh had acquired the largest land bank of virtual urban space in India, as “DLF was able to amass 3,500 acres in Gurgaon and began building some of India’s first modern commercial structures…Land that cost Singh as little as $65 an acre at current exchange rates now sells for about $4 million an acre.”36 HDRUA’s intended purpose, to prevent “ill-planned and haphazard urbanization” in Haryana, was rather unsuccessful in Gurgaon. In the absence of any local municipality to oversee and administer land exchanges, particularly involving farmlands and private real estate builders, transactions could take place with little or no governmental interference. Where contestations over acquisition on the part of farmers or villagers arose, “the decisions of the Chief Minister’s office [in Chandigarh] alone were sufficient. The democratic process didn’t exist” (Debroy and Bhandari 2009, 16).

Indeed, the Haryana government has been particularly adept at creating exceptions to existing rules and regulations on acquisition of rural land and conversion of the same to industrial or commercial use. As reported (and applauded) by *DLF City News* (a real estate and lifestyle magazine for residents of DLF City) in 2008, this practice has continued up till today:

Haryana Government has taken a landmark policy decision to cut red tape and corruption after a go-ahead from Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda…A forthcoming notification will allow people to start construction of houses, commercial establishments and IT complexes without waiting for time-consuming and bothersome approvals from various government departments.37

35 Ibid.
36 “Soldier of Fortune - 60 Years of Independence - TIME.”
Within these statements, one can already detect two conflicting temporalities at work in the urbanization process, one of private land acquisition and development and one of public administration and government oversight. The narrative of postcolonial capitalism is very much about rendering this conflict in a particular way, as that between private productivity and public inefficiency. Perceptions of urbanization slowed down by bureaucratic “red-tape” and ‘time-consuming” and “bothersome approvals from government departments” is part of the temporality of postcolonial capitalism, part of its discursive narration of the present played out in the politics of land acquisition and urbanization. Increasingly, anything that is perceived as getting in the way of this narrative of speculative development, whether it is farmers protesting land acquisition, environmentalists opposing development in ecologically fragile zones, or government agencies limiting the extent of urbanization, is articulated as a temporal hurdle more than a political one, a problem of time more than of deliberation and debate regarding the constitution of the urban and the democratic nature of development.

3.5 Dual Modes of Land Acquisition in Gurgaon

HDRUA was established to organize licensed land acquisition by private real estate developers and provide a legal framework for negotiations between developers and agricultural landowners. These privately acquired lands were to be incorporated within the guidelines of the Directorate of Town Planning in Gurgaon. The bureaucratic process is described below:

urban planning here is in the hand of a state level organization – the Directorate of Town Planning (DTP) – which is typical across India. Another state
organization, the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) is in charge of implementation of the master plan through preparation of lower order spatial plans like sector layouts, designs of city centre and other public facilities as well as development of serviced land and citywide infrastructure networks. The HUDA prepares also building byelaws and development controls in consultation with the DTP and implements these across private developments. (Joardar 2006, 9)

Outside of the private acquisition of land that allowed DLF to assemble a large but fragmented rural land bank on the dry, dusty plains of Gurgaon, land acquisition for “public purposes” takes place through the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, a colonial era ordinance that has been the cause of recent political turbulence in different parts of India, particularly when rural land is forcibly acquired for industrial purposes, displacing many farmers and other rural workers. Furthermore, in the neoliberal era of postcolonial capitalism, “public purpose” does not exclude the participation of the private sector in land and infrastructure development, so that “public purpose” has become wholly consistent with “private profit” (Court News, July-September 2008).  

The original British legislation of 1894 “was partly motivated by the intension of developing railways and acquiring land for these” (Debroy and Bhandari 2009, 2). Today it is used by para-statal agencies like the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), which was constituted under the Haryana Urban Development Act of 1977, to carry out “bulk land acquisition through the Indian Land Acquisition Act and large-scale land development to meet the demands for serviced land and city-wide infrastructure” (Joardar 2006, 10). According to its official guidelines, HUDA works on a “no profit no loss” basis, in which “funds from land sales of residential, industrial and institutional plots are invested into acquisition of new areas, which enable [HUDA] to generate more plots for the public and more funds for the

development works and new acquisitions.”

For public para-statal agencies like HUDA that utilize the Land Acquisition Act in order to accumulate land banks for future urbanization, a number of mediating factors come into play in determining the compulsory price at which the land will be sold to the government:

In determining the amount of compensation to be awarded for land acquired under this Act, the Court shall take into consideration—first, the market-value of the land at the date of the publication of the notification…; secondly, the damage sustained by the person interested, by reason of the taking of any standing crops or trees which may be on the land at the time of the Collector’s taking possession thereof…In addition to the market value of the land as above provided, the Court shall in every case award a sum of thirty per centum on such market value, in consideration of the compulsory nature of the acquisition.

In the absence of a local governing body to oversee the conversion of agricultural lands into non-agricultural uses in Gurgaon, the state-level organization HUDA has emerged as “the apex land acquisition para-governmental structure” (Wahdan 2007, 163). But in terms of bulk acquisitions of land for urban development, private developers have far outpaced public agencies like HUDA, for whom the land acquisition process “is riddled with bureaucratic tangles of involvement of many organizations as well as legal squabbles over land records and compensation rates” (Joardar 2006, 11). In a five-year period during the mid-eighties, for instance, DLF assembled 225 hectares (1 hectare = 2.4 acres) of rural lands for conversion to commercial, industrial and residential real estate, while HUDA could only manage to acquire about 150 hectares through the process of compulsory public land acquisition (Joardar 2006, 11).

Land acquisition in its dual modes, that is, through the public Land Acquisition Act and through direct private negotiation with farmers, has led to two dramatically different speeds of urban development in Gurgaon, and this has had a profound impact on the built environment and infrastructure of the city. As we will in the next chapter, there is an inherent mismatch between these two modes, with “private colonization occurring disjointedly both in space and time which conflicts also with the phasing of development as well as the spatial configuration or the sector layouts in the master plan…the difference between the pace of private development and the pace of extension of city infrastructure by the public agencies aggravates the problem of disjointed growth” (Joardar 2006, 12). This has led to disappointments over unmet expectations amongst Gurgaon’s elite residents, who have recently protested this lack of urban infrastructure in what comprises some of the most expensive real estate in the NCR. But before entering that realm of middle class politics, which is the topic of the next chapter, it is necessary to first foreground the politics of land acquisition and development that make the former possible. As we will see in this concluding section, this latter form of politics is very much about speed and the distribution of value and intelligibility between urban and rural life-worlds. This speed of acquisition and development, which effectively re-distributes the intelligibility of space, is a key condition of possibility for the uneven and fragmented urbanization of Gurgaon.

3.6 Temporal Politics on the Rural Frontiers of the Global Economy

A.R. Vasavi, who has written widely about farmer suicides and agrarian distress in contemporary India, describes “land as the single most important commodity” in the
country (Vasavi 2010). “Rapacious land development” on the outskirts of New Delhi, for example, “has transformed tranquil and bio-diversity rich belts into enclaves of exclusive housing and recreation,” as well as spaces of “high-rise international work” that have “eroded the strong agricultural base of the region.” At stake in such rapacious urbanization of erstwhile rural lands, particularly when it is done under the guise of “public purpose,” is the very concept of the “public” itself in neoliberal India.

In one recent example of this, the Indian Supreme Court ruled in September 2008 that, in cases of land acquisition by the state (or para-statal agencies like HUDA) for the “public purpose” of urban infrastructure development, the fact that a private company is contracted to execute the project does not contradict its contribution to the “common good,” and is therefore deemed “legitimate” and “legal.” This de-facto legitimacy is important to establish, for “exercising the power of eminent domain” often means forcibly acquiring land from farmers and other agricultural land holders who are otherwise unwilling to give up their land and livelihood for the “common good.” In contesting such legitimacy, many farmers in India have organized in massive numbers throughout India to protest forcible acquisition. Some groups have been successful in contesting this kind of urban development. I explore one “successful” case of such contestation and resistance to land acquisition in Chapter Five.

Other protests against land acquisition have merely slowed down the speed of acquisition and hyper-development. Some oppositions groups, however, have had to face the wrath of a state increasingly pressured by the impatient narrative of postcolonial capitalism and the temporality of global finance. As Baviskar and Sundar have recently noted, “the violent crushing of peasant opposition to land acquisition shows the collusion between corporate capital and the state, a compact
that cannot be described as civil by any stretch of the imagination” (Baviskar and Sundar 2008, 89). Accordingly, these two writers argue, “attention must be focused on how the ‘great transformation’ of our times—the attempt by the economy to dominate society—summons forth powerful counter-movements that resist the commodification of land and labour, as well as groups that are set up precisely to divide society” (ibid.).

Such counter-movements are prevalent all over the urban/rural fringes of neoliberal India, and they constitute a counter-temporality that contests the postcolonial capitalist narrative and its articulation of the present. During a protest against land acquisition for the development of a Special Economic Zone in Gurgaon, for instance, one local farmer articulated such a counter-temporal discourse: “Now, the state government wants to pursue its own plans of taking up the development of a Global Corridor on our lands. We have been ploughing the land for generations. Why we should give it to them against our wish?”

Here the farmer’s recalcitrance towards the government’s “public purpose” reiterates Spivak’s claim that “the ‘rural’ is the inter-diction of the local and the global-in-urban-space” (Spivak 2000, 16). But the discursive circuits of financial temporality work constantly to transform such recalcitrance into unintelligibility, as a form of performative interpretation. Here is how Indian Reality News narrated the event.

Despite the lucrative compensation offered by Haryana (an annual royalty of Rs 10,000 per acre for 33 years to the farmers affected by state industrial and housing projects, besides usual compensation, 25 per cent job reservation for farmers and landless villagers dependent on land acquired and job reservations,

for dalits as safai karamcharis in the SEZs), the farmers did not show any enthusiasm. The Hooda government wants to create over one million jobs in SEZs.

Implicit in this postcolonial capitalist discourse is the abstraction of farmers into economic subjects who appear to be acting against their own financial self-interests by not taking the government’s money. More importantly, they act against the common (“national”/“public”) good of creating over one million jobs in Special Economic Zones. It is postcolonial capitalism’s ability to project a becoming-universal future (private development for public purposes) over the recalcitrant particularities of untimely subjects (farmers in Haryana), that secures its discursive power of rendering the present in a very particular way.

In such irreconcilably different temporal imaginaries, the virtuality of economic space on the rural/urban frontiers of neoliberal India becomes manifest. The publicity machine of finance (with the support of the mainstream media) works actively to constitute a general will for the virtual megacity, as Spivak Argues (2000), in which the rural becomes a “meta-constitutive” outside of the urban. Such a general will simultaneously strives “to make economic liberalization the common sense of our times,” as Baviskar and Sundar argue (2008, 89). But even more than the constitution of an economic common sense is the distribution of value and intelligibility that such a “common” sense presupposes, as “mainstream economics abstracts its analysis from its social context and constructs a virtual reality of so-called rational individuals” that it projects over complex and often times chaotic social realities (Fine 1998, 49). By declining the states “lucrative compensation,” and by showing little enthusiasm over the “one million jobs” to be created through the

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42 Special Economic Zones are an integral part of global qua urban development in discourses of postcolonial capitalism. See for instance: Palit and Bhattacharjee 2008, who display in their understanding of SEZs as well as acquired land for the same, a purely economic calculative valuation of space, one that may be at odds with the temporal imaginations of agriculturalists and farmers.
economic development of acquired farmland, the farmers are rendered economically unintelligible as rational individuals. The virtualism at work in the common sense discourse of economics comprises “a tendency to see the world in terms of idealized categories, a virtual reality, and then act in ways to make the real conform to the virtual” (Carrier and Miller 1998: 5). Mainstream economics and the popular intelligibility it enjoys in the neoliberal media (itself increasingly controlled by financial interests) itself becomes a powerful mediation, a performative interpretation that transforms the complex social realities it encounters. Aneesh’s writing on the virtuality of economic and financial models and their intelligibility-effects on actual investment behavior is especially relevant in this regard:

Economic models do not simply describe an existing, empirical state of affairs; rather, they are performative. For instance, in the world of finance the Black-Scholes-Merton option pricing equation altered trader behavior and pricing patterns in a way that made itself more true over time. The equation did not merely represent but performed the real. A simpler example would be the theoretical assumption of economic models that humans are rational, competitive, and calculating individuals. A competitive system based on this model produces such individuals by making difficult the survival of noncompetitive and noncalculative behavior within the system. (2006: 67)

In the context of the complex urban/rural frontier spaces of neoliberal India, “the autonomous, asocial and apolitical individual who rationally calculates how to achieve his or her best advantage” (Carrier and Miller 1998: 6) comes face to face with other temporalities of being and becoming, which are not only rendered unintelligible because they are “noncompetitive” and “noncalculative,” but their relative unintelligibility also enacts their larger exclusion from the global qua urban economy that virtually materializes in this ambivalent, yet violent way.

For the farmer in the protest against SEZs above, his generational attachments to farmland and the temporal imaginary implicit within this form of attachment are quite simply unintelligible to the publicity machine of global finance, which can only
make sense of his land as potential real estate, to be developed both for “private profit” and the “common good.” The refusal of many farmers to partake in this temporality, this distribution of value and intelligibility vis-à-vis virtual urban space, speaks to the multiplicity of other intelligibilities and temporalities that intersect with and contest the temporality of global finance and the becoming-dominant narrative of postcolonial capitalism, which must, of course, conjure away through performative interpretation those temporal imaginaries and narratives that fall outside of the transformative interpretation of the neoliberal present.

Within the past few years in urban India, and especially along the urban/rural frontier of Delhi’s hinterland, many SEZs and other land acquisition projects have stalled due to massive farmer protests. In West Bengal last year, Tata Motors had to pull the plug on one of its car assembly plants in the face of intense opposition from farmers and populist politicians over what was regarded as unfair land acquisition and compensation practices. Moreover, as a response to growing agrarian unrest over forced land acquisition on the part of the state, the Indian government just passed a bill that effectively passes much of the responsibility for acquiring land onto the private sector. Interpreted through the postcolonial capitalist lens of the *Financial Times* in India, this land bill “would seriously hinder industrial development by making it more difficult for private companies to acquire sites for big factories.”

Significantly, the land bill does not actually curtail the government’s ability to forcibly acquire land from farmers. Rather, the bill stipulates “fairer compensation for farmers whose land was taken,” and that the state “would no longer take the lead in acquiring land for factories, office parks, residential areas or special economic

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43 “FT.com / In depth - India land bill will slow growth, business warns,” http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0ac28678-e9e2-11de-ae43-00144feab49a,dwp_uuid=494bcf8-ca01-11de-a5b5-00144feabdc0.html?nclick_check=1.
zones. That would be left to private groups, with the condition that once the buyer was able to secure at least 70 percent of the required land, the state could step in to compel those holding out to sell.”\textsuperscript{44} An executive of a private infrastructure developer told Financial Times “the shift of responsibility [for land acquisition] would impede industrial growth,” namely by slowing the speed of conversion from rural land into commercial real estate, leading to a potential loss of investment in real estate development.

Meanwhile, farmers in Gurgaon protested the bill as well, arguing to the contrary of the developers that it “will lead to an easier acquisition of land by the authorities.”\textsuperscript{45} As one advocate for the farmers argued, the authorities will use the legislation “to deprive the poor of their meager resources of livelihood, render agriculturalists landless, and take away rights traditionally exercised by communities over all natural resources.”\textsuperscript{46}

Two competing temporalities contest for the narrative intelligibility of the neoliberal urban present at the rural/urban frontiers of Delhi and other Indian cities. On the one side, there is the futurist temporal imaginary of real estate (neoliberal) urbanism that is aligned with the narrative of postcolonial capitalism, and that sees in agricultural land a \textit{virtual} space for future urbanization and speculative hyper-development. On the other side are farmers for whom land is generational and decisions often fall outside of the narrow logic of the fetishistic cash-nexus. But the battle is not zero-sum. The farmers seem to win by slowing down the pace of hyper-development. But in doing so, they also lose intelligibility in front of the global

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{45} “BBC News : Protests against India land bill,” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8365655.stm.
\item\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
publicity machine of finance, they become increasingly “anachronistic” and temporally unintelligible with respect to the narrative of postcolonial capitalism. Moreover, this denial of coevalness opens up the discursive space for postcolonial capitalists to attempt to speak for the excluded subaltern farmer on the rural hinterlands of the new urban India, so that such subalterns become temporal subjects of this becoming-dominant narrative. For while it is readily recognized that rural India has so far been left off the reform agenda and has therefore been unable to “benefit” from neoliberalization, the temporality of postcolonial capitalism is able to project a future consensus on neoliberalism that includes these farmers. In the words of Nilekani, "So far, India, particularly the country side, has not yet experienced the immense productivity gains that will emerge from the 'network effect' of being well connected to markets through telecom, roads and rail." (2009: 235). It is the “not yet” that is so central to the discursive narration, which is, of course, inherited from the historicist discourses of colonialism and modernity in India (Chakrabarty 2000), fixed as they are with rendering the present in terms of its progression towards a desired and imagined future. This “not yet” secures what Spivak has called the “subaltern general will” and what I have termed a virtual consensus on postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal reform. For Spivak, this “general will” is directly connected to the question of land and the virtual project of urbanization, “for the fashioning of the general will for the real space of the megacity is in the interest of the virtual, consolidated not only by the destruction of biodiversity but by the incursion of foreign capital into the agricultural sector, making it even easier for foreign companies to buy land” (168). On this rural palimpsest, urban politics becomes a particularly haunted affair, as the remaining chapters will show.
CHAPTER 4. NEOLIBERAL URBANISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL MIDDLE CLASS

4.0 Introduction

On September 22, 2008, residents from a gated community, executives at several multi-national corporations (MNCs), and even a well-known cricketer on the Indian national team took to the streets in the late-summer heat of Gurgaon. This unlikely group of activists was staging a protest against the unauthorized dumping of garbage just outside Qutab Enclave, one of the elite and exclusive residential communities of DLF City. Many of the well-groomed protestors were depicted in newspapers and television the next day holding up professionally made signs reading “Stop Dumping Now” and “Dengue Center Courtesy MCG [Municipal Council Gurgaon] and HUDA [Haryana Urban Development Authority].” Others wore protective masks to cover their mouths and noses, visually demonstrating the putrid smell introduced to the environment through the piles of waste that had accumulated right next to some of the most expensive real estate in the greater Delhi region. Residents and workers complained to reporters covering the protest about the apparently horrific smell, as well as the fact that the dump was now attracting vermin and insects inside the gates. As one protestor grumbled, “Residents are already suffering from various skin allergies and cases of dengue are also being reported frequently from the area.”

47 For more on the commercial real estate industry in Delhi and Gurgaon, from critical ethnographic and spatial perspectives, see Dumont 2000 and 2006, and Searle 2010.
BPO Watch India, an online business magazine, ran an article a few days after the protests in DLF City entitled “Gurgaon should shape up or they’ll ship out,” referring to the scores of Fortune 500 companies and other MNCs invested in Gurgaon.

The ‘Millenium City’ it may be, but Gurgaon is dealing with the very basic problem of potholed roads and power outages to worsening law and order. This considering that a large number of companies have pumped in billions in investments in the Delhi suburb. In an unprecedented move to protest against these growing problems, CEOs of a large number of corporations and eminent personalities joined hands in the DLF area to protest against illegal dumping of garbage at Gurgaon-Faridabad road last week. These included CEOs, lawyers, CAs and doctors who are coming forward to protest against HUDA officials. DLF resident and mother of cricketer Yuvraj Singh was also part of this protest. “Gurgaon is probably among the most expensive places to live in India but it is a pity that we have to live in this life-threatening situation,” she said.49

The protest was described in the media as “unprecedented” precisely because of the distinct class background of those who had taken to the streets to hold signs and demonstrate: the loosely defined50 but widely talked about “Indian middle class,” a class commonly, if simplistically, identified as the primary beneficiaries of globalization and liberalization in India (Damodaran 2008, Khanna 2008, Nilekani 2009). More precisely, the protest in Qutab Enclave was so apparently singular and “new” because it was performed by a class that was often assumed to be politically apathetic and disengaged from everyday forms of democratic politics like elections and organized protest (Fernandes 2006, Harriss 2006, Sridharan 2004, Suri 2004, Varma 1998, 2004). Indeed, some have even characterized this “middle” class as a

49 “Gurgaon should shape up or they’ll ship out: BPO Watch India,” http://www.bpowatchindia.com/bpo_news/gurgaon_clean/September-26-2008/gurgaon_ceos_cleanliness.html.
50 As I expain later, the Indian middle class is not middle in terms of occupying a median or even mean position on the steep social hierarchy of Indian society, but middle in a different sense, as a mediating role between the global and the national, not unlike the urban, as argued in the previous chapter.
“secessionist class,” one that has removed itself from political and urban life altogether in the interest of pursuing “first-world” lifestyles in enclosed, privatized, and secured spaces (Ashraf 2007, Krishna 2006, Spivak 2000). As a postcolonial capitalist like Nandan Nilekani explains, “India's urban rich and middle class are seceding from the public sector by investing in gated communities and private guards for security, pumps and borewells for water, private generators for electricity and private schools and hospitals” (2009: 207, emphasis mine).

Notwithstanding the supposed “newness” of middle class activism on the streets of Gurgaon that September day, in this chapter I will argue that the event of the protest in DLF City, and the way in which it was contextualized and narrated in the dominant media, betrays a characteristically postcolonial subjectivity that is not new at all, but that is now re-interpreted and re-iterated within the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism. This narrative is increasingly performed through spatial practices of neoliberal urbanism in the name of a globally intelligible and recognizable “Indian middle class.” In short, discursive practices and spatial practices together work to give this middle class a new form of visibility vis-à-vis the postcolonial nation.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to briefly underline a simple but crucial point: that middle as a class description for the group of people assembled that day outside Qutab Enclave does not refer to its economic position on the steep hierarchy of Indian society (in this sense, they would be more accurately described as elite or upper class). The postcolonial Indian middle class, in the way it is conceptualized in this chapter, occupies not so much a demographic position, but rather a political one of mediation, of translating the global to the national and vice versa. This class-based mediation occurs because the middle class essentially fulfills
two different but inter-related roles in contemporary urban India, one novel and the other historical. Historically, the middle class has long performed a privileged role of interpreting (first colonial and then postcolonial) modernity in India, as the introductory chapter briefly highlighted. But more recently, the middle class has emerged as a singularly symbolic figure that represents the aspiration, optimism and dynamism of the new India. This role is novel. Previously, while the middle class dominated the state and politics in general, it was the “rural villager” and “the poor masses” more generally that were the symbolic representatives of the nation, and the political target of the state’s postcolonial ideology of development. The middle class was ideologically less visible in this period, even if this class was almost by definition running the state machinery. The middle class now is vividly depicted as “growing” and “rising” in both national and international discourses, and the mobilizing image of the middle class is positioned as a metonym for the larger rise of the postcolonial capitalist nation.

4.1 Gurgaon Collapsing

Just two days after the initial protest at DLF Qutab Enclave, *Hindustan Times (HT)*, India’s second largest English-language daily, began a week-long series entitled “Gurgaon Collapsing,” sharply criticizing the utter lack of infrastructure and public services in the Millenium City: “With over 200 Fortune 500 companies, it is the

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51 As Varma argues: “The important point is that in the years immediately after Independence, the middle class believed that the professed bias of the State towards the poor was valid and necessary, and it was prepared, at least in theory, to accommodate interests outside its own narrow ken” (1998: 41). Varma contrasts this (at least theoretical) focus of the state on the “development” of the poor to the more naked and predatory pursuit of self-interest seen in the contemporary middle class and postcolonial state.
gateway to the new India. But Gurgaon’s rapid slide into the third-world is
demolishing its first-world dreams.”\textsuperscript{52} The week-long “Gurgaon Collapsing” series,
which addressed different facets of infrastructure in turn (waste management,
electrical power, sewerage, roads, and policing), served to amplify the voice of the
DLF City protestors, often reporting about the lacks and inefficiencies in these
respective public infrastructures and services in the style of an \textit{exposé}. For instance,
“Global Destination or Garbage Dump?” was what the first headline of the series
read, with the following sub-heading: “This city of 1.6 million residents with a daily
solid waste generation of 400-500 metric tonnes does not have a single garbage
disposal facility.”\textsuperscript{53} This sensationalizing tone was not limited to the first day, but
was rather a consistent feature of the weeklong series.

In providing a public platform to amplify the grievances of these wealthy
urban residents and white collar workers, \textit{HT} also placed blame on the same
institutions as the protestors, charging para-statal agencies like MCG and HUDA as
the main culprits for Gurgaon’s apparent slide back into the “third-world.” As one
article reported, for example, “With no landfill site available, HUDA officials are not
only dumping the garbage on vacant plots in the vicinity of inhabited localities but
they have also converted a stretch of the Aravalli reserved forest for disposing of solid
waste.”\textsuperscript{54}

Nor did public bureaucrats seem to help themselves in interviews conducted
by \textit{HT} regarding the lack of adequate infrastructure in each of the highlighted arenas.
Often times these representatives evaded any personal responsibility or else entirely

\textsuperscript{52} “Gurgaon Collapsing”—\textit{Hindustan Times} (9/24/08).
\textsuperscript{53} “Gurgaon Collapsing”—\textit{Hindustan Times} (9/24/08).
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
dismissed the critiques of their performance in delivering urban infrastructure and public services like electricity, garbage collection, sewerage, and the like. In an interview with HUDA administrator in Gurgaon, G. Anupama, that was a part of the first installment of “Gurgaon Collapsing,” *HT* inquired in to why it had taken so long for HUDA to set up a solid waste management facility, to which the administrator’s reply was disappointingly terse: “I have joined as HUDA administrator recently. I can’t comment on the decisions taken in the past.”\(^{55}\)

Official indifference and evasion of responsibility thus became a running theme in the “Gurgaon Collapsing” series. The next day the focus was on road conditions in Gurgaon, with *HT* reporting that “40% of roads in new Gurgaon are potholed.”\(^{56}\) But in the corresponding interview with T.C. Gupta, HUDA’s Chief Administrator based in Chandigarh (located some 300 km away from Gurgaon), the latter claimed that “There are only four roads that have problems…There are no major problems with other roads.”\(^{57}\)

In contrast to the aloofness and distance of HUDA and its unwillingness to take blame for its alleged infrastructural failures, *HT* presented in each episode a section entitled “Boss Speak,” where a CEO, Managing Director, or Senior VP of some private sector company based in Gurgaon would diagnose the situation himself (only men were featured), giving the private sector’s perspective on the alleged failures of public agencies. On the 25\(^{th}\) of September, for instance, former Managing Director of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. Jagdish Khattar offered his two-cents:

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
\(^{56}\) “Gurgaon Collapsing”—*Hindustan Times* (9/25/08).
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
… Money is not the problem. The Haryana government has reportedly collected about Rs 1,500 crore as what it calls external development charges from developers in Gurgaon… While the architecture of the buildings and companies housed in Gurgaon boast of modern technologies, civic authorities have yet to move over the old and outdated technologies they have been using for roads and other infrastructure facilities for decades.”

The pragmatic, problem-solving approach of the private sector (its simply a matter of updating the technology) was set in stark contrast to the contrivances and evasions of public sector bureaucrats. This juxtaposition was articulated again and again over the course of the series, but also visualized spatially on the page-wide layouts in each day’s paper.

One month after the “Gurgaon Collapsing” series concluded, I visited HT’s headquarters, located on the eleventh floor of the resplendently post-modern Park Centra Building in New Gurgaon. I had scheduled an interview with Sanjeev Ahuja, the journalist who edited the series for HT and has reported on Gurgaon for over a decade. Ahuja informed me in our interview that problems with infrastructure had hampered Gurgaon since the beginning of its growth in the eighties, and that these were reported in the media from time to time. But what inspired HT to put together the “Gurgaon Collapsing” series were “the popular images of angry middle class residents in gated communities and wealthy CEOs protesting Gurgaon’s poor infrastructure. This was the first time we saw the middle class itself come out and demand some change in the chalte chalte approach of the local government in Gurgaon.” Ahuja himself makes quite clear the precise way in which the “middle class” becomes positioned through the publicity machine of corporate print media as the normative subjects of the neoliberal nation.

58 Interview with Sanjeev Ahuja, 23 October, 2008.
59 For more about this “chalte chalte” attitude and the way it is deployed rhetorically in India, see my blog: http://virtualpolitics-india.blogspot.com/2008/10/chalte-chalte-vs-india-inc_21.html
In the “Gurgaon Collapsing” spectacle, which began with the staging of a “middle class” protest that was quickly amplified through the English-language media into a national story, we see the confluence of three intimately related forces: first, a small English-speaking elite asserting a national presence; second, a business-centered approach to problem solving that privileges the private sector over inefficient public bureaucracy (embodied in the space given each day to “Boss Speak”); and most importantly, the underlying desire to create “first-world” urban spaces in the midst of an otherwise “third-world” environment. The episode of “Gurgaon Collapsing” as a national media event illustrates the discursive dynamics of postcolonial capitalism that are outlined in Chapter One, but here I underline the particularly *classed* dimension of this mediating discourse.

While *HT*’s circulation is said to be the second largest in India among English-language dailies (*The Times of India* is first), this circulation itself is quite small when compared with India’s total population. With a circulation of only 1.41 million in a country of 1.1 billion, the small fraction of Indians that might have even picked up and read about “Gurgaon Collapsing” reminds us that English continues to be a minor language in postcolonial India. Indeed, as Varma has argued, the minor but dominant status of English points to the problematic legacy of British rule and its influence on the ruling elite of India, a nationalist elite that has never been able to fully leave the former colonizer’s shadow.

To say that the perpetuation of English was in the national interest was a transparent attempt to give the cloak of ideology to a dominant sectional interest. For, how could a language spoken by less than one percent of the population become a vehicle for national unity? Unless, of course, those who constituted that one percent were also those who were running the country and interpreted the national interest from the very limited perspective of their own interests… The truth is that English had become an instrument for social exclusion: the upper crust of the Indian middle class presided over this
linguistic apartheid; the rest of India consisted of victims and aspirants. (1998: 61)

It is interesting to contrast Varma’s critical take on the “perpetuation of English” as a (post)colonial technology of exclusion, with the more optimistic take of postcolonial capitalists like Nilekani, for whom English is more benignly coded as the lingua franca of the “new” India, since “it is the predominant tongue in which business transactions, boardroom discussions and water-cooler gossip take place” (2009: 77).

What matters, for Nilekani, is not so much the demographic size of this English-speaking elite, but rather the possibilities that learning English opens up for potentially anybody. English as a language becomes another mediation, a way of bridging the global and the national, though this mediation becomes one that privileges a particular class of subjects and projects a particular image of the city, to the exclusion of heterogeneous groups, languages, and spaces in the city that become unintelligible from the perspective of this English-urbanist idiom.  

Roughly a year after the “Gurgaon Collapsing” series, Sanjeev Ahuja reported on the apparent increase in slums in Gurgaon that has accompanied its hyper-development in an article entitled “Slum total of growth story.” Yet instead of faulting the lack of affordable housing for construction workers and their families, who live in the slums and work in the city, Ahuja instead gives us a classically postcolonial middle class perspective, sharing the frustrated story of a former MNC-

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60 It is estimated, according to the 2001 Indian census, that roughly ten percent of the total population, or 100 million people, speaks English in the country today. See: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/

61 Anthony King (2004) writes of DLF City as embodying an American-English urban imaginary, in contrast to the Urdu imaginary of Mughal Old Delhi, and the British-English imaginary of colonial New Delhi. I draw on this work, particularly the linkages it finds between linguistic and spatial orders, in order to examine the material and symbolic processes productive of what I call, in contrast to both Old and New Delhis, Neo Delhi.
executive who had “crusaded against slums in his neighbourhood since he retired and relocated to DLF City 10 years ago.” Shanties and hutments numbering up to 600 had “sprung up” around his apartment block. “You’ll find the same story repeated anywhere you go in Gurgaon today,” Ahuja reported.

Mumbai has its (now) celebrated Dharavi slum. But does Millenium City, too, need a sprawling shanty town? This question is uppermost in the minds of all concerned residents of the city….it is estimated that there are 4-5 lakh [hundred thousand] slum dwellers in the city. Since slums are not part of the civic plans, the existence of so many people in slums strains the city’s infrastructure to almost breaking point. Perhaps the most sinister influence of this unaccounted population is on the city’s law and order situation.

Ahuja performs a characteristically postcolonial capitalist interpretation by both speaking in universals (“the minds of all concerned residents in the city”) while simultaneously erasing the very conditions that make this universality possible. Indeed, Ahuja notes that “setting up shanties along the construction sites is a compulsion for developers,” but within his discourse, the presence of slum dwellers who actually build, clean and maintain the Millenium City is rendered spectral and transient. They themselves are depicted not as citizens of the city’s political space, but rather as “strains” on its urban infrastructure. Slum dwellers are an “unaccounted population” whose relative unintelligibility is articulated as a “sinister” threat to law and order in Gurgaon.

When I first met Ahuja for our interview in the Park Centra Building, it was clear to me that Ahuja was very much a part of the middle class city he has written about for the past decade. He often spoke in terms of “we” when articulating the issues Gurgaon’s elite residents faced, and was indeed himself a resident of New Gurgaon. But my point is not to simply point out the collusion between the middle

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class and the media in contemporary India. This much is rather obvious, particularly in the English-language print media of newspapers like *HT*. My point is rather to underline their less obvious and more complex roles in reproducing a particular spatio-temporal imaginary, that of Gurgaon as a Millenium City, an urban metonym for the “new” India. But as the “Gurgaon Collapsing” event vividly demonstrates, these transformations are themselves haunted by a spectral presence: the “third-world” environment (including its impoverished masses) that constantly threaten to upset the “first-world” expectations of the Millennium City.

4.2 Mediating Modernity

Partha Chatterjee, in his influential work on the nationalist movement in colonial India, argues that the middle class of British India was “middle” not so much in terms of its position on the steep class and caste hierarchy of Indian society, but in a radically different sense: “in the sense of the action of a subject who stands ‘in the middle,’ working upon and transforming one term of a relation into the other” (Chatterjee 1993: 35). From its colonial inception, the modern Indian middle class was positioned as a class of interpreters and translators who stood between the colonizer, on the one hand, and the native masses, on the other, representing, interpreting and transforming each side of the colonial encounter for the other. In being singularly placed in this interpretive and translational role, the middle class also reproduced its privileged position vis-à-vis the colonial state, while distinguishing itself from the rest of its fellow native subjects.
In many ways, the Indian middle class was conjured into its modern (and thus simulacral and virtual\textsuperscript{63}) formation by British administrator Thomas Macaulay in his infamous 1835 “Minute on Indian Education,” in which he wrote: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be \textit{interpreters} between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (quoted in Varma 1998: 2, italics mine). Macaulay’s desire was to create a class of colonial subjects who, in mimicking British tastes, opinions and morals were to become \textit{virtually} British yet would remain \textit{actually} Indian. From the standpoint of the colonial state, this dual coding would enable the middle class to stand in-between the British and “the millions” of natives otherwise out of direct and immediate contact with the colonizer and its “civilizing” culture. But this very position of in-betweeness, of interpreting both colonial modernity for the “pre-modern” natives and “native culture” for the colonial rulers, was marked by ambivalence at the very outset, for in mimicking colonial rule on the one hand and representing native culture on the other, the colonial middle class was itself estranged from both colonial and native cultures alike.

\textsuperscript{63} See Deleuze’s \textit{The Logic of Sense}, where he writes that, “Modernity is defined by the power of the simulacrum. It behooves philosophy not to be modern at any cost, no more than to be nontemporal, but to extract from modernity something that Nietzsche designated as the untimely, which pertains to modernity, but which must be turned against it—‘in favor, I hope, of a time to come’... the simulacrum conceived as the critical edge of modernity” (1990: 265). In arguing that postcolonial modernity can be conceptualized as a simulacrum, I will turn to the cinema to explore its critical, virtual edge, at a point where other genres of academic investigation fail to see the transformational potential immanent in the concept of simulacrum. “The simulacrum is not a degraded copy,” Deleuze writes, “It harbors a positive power which denies the \textit{original} and the \textit{copy}, the \textit{model} and the \textit{reproduction}” (1990: 262). In describing postcolonial modernity as an era marked by the powers of the virtual and the simulacrum, I build off the interpretive framework developed in Chapter One. In the concluding Chapter Six, I return to these Deleuzean reflections in order to theorize neoliberal globalization itself as a postcolonial simulacrum.
Rendering this estrangement cinematically, Satyajit Ray’s 1977 film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi (The Chess Players)* provocatively brings the viewer into the ambivalent world of the Indian middle class in the colonial context. Briefly, Ray’s film re-tells the story of one of the last Mughal kingdoms to come under the direct rule of the British through annexation, just one year before the great sepoy rebellion of 1857. The kingdom of Oudh (modern day Lucknow) is governed by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, whose “effeminate” rule is characterized by his obsession with the arts and culture over and above the “affairs of state.” These characteristics render him an ineffective ruler in the eyes of the British General Outram, whose task it is to oversee the transition of authority from Mughal King to British Crown.

In one particular scene, we are witness to the in-between position of the king’s Prime Minister Victor Banerjee, who, as a representative of the Nawab to the office of General Outram, literally stands in the middle of this historical transition, and must communicate Outram’s decision to displace Wajid Ali Shah to the Nawab himself. Wajid Ali Shah, the inscrutable aesthete-king, is shown reclining on a plush bed of

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64 Ashis Nandy (1995) argues that Satyajit Ray inherits a decidedly orientalist position in his rendering of the Mughal king Wajid Ali Shah, arguing that Ray chooses to “depict Wajid as a feudal prototype, a king who fails to perform his kingly functions, who is first an aesthete and only then a ruler” (221). Rather than an orientalist reading of the king as inscrutable and thus effeminate, I would argue that Ray’s depiction of the Nawab as an “aesthete-king” contains an implicit and powerful critique of the colonial encounter with historical difference. As an aesthete-king, Wajid Ali Shah rules both through a regime of aesthetics (he composes songs and poetry and measures his own legitimacy by the degree to which his subjects recite his art), but also through a “politics of aesthetics,” a policed distribution of the perceptible and the sensible, what qualifies as valuable and intelligible within the domain of the political speech and what is disqualified as mere “noise” (Ranciere 2004).

For instance, when charged by the British General Outram of being an inefficient and thus illegitimate king (again, this is communicated through the Prime Minister’s translations), Wajid Ali Shah responds to the colonizer’s hyper-rational interpretation with a counter-interpretation that I would call a singularly postcolonial aesthetic, underlining the Rancierean idea that the
pillows in a lavish, golden room, immersed in a private kathak performance in his palace. His Prime Minister patiently stands in the wings, waiting for the performance to end so that he can share the bad news of the immanent takeover with the king. As viewers, we share in the suspended sense of time that the Prime Minister experiences as he waits for the performance to end. The Prime Minister and viewer alike now see the king with new eyes, understanding that Wajid Ali Shah’s aesthetic regime of political rule would no longer be intelligible from the perspective of a becoming-dominant discourse of British colonial expansion in South Asia. This historical becoming is communicated critically through the film’s visual and audio assemblages, namely the cinematic analysis it applies to the colonial encounter with historical and aesthetic difference.

The scene unfolds patiently, in duration with the temporality of the kathak performance, which is shown in its entirety. While the song and dance is performed, the camera cuts between shots of the performers (comprised of a female dancer and several musicians behind her playing sitar, tabla and tambura) and shots of the king.

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politics of legitimacy, or legitimate domination, is very much an aesthetic phenomenon (where legitimacy is reproduced through the recitation of dominant discourses and political rhetoric, if not more symbolically through the recitation of songs, anthems, pageantry, etc.). Here is the king’s articulation of his own aesthetic legitimacy compared to that of the British rulers’ when faced with the immanent overthrow of his government: “Even after ten years I can see the love in [my subjects’] eyes. They love my songs. They sing them. Go and ask the Resident Sahib [General Outram]: how many Kings of England have written songs? Ask if Queen Victoria has composed songs which her people sing.” For the British, the king’s understanding of political legitimacy through artistic performance and recognition is unintelligible, or rendered ambiguously as somehow less than masculine, peculiarly effete. From the king’s perspective, the legitimacy of British rule is incommensurate with the aesthetic legitimacy he already enjoys over this subjects. It is this mutual unintelligibility, the becoming-anachronistic discourse of the king and the becoming-dominant discourse of British rationality, that the film critically and cinematically treats, above and beyond the reinscription of orientalist representations of Mughal rulers that Nandy argues Ray inherits and reproduces.
who watches the performance with great attention, fully immersed in its melody and rhythm. Interspersed between these shots of the performance and the king’s undivided attention to it, we get close-up shots of the temporarily frozen and “un-timely” Prime Minister Banerjee’s face as he waits for the performance to conclude. The Prime Minister is “un-timely” or “out of joint” with respect to the temporality of the *kathak* performance, as a result of his own awareness of (or subjection to) a different temporality, that of the historical transition from Mughal to British rule in north India. Meanwhile, the king is figured precisely in the opposite way, fully immersed here and in synch with the temporality of the song and dance, yet “out of joint” with respect to “History.” The Prime Minister’s mournful expression indicates his knowledge of the immanent abdication of the King’s throne, even as the King himself remains unaware of the historically changing circumstances. The Prime Minister thus functions as a Deleuzean “attendant” figure, which

does not signify an observer or a spectator-voyeur (although it might also be one from the point of view of a figuration that remains, despite everything). More profoundly, the attendant only indicates a constant, a measure or cadence, in relation to which we can appraise a variation. (Deleuze 2002: 59)

Figuring the Prime Minister as an attendant, Ray’s camera dramatizes the ambivalence of in-betweenness (Bhabha 1994) through a juxtaposition of counter-veiling temporalities, rendering the aesthetic politics of cultural variation and historical difference. When the king and the Prime Minster are finally brought within a single frame (see figure 3.1), we bear witness to a cinematic interpretation of colonial modernity: as the king’s aesthetic regime of rule becomes historically anachronistic, colonial modernity becomes dominant.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will read a documentary film about the contemporary Indian “middle” class, a film about residents in gated communities in
Gurgaon. I will treat the middle class subjects of the film as “aesthetic subjects” in a manner similar to the way in which the above analysis of *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* treats Prime Minister Banerjee, through the mode of the attendant figure. What the aesthetic subjects of Gurgaon attend to is not the ambivalence of the colonial encounter with historical difference, which the alienated Prime Minister mournfully mediates, but rather the ambivalent hauntology of the urban as a mediation between the global and the national in an era of postcolonial capitalism.

4.3 *I Am Gurgaon*

*I Am Gurgaon: The New Urban India* (2009, hereafter *IAG*) is an experimental documentary film that supplies an uncommon sense of neoliberal globalization in India through its cinematic thinking, that is, its “camera consciousness” (Shapiro 1999). This film utilizes the documentary idiom but also departs from the “realism” of documentary in order to present middle class residents of Gurgaon as aesthetic subjects whose spatial and discursive practices are performative interpretations of “the new urban India.”

Directed by the Dutch documentary filmmaker Marije Meerman in 2009, *IAG* was produced by an Amsterdam-based NGO called VPRO, which provides a summary of the film on its website:

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65 My cinematic analysis here as well as in Chapter Six on the 2006 film *John and Jane* is deeply indebted to the critical work of Michael J. Shapiro, who introduced to me a way of reading film and doing critical political theory at the same time. See Shapiro 1999 for a philosophical treatment of the relationship between cinema and political thought. In addition, I inherit my treatment of aesthetic subjects in film from Shapiro, namely his forthcoming work (2011). For more on aesthetic subjects, see Bersani and Dutoit 2008.
The shining facades of Gurgaon, a satellite city of New Delhi, are symbols of India’s unparalleled economic growth. Gurgaon was built at the turn of this century by the largest project developers in the world. A village 15 years ago, has now grown into a city of 1.4 million inhabitants, but with little or no infrastructure. How viable is this new type of city? Residents of the gated communities of this privatized society offer insights in their hope, desires, and in the new self-confidence of the Indian middle class. Gradually it becomes clear what the consequences of the credit crisis and the growing gap between rich and poor are for the city and the psyche of its inhabitants.66

IAG was part of VPRO’s “Backlight Series: Future Affairs Program,” which espouses two modes of communication through its documentary films. The first mode provides “in-depth analysis of new developments by leading intellectuals and architects of change.”67 The second mode applies what it calls “daring cinematic techniques, capturing the effects those changes have on the daily lives of the real world’s citizens.” But in my reading of the film, IAG creatively departs from this simplistic formula; the in-depth analysis is provided not by “leading intellectuals” and “experts” on urban development in India per se, but through intimate cinematic portraits of “real world” residents of several new gated communities in Gurgaon, whose everyday spatial practices, discourses and performative interpretations (narratives) the film treats and analyzes. The film’s deft utilization of the second mode of communication—“daring cinematic techniques,” which I will specify more concretely next—enable it to perform this critical analysis by presenting Gurgaon’s residents as aesthetic subjects (attendants) of “the new urban India,” subjects produced through the aesthetic politics of partitioned city spaces and experiential, mediated discourses that are interpreted and performed in everyday life.68

66 Website for VPRO: http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/backlight.html
67 Ibid.
68 For the sake of recollection, I remind the reader of two recent works on the aesthetics of urban experiences in contemporary Delhi, which I briefly treated in Chapter Two: Sundaram 2009 and Ghertner 2010. Sundaram’s concept of
The most “daring” cinematic technique of the film is its narrative structure, namely, its eschewing of an omniscient, third-person narrator who supplies factual content and socio-historical context for the audio-visual assemblages that are presented. Instead of utilizing a “voice-of-God” narration that is common to the narrative structure of many traditional and contemporary documentary films (Chanan 2007, Rabinowitz 1994), the story of IAG is stitched together through multiple narrative fragments that come from the film’s various aesthetic subjects, with an accompanying sound design that mixes familiar north Indian classical melodies with more ambient sounds of meditative suspense.

The film opens with a series of shots from inside the confines of a gated residential community. We see everyday activities of residents and workers: a man walking his dog on a well-paved road; several people dressed in color-coordinated exercise outfits doing yoga on a lush grass lawn; a man washing a car window with a rag. Hindustani classical music accompanies the opening montage: we hear a sonorous melodic instrument play a slow, searching melody. The soundscape that accompanies the opening shots of the neoliberal urban landscape evokes the alaap stage of the Indian classical music form of raga, in which the introductory phase slowly hails the listener through its deliberately drawn out melodic explorations of the

“media urbanism” focuses our attention on the transformed “anthropology of the senses,” prefigured in new media circuits, images, and discourses that articulate urban experiences of desire, belonging, survival and fear. Meanwhile, Ghertner’s concept of a “rule by aesthetics” argues that technologies of urban renewal in Delhi, including urban planning and judicial practices regarding urban space and land-use are increasingly predicated on an imagined “world-class aesthetics,” whereby certain spaces, peoples and lifestyles are rendered aesthetically and legally legitimate based more on their appearance than on their adherence to planning and legal strictures. Building from this work, I add the cinematic concept of aesthetic subjects to critically treat the narrative and discursive politics that accompanies this mediated and aesthetic urbanism, as it is articulated by groups mobilized in different ways by this new aesthetic and media-driven regime of urbanization in Gurgaon.
raga’s musical scale, its tonal patterns and themes. The overall ambience of the image-sound assemblage in the opening montage is one of serenity and meditation as we witness the early morning rhythms of everyday life in a gated community. Accompanying the music and images are the placid sounds of birds chirping.

In the middle of the opening progression, we hear a woman’s voice that sounds just as tranquil, calm and intimate as the meditative sound-image assemblage it adjoins, though we cannot see her face:

My first and foremost requirement was space. Three children require a lot of space to move in and around the house. I wanted accessibility to a park, I got that here. I wanted safety and security above everything else. When my children go to the park, I want to be sure that nobody’s going to pick one of them or no vehicle is going to run them down.

The woman’s voice is played over more shots of the gated community’s various protected and secured spaces: its green lawns, trimmed hedges, and homogeneous row housing. And then we cut to the interior of a spacious and well-decorated middle class home, with a woman sitting in front of the camera. She finishes her opening statement, gesturing with her hands: “I wanted a kind of gated community.”

This is Shilpa Sonal, a marketing consultant and resident of a gated community in Gurgaon called “Nirvana.” Her voice is introduced before her face is, and it is played over images of “Nirvana.” It is almost as if the discourse belongs more to the gated community’s inter-subjective space than to the particular subject that enunciates it. The displaced sound-image assemblage in the opening montage provides an analytic framework through which we can explore the micro-politics of interpretive practices on the part of the middle class, a class whose interpretations transform the very realities and spaces they move within and encounter.

By rendering the inter-subjectivity of Sonal’s narrative discourse, that is, the ways in which it renders the intelligibility of “Nirvana” as a space of security and
desire in the “here” and “now,” her discourse becomes performative rather than merely descriptive or even explanatory. This productive aspect of discourse is presented through the cinematic technique of juxtaposing de-personalized voices to the multiple and dispersed spaces (indoor and outdoor, inside and outside the gates) of “Nirvana” suggests that Sonal’s discourse belongs not so much to her individual desire, but rather to the inter-subjective, virtual space of the gated community itself that gives this desire a rather haunted intelligibility.

But even more than this, it is the way in which this juxtaposition is actualized in the opening montage, with the ambivalent and ambient soundscape behind it, that reminds us of the fundamental strangeness and alienation of such a space, even in the otherwise mundane description of everyday life inside a gated community that the film presents in its opening montage. It is the way in which a new urban space like Nirvana will always require a narrative discourse, a temporal mediation of some kind, to manage its ambivalence, to conjure away its chaotic context and order its unruly presence, in order to become intelligible.

Meerman’s film, through its ambivalent middle class subjects and its haunting cinematic juxtapositions, presents a kind of cinematic analysis that is not organized through the ontological division between the objective dimension (what the camera shows or what some omniscient narrator tells us) and the subjective (the personalized narratives of the individual subjects of the film as an empirical expression of middle class consciousness). Rather the film presents us with the ambivalent temporality that surrounds “middle class” spaces like Nirvana, the ways in which they gain intelligibility through narrations and discourses that are interested and invested interpretations of the present. They are interested in producing “good” or “common” sense backed by expert opinion and History. But we should always remember that
common goods, objects, histories and opinions cannot make sense in the present “without imposing on it a conformity with the past” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 202). Meerman shows us how subjectivity is enacted through an inter-relation amongst spaces which are interpreted and discourses which are performed, rendering a contingent narration of the present. The film’s subjects thus perform a dual role, providing not only “expert knowledge” from “leading architects of change,” as espoused in VPRO’s vision for its Backlight Futures Issues Series, but also providing “aesthetic knowledge,” that is, knowledge that becomes “expert” by appealing to a common sense, but that becomes intelligible in the film through a critical and artistic exploration of the uncommon sense that makes such “expertise” even possible.

Once again, playing Sonal’s voice over images of Gurgaon’s high rise office buildings and condominiums, we hear a discourse that is at once descriptive, analytical, and poetically performative:

There was some kind of crunch within Delhi City. It lacked space. Delhi had to expand into nearby areas. Gurgaon happened to be the place where a lot of technically qualified people came and started setting up their base. So when they came, a lot of multinationals from abroad also decided to open up offices. A lot of talent moved in. Talent which was all over the world. The brain drain from India found it comfortable to come back to Gurgaon with the economic growth that India saw. Everything came together at the right time. That’s one of the most important factors for Gurgaon to have seen this growth.

As we see shots of glass office towers with “global” signs—Microsoft, Canon, Ericsson—Sonal continues her narrative: “Gurgaon has been basically created by builders. In my view, Gurgaon is the place where there’s globalization. It’s the most modern area that people all over the country look forward to. They feel that if something’s happening in the country, if something is growing then Gurgaon is one of those places. A Singapore for India.”
Another narrative description is supplied by Bineeta Singh, a loquacious and rotund textile designer. While sitting in her earth-toned living room she tells us

Gurgaon caters to the young urban mobile couple who have just married so they go and live in these high-rise buildings. Two-bedroom apartments, a studio kind of look. And also to young families with one or two children. Which is where we feature. So they are progressive, moving and modern. They have been exposed to the world.

As we hear her words, which are spoken with a real estate agent’s familiarity with advertising rhetoric, we are shown a roadside billboard depicting a future mall in Gurgaon. The camera pans over the length of the billboard, and the image of the mall, with its amplified design and pristine landscaped environs, eventually takes up the entire screen. The billboard stops being a representation of a future development and becomes *presented* in its virtuality, its simulacral present. In the virtual image that occupies the screen, all signs of locality/Gurgaon are erased: there are no cows, no stray dogs, no slums, no piles of garbage, no surrounding farmland. The grass is lush and green as opposed to dry and parched (which is how the actual land is underneath the billboard). The utopic vision of this as-yet unbuilt commercial retail space is accompanied by Singh’s discourse, which describes the emergence of a globally-minded middle class in Gurgaon: “They expect the good things of life. And that is what Gurgaon offers: clubs, infrastructure, commercial space, shopping areas, malls. These are the things we see when we travel. It’s what we expect back in return when we come back to our country.”

The effect of these descriptive/performative analyses by the likes of Singh and Sonal is visualized powerfully in *IAG* through the peculiar discursive and imaginative power of the cinema. As Ranciere writes, cinematic images do not merely re-present objects, subjects, spaces and relations that exist in “real life.” The cinema changes “the very status of the “real.”
It does not reproduce things as they offer themselves to the gaze. It records them as the human eye cannot see them, as they come into being, in a state of waves and vibrations, before they can be qualified as intelligible objects, people or events to their descriptive and narrative properties. (Ranciere 2006: 2)

By detaching objects, people or events from their descriptive and narrative properties, cinema offers the possibility of re-articulating and re-distributing the experience and intelligibility of these. It is in this way that the “common sense” discourse of the likes of Sonal and Singh, when presented in *IAG* through a cinematic technique that foregrounds the ambivalent spaces to which their discourses ostensibly refer, appears strange and unusual, revealing an *uncommon sense* that underlies and in fact conditions the possible intelligibility of any emergent common sense.

Moreover, Ranciere argues that the cinema articulates “relations between a whole and parts; between a visibility and a power of signification and affect associated with it; between expectations and what happens to meet them” (Ranciere 2007: 3). Indeed, such expectations, mediated through Meerman’s image-sound assemblages, come to constitute the transformative realities of Gurgaon as an intersubjective space that is a once real and imagined, virtual and actual. Cinema as a medium is particularly attuned to render such a complex virtuality, showing spaces of expectation and anticipation and how they become *real* through the temporal discourses of middle class interpreters like Singh and Sonal.

By juxtaposing their discourses with images of real and imagined spaces, *IAG* works within a simultaneous logic of resemblance and dissemblance that Ranciere argues is unique to cinema and is indicative of its singular and critical political power.  

69 The cinematic image, for Ranciere, refers to two different things: “There is


69 My usage of the political in inherited from Ranciere's (2004) sense of the word as a “re-partitioning of the sensible.”
the simple relationship that produces the likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand in for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produces what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance” (Ranciere 2007: 6). The dissemblance practiced by Meerman’s camera, juxtaposing disconnected spaces with detached voices, allows her to provide more than “in-depth analysis” of urbanization in Gurgaon, it involves us as viewers in the micro-politics of experience and the inter-subjective realm of the urban that is the site of this micro-political transformation.

4.4 “I am Gurgaon”

Henry Ledlie is a boisterous and aristocratic man who is a member of an organization called World Spa Action Group, a Residential Welfare Association (RWA) that is unlike other RWAs. As I will explain more fully in the next section, RWAs are an increasingly active site of middle class politics in Indian cities. These associations are comprised of representatives from neighborhoods with like-minded residents (usually neighborhoods with homogeneous class make-ups) that collectively pressure local and state governments for particular urban reforms. These initiatives are mostly directed at their own neighborhoods but sometimes reach out to touch upon larger spatial issues, such as urban infrastructure, public space in the city, and urban aesthetics (Anjaria 2006). World Spa Action Group (WSAG) is unlike other RWAs in the sense that the neighborhood it ostensibly represents does not yet exist; its construction is on hiatus in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. WSAG represents the disgruntled investors of the World Spa, a gated high rise luxury complex that was promised to the future residents by an already past date.
Meerman introduces us to the political world of this group by foregrounding the temporal imaginary of someone like Ledlie, juxtaposing his narrative with time-images of Gurgaon’s incomplete and halted hyper-development. Once again, slow and meditative classical music completes the ambivalent *mise-en-scène*. We see a bored security guard in the foreground scratching his crotch, with an unfinished high rise complex in soft focus behind him: he’s shown as bored because all he has to guard is an empty, unfinished and abandoned building. Then we get a wider shot that shows us the juxtaposition of a billboard advertisement for DLF Park Place, with lush green and landscaped environs within its simulated image, and the dusty and parched landscape over which this simulation is projected. Ledlie’s narrative is played over this montage:

Swedish massage rooms, aromatic therapy centres, meditation rooms, gymnasiums, indoor and outdoor pools, poolside wireless connectivity, putting greens, golf. Who doesn't want to live there, especially if you've got the money. Who does not want to live here? Of course, we understand that you can't get heaven on earth. But when you're playing with sentiments of people with money we want to believe that there is going to be heaven on earth.

Then, like in the parts featuring Sonal and Singh, the camera joins Ledlie in the car as he drives to World Spa. Through the passenger side window we see a city frozen in incomplete development, half-finished buildings with scaffolded skylines: “We are going to this residential complex where I and 300 others have invested our money, not in terms of an investment but in terms of the promise of better living. The dream. We are all dream merchants. We want to live and have good dreams. But this is turning into a bloody nightmare.”

The camera follows Ledlie as he enters the unfinished spaces of World Spa, eventually taking us up to his own apartment on the seventeenth floor of the high rise: “We bought these apartments six years ago,” Ledlie tells us, “They were supposed to
be delivered four years back.” The camera follows Ledlie into his apartment, which was delivered to him even though most of the other apartments remain unfinished.

This is my apartment here on the seventeenth floor. I took possession, but as you see, I’ve broken everything down. You’re asking me why I’m breaking it all down. Well, this is the reason I’m breaking it all down. So that my children, my mother, and my home, my investment is solid and safe as promised.

We see Ledlie peeling away crumbling plaster from the walls, showing the shoddy construction. He walks to the balcony in the master bedroom, accessed through a glass door that is missing the glass. “This is what they gave me!” exclaims Ledlie as he steps back and forth through the nonexistent glass door. “Shocking! Thank you very much for taking my money and giving me this!”

Ledlie explains that he and many others like him paid the full amount for the apartment before construction even began, because there was a ten percent discount for early investors. “By the way, we are not talking a small 100 or 200,000, we’re talking half a million [dollars] plus.”

Latika Tukral, also part of the World Spa action group, informs us, “We’re after them to give us our apartments. But they can’t deliver, because the money is not there.” According to Ledlie, the construction company took the money he and others put down for their apartments and used it to finish other developments. “That is where greed has entered. They have taken loans, our money, everything, and suddenly there’s a crash. These guys are in trouble. They’re business model is a Ponzi scheme.”

After showing us the half-finished development of World Spa, and the disappointment on the part of resident investors whose expectations were unmet, the film suddenly turns to “I am Gurgaon,” a citizen’s initiative comprised of largely middle class and wealthy residents in Gurgaon who challenge private builders and
para-statal agencies alike to deliver on their promises of creating “world-class” urban space. The camera cycles through a series of shots depicting urban calamity in Gurgaon: flooded streets due to inadequate sewage treatment, traffic jams, slums next to elevated highways and skyscrapers. Then it cuts to an interior shot: a meeting room in a corporate office, with a polished wood desk, tinted glass walls, and a group of women and men in business attire sitting and holding a discussion.

Deep Kalra of “I am Gurgaon” explained the genesis of the group: “Why has something like ‘I am Gurgaon’ come up? Because there is a gap. If it were as well planned as Singapore, which is one extreme, or the hundreds of new suburbs that come up outside cities anywhere in the world there wouldn’t be a need for someone like I am Gurgaon. We are addressing issues which lie with the responsibility of the government and the big developers, who I think have run amok.”

A self-funded group comprised of elite activists, citizen’s initiatives like “I am Gurgaon” enact a politics of expectation and exclusion similar to that exemplified in the “Gurgaon Collapsing” episode at the beginning of this chapter. In both cases their cause was immediately publicized in the English-language print media. The Times of India on May 30, 2010, for instance, featured an article about “I am Gurgaon” in which journalist Sumi Sukanya described the group as “solutions driven,” oriented more towards problem-solving than any ideological or “political agenda.”

“Our mantra is cooperate, don’t confront,” one member is quoted as saying. Another member, an accountant at a large multi-national firm, described the initiative as a pressure group that uses “corporate methods” and “business strategies” to organize as

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efficiently as possible: “We have a talent pool of experts as we assign tasks to members according to their area of expertise.”

In its business-oriented and cooperative approach to urban reform, the group is depicted as non-partisan and even apolitical, though the issues it pursues are decidedly “middle class issues”: “shortage of parking [in the city], littering of garbage, and ill maintained parks.” Moreover, one can read a distinctly aesthetic politics of class-partitioned urban experience in the following anecdote shared in Sukanya’s article, in which one of the founders of I am Gurgaon, Latika Thukral (who is also depicted in Meerman’s film), faced hurdles from local businesses and vendors when she tried to get permission for building a parking structure in Gurgaon.

Thukral identified a vacant plot and approached the municipality for turning it into a parking lot. Once ready, it will house 100 cars. But crusaders always face their share of troubles. Thukral has been advised not to use that road because vendors uprooted from the vacant spot are angry with her.

Of course, we might reasonably ask, how could this plot of land be “vacant” if vendors had to be uprooted from it? Such a contradiction exemplifies the ways in which media-driven middle class discourses de-limit fields of vision and intelligibility, so that vendors, squatters, slum dwellers, hawkers, beggars, and others are obscured from view. Once rendered unintelligible, Thukral and the initiative which she began in 2007 become intelligible as a “crusader” for the “common” cause of building a parking garage.

If we follow the narrative trajectory of IAG (the film, not the citizen’s initiative), we might come to commiserate with the “elite activists” whose expectations for World Spa in particular and Gurgaon in general were disappointed. At a narrative level, the film does not offer an explicit critique of such elite activism. And yet, through its cinematic technique, the film does more than present a merely moralistic critique of elite activism; it more critically renders the conditions of
intelligibility for such elite activism, what must take place and what must be effaced in order for middle class groups like “I am Gurgaon,” or middle class stories like “Gurgaon Collapsing” to even make sense.

4.5 Conclusion: the Hauntology of a Hatred

To return to a point made earlier in this chapter, it is significant that someone like Nandan Nilekani, who in Imaging India seeks to articulate an inclusive and thus consensual image of a “renewed nation,” locates private gated communities as a model of urban development for the nation to follow. These secessionist projects, Nilekani writes rather explicitly, “are showcasing themselves as small-scale models of how cities ought to be run” (2009: 213).

In his consensus-seeking narrative of postcolonial capitalism in India, Nilekani somehow transforms the desire to secede from urban society into something that emerges “from below,” into popular demands for “first-world” infrastructures in an otherwise “third-world” country. Like in the Bergsonian model of perception and temporal subjectivity, Nilekani’s perception of the present is shaped by his articulated memory of the past. 71 Read, for instance, how he attempts to distinguish what I am calling neoliberal urbanism in contemporary India from the British regime of urban development in colonial times: “Imperial India’s approach to infrastructure shows up the differences between empires and democracies. For British India, infrastructure meant building roads and rail that focused on colonial requirements, rather than as

71 In his Matter and Memory, Bergson argues that “there is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience” (1988: 33). This is not to argue that the past determines the present, but rather that the past is a virtuality, and is always virtually present in perception. The point is, we might say, that the present is never perceived in a pure, un-hybridized form.
responses to popular demand” (2009: 219). Framing the present in terms of its difference from the past is the condition of possibility for an interested interpretation of the present, as driven by “popular demand” rather than “colonial requirements.” A more critical perspective, such as the one introduced through the analysis of the “megacity initiative” by Gayatri Spivak in Chapter Two, for instance, offers a different interpretation of the present, seeing in this megacity initiative a virtual coloniziation of the national by the global, via the urban. For Spivak (2000), electronic capitalism, as she calls it, creates urban infrastructures in “third-world” cities that guarantee its own efficiency and functionality and nothing more. One need only look at the in-between spaces of Gurgaon: poor construction and service workers housed in tent cities and shanty towns spectrally occupying a not-yet urbanized (virtual) space: the urban slum. This not-yet (and perhaps never) included subaltern of the megacity initiative, this (“unaccounted for”) population is nonetheless spoken for by postcolonial capitalists through the consensual rhetoric of “popular demand.”

Perhaps Nilekani is so readily seduced by gated communities as a normative model for the nation because the fragmented and divided urban space he envisages is itself built upon a partitioned imagination of the urban, indeed, the postcolonial nation itself. Namely, the urban poor, and perhaps even the poor at large, has ceased to exist for the postcolonial middle class in a meaningful sense. To use Pavan Varma’s grim, yet ethically grounded critique of the Indian middle class, the current state of affairs in the ideological life of this class is in stark contrast to the early postcolonial years, when the memory of the likes of Gandhi and Nehru still exerted a virtual presence in middle class imaginations, if not always in their political and social practices:

72 For more critical takes on how such “unaccounted populations” re-create urban space and infrastructure for their own urban survival (within the Delhi region) see Schindler 2007 and Sundaram 2009.
In the beginning, in the years just after 1947, there was at least the awareness that India is a poor country and the poor exist and something needs to be done for them. No longer. In all these years the numbers of the poor has gone up, but paradoxically and tragically, the middle class’ ability to notice them has gone down. The poor have been around for so long that they have become a part of the accepted landscape. Since they refused to go away, and could not be got rid of, the only other alternative was to take as little notice of them as possible… For the burgeoning and upwardly mobile middle class of India, such poverty has ceased to exist. It has ceased to exist because it does not create in most of its members the slightest motivation to do something about it. Its existence is taken for granted. Its symptoms, which would revolt even the most sympathetic foreign observer, do not register any more. The general approach is to get on with one’s life, to carve out a tiny island of well-being in a sea of deprivation…not unlike a system of apartheid, rendered more insidious because the perpetrators no longer even notice the conditions of those they have banished. (1998: 132)

All this leads Varma to a rather damning indictment of the postcolonial middle class, which he argues “must be one of the few classes in the world where the extreme sensitivity to intra-material hierarchies coexists so effortlessly with the most blatant insensitivity to the conditions of the world ‘external’ to such interests.” (137).

But perhaps such blatant disregard for inequality is not unique to the postcolonial middle class; it is rather indicative of middle classes more generally, as a condition of modernity and capitalism itself. As Gilles Deleuze writes, “Good sense is the ideology of the middle class who recognize themselves in equality as an abstract product” (1994 [1968]: 225). The middle class becomes a universal and normative projection precisely by constructing a “good” or “common” sense that must deny and repress all that which is “uncommon,” unintelligible, chaotic (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). This is the fundamentally undemocratic nature of liberal democracy and its normative project of making only “middle class” or “normal” citizen-subjects intelligible to politics. This is what comes out in Nilekani’s recommendation for more gated communities, SEZs, and other partitioned urban spaces that can only exist by virtue of a violent rejection and exclusion of the very conditions that make their privatized space possible.
And this is indeed not too far from what Varma criticizes in the Indian middle class, what I have called, borrowing from Ranciere (2006), its inherent “hatred of democracy”: “the middle class, notwithstanding its theoretical reiteration of the self-evident merits of democracy, could quite happily accept an alternative, authoritarian regime, provided it perceived the latter to be more conducive to its interests” (1998: 146).

And yet what of the sudden embrace of democratic politics by the ostensibly secessionist middle class in urban India? What of the elite activism of the residents of Qutab Enclave? And what of NGOs like “I am Gurgaon,” who organize resident-investors in the Millenium City in order to articulate a united voice for urban change? Is this not an embrace of politics and of democratic political life? To such a question my answer would be the following: it all depends on what exactly one means by “democratic political life.”

I met with Hindustan Times reporter Sanjeev Ahuja in the aftermath of the “Gurgaon Collapsing” story, and the journalist directed me to further contacts that could assist me in understanding the “problems with urban development in Gurgaon.”73 This eventually led me to the world of Residential Welfare Associations (RWAs), which, as I quickly learned, were projecting an increasingly loud voice in local politics in Gurgaon. But this increase was conspicuous primarily because previously it was non-existent.

I met Sanjay Kaul in February of 2009. Kaul was an active organizer of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) in both Delhi and Gurgaon and started a public advocacy group called People’s Action that sought to address what he referred

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73 Interview with Sanjeev Ahuja, 23 October, 2008.
to as “dirty politics.” He informed me quite bluntly that many middle class residents in Gurgaon turned to RWAs to solve local issues rather than petition municipal governments or para-statal agencies like HUDA. In fact, many residents of New Gurgaon did not even vote in local elections because “all the parties are lousy.”

In 2004 People’s Action began to organize politically, with Kaul and others galvanizing Gurgaon’s various RWAs to join together and put up a “clean” candidate for the legislative assembly seat of Gurgaon in the February 2005 Haryana state elections. According to Kaul, “the act was a response to the common refrain of the middle class that they did not vote due to poor choice of candidates. This event became a watershed as a majority of the RWAs in the constituency forged an agreement to support such a move.”

In January 2005, People’s Action facilitated the creation of the Gurgaon Resident’s Party and fielded a candidate in the state elections. The group attempted to consolidate residents around a “clean” candidate that represented middle class issues and was not beholden to “vote bank” politics. As V.N. Kapoor, President of Recency Park II Residential Welfare Association put it, “Political Partities are more interested in addressing slum issues than our problems. They know they will get chunk of votes from there and hence hardly waste time in contacting us. We are useless for them.”

By speaking specifically, through RWAs, to the concerns of residents in the wealthier sections of Gurgaon, Kaul attempted to politically mobilize citizens who were already economically and spatially mobilized, yet relatively apathetic when it came to local issues. According to Kaul, their political organizing led to “an unprecedented participation of urban voters…in Gurgaon, with close to 35% polling

74 Interview with Sanjay Kaul, 24 February, 2009.
in some areas, up from a dismal 10% in earlier elections.”

But New Gurgaon voters, even if relatively more mobilized in the 2005 election, themselves only constituted 10 percent of the total electorate in the Gurgaon Assembly constituency. And notwithstanding the rather isolated politicizing tactics of groups like People’s Action, overall voter participation in New Gurgaon was dramatically out of pace with the rest of Haryana. In the most recent state elections, the Haryana electorate recorded its highest polling percentages since the state was created in 1966. But within the newer sections of Gurgaon, some localities registered 25% voter turnouts, and overall “only about half the residents of the suburban town turned up to vote,” of which most of these came from the rural villages on the outskirts of the new town.

Thus Kaul’s desire was to challenge the logic that the middle class had seceded from political life in India. This was a logic that was self-alienating for the middle class. For as Pavan Varma points out, the logic “is strikingly circular: politics is dirty because good people do not enter it, and because good people do not enter it, politics is dirty” (1998: 147). Kaul proposed through People’s Action, to nominate “clean candidates” free of “political baggage” (i.e. independent of the locally dominant political parties). But Gurgaon Residents Party was unsuccessful even in an ostensibly “middle class city” like Gurgaon, largely because even such elite economic spaces remain jurisdictionally rural and are mostly comprised of poorer agricultural workers, farmers and villagers, as well as slum dwellers that reside in the city but are otherwise excluded from the elite lifestyle spaces of New Gurgaon.

I would argue that the apparent middle class turn to politics can itself be seen as anti-democratic, since what it wants is a politics that will justify and create
conditions for a more efficiently partitioned neoliberal urban landscape. The secessionist middle class wants a postcolonial capitalist politics (often coded in neoclassical economic discourses as “the right economic policies to produce growth”) that enables the political to be hidden in plain sight, surreptitiously practiced through the latest available models of paranoid architecture and secessionist urban design, as the next chapter will show, and differential speeds and modes of transportation, as Chapter Five will.
CHAPTER 5. FRAGMENTATION BY DESIGN: ARCHITECTURE, FINANCE, IDENTITY IN GURGAON

Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented.
-Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari

5.0 Introduction

One day, still early in my research stay, I was riding in a car with Krishan Kumar, my cousin’s hired driver and a long time resident of Old Gurgaon. While driving past DLF Cyber City in the new part of town, which housed dozens of high-tech MNCs in sparkling mirror-glass towers, Krishan suddenly said in Hindi: “When I drive past these buildings, I feel that this is not India anymore!”

I had heard this kind of sentiment before, regarding the state-of-the-art architecture and urban design of New Gurgaon, but primarily from members of Gurgaon’s elite classes. This feeling of escaping India, while remaining close enough to family and business interests was what brought many wealthy ex-urbanites and mobile non-resident Indians (NRIs) to an elite suburb like New Gurgaon. But Krishan’s reaction to the corporate towers of DLF Cyber City was particularly interesting to me given that he was a hired driver, that is, a member of a servant underclass that was largely prohibited from accessing the interiors of new office buildings, as well as other newly created spaces like shopping malls and gated residential communities that middle and elite classes effortlessly inhabited. Nonetheless, despite such outward exclusion, it seemed, the visual encounter with the architecture itself produced a visceral feeling of belonging and attachment to

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75 It is common for wealthy families in India to hire private drivers. My cousin, an Indian-born but Western-educated and newly-returned business executive, certainly belonged to that elite contingent of urban India that can afford not only private drivers, but live-in cooks and daily maids. In this sense, my cousin was fairly typical of the residents of Park View City, the luxury gated-community in New Gurgaon where he lived and played host to me. Much of my ethnographic research on everyday life in the gated residential spaces of New Gurgaon was conducted within Park View City.
something remarkably new and different, something decidedly “not-India.” But if Gurgaon did not feel like India, what did it feel like?

Notwithstanding this common articulation of new architecture and urban design, in which the newness of the global is articulated through a negation—not India, we can take notice of DLF’s public corporate motto, which signals something quite the opposite of a negation: “Building India.” The explicitly nationalistic tag line can be found anywhere DLF’s ubiquitous logo appears in New Gurgaon. Taken in this context, the newly built glass towers in DLF Cyber City and elsewhere seem to suggest that the “India” that DLF is actively trying to construct in new urban spaces like New Gurgaon is one that is fundamentally de-territorialized in very interesting ways: a “new” India that is paradoxically “not India” anymore. But if this “not-India” is in fact a new India, then what is being negated in the articulation of someone like Krishan? Which “India” is it that does not seem to belong to the common sense of the present, and how are these exclusions enacted through new architecture and urban design in Gurgaon? In this chapter I link the production of new “global” spaces to an increasingly de-territorialized temporal imagination of postcolonial India (itself increasingly connected with accelerated flows of finance), and trace the exclusions that haunt the temporality of national newness and hyper-development as it is embodied in the global skyline of Gurgaon.

The chapter is divided into six subsequent sections. The second and third sections examine contemporary urban experience in New Gurgaon through time-images of neoliberal urbanism, linking the temporality of the built environment (section 2) to that of global finance (section 3). Architecture and finance, driven by desires and expectations of India’s increasing global recognition and economic potential as a site of investment, mediate future-oriented urban imaginaries that I
argue re-code the experience of the present as one of arrival and anticipation. The fourth section takes a look at the architectural designs of one Hafeez Contractor, arguably India’s most commercially successful practitioner. Namely, I examine three of his recent productions in New Gurgaon that enact the spatio-temporal imagination of what I call neoliberal urbanism. In contrast to the privatized, corporate architecture of neoliberal urbanism, in the fifth section I show a different social imaginary at work in postcolonial modernist architecture in New Delhi in the decades after independence, where a deliberately hybrid style of design coincided with a social vision associated with modernist architecture and urban design in India. Rather than negating the national and distancing itself from the local context, postmodernist architecture constituted a critical embrace of modernism mixed with a recognition of existing building traditions and styles. In the sixth section, I examine the spatialized discourse of postcolonial identity in India before and after economic liberalization, arguing that neoliberal architecture can be read as an expression and manifestation of an increasingly de-territorialized national imaginary that partitions decidedly anachronistic parts of the national self. I conclude the article by returning to Krishan, my cousin’s driver, and relating how his statement on the new architecture of Gurgaon effectively enacts the temporal imaginary of the new India, even when it claims to not feel like India at all.

5.1 Time-Images of Neoliberal Urbanism

Since “liberalization” began and particular sectors of the Indian economy were deliberately reformed (i.e. de-regulated or privatized) in the early 1990s and on, select parts of Gurgaon have mushroomed into new economic spaces of rapid capital
accumulation. The homology between partial and selective economic reform and a fragmented and uneven urban landscape is not merely coincidental. Both are expressions of a political economic life that is experientially partitioned, and whose fundamental exclusions and divisions require a temporal politics that mediates and sutures together a coherent urban reality. This chapter examines some of these mediating technologies in architecture, urban design, and the temporalities of finance capitalism.

The fragmented parts of New Gurgaon do not quite form an urban whole, but rather constitute a semi-urbanized topography in which pockets of actualized capitalist space are surrounded by land banks of virtual, not-yet developed spaces for future development and capital accumulation. Within this actual/virtual circuit of spatial production, architecture and urbanism give expression to what the new, globalized India looks like.

Henri Lefebvre provides the conceptual vocabulary for critically rendering what I call time-images of urban development. In his *Urban Revolution*, he argues, “An urban society is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future” (1970, 1). But it is unclear in Lefebvre’s work if and when this future “real” will ever actually materialize, or whether “complete urbanization” is an endlessly deferred virtuality in the present, an impossible future ideal that nonetheless regulates and structures the experience of the present.  

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76 My conceptual usage of “experience” and “the present” draws heavily on the work of Michael J. Shapiro (1999) in the field of political thought, critical theory, and film and genre studies. In particular, Shapiro’s critical exploration of the “politics of now-time,” itself inflected through the work of Walter Benjamin, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Ranciere, informs my idea that
Lefebvre’s concept of virtuality is vividly depicted in the mediated landscapes of New Gurgaon, that is, in the visual and spatial distribution of images of development in the city and its urban media that project a desired future reality. A temporality of anticipation is most vividly expressed through the publicity hype of real estate advertisements, which project an “elsewhere” and a “coming soon,” over the here and now (Ashraf 2007, Dupot 2005). For example, billboards for future corporate campuses depict lush green spaces with pristine glass structures punctuating a sanitized, manicured and sprawling landscape. These images form a stark visual contrast with the barren, desert-like environs over which they get constructed in the dry plains of Gurgaon, as well as the undeveloped spaces and frequent rubbish dumps that surround them. Around these dumps one often finds pigs, cows and dogs, rummaging for scraps. Not surprisingly, urban “wild life” is never featured in the virtual images of real estate advertising, nor are the slums that house the workers who build and maintain the buildings.

Real estate advertisements for shopping malls in Gurgaon boast of “Experiential Architecture” with amusement park-like facilities and amenities, while those for private gated communities urge potential investors to “Experience the Perfect Life” in their manicured and secured mini-cities, equipped with schools, markets and gymnasiums. Such advertisements (see images below) constitute “commodity images” in that “the advertisement itself is a very particular kind of commodity, a commodity built on images” (Mazzarella 2003, 20). But when seen in the context of hyper-development in New Gurgaon, that is, when the advertisements are juxtaposed to the very spaces they re-imagine and commodify, they are also

political experience can be analyzed as a spatial and temporal distribution of value and intelligibility in the present.
revealed as “time-images,” in which the actual and the virtual work together to constitute a contingent articulation of the present (Deleuze 1989b). In the images below, the focus is not so much on the graphics contained on the billboards, but the imaginative work the billboards themselves do by virtue of their positions in space, that is, by the juxtaposition between the commodity images on the billboards and the undeveloped spaces behind them, virtual spaces that will be subject to the spatial transformations already contained within the images.

The built environment of New Gurgaon, which is always a work in progress, consists of new economic spaces which are primarily of four varieties:

(1) office space for tertiary level economic activity;
(2) commercial retail space for shopping malls;
(3) Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for export production (containing secondary level activities such as manufacturing)
(4) and residential space for urban middle class living.

What is common amongst these spatial formations is the unique way in which they are each designed to provide holistic spatial experiences for the user, psychogeographic experiences so total and complete that relations with the surrounding social environment become unnecessary, even redundant. As Sunil Khilnani notes, “private capital now chooses to build its own, self-generated and controlled habitats: their value lies precisely in the extent to which they are isolated from their surrounding environment” (Khilnani 2008, 15). It is in this way that these enclosed enclave spaces are globally integrated to networks of accumulation and exchange, while being locally alienated from the surrounding urban milieu.
In New Gurgaon, residential enclave communities often have their own convenience stores, pharmacies, schools, parks and playgrounds within the gates. Special Economic Zones often contain dormitory housing for workers so that the surplus reproductive labor time for transport between work and home is kept to a minimum. Meanwhile, corporate office parks are increasingly equipped with in-house cafeterias and gymnasiums, to keep workers fitter, happier, and more productive. These totalized, enclosed, and experiential spatial designs make it possible for the residents and workers of New Gurgaon to essentially exist apart from others, to live amongst, but not with the urban groups and environment that surrounds them.

But while enclosed private spaces boast of world-class amenities and first-world aesthetics, as soon as one exits these exceptional “global” spaces, one is “back in India,” as it were. The undeveloped spaces of New Gurgaon often receive the most media attention, to the detriment of the projected image of the Millenium City promoted by local and state development authorities and real estate marketers. As explained in the previous chapter, the Millenium City is frequently harangued in the media for its decrepit urban infrastructure, its crumbling roads, regular power outages, lack of waste and sewage disposal, and its high rates of crime. If India’s economic successes are often associated with the commercially developed spaces of New

79 This quotation is taken from one of the subjects of Ashim Ahluwalia’s documentary film John and Jane (2006), about call center workers in Mumbai. “Once your shift [in the call center] is over,” Sydney tells us early in the film, “you’re back in India!” Ahluwalia’s film is remarkable, among other things, for the way it is able to juxtapose the pristine “global” spaces of the call center, where all of the subjects of the film work, with the other spaces of their everyday lives. I examine this film in Chapter Six.
Gurgaon, with its Fortune 500 companies and glitzy new malls, so too are its failures to provide world class infrastructure for its growing urban demographic, let alone the transnational elite that are the Millenium City’s privileged clientele.

Of course, one could assert that, as a work in progress, Gurgaon’s fragmented design is as yet incomplete. Surely the day will come when Gurgaon finally comes into its own as a “world class” city and its development reaches completion. Indeed, this is precisely the promise of the Millennium City, a city of future arrival and recognition. And yet, it is important to remember how this promise of future completion can only be infinitely deferred; indeed, the capitalist discourse of economic development, inaugurated in colonial times but gaining hegemonic status in the middle of the twentieth century (Escobar 1995), assumes that the object of “development” is continually deferred, always anticipated and desired, never quite reached. This continuous temporal deferral filters out, represses or excludes aspects of the present that contradict or threaten this imagined future. Architectural time-images thus operate as a mediation of this deferred present, in a fashion homologous to Lata Mani’s concept of “globality,” where, “Precisely because the economic and socio-cultural changes that [globalization] initiates are so disruptive, it requires an unanchored discourse of globality to mediate its effects” (Mani 2008, 42). Time-images of globality, Mani’s analysis suggests, are found in the new corporate media, which she argues incessantly project a nation “on the move,” gaining the respect and recognition of the world through entrepreneurial and technological achievements, projecting optimistic economic growth rates, etc.81 Along with the dominant

81 This postcolonial capitalist literature is vast in the public sphere of India, where op-ed pieces in newspapers constantly debate India’s status as an “emerging economy” to be taken seriously. Two books, amongst countless others, that express such concerns are Gurcharan Das’ India Unbound (2000)
discourses of globality and development which exuberantly project a new, globalized India, and the displacements, exclusions, and negations required in order for this projection to make sense in the present, architecture and urban design visually mediate the experience of the city. In a different, but related context, Ravi Sundaram (2009) characterizes this assemblage of media images and urban spaces with the concept of “media urbanism.”

When one encounters the image-scapes of New Gurgaon, whether the newly completed structure or the virtual images in real estate advertisements on billboards and magazines, it is not simply a visual encounter between a subject and a building, or the movement of an individual in space. The encounter itself occurs in the context of a temporality of anticipation and future arrival, a temporality invested with the promise of a seemingly totally privatized and enclosed socio-economic life. It is in this way that the politics of exclusion in New Gurgaon is rendered spatially but must be thought temporally. If subjectivity is first of all a temporal matter, as the first chapter argued, if it is the inter-subjective co-existence of perception and memory, present and past, then time-images in New Gurgaon re-distribute the inter-subjective experience of progress and development, introducing new material signs and symbols while excluding others that do not belong to the dominant experiences associated with progress and development.

and, more recently, Nandan Nilekani’s Imagining India: the Idea of a Renewed Nation (2009). Such discourses work tirelessly to secure the intelligibility of the new India in a “globalized” context.
5.2 The Temporality of Neoliberal Finance

What is the relationship between these time-images of urban development that mediate a fragmentary and disjointed present and the temporal processes of capitalist urbanization that are at work on the frontiers of Neo Delhi?

Urban geographer David Harvey argues that neoliberal urbanization is driven by the de-territorialized and de-territorializing international credit system of finance capital, which “has emerged as the hegemonic force in advanced capitalist societies” (1985: 88). Finance capital is the result of over-accumulation in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy which is re-distributed as “fictitious capital” to sustain and reproduce the capitalist economy and spur its continued growth. Private creditors, state and private banks, brokers and financiers, all exist to distribute fictitious capital across a mass consumerist society, where fictitious capital becomes “fact” in the lived imaginaries of economic citizens whose primary modes of existence are the various practices of consumption through which they reproduce themselves. Fiction also becomes fact in the physical built environment of the city, which constitutes a pscho-geographic terrain for the cultivation and reproduction of neoliberal economic subjectivities, including proclivities, dispositions and desires for consumption.

Urban infrastructure and commercial real estate development, two capital and labor-intensive activities, require high levels of investment from public and private sources, with interest acting as a temporal mediation to attract present capital for future profit realization. Thus finance capital, in Harvey’s sense of the word, is fictitious not in the sense of being “make-believe,” but in the sense of its temporal displacement of present capital accumulation: “Fictitious capital amounts to a
property right over some future revenue” (Harvey 1985, 95). To deploy the language of Lefebvre in the previous section, such fictitious capital is also *virtual* in the sense that it is only “real” in a deeply temporal sense, a future time of repayment plus accumulated interest.

In the contemporary period of neoliberal globalization, which some have also characterized as the “financialization” of practically the entire world (Spivak 1999, 364), the virtual temporality of finance capital has been unleashed upon a previously protected Indian economy. The Government of India began liberalizing its financial sector after 1991, “in recognition of the important role of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the accelerated economic growth of the country” (Secretariat for Industrial Assistance 2003, 9). Throughout the 90’s the central government deliberately eased restrictions on investment from foreign investors and began exposing previously protected industries to global competition, as new consumer products and capital entered the country.

In 2005 the government began to allow 100% FDI in key industries such as construction and real estate development under the “automatic route,” that is, sans prior approval from the government. This step made it easier and faster for foreign investors to inject capital into Indian companies. A recent study by the International Monetary Fund found that Indian companies have likewise turned increasingly to external sources for funds and that growing capital markets provide fuel for the

82 It is not that interest and finance were absent from India prior to 1991, but rather that a particular type of *neoliberal* finance, which is characterized by its computational complexity, its global reach, and its near instantaneous speed only comes into being in the late 1980s. Scholars of international finance has shown that this complexity and speed has led to increased volatility in stock markets everywhere, with rapid boom and bust cycles replacing previously slower expansion and contraction cycles. One could conceptualize this shift in the *speed* and turbulent power of finance in different terms, I use the term neoliberal to underline the connection this increased volatility, complexity, and global reach had to the “liberalization” of finance markets in the economies of Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa.
rapidly growing economy. Within this capital sector, the presence of FDI has risen dramatically (Oura 2008). From 2004 to 2007, total FDI coming into the country rose from $2.7 billion to $8 billion per year. In addition, the inflow of global capital from Foreign Institutional Investors in the form of hedge funds, mutual funds, and pension funds invested in stock markets also rose rapidly since the early 1990s, crossing $3 billion in 2009. Today, large multi-national banks such as HSBC Holdings, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase, and Bank of America have become heavily involved in commercial lending and financial investment in India, along with the State Bank of India and many new domestic private banks.

All this influx of finance capital into the Indian markets has resulted in the wide availability of fictitious capital in the form of credit and debt. Over the last several years, “millions of upwardly mobile Indians [have] embraced debt-fueled consumerism,” one financial daily in India reported (Chopra 2009). The use of credit cards is increasingly common, as “the size of the Indian credit-card market is estimated to be about $4 billion and growing at 35% yearly” (Sender 2006). Such debt-fueled consumption incorporates citizens into the virtual temporality of global finance (a temporality driven not only by the anticipation of future repayment, but also by a continual deferral of the present in the form of interest). Indeed, the growth of debt-fueled consumption through credit cards and private loans in India over just the past few years is staggering, and coincides with the intensified liberalization of India’s financial markets. Outstanding loans on credit cards reached $6 billion at the end of 2008, up 85% from the previous year. India currently has “30 million credit card holders, triple the number half a decade ago” (ibid). While in absolute numbers, the Indian credit markets are still relatively small compared with other Asian economies, what is significant for my argument is the sheer acceleration in the size of
these markets, and the increased incorporation of individuals and firms into the temporality of financial circulation and investment. From near negligible amounts of private foreign finance a few decades ago the Indian economy now harbors figures going well into the tens of billions of dollars over the past half decade.

Perhaps the most visible effect the dramatic influx of finance capital has had in India is in the acceleration of private real estate development and explosion of new construction in and around cities and towns. Such speculative economic activities, which are again constructed virtually in the present on the basis of an expected future return (extracted through rent), require high levels of capital investment in building materials, tools and machinery for construction, and for labor (though labor costs in India and other developing economies is a mere fraction of those in the so-called “developed” world). In 2003, only 4.5% of total FDI inflow was committed to the real estate and construction related-sectors. In 2004, the share of real estate investment increased to 10.6%. By 2007, when total FDI reached $8 billion, the share invested in the real estate sector was 26.5%. The Indian real estate sector, which has now become a key driver of financial markets and stock exchanges in the country, is expected to receive $25 billion as foreign direct investment in the next decade.

According to David Harvey, finance acts as a kind of nerve center that mediates different circuits of economic production, channeling flows of capital from over-accumulated private firms to public urban infrastructure and built environment (Harvey 1985). “Fictitious capital” thus gets actualized in urban space, and the speed of actualization, or the rate of urban development, corresponds directly with flows of

finance, which are themselves contingent upon the will and desires of global investors and banks. Actualized spaces are designed in order to facilitate the further temporal accumulation of capital, showcasing not only an influx of finance into urban spaces, but also projecting an image of the future in the present. The next section turns to the virtual architecture of finance capital in New Gurgaon. While it looks at space and visuality, however, what it thinks and critiques are time and subjectivity, as architecture and urban design serve their function as psycho-geographic interpellators of urban dwellers into neoliberal economic subjects.

5.3 Hafeez Contractor: Neoliberal Architect for Hire

There is always something of a gap between the unconveyed aspirations and desires of the client, the secret inspirations and fascinations of the architect, and the distracted yet judgmental perceptions of the users. As such, an architectural construction is a multinucleated field, a complex mesh of signs, a creative document that simultaneously has an internal logic of its own and is created by and understood in the context in which it is situated.

-Vikramaditya Prakash

In the multinucleated field of contemporary Indian architecture, Hafeez Contractor “is arguably India’s most prolific—and most famous—practitioner” (Martin and Baxi 2007, 113). Contractor is based out of Mumbai, where he began his practice in 1982 after studying architecture at Columbia University in New York City. Upon returning to India, Contractor made a name for himself in Mumbai (then Bombay) with his unconventional designs for residential high rises. According to his biographer Prathima Manohar, Contractor stood apart from other designers.

Contractor created buildings that looked like spaceships, other buildings sported round windows and crescent balconies. His style had unorthodox qualities filled with domes, pitched roofs, arches, triangular canopies, sprites and gates that looked like entrances to fortresses. Sweeping shapes, whimsical
forms and playful colours provided Mumbai with glimpses of a place and time outside its experience. (Manohar 2006, 35)

Contractor’s unapologetically “post-modern” style and penchant for creating buildings and using ornamentations and materials that were out of place with respect to local surroundings drew criticisms from many in the so-called “architectural establishment” of India, an establishment that Contractor has repeatedly and openly disavowed. “Even though most pundits might term my residential work gimmicky,” Contractor wryly notes in the forward to Manohar’s book on his work, “it comes out of valid rationale. The numerous styles that seem to tick off many people are simply a response to the aspirations of the consumers and the market context” (Manohar 2006, 7).

Architectural critic Kenneth Frampton has characterized a broad shift in the ethos and practice of architecture that Contractor exemplifies: “The globalization of the world is now such that the time-honoured differences between climates, landscapes, and subcultures are in the process of being flattened out by the ruthless application of universal technology, activated by the play of the market and by the escalated fluidity of transnational capitalism” (Frampton 1998, 10). Contractor’s ethos and practice are a vivid illustration of the embrace of market-based pragmatics in the profession, where architecture literally has to keep up with the speed of urban development and the influx of global finance outlined in the previous sections. Contractor’s commercial success is no doubt due to his ability to keep pace by internalizing the business ethics of speed, efficiency and discipline into his own firm, which has been described as a virtual factory for commodified design.

Hundreds of architects and draftsmen sit elbow to elbow to churn out buildings. From morning to night, their sole purpose is to draft and design the innumerable sketches that originate from Hafeez, who has a good view of the office exit. As a result, employees do not attempt to leave before dinner. When
a project is over they immediately begin work on the next. There are no milestones, only more buildings to make. People here do not linger. They have been taught to respect time. (Bhatia 2009)

Hafeez, like any good capitalist, renders his designers into abstract laborers, and such alienation is what allows their (his) commodified products to become actualized as exchange values in the highly lucrative real estate markets of neoliberal cities like New Gurgaon. The resulting speculative development may have disastrous consequences for urban life and planning overall (and has indeed given New Gurgaon a mixed reputation as a fast-growing, but horribly disorganized and unevenly developed city,\footnote{I explore the dimensions of this disorganized and unevenly developed city in a forthcoming article which looks specifically at land policies and urban planning strategies implemented in New Gurgaon. What I argue is that the private speed of development by the likes of DLF is out-of-joint with the ability of the state to provide an urban infrastructure adequate to the demands of global investors. This temporal disjuncture is the cause of much conservation and anxiety amongst postcolonial capitalists who desire to produce and inhabit “first world” spaces in India.} as detailed in the previous chapter), but it has given Contractor commercial success beyond that of any other Indian architect. As his biographer Prathima Manohar points out, “Architectural technology today has to deliver buildings at astonishing speeds; consequently old-fashioned technological ideas that can’t cope with these deadlines are bound to vanish” (Manohar 2006, 23).

This is the accelerated, cut-throat, market-oriented environment in which Contractor’s practice has excelled. His is an architecture of speed. Working exclusively for DLF in New Gurgaon, Contractor has designed more than “four million square feet of residential space, 2.5 million square feet of commercial space, and half a million square feet of shopping for the DLF Group” (Martin and Baxi 2007, 113). Contractor’s residential, commercial and corporate designs can be found all over New Gurgaon, with “cosmopolitan” names like DLF Beverly Park, DLF Ericsson House, DLF Plaza Tower, DLF Corporate Park and DLF Square. In what follows, I will look at three exemplary projects by Contractor, one office building, one

85
residential complex, and one shopping mall. The examples are taken from Prathima Manohar’s illustrated book on Contractor’s work, though the critical reflections on these works are mine.

A. DLF Gateway Tower

As its name suggests, DLF Gateway Tower marks an entryway into New Gurgaon. As one exits Delhi (or Indira Gandhi International Airport) from the south on the elevated Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway (DGE), the sleek and imposing tower welcomes the mobile subject into the psycho-geographic image-scape of DLF Cyber City, populated with large post-modern structures and futuristic towers encased in mirror-glass. The building was completed in 2000, and is now surrounded by several other similarly styled, though structurally heterogeneous buildings that house multinational corporations inside their aluminum and glass facades. DLF Gateway Tower hails the auto-driver/passenger (see chapter five for more on the car-driver assemblage and its relationship to neoliberal urban subjectivities in India) with its severe granite and glass façade and its curvilinear shape. The oblong tower culminates in a tall vertical spire, announcing itself dramatically in front of the crystalline skyline of Cyber City. According to Manohar, the tower embodies a design that “seeks to create an aesthetic based on tectonics,” juxtaposing and balancing granite and glass in a ziggurat pattern of emergence and exchange (Manohar 2006, 225).

Like on many of Contractor’s buildings in New Gurgaon, glass is the dominant material used to create the façade of DLF Gateway Tower, and gives the structure its shiny, spectacular appearance from DGE. In the post-liberalization period in India, glass has become a popular building material, both for its relatively
cheap price in India and now increasingly from abroad, as well as because of the ostensibly “global” aesthetics it embodies, which constitute the symbolic power of corporate architecture. As scholars of such architecture have noted, “We have been conditioned by the use of glass in American skyscrapers into believing that it best expresses corporate identity. Over the second half of the 20th century, private corporations rose in power, and glass became the architectural motif of power and prestige” (Burte 2009b).

As early as 1933, Walter Benjamin linked the proliferation of modern glass architecture with the impoverishment of everyday experience: “It is no coincidence that glass is such a hard, smooth material to which nothing can be fixed…Objects made of glass have no ‘aura’” (Benjamin 1999, 735). Like in many of Benjamin’s writings on modern art and aesthetics, however, the loss of aura and authenticity and the new poverty of experience in modernism were not to be strictly bemoaned. These losses could also be productive of new possibilities in experience. Indeed, glass was first used along with concrete as “a wonder material for early 20th century modernist European architects. Design leaders such as Le Corbusier (who later designed Chandigarh) and Mies van der Rohe were trying to create a new language for European architecture that expressed the high level of industrialization Western societies had achieved” (Burte 2009a). But beyond this symbolic value of glass, the material was valued for its efficiency, since it allowed natural light during the day, saving energy and money by reducing electricity consumption. Moreover, glass also let in heat along with light, “and it allows only light to reflect back, trapping the heat inside” (Burte 2009a). In the temperate climates of Western Europe and North America, this greenhouse effect resulted in lower heating costs, and by the middle of
the twentieth century, glass curtain walls began to appear widely on commercial skyscrapers all over the western world.

In the contemporary Indian context, however, the greenhouse effect becomes an additional cost, rather than a benefit of design: “the huge glass walls face any direction, including the west, from where the hottest low-angle sun streams in. Glass lets in light and traps heat. So these corporations must consume a lot of energy (and cash) to keep the interiors cool. All this because of the ‘progressive’ look they desire” (Burte 2009b). Thus glass architecture, which is now an almost defining characteristic of new corporate towers in India, and is featured on nearly all of Contractor’s office buildings in New Gurgaon, serves as a highly visual form of conspicuous consumption, since “A glass tower broadcasts the ability of the owner-occupant to pay for all this” (Burte 2009a). But beyond the costs incurred to the firm, there are also those born by society and the environment, who are subject to the negative externalities that the desire for global intelligibility through architectural design generates.

B. DLF Pinnacle Tower

As the architectural critics Martin and Baxi note, “DLF City/Gurgaon emerged from the latest phase of modernization serviced so adeptly by Hafeez Contractor… accommodating a middle-class flight from the city, and from the newly urbanized rural masses” (Martin and Baxi 2007, 116). This flight from the rural masses is ironic, of course, since DLF City itself was built on former rural lands acquired and converted into commercialized real estate. Gurgaon’s ex-urban residents are haunted by the spatio-temporal conditions of the Milennium City’s possibility: the death of
agricultural life-worlds and their paradoxical re-birth in the urban slums of postcolonial megacities like Delhi, which are full of farm workers and economic migrants whose work has been rendered anachronistic due to the commodification of agriculture in rural India and the steady erosion of village economies in the post-liberalization era (Spivak 2008). And so the temporal citizens of the Millenium City protect themselves existentially by living in gated residential communities like DLF Pinnacle Tower, which are not only spatially distanced from increasingly invisible and unintelligible others, but are placed temporally on a different timeline of development altogether.

While DLF Gateway Tower was Contractor’s first office building in New Gurgaon, the bulk of his work has been in what he has called “real estate driven residential architecture” (Contractor 2006, 7), in which his designs are said to respond to the aspirations of upwardly mobile classes that demand “global” life-styles, aesthetics, and amenities in secure communities. DLF Pinnacle Tower is a 19-storey residential complex that comprises two clusters of high-rise apartment blocks, secured by walls and a continuously guarded main gate. The galactic and futuristic glass and concrete buildings are located within walking distance to offices, shopping malls, multiplexes, and DLF Golf and Country Club. The proximity to these locales is a part of the developer’s vision of DLF City as a “walkable” city. This desire, too, is ironic, since the vast majority of New Gurgaon’s residents own private cars, and use them even for intra-urban transit. Most of DLF City is devoid of sidewalks, and there is virtually no public transport in New Gurgaon (Wadhan 2007). Thus non-

86 The film I am Gurgaon intimately and deftly documents everyday perceptions, desires, and imaginations amongst the “secessionist class” (Spivak 2008) of New Gurgaon that occupies such gated communities.
automobile transport in this sprawling suburb is limited and hectic at best, and violently terrifying at worst.

What defines the experiential space of residential communities like Pinnacle Tower is not their proximity to other developments, however, but rather their ability to provide a wholistic experience that makes interaction with the outside environment redundant. For instance, Manohar’s description of Pinnacle Tower’s amenities below demonstrates how such spaces are not merely a place to live, but an experience in and of themselves:

The layout of the development is a great attraction too. The 2 clusters of high rise apartment blocks are set within magnificently landscaped grounds. The water bodies, sculptural elements and broad walkways are just right for a stroll and wind their way through the peaceful gardens. In between the two apartment blocks is a clubhouse, which offers extensive views of the park. The recreational facilities in the club include a pool, a gym, and the tennis court. The complex is also set to include a party room. The apartments are spacious and airy, with a large balcony that adds a dash of brightness to the entire flat.

As Lata Mani has argued, globality “is self-evidently about aspiring to live as though one were rich and lived in New York, London, Paris, Frankfurt, or Amsterdam and not as though one were poor or lower middle class in these cities. And since one is aspiring to live in one place a though it were an elsewhere, the virtual can attain the status of reality, thus generating and sustaining illusions about both locales” (Mani 2008, 42). One thing we might add to Mani’s notion of the virtual, however, is how illusions become real in the same sense that fictitious capital does, that is, through the virtual temporality of anticipation and desire that projects the imagined “elsewhere” of New York, London or Paris in the here and now of Neo Delhi. What matters here is not so much a fidelity to the original locales, per se, but rather the virtual power contained in the psycho-geographic environment itself, its power to conjure image-
scapes that suture together an otherwise fragmented and in many ways incoherent actuality (or set of actualities).

The two images above contrast virtual and actual images of DLF Pinnacle Tower. The juxtaposition shows the limits to architectural simulation in DLF City: the actualization of the abstract design is virtually exact, but there is noticeable dissemblance in the finished product that is in fact integral to the power of the simulacrum, which is always “built upon a disparity or upon a difference. It internalizes dissimilarity” (Deleuze 1990, 258). The dissimilarity comes from the ground upon which the “shining, powering” (Manohar 2006, 125) towers rise: the artists’ rendering of the finished space above includes the “peaceful gardens” and interior park that Manohar advertises above, and the image includes plenty of shade-giving trees. In actuality, however, the finished grounds themselves are devoid of any shade-giving vegetation, and instead of a lush green park and garden we see the more familiar dusty and dry terrain of Gurgaon. Indeed, to keep lawns green and ostentatious fountains running in opulent residential spaces like Pinnacle Tower, water must be used in copious amounts, further adding to the environmental and economic costs of such neoliberal developments. While the virtual image hides these externalities within the antiseptic imaging of “elsewhere,” in which meticulously manicured lawns and flowing fountains are apparently a given, the actualized space has struggled to meet the costs necessary to keep water running in sufficient amounts. It bears to be noted here that this is all happening in a municipal context in which the water table of Gurgaon district is depleting heavily and private developers like DLF
illegally dig their own wells in order to extract water, further decreasing the water supply.\textsuperscript{87}

C. DLF City Centre

In addition to being a Millennium City, Gurgaon is also popularly known as “the mall capital of India,” boasting numerous “state-of-the-art” shopping malls with “global” retail brands, food courts and multiplexes. DLF envisions a future in which Gurgaon will “soon develop as a mega shopping district in the [National Capital Region].”\textsuperscript{88}

And this despite the fact that many stores in these malls do not make money, or struggle to do so. According to a recent report, “many people come to the malls in New Gurgaon to look around and enjoy the air-conditioned and modern interiors, but very few actually buy anything.”\textsuperscript{89}

Always ready to respond to the commercial needs of private developers like DLF, which have struggled in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 to rent out retail space because of fears of low-sales, Contractor’s DLF City Centre mall responds to a virtually continuous need to image and advertise consumerism to the economically mobilized subjects of neoliberal India, and increase footfalls in New Gurgaon’s malls. Thus, Contractor’s DLF City Centre “explores the realms of advertising visual imagery in building design” (Manohar 2006, 231). The building’s glass and aluminum façade incorporates billboard advertising into its structure,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[87]“Crisis in sight: water table in Gurgaon takes a plunge,” \url{http://www.indianexpress.com/news/crisis-in-sight-water-table-in-gurgaon-takes.../406761/}.
\item[88]“DLF Building India.”
\item[89]“India: A Mania for Shopping Malls”—\textit{Time Magazine}, \url{http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,695915,00.html}
\end{footnotes}
promoting the products and services that it houses “with forceful aplomb” (ibid), as Manohar euphemistically puts it.

DLF City Centre features an 11-storey high tower that “serves the significant role of communicating and attracting the outside spectator,” proclaiming a “billboard jargon” with “flashy graphics” (ibid). The aesthetic expression of the building “is strongly anchored in the zany colors of the graphic illustrations” (ibid).

Beyond the visually loud exterior of Contractor’s DLF City Centre and its formal functionality vis-à-vis the financial and commercial interests of real estate investors and retailers, existentially the mall is like many others in New Gurgaon. As architect Kazi Ashraf writes, malls like City Centre are “hermetically sealed interiorized enclaves that are in complete visual and attitudinal denial of their surroundings.

The city is held at arms length through a series of barriers, by the virtually resplendent architecture, by the curtailing of interaction with the surrounding city, by the inevitable motorized access, and by the spectacular security befitting a royal precinct—all of which work towards intimidating groups that are not participants of this new urban experience. The residential enclaves are also similarly policed and truncated off the continuum of the city. The metrosexual citizen can now travel from home to mall, bypassing the rest of India. (Ashraf 2007: 69)

In DLF City Centre, as well as the countless new shopping malls like it (though each one is unlike the others in its uniquely amplified design), architectural design and economic interests join together to form an existentially “continuous interior” space (Martin and Baxi 2007, 68) designed to exteriorize the outside world, while excluding groups that are not participants of this new urban experience.

* * *
The three buildings examined above are examples of neoliberal urbanism designed by the likes of Hafeez Contractor for private builders like DLF Limited. Contractor exemplifies a new role for the architect in the era of neoliberal finance.

The loss of architecture’s social vision has coincided with its being coopted by large institutional investors and speculative developers. This emphasis for the architectural profession has shifted to one of satisfying the demands of their clients, often engaged for a single project. This is typically achieved through decorative design and stylistic distinction, the massive scale of developments of the employment of a publicly known ‘superstar’ architect whose presence on a project will attract a great deal of media attention. The consequence of this sea-change in the architectural profession has been that the urban landscape is designed in (artful) fragments and becomes littered with a number of ‘spectacular’, ‘imageable’, or ‘scenographic’ enclaves which are largely divorced from their immediate urban or social contexts. (Hall 1996: 89)

These fragmented urban spaces are “neoliberal” in the sense that Aihwa Ong characterizes new economic spaces that result from exceptional governmental policies and practices in Asia, as exceptions to national economic policies. Neoliberal policies enact, among other things, what Ong has called “technologies of subjection,” where “sovereign rule invokes the exception to create new economic possibilities, spaces, and techniques for governing the population.” This certainly seems to be the case in spaces like New Gurgaon, where the elevated Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway, already both a high-speed connection to Indira Gandhi International Airport and a virtual gallery for visually encountering new architecture and urban design, is also the border that now divides New Gurgaon from the existing town, or Old Gurgaon, creating very different economic and spatial realities on different sides of the expressway.

Neoliberal technologies of governance work to “fragment and extend the space of the nation-state,” and they are exceptional in this two-pronged sense. On the one hand, neoliberal urbanism fragments cities internally, excluding participants who are not

part of this new economic experience through the securitization and social policing of new economic spaces that are an escape from the immediate social environment.

Neoliberal urbanism is founded on “the rise of ‘paranoid’ or carceral architecture based on protection, surveillance and exclusion and finally the increasing presence of simulation within urban landscapes, imaginations of alternative cities to the ‘dreadful reality’ of actual cities, for example theme parks, themed, policed shopping malls, and more subtle forms of simulation that invade everyday life.”

It is in this way that neoliberal urbanism serves as an existential escape from the perceived chaos and clamor, squalor and underdevelopment of postcolonial India.

On the other hand, and simultaneously, architectural designs recode these spatial experiences within a de-territorialized national imaginary of extension, growth, development, if not global interconnection. Thus Ong’s argument is apt to explain the way neoliberal exceptions de-territorialize domestic economic space in order to project a “new India” in places like New Gurgaon. But one thing Ong fails to mention is that exception works not only spatially, but also temporally, as a discursive narration of the postcolonial nation and its neoliberal urban present. In India, hyper-development in the aftermath of economic liberalization came as a temporal exception that changed the rule of the “Hindu rate of growth,” at least within the dominant narrative of postcolonial capitalism, transforming the historically produced meanings of the postcolonial nation through the creation of urban metonyms for the new India.

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92 Hall. *Urban Geography*, 12.

93 No one critically deconstructs the psychological motivations for such existential escape on the part of the postcolonial middle class more acutely than the venerable Ashis Nandy. See especially his “The Beautiful, Expanding Future of Poverty,” *International Studies Review*. Vol. 4, No. 2. (Summer 2002).

94 The term “Hindu rate of growth” characterizes the relatively stagnant (when compared to other Asian economies to the East and South-East) 3.5 percent average growth over the first three decades after independence. According to Shashi Tharoor, “The combination of internal controls and international protectionism gave India a distorted economy, underproductive and grossly inefficient, making too few
New Gurgaon is precisely such a metonym, a spatial manifestation of a de-territorialized and accelerated national imaginary, a part (the urban) that stands in for the whole (the nation). In order to more critically understand the temporal rupture such architecture and urban design represents in urban India, let us briefly contrast the neoliberal urbanism with its predecessor in India and Delhi in particular, postcolonial modernist architecture.

5.4 Postcolonial Modernism

You cannot isolate architecture from the age, from the social conditions, from the thinking, from the objectives and ideals of that particular age…The past was good when it was the present, but you cannot bring it forward when the world has changed into a technological period.

-Jawaharlal Nehru

India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave modern architecture official sanctioning “as the approved national style and symbol of a fresh start after Independence.”

Modern architecture, according to Nehru, “offered India a vision of the future based on a functionalist language that was free of colonial associations and of reference to specific religious or ethnic traditions.” Yet, from its inception, postcolonial architecture in India has entailed a negotiated synthesis of what was perceived as the modern and the traditional. The adaptation of modernist architecture to climatic, cultural, and historical considerations points to a hybrid modernism, one that was less about simulating Western modernity and more about reconciling the modern with local conditions which “offered resistance to a homogeneous adaptation of goods, of too low a quality, at too high a price,” see his India From Midnight to Millenium, (New York: Harper, 1997), 166.


Ibid., 13.
of modern principles, and could actually inflect them toward a more critical production of architecture.”

An early form of this hybrid modernism in architecture actually pre-dates India’s independence from colonial rule. For the British in India, colonial architecture in the new capital city of Delhi was a way of making themselves intelligible to their native subjects, namely by coding their symbolic power in an indigenous architectural idiom. In 1912, when the British Raj decided to relocate the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, there was a conscious effort on the part of the architect and planner Edwin Lutyens to produce designs that could bring the colonizers “closer to the hearts and minds of their colonial subjects” while also unequivocally stating their political dominance over the same. In the New Delhi Imperial Complex, “the British had typically appropriated compositional devices from India’s past for use on buildings that were designed according to Western spatial concepts.” The case in point here was the Viceroy’s Palace, which was constructed with indigenous materials and stylized with Indo-Saracenic ornamentations including chattris (pavilions) and jhallis (carved stone screens), but otherwise structured spatially according to the precepts of Western neoclassicism. By the time New Delhi was completed in 1931, the anti-colonial nationalist movement was already in full swing, however, and the first post-independence government would inhabit these very buildings just sixteen years later, sitting (too) comfortably, perhaps, in the hybrid architecture the British left behind.

In the immediate period after independence, almost as if to demonstrate a firm confidence in the modernist course, the so-called father of European modernism, Le

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98 Ibid., 27.
99 Martin and Baxi. Multi-National City, 57.
Corbusier was commissioned by Nehru to design the city of Chandigarh in Punjab. But far from simply implanting an abstract “western” design Le Corbusier incorporated his “enchantment with India’s humane and profound civilization” into his designs, through symbolisms and formal adjustments that were not merely ornamental, but structural.  

This kind of hybridity in design is most visible in the Palace of the Assembly building in Chandigarh (1963). Le Corbusier’s designs here also attended seriously to the specific climate of northern India, attempting to use the buildings’ physical and material properties to negotiate, rather than negate, the natural environment. These were not simply gestural citations of the local, but structural considerations which implied a contingent, yet specific negotiation of form, site, climate, and for Le Corbusier, a quasi-mystical (if somewhat Orientalist) symbology.

Following the likes of Lutyens, Herbert Baker, Le Corbusier, and Louis Kahn, notable postcolonial architects in India such as Achyut Kavinde, Balkrishna Doshi, and Charles Correa each pursued a hybrid modern style, though they balanced what was perceived to be the modern and the traditional in distinct ways. For instance, Kavinde furthered Nehru’s project of modernizing India in order to break away from the regressions of the past, and “played a crucial role in the transformation of building from a manual trade to an organized industry based upon a new division of labor.” Doshi, on the other hand, more readily embraced India’s history and looked to the past as a way of negotiating the modern context. Doshi’s architecture represents the

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102 Here it should be noted that “modern” and “traditional” are not static terms, but are rather deployed by particular architects in different ways.
refinement and perpetuation of “the central principles of modern architecture as they relate to the history, climate and diverse cultural mixture of India.”

Charles Correa too has used the past as well as particular elements of Indian aesthetic traditions in order to cultivate a postcolonial hybridized modern style. In his various works, Correa has “evolved an approach to design that draws upon traditional Indian forms and ordering devices, which he uses to create buildings that are nonetheless unmistakably modern.” All three postcolonial architects have utilized a style which attempts to go “beyond the formal boundaries of the Modernist Movement to evolve a personal approach that acknowledges Indian traditions” and also establishes an ethical “relationship to the country’s poor, especially in urban areas.” Thus in addition to working actively to build housing for the urban poor, the likes of Correa also wrote extensively on the problems of urban inequality in India. In this way, these architects took on a “democratic approach” when conceiving their modern designs in the context of an impoverished, postcolonial country.

All three architects too have worked extensively in New Delhi, which, after independence quickly became a major center of architectural activity, as the state was the predominant client of architecture up until the neoliberal period. In these and other works in Delhi, climate, culture, and financial constraints led Kavinde, Doshi, and Correa and others to use particular materials, namely concrete and red sandstone, as the predominant materials for building. Martin and Baxi argue that these materials

104 Ibid., 8.
105 Ibid., 19.
106 Ibid.
helped define a specifically hybrid postcolonial aesthetics based on functionality, pragmatics, and site. The use of concrete corresponded with the perceived economic efficiency of modernization, while the red sandstone registered with indigenous traditions of building: “one offered the presumably solid footing of techno-scientific calculation, while the other offered the more ephemeral but no less real footing of imagined cultural identity, more often than not rendered in dusky reds, trimmed with beige.”

Red sandstone, quarried in the Delhi region or in neighboring Rajasthan, conjured the “specter of Indianness” in the Delhi designs of architects like Correa, such as in his Hindustan Lever Pavilion (1961), the Life Insurance Corporation of India (1986), and the British Council (1992). Red sandstone was even prominently featured in Correa’s only building in New York City, the India Permanent Mission to the United States (1992). In addition, Raj Rewal, who Martin and Baxi call “the doyen” of the contemporary Delhi design scene, uses red sandstone “as a blunt instrument for smashing concrete modernism.” The standout examples of Rewal’s work in red sandstone in New Delhi are the State Trading Corporation Headquarters (1976), and the Standing Conference of Public Enterprise (1989). As one might glean from the names of these buildings, both were government commissioned projects.

5.5 De-territorializing the National through the Urban

Vernacular architecture which uses local materials is dead. Using local materials has become more expensive. There are materials coming in from China which works out cheaper than the local materials. The most honest way of construction at any point in history has been the cheapest, fastest, and the most superior. Today if the global options provide those qualities then I will obviously opt for them.

As Chapter One explained, the postcolonial scholar Himadeep Muppidi has critically analyzed discourses of national identity in India before and after economic liberalization in 1991.\(^{112}\) He finds that anti-colonial and postcolonial national identities in India were historically constructed through a careful balancing of what was perceived as the modern and the traditional, under the respective signs of the foreign Other and the domestic Self. In the aftermath of two hundred years of foreign colonial domination, nationalists sought to limit the amount of foreign capital permitted within postcolonial domestic space. Though the foreign was perceived as necessary, since it brought with it technologies of modernization and progress, too much of a reliance on and mimicry of the foreign was considered a threat to national identity. The architecture of postcolonial modernism, embodied in the works of Kavinde, Doshi and Correa in the previous section, fits this selective and hybrid negotiation of the modern and the traditional, what Muppidi calls the “ambivalent identity-logic” of the postcolonial social imaginary.

Within this postcolonial imaginary, economic self-reliance, through nationalization, modernization, and endogenization was the historical manifestation of this postcolonial identity-logic.\(^{113}\) As Chapter One on the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism examined, this negotiation of postcolonial national identity was fundamentally challenged after 1991, when a balance of payments crisis signaled that the domestic Self was insufficiently providing for the nation’s economic development, and that greater involvement of foreign capital would be needed in order to augment economic growth.


\(^{113}\) *Ibid*, 51.
But far from abandoning the postcolonial identity-logic, Muppidi finds, those who have argued in favor of India’s continuing liberal reform have actually articulated their positions from within the discourse of India’s postcolonial identity. In particular, they have argued for changed meanings of national economic Self-reliance. Liberalization, they claim, far from leading to re-colonization of the Self, constitutes a “manageable level of reliance on the outside world.” Moreover, if the outside world (the foreign/the Other) posed a threat to the postcolonial Self, then “the danger posed by the Other predominantly threatens a part that can be divorced from the Self—inefficient industry. Such a divorce, in fact, is seen as only strengthening the Self.”

This divorcing of inefficient, redundant, and increasingly anachronistic elements of the national Self simultaneously allows the global to become intelligible as a new, de-territorialized extension of the nation. DLF’s corporate motto “Building India” is an expression precisely of this new de-territorialized imaginary. And perhaps not surprisingly, it is the non-resident Indian (NRI) who is increasingly invited, along with foreign investment, to serve as the virtual citizen-subject of this new India, part of “the deliberate rearticulation of Indianness from a predominantly territorial conception to an increasingly deterritorialized one.” The aggressive and wide dispersion of images of NRIs, particularly in the west, seems to resolve the postcolonial problematic of balancing mimicry of the west with repudiation:

NRIs are coded as successfully reproducing Indianness in alien spaces and of forever desiring to return home. The difficult problem of getting the modern west in without losing premodern India has been partially resolved through the bodies of the NRIs…The economic success and cultural obduracy of NRIs in

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115 Ibid., 53.
116 Ibid., 56.
the modern West is read as proof of India’s potential success in dealing with Western forces.\textsuperscript{117}

Since 2003, the Government of India has explicitly sought to increase the exposure of NRIs in the national imagination. Each year, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs commences with the highly publicized annual awarding of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, an award that recognizes the achievements of the Indian Diaspora in a variety of fields. Such explicit recognition is meant not only to strengthen ties with NRIs and increase their public visibility, it also draws on their considerable financial resources for investment. Indeed, the liberalization of FDI inflow has long been linked to the “promotion and facilitation of investment by NRIs.”\textsuperscript{118}

It should not surprise us, then, that NRIs play a central role in the symbolic and material production of new architectural/economic spaces in New Gurgaon. DLF City functions as an urban metonym for a new India whose de-territorialization can be indexed in the nomenclature of various enclave spaces there, such as Hamilton Court, Belvedere Place, or Ridgewood and Princeton Estates, among countless others. The “televisual names connect these objects to other objects in places like suburban New Jersey, where new condominium developments in the greater Princeton area [and the suburban town of Ridgewood] offer an independent, home-owning lifestyle to the expanding class of international, English-speaking technical workers trained in India.”\textsuperscript{119} Martin and Baxi go on, “among the main clientele of DLF City is the NRI, for whom apartment units in Princeton Estate may represent both a potential

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Government of India. \textit{Manual for FDI}, 3.
\textsuperscript{119} Martin and Baxi. \textit{Multi-National City}, 116.
\end{flushleft}
investment in a rising real estate market, and a kind of displaced homecoming—a base from which to visit the family while still maintaining a safe distance.”

In the neoliberal era, postcolonial national identity has itself become de-territorialized and partitioned, whereby the efficient and competitive parts fit for global competition now seem effectively divorced from those parts which are deemed inefficient, uncompetitive, if not anachronistic and “dead.” In a homologous fashion, cities like Gurgaon are themselves partitioned between the competitive and “global” parts (New Gurgaon), and the anachronistic “local” parts (Old Gurgaon). Indeed, such a partitioning was examined in Chapter One as constitutive of the narrative discourse of postcolonial capitalism. The neoliberal state has implemented policies that “differently regulate populations for optimal productivity, increasingly through spatial practices that engage market forces.” If the figure of the NRIs has given globalization qua economic liberalization greater intelligibility for the postcolonial Self, then we have to recognize that this is an increasingly de-territorialized Self that is divorced from those who are not seen as part of the new urban/economic/aesthetic experience of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberal urbanism is literally the spatial manifestation of a radically partitioned imagination of the postcolonial nation, temporally coded as the “new India.”

5.6 Conclusion

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120 Ibid.
121 This finding is corroborated in the case of another Indian city known internationally as a center for high-tech and “global” industries, Bangalore. See Solomon Benjamin, “Governance, economic settings and poverty in Bangalore,” Environment and Urbanization 2000 (12:35), where Benjamin finds two modes of governance at work for the “local” economy and the “corporate” or globally-linked economy.
122 Ong. Neoliberalism as Exception, 6.
This chapter has argued that neoliberal architecture and urban design in New Gurgaon, fueled by liberalized flows of global finance, gives intelligibility to a new India that is partitioned spatially and temporally from the “old India.” Urban space is where this new India both fragments and extends “national” space. The spaces of neoliberal architecture are fragmented by their very design, representing new economic enclaves of efficiency, optimization, competition, and hyper-development that are effectively divorced from the rest of India through barriers, gates, expressways, and other modes of inhibition and policing. But these spaces simultaneously extend outwards, connecting transnationally to other nodal points in the global network economy. Hafeez Contractor’s architectural vocation for DLF is best understood as a symbolic and material articulation of this new, de-territorialized India.

But this distancing cannot be understood in purely spatial terms. As my argument has been throughout this article, encounters with architecture and urban design occur just as much in space as they do in time. Thus one effect of the de-territorialization of urban space in the neoliberal era is that the vast majority which is excluded from this new urban experience comes to be seen as anachronistic, no longer “pretending to be a part of the contemporary world and relevant to human futures,” as the venerable Ashis Nandy bitingly puts it.123 This is perhaps the hidden irony of the statement that Krishan made that day when we drove past the mirror-glass towers of DLF Cyber City. When he enthusiastically articulated a feeling of not being in India, perhaps what he was also articulating, unbeknownst to himself, was his own temporal exclusion from the postcolonial narrative of this “new” India.

CHAPTER 6. MOVEMENT AS MEDIUM: AUTOMOBILITY AND
SUBJECTIVITY IN NEO DELHI

Speed enables you to see. It does not simply allow you to arrive at your destination more quickly, rather it enables you to see and foresee. Speed changes the world vision.

-Paul Virilio

6.0 Introduction

This chapter does three things. First, it analyzes a work of contemporary literature from India in which movement, rather than merely language, is the medium of expression. Second, it proposes a model of subjectivity that is made possible by a particular form of mobility in urban space. Third, it examines recent episodes of transportation politics in Neo Delhi and India at large, analyzing these on the basis of this model of subjectivity.

I will use the motif of movement as medium, which is so central to the narrative of the literary work examined in the next section, to explore the ways in which hierarchies of movement and urban transportation in particular serve to partition the postcolonial megacity and political life in violently problematic ways, while also giving narrative intelligibility to the transformative present. That is, movement is both a metaphor and a force, an embodied experience. This dual deployment of movement brings together (without collapsing the distinctions between) subjective experiences of mobility in urban India and the inter-subjective narratives of progress and newness (a nation “on the move” and “rising”) that characterize the discourse of postcolonial capitalism and the spatial practices of neoliberal urbanism.
6.1 *The White Tiger*

In 2008, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga won the prestigious Booker Prize for best literary work of fiction in the Anglophone world that year (other notable South Asian writers to receive this award in years past include Salman Rushdie for *Midnight’s Children* [1981] and Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* [1997]). But like other recent texts dealing with contemporary India in a decidedly unsavory light (Adiga does this, as we will see, with a satirical zeal that is reminiscent of, if perhaps slightly less subtle than, Rushdie), the book and its prize-winning status were fervently debated in the English-language public sphere of urban India. Often times, criticism easily slipped from arguments about *The White Tiger*’s style (simplistic, inconsistent) and form (unconvincing, inauthentic) to its content (demeaning and anti-Indian), easily stoking the sub-currents of nationalism in many critics.124

Perhaps the idea of the British awarding a Booker Prize for a work like *The White Tiger*, which as we will see, provokes a morally ambiguous reflection on the social divides that partition Indian society, or the Americans awarding an Oscar to a film like Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire*, released the same year to international audiences, served as a bitter reminder for the Indian public that former-colonial masters and neo-colonial powers continue to recognize India primarily as a poor, backwards, and violently underdeveloped country. This image is dramatically at odds with the public narrative propagated in the discourses of postcolonial capitalism, which, as we have seen thus far in this book, work tirelessly to secure the image and intelligibility of the “new” India in contrast to this ostensibly “old” India. One way

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124 Danny Boyle’s 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire* similarly generated vitriolic condemnations from some writers for its vivid depiction of Mumbai slums and the violence of urban poverty, particularly after it won an Oscar in the United States for best picture.
of reading the public reaction to works like *The White Tiger*, or *Slumdog Millionaire* (which I will not examine here) is as the reaction and rejection on the part of an elite class of an anachronistic, inferior presence that persistently haunts the present and just as persistently must be conjured away. But before addressing these criticisms, which unearth a mediated realm of public and political life that goes hand-in-hand with the becoming dominant narrative of postcolonial capitalism, it will be necessary to first examine what exactly it is that Adiga’s novel does. As we will see, what the novel *does* is far more interesting, and crucial for my argument in this chapter, than what it ostensibly represents or mis-represents.

*The White Tiger* is written in the first person, from the perspective of one Balram Halwai. Balram is the son of a rickshaw puller from the rural village of Laxmangarh, a fictional town set along the banks of the Ganga River, likely in the state of Bihar (although this is never explicitly confirmed in the novel). By way of brief summary, the narrator’s story is one of escape from poverty and ignorance to wealth and enlightenment (of sorts), made possible through two forms of movement, spatial and social: across national space from rural to urban India, on the one hand, and up the steep class hierarchy of Indian society, on the other.

Balram begins his journey first by becoming the chauffer of a politically powerful family in Laxmangarh. Through circumstance, conniving, and good fortune, Balram manages to secure the job of driver for the son of the family and his wife, who are newly returned to India from the United States. The couple, along with Balram, move from Laxmangarh to Delhi (Gurgaon in particular) to work the family’s political connections in the capital. While working in Delhi and Gurgaon as a private chauffer, Balram is introduced to many of the colors, contrasts and contradictions of social and political life in urban India, which I examine in more detail below. Balram
eventually murders his “master,” as he refers to Ashok, in order to begin his life anew, escaping his fate as a faceless servant and gaining inclusion into dominant society. For this he is unrepentant: “All I wanted was the chance to be a man—and for that, one murder was enough” (318).

As a protagonist, Adiga’s narrator Balram Halwai is far from a simplistic or two-dimensional character. Indeed, Balram’s stories and opinions, which are contradictory yet persuasive, idiosyncratic yet compelling, are what drive the darkly comedic pace of the narration. He is immensely likeable, but also tremendously flawed. Balram is angry, but understandably so: born into a position of social confinement and exclusion, he can only begin to grasp his existential and social invisibility vis-à-vis dominant society after singularly reversing the forces which rendered him subaltern.

Balram’s quasi-Fanonian narrative, which finds its liberation through an unflinching embrace of violence, is inscribed in a series of letters to the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jaiboa, upon the latter’s highly publicized visit to India. According to a media report, “Mr Jiabao wants to meet some Indian entrepreneurs and hear the story of their success from their own lips” (4). To this end, Balram offers his own story as a shining example of such “success” and proceeds to write it down.

In narrating his story to the Chinese Premier, Balram paints a grim portrait of contemporary India: a country severely divided between haves and have-nots, urban lifestyles and rural poverty, English-language speakers and those stuck in the vernacular, and more. Through the words of his protagonist, Adiga encapsulates these historically produced divisions in stunningly simple terms. As Balram rather glibly points out early in the novel, India is not just one country, it is really two: “an
India of Light, and an India of Darkness” (14). He tells Jiabao, “You see, I am in the Light now, but I was born and raised in the Darkness” (ibid.).

The India of Darkness includes Balram’s childhood rural village in eastern-central India, which he describes as full of failed schools that lack teachers, hospitals that lack doctors, and corrupt politicians who use elections to gain favors and further selfish ends. From his own perspective, Balram’s singularity lies in the way he was able to use opportunity and circumstance to escape from the Darkness and enter into the Light.

But this escape from darkness to light was not simply a matter of moving from rural to urban India. Rather, soon after he finds himself in Delhi, Balram realizes that many others in the city were just like he was, only worse, living on the streets and in slums, laboring as construction workers, street cleaners and rag pickers: “These poor bastards had come from the Darkness to find some light—but were still in the darkness” (138). As a driver for a family belonging to Delhi’s political and economic elite, Balram feels relatively privileged, and comes to occupy a kind of third-space in between the Darkness and the Light. Crucially, it is the enclosed space of the automobile that allows him to see the spectral presence of darkness in the light of the city:

With their tinted windows up, the cars of the rich go like dark eggs down the roads of Delhi...We were like to separate cities—inside and outside the dark egg. I knew I was in the right city. But my father, if he were alive, would be sitting on that pavement, cooking some rice and gruel for dinner, and getting ready to lie down and sleep under a streetlamp, and I couldn’t stop thinking of that and recognizing his features in some beggar out there. So I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it. (134...139)

The third space of the enclosed automobile allows Balram to virtually connect with those living on the streets of Delhi, seeing traces of his past in the violently
partitioned urban present. But it also allows him to discern his own relative privilege over those he passes by driving everyday in the city. And it is spatial mobility that ultimately allows Balram to begin to imagine his vertical ascent up the steep social hierarchy of contemporary India.

The car transports Balram, along with his rich employers, Mr Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam, through the partitioned and fragmented spaces of Delhi and Gurgaon. His employers live in a gated community in Gurgaon called Buckingham Estate in DLF City. But Balram navigates neoliberal spaces in Delhi city as well, such as a mall called PVR Saket in posh south Delhi: “The scene of a big cinema, which shows ten or twelve films at the same time, and charges over a hundred and fifty rupees per film—yes, that’s right, a hundred and fifty rupees! That’s not all: you’ve also got plenty of places to drink beer, dance, pick up girls, that sort of thing. A small bit of America in India” (123). But while exposed to these images and signs of neoliberal urbanism in Neo Delhi, Balram is simultaneously reminded of his own exclusion from the same, as well as the fact that every exclusionary urban enclave has its abjected, yet necessary, other, its condition of possibility:

Beyond the last shining shop begins the second PVR. Every big market in Delhi is two markets in one—there is always a smaller, grimmer mirror image of the real market, bucked somewhere into a by-lane…This is the market for servants. I crossed over to this second PVR—a line of stinking restaurants, tea stalls, and giant frying pans where bread was toasted in oil. The men who work in the cinemas, and who sweep them clean, come here to eat. The beggars have their homes here. (ibid.)

Singularly mobilized as a driver, Balram nonetheless knows that of the two PVRs—the mini-America and the grimmer mirror image—he belonged squarely to the latter and was strictly prohibited from ever entering the glittering spaces of the former: “no one had to tell us these things” (ibid.).
Indeed, servants like Balram and impoverished urban dwellers always already knew they didn’t belong to places like PVR Saket because they had internalized their own social and existential exclusion from dominant society. Never afraid of grand-theorizing, Balram comes to explain this internalized submission to dominance and exclusion in a colorful term: “the Rooster’s Coop.” Even when roosters know they are about to get slaughtered in a farm, Balram explains, “they do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country” (175). This is how Balram explains why the multitudes that comprise the oppressed classes and castes in India seem to passively accept their servitude. Is it “because Indians are the world’s most honest people? No. It’s because 99.9 percent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like the poor guys in the poultry market…Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That’s because we have the coop” (ibid.).

While others might explain India’s socio-economic structure in terms of complex orders of class hierarchy and caste identity, for Balram, “there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat—or get eaten up” (64). It is the Rooster’s Coop that polices this Manichean division: “The coop is guarded from the inside…A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent—as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way—to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse” (176).

Indeed, it is “the trustworthiness of servants” that “is the basis of the entire Indian economy,” Balram critically discovers (175). Trustworthiness is what enables the Darkness and the Light to come into intimate contact in everyday urban life and yet reproduce strict social borders of inclusion and exclusion. Proximity and intimacy allow servants to at once witness the opulent lifestyles of their masters, while
simultaneously accept and internalize their own exclusion from the same. Balram’s realization of this is profound: “Don’t test your chauffer with a rupee coin or two—he may well steal that much. But leave a million dollars in front of a servant and he won’t touch a penny” (175).

So how does Balram manage to transcend this fundamental division? How does Balram manage to not only murder his master and steal a large sum of money, but also get away with it and live to tell us about it? In his own conception, Balram is a “white tiger,” a mutant, a freak accident of postcolonial history. He is the exception that proves the rule of the Rooster’s Coop and its pervasive social control. Balram takes advantage Ashok’s trust in him to do “things that I am still ashamed to admit. I cheated my employer. I siphoned his petrol. I took his car to a corrupt mechanic who billed him for work that was not necessary; and three times, while driving back to Buckingham B [the gated residential complex in Gurgaon where Ashok lives], I picked up a paying customer” (152). Thus, while still operating within the constricted moral economy of the master-servant relationship, in which Balram continues to outwardly display his loyalty and subservience to his employer, he nonetheless resists invisibly from his position of marginalization: “The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me…That was when it hit me—in a way it never had before—how the rich always get the best things in life, and all that we get is their leftovers” (230, 233).

Still, it is not the mere realization of oppression and exclusion that is the key to Balram’s liberation, for India has “a billion servants [who] are secretly fantasizing about strangling their bosses” (125). What is crucial is the willingness to act on such fantasies, and here the price of breaking out of the Rooster’s Coop is perilously high: “only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned
alive by the masters—can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature. It would in fact, take a white tiger” (177).

Balram’s break comes when he decides to savagely kill his master in cold blood on a dark road in Delhi, steals a large bundle of money, and absconds to Bangalore, where he starts a business of his own, a transportation company that shuttles call center workers to and from their offices at all hours of the night. Balram murders his master not out of personal hatred for the latter. In fact, he describes Ashok as relatively kind and sympathetic compared to other “masters” depicted in the novel. Balram’s motivations are rather Fanonian, to de-colonize his oppressed humanity paradoxically through a de-humanizing act of violence: “I’ll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat. I’ll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means to not be a servant” (321).

In the end, for the price of possibly losing his entire family back in Laxmangarh, and being permanently on the run from the law, Balram gains inclusion into postcolonial capitalist society, becoming a bona fide part of “a new Bangalore for a new India” (318). Regarding the problem of being on the lamb, Balram is confident that he will get away with his crime: “The police searched for me in the darkness, but I hid myself in the light” (118). The very social divisions that had once excluded him now protect his inclusion: “Mr. Ashok’s family can put up a reward of a million dollars on my head, and it will not matter. I have switched sides: I am now one of those who cannot be caught in India” (320).
And regarding the price he had to pay to gain this inclusion, Balram holds no regrets: “Why not? Am I not a part of all that is changing this country? Haven’t I succeeded in the struggle that every poor man here should be making?” (318).

It is perhaps here where those who have publicly criticized the novel took their biggest offense. For example, the well-known Delhi-based writer Khushwant Singh joined the chorus of critics that felt Adiga’s cynical novel portrayed an overly negative, and morally repugnant image of India. While admitting that Adiga’s novel was well-written and “highly readable,” it was “also infinitely depressing; it is a dark, one-sided picture of India I have ever read [sic.] I don’t mind reading harsh criticism of my countrymen, but I find half-truths unpalatable” (Singh 2008). Singh argues that Adiga’s novel focused only on the negative aspects of India in general and Delhi in particular, ignoring any positive aspects.

Adiga now says he wants to dedicate his prize-winning novel to the people of Delhi. However, it is not the Delhi of which Dilliwalas are proud of—a city of marble palaces, mosques and temples, of ancient forts and mausolea—all this escapes the author’s eyes. What draws him are the slums, stench of drains filled with human excrement, pigs rummaging in garbage dumps, pimps and prostitutes. We, who belong to this city, have nothing to thank him for. But bless him. Though full of half-truths, he writes well. His black humour and biting satire persuade the reader to forgive him. (ibid.)

Other critics were less concerned with the content, per se, and more with the style of writing, which they found unconvicing. Some questioned the very capacity of someone like Adiga, a transnational, English-educated man of the Indian middle class, to speak for a subaltern like Balram.125 One critic asked, for instance, “is this just Adiga speaking to the reader over the head of his character, trying to score some

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125 Adiga was born in Madras and raised in Mangalore before studying in Australia, America, and England.
points for being a bleeding heart?”

126 This particular critic also found the writing itself to be decidedly inauthentic: “Adiga cannot persuasively inhabit the voice or perspective of a hick from the hinterland,” referring ostensibly to Balram. 127

But one could respond, who could persuasively inhabit such a voice, and what would constitutive its authenticity? Rather than getting caught up in questions of authorial intentionality (Adiga’s “bleeding heart” agenda) or his subject’s authenticity (inhabiting the voice “of a hick from the hinterland”), I read the book in a radically different way.

Namely, I argue that The White Tiger shouldn’t be read as an inauthentic rendition of India seen “from below,” or from a “subaltern” perspective. It is, first of all, an English novel written for an English audience (though it has been subsequently translated into Hindi and other Indian languages). In this sense, how could it be anything other than a view from above? 128 But through the first person narration of Balram Halwai, this view is articulated from an uncommon perspective: a view from above that is rendered askew. Our focus, then, should not be on whether or not Balram is authentic or contrived, but rather on an entirely different set of questions. Through Balram’s violent, grotesque, and morally ambiguous narrative, a mirror is held up to elite urban society in neoliberal India. What image is it that is refracted through Balram’s convoluted, fragmented, and idiosyncratic narration? In my reading of Adiga’s novel, Halwai is depicted not as an “authentic” subaltern, but rather as an aesthetic subject whose movements reveal various centrifugal forces at work in the

127 Ibid.
128 See Chapter Three for the history of class and the English language in colonial and postcolonial India.
neoliberal Indian city, allowing us to explore an uncommon sense of neoliberal urbanism that is nonetheless rendered from above.

Adiga’s presentation of Balram’s story of self-becoming is only made possible through extraordinary violence. The novel leaves us to think not so much about what was learned and what changed in the protagonist to constitute an individual’s, or (by way of metaphor), a nation’s evolution, as in a classic version of *Bildungsroman*. Rather, it pushes us to think more critically about the social milieu and spatial environment within which Balram executes his transformation from a socially excluded member of India’s vast servant underclass, to a shining personification of “tomorrow’s India,” as he puts it, “a self-taught entrepreneur” (Adiga 2008: 6).

It is movement as a medium that allows Adiga’s novel to pursue this extra-representational vocation (that is, presenting something other than an “authentic” subaltern perspective or something irreducibly linked to the author’s own “intentionality”). As pointed out earlier, Balram is mobilized within neoliberal India in two related ways—across horizontal, or geographic space from rural to urban India and within divided and partitioned urban space itself, and up vertical space, that is, up the steep class hierarchy of Indian society—and it is the way these two forms of mobility are related that is both the subject of this chapter and the strength of *The Write Tiger* as a critical aesthetic work, at least in my (admittedly interested and partial) reading.

In addition to these two forms of mobility, however, what is also powerfully offered in Adiga’s novel are the kinds of agency, economy, and most critically, *knowledge*, that are made possible through *automobility*, which will be explored subsequently in this chapter. At the level of agency, it is the car and his position as a
private chauffer, that is, a car-driver, that affords Balram the opportunity to murder his master and get away with it. At the level of economy, once Balram absconds to Bangalore, it is automobility, or one form of it (taxiing call center workers), that empowers him and signals his inclusion in the “new India.” As he tells the Chinese Premier towards the end of the novel, “The last stage of my amazing success story, sir, was to go from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur” (299). Setting up a taxi service for call center workers in Bangalore represents this entrepreneurial transformation and his own economic success.

But perhaps most critical for the ideas I want to put forth in this chapter regarding the relationship between mobility and subjectivity in urban space, is the kind of knowledge and experience of the city that Balram gains through his employment and everyday activities as a driver. Balram not only navigates and encounters the new urban spaces of Gurgaon and parts of Delhi, what I have collectively termed Neo Delhi—malls, gated communities, Cyber Cities, etc.—he is also able to “hear” Delhi’s voice (297), to understand its workings and contradictions. He encounters a city that is a perpetual “work in progress”: “There is construction work in any direction you look in Delhi” (158). Moreover, as a driver he experiences and begins to critique the partitioned and fragmented spaces of neoliberal urbanism:

Displaying their usual genius for town planning, the rich of Delhi had built this part of Gurgaon with no parks, lawns or playgrounds—it was just buildings, shopping malls, hotels and more buildings. There was a pavement outside, but that was for the poor to live on. So if you wanted to do some ‘walking’, it had to be done around the concrete compound of your own building. (225)

But as a hired driver, a member of the servant class of urban India, Balram is simultaneously excluded from neoliberal urban spaces even as he encounters them everyday, and thus it is a fragmented subjectivity and partitioned experience that is
presented through his narrative. “The Autobiography of a Half-Baked India. That’s what I ought to call my life’s story,” Balram tell the Chinese Prime Minister after hearing Ashok tell his wife that Balram couldn’t understand most of what they said in his presence. (10). Excluded within the car itself, Balram’s subjectivity and mobility is itself fragmented: “When you’re the driver, you never see the whole picture. Just flashes, glimpses, bits of conversation” (140). But it is through this fragmentary experience that Balram learns of his employer’s dealings and eventually plans his eventual murder and liberation. Beyond this narrative function, however, Balram is also able to hear and interpret crucial signs and discourses of the narrative of postcolonial capitalism that render the intelligibility of neoliberal urbanist spaces like Gurgaon. For instance, in the midst of an argument between Pinky and Ashok, the latter tries to convince his wife about the benefits of staying in India and not returning to America, as Balram listens:

The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years. Plus, I like it better here. We’ve got people to take care of us here—our drivers, our watchmen, our masseurs. Where in New York will you find someone to bring you tea and sweet biscuits while you’re still lying in bed, the way Ram Bahadur does for us? You know, he’s been in my family for thirty years—we call him a servant, but he’s part of the family… (89)

Such narratives, which are a part of the discourse of postcolonial capitalism and its projection of a future-oriented, “new” India (ten years behind the United States), are experienced by Balram from an “uncommon” perspective, one of exclusion. But this only serves to render these dominant discourses unfamiliar and strange, the hybrid expression of an alienated postcolonial imaginary, as analyzed in Chapters One and Three.

Balram’s fragmented urban epistemology and his opportunistic economic agency are afforded through his car-dependent mobility. Whether or not its author is
telling the truth or “half-truth” about the “real” India, Adiga’s novel allows us to theorize more broadly about the relationship between automobility and subjectivity in urban space. In order to pursue this, however, it is necessary to first provide a brief gloss on a concept that I have been arguing is central to the narrative thrust and the extra-representational power of The White Tiger: automobility.

6.2 Automobility as an Urban Ontology

James Flink first developed the term “automobility” in an article published in American Quarterly in 1972. In “Three Stages of American Automobile Consciousness” Flink used the term to explain “the rapid development of an attitudinal and institutional context that made the domination of American civilization by the automobile inevitable” (1972, 452). Beginning with the advent of the mass-consumer car in first half of the twentieth century, the subsequent maturation of the automobile industry in the middle of the century, and continuing on to his present, Flink argued that automobility became a powerful cultural institution because of the way in which it both fit within and extended an existing moral economy in the United States that valued liberal ideas of individualism, self-responsibility, and free mobility. Automobiles were valued for providing faster, safer, more convenient and more reliable transportation that made previous modes of personal transport moot, namely the horse-drawn carriage. But besides the technical capacities and improvements of the automobile, individualism—“defined in terms of privatism, freedom of choice and opportunity to extend one’s control over his physical and social environment”—was one of the important American core values that automobility promised to preserve and enhance in a changing urban-industrial society” (455). The self-mobilization afforded
by the automobile seemed to comport well with a society that traditionally favored personal responsibility and self-help over government intervention. Spatial mobility through cars was also understood as augmenting upward class mobility, as ownership of cars quickly went from being a status symbol of elite privilege in the early twentieth century to one of everyday utility and middle class belonging by mid-century.

Flink argued that automobility radically altered the social and physical landscape of the country, leading to the antiseptic city (no more horse shit on the street!), the end of rural isolation, improved roads, better medical care, consolidated schools, decentralization of business and residential patterns, and the creation of a standardized national culture. Perhaps most significantly, automobility not only normalized a dominant middle class identity, it also led to the creation of a de-politicized space for reproducing middle class heteronormativity (Warner 1991): the suburbs. Perhaps no one articulated the paradoxical politics of automobility (where politics worked through a distinctly liberal de-politicizing rhetoric) better than one of its chief architects, Henry Ford, who proclaimed that, with the help of the personal automobile “we shall solve the city problem by leaving the city” (quoted in Flink 1972, 456). And this was indeed one of the chief political values of automobility in America and elsewhere, “that it permitted escape from the supposedly debilitating environment of the city without cutting one self off from the advantages only the metropolis offered” (ibid). As we have seen in the previous chapters of this book, such proximate escapism is highly valued within the fragmented and partitioned urban imaginary of Neo Delhi.

In the aftermath of Flink’s work, the concept of automobility has been advanced by a number of urban theorists who have taken to the term to think how
experience and subjectivity in the city are radically transformed with the advent of automobility. They have also expanded on the scope of the term itself. John Urry, for instance, defines automobility as a complex machinic assemblage that not only reifies a moral economy that values individualism and freedom of movement, it also generates the conditions for its own social reproduction. Automobility comprises not just cars, but also a number of related industries (construction, oil, steel, real estate, etc.), spaces (roads and cities, suburbs and the interstate highway system) and people (drivers, passengers and workers that produce and advertise cars) that are all mobilized in myriad ways. But at a more general level Urry notes that, “It is through automobility’s restructuring of time and space that it generates the need for ever more cars to deal with what they presuppose and call into existence” (Urry 2004, 27). Automobility thus comes to represent “a system that coerces people into an intense flexibility” (ibid.), or what Mike Shapiro calls in a slightly different context, “an important aspect of contemporary power: an imposition of an obligation to mobility” (Shapiro 1999: 33).

Automobility is self-regenerative because “the mobilization of self assures its own reproduction by creating social, spatio-temporal and technological conditions that restrict the genesis of any other mobility paradigm” (Wahdan 2007: 45). Generating the ontological conditions of its own reproductive possibility, automobility “produces desires for flexibility that so far only the car is able to satisfy…[as] modernist urban landscapes were built to facilitate automobility and to discourage other forms of human movement” (Urry 2004, 29-30). In shaping desires and spaces for its own material and ideological reproduction, automobility is conceived here as not simply a large and dispersed industrial complex, as it was for someone like Guy Debord and the Situationists in the late 1950s (Debord 1959), but
as a complex social imaginary that “is neither socially necessary nor inevitable but has seemed impossible to break from” (27).

Closely associated with the phenomenon of automobility is its virtual, cyborg subject: the car-driver, part machine, part human. Urry defines the car-driver as “a hybrid assemblage of specific human activities, machines, roads, buildings, signs and cultures of mobility…What is key is not the ‘car’ as such but the system of these fluid interconnections” (26). Nigel Thrift fills in the conceptual persona of the car-driver by thinking about

driving (and passengering) as both profoundly embodied and sensuous experiences, though of a particular kind, which ‘requires and occasions a metaphysical merger, an intertwining of the identities of the driver and car that generates a distinctive ontology in the form of a person-thing, a humanized car or, alternatively, an automobilized person. (Thrift 2004, 47)

The embodied and sensuous experience of driving makes possible perceptions of/in movement, space, and time, as well as a complex relationship of the car-driver and the surrounding built environment. Tim Dant theorizes the car-driver assemblage as enacting a relationship between bodies, movement and space: “the perception of the road, other moving objects and embodied movement depends not on processing data as a machine would, but through experiencing the process in relation to bodily memory” (Dant 2004, 72). In framing the car-driver assemblage as a relationship not only of bodies and space, but between movement, perception, and memory, Dant moves us to the ontological terrain of subjectivity, as developed by Deleuze (qua Bergson).

Automobility, in shaping urban infrastructures and spatial economies, but also producing subjects that desire mobility and imagine the city through movement, is more complex than a purely technical process. It is also more complex than the
economic interests that are often-times served by it, for just as often the desire for preserving the system of automobility goes against strictly economic interests and logics (Shapiro 2010). For the sake of clarity and elucidation, I operationalize the concept of automobility in two separate episodes of urban transport politics in Delhi and in India at large. I conceptualize automobility as a complex social imaginary that operates “by its capacity to organize and institutionalize the sets of meanings through which agents understand the world and act within it” (Muppidi 2004, 26). It is precisely through such understandings and actions that agents are inscribed with identities and rendered intelligible as urban subjects. In the next two sections, we will see how the social/urban imaginary of automobility works in public discourses surrounding transport politics, de-limiting fields of intelligibility and inscribing particular identities and subject-positions with meaning and value, while excluding other ways of being and becoming in the city as unintelligible.

6.3 Automobility in Neoliberal India

The concept of automobility was developed in the context of the United States over the space of the twentieth century, as car-ownership greatly expanded and went from being a marker of class distinction to one of middle class normalization. The spread of automobile culture is thus intimately intertwined with the emergence of the Fordist middle class of mid-century America.

The difference between automobility and the car-driver assemblage in contemporary India, on one hand, and mid-century America, on the other, is that in the latter, the automobile was a leveler of social difference and class, whereas in India today, it enhances class differences and creates radical spatial and existential
distances, as exemplified in the movements and experiences of Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger*. In neoliberal urban India, class distinction is amplified by automobility in its symbolic dimension, that is, as a marker of status, and its material dimension, as an enabler of movement and the extension of individuals and groups across geographic space with greater ease and comfort. As Marshall McLuhan argues, “it is the *power* of the motorcar that levels all social differences, and makes the pedestrian a second-class citizen…The simple and obvious fact about the car is that, more than any horse, it is an extension of man that turns the rider into a superman” (1964: 221).

What is remarkable is that automobility is a minoritarian affair in urban India, yet commands a major portion of funds for urban infrastructure and development, particularly over the past decade of intensified neoliberal urbanism. Even in the National Capital Region of Delhi, which has more cars than the next three largest metros combined,\(^{129}\) cars are owned by less than 15% of urban households, as the vast majority of urban dwellers in the capital rely on walking, bicycling, and public modes of transport like buses. Indeed, between 2002 and 2007, total funds allocated for the transport sector in Delhi doubled, but 80% of these additional funds were allocated for car-oriented infrastructure, such as flyovers, expressways and road-widening schemes (Tiwari 2007: 45). The vast majority of funds go to service a privileged mode of transport used by a small (but economically and politically powerful) minority of the

\(^{129}\) The increase in car and motorcycle ownership in Delhi is staggering. According to one recent study, the city adds nearly 100,000 cars everyday to its teeming streets, or 275 per day. In addition, Delhi adds about 450 motorcycles per day (Sivaramkrishnan 2007: 21), signaling the new economic and spatial mobility of the lower-rungs of the middle class. Despite the fact that cars and motorcycles constitute forms of automobility that are generally associated with freer and faster travel, over-saturation of automobiles has led to a dramatic deceleration of average speeds on Delhi’s streets: “the average vehicular speed fell from 20-27 km/h in 1997 to only 15 km/h in 2002. moreover, the periods of peak congestion in Delhi now last 5 h: from 8:30 to 10:30 in the morning and from 4:30 to 7:30 in the evening (Pucher *et al.* 2005: 192).
urban populace, “Therefore, an investment in car friendly infrastructure is not meant for the majority of commuters” (ibid.)

In the two decades between 1981 and 2001, the population of urban India nearly doubled. Within that same time span, the number of registered vehicles in Indian cities rose nearly eight-fold (Wadhan 2007: 49). This hugely disproportionate rise in mostly cars and motorcycles (owned by different segments of the middle class) has been linked to the liberalization of the Indian economy and the “rise” of the urban middle class. But the sheer volume of cars and motorcycles has also brought increased attention to problems of traffic and road congestion, environmental damage, as well as harmful effects on health and safety in cities.

6.4 The Debacle of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Delhi

In 2005, the Ministry of Urban Development outlined a strategy for dealing with this rapid increase in urban congestion, arguing that “Billions of man hours are lost with people ‘stuck in traffic’…poor mobility can become a major dampener to economic growth and cause the quality of life to deteriorate” (MoUD 2005, 3-4). In the policy white paper produced by MoUD, it was recommended that state and urban local bodies should enact policies “that bring about a more equitable allocation of road space with people, rather than vehicles, as its main focus”

One initiative that the MoUD advocated in 2005 was implemented in Delhi in 2008. The white paper suggested that people-oriented transport and equitable re-distribution of road space could “be achieved by reserving lanes and corridors exclusively for public transport and non-motorized modes of travel” (MoUD 2005, 8).
Pointing out that “public transport occupies less road space and causes less pollution per passenger-km than personal vehicles…the central government would promote investments in public transport as well as measures that make its use more attractive than that of personal motor vehicles” (8).

But the task of making public transport more attractive than personal motor vehicles is an extremely tall order, given the ontological and self-regenerative power of automobility outlined above. Indeed, public modes of urban transport, by their very collectivizing nature, can never be as flexible and mobile as individual modes like cars and motorcycles. Therefore, one would need to do two things simultaneously: (1) make public transport more attractive to those already personally mobile (i.e. increase the comfort-level, convenience and safety of public transport vehicles, making them nearly as efficient and desirable as personal transport); and (2) make personal transport less appealing to those who already use it (i.e. either by taxing car use, fuel and parking, or making personal transport less efficient in terms of speed and time on the road, presumably by increasing the share of the road allocated to public transport, while decreasing that given to personal modes).

The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Delhi, I would argue, was an initiative that tried to do both. But because it impacted car-drivers and automobility most adversely (at least insofar as the Delhi media reported it), BRT was virtually unanimously condemned in newspapers and popular discourses as an abject failure. In this section I will outline the brief history of this beleaguered project, the way in which it was reported in the print media, and the politics of representation that actualized automobility as a becoming dominant urban imaginary, an imaginary that
renders the intelligibility of the urban by foreclosing the possibility for alternative experiences and space-time modalities in the city.\textsuperscript{130}

Originally called the High Capacity Bus System (HCBS), BRT in Delhi was intended to re-distribute road space and speed amongst different modes of urban transport. It did this by designing dedicated bus lanes and dividing the remainder of road space between motorized vehicles (cars, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws) and non-motorized transport (pedestrians, bicyclists and cycle-rickshaws) along selected corridors in the city. BRT thus entails a comprehensive transportation system which through various improvements in infrastructure, scheduling of traffic movement and vehicles, attempts to use buses for providing a mode of transport better than an ordinary bus line. The road is designed and engineered with dedicated bus lanes that no other vehicles can use and likewise, there are separated lanes for motorized vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.\textsuperscript{131}

BRT was first implemented in the city of Curitiba, Brazil in 1974, where it was a celebrated success. Since then, the Curitiba BRT has been used as a model in many other cities, particularly in South America. Enrique Penalosa, former mayor of Bogota, Columbia, institutionalized BRT in his city in the 1990s, arguing that BRT “systems invented in Curitiba, Brazil and applied in cities such as Bogota are moving more passengers per kilometer per hour than 95 percent of rail systems, at comparable speeds and at a fraction of the cost” (Penalosa 2008, 12). Indeed, BRT is often seen as a more affordable alternative to elevated or underground metro rail systems, and according to Penalosa, is essential for cities in the developing world with vast class and speed inequalities. In this way, BRTs constitute one way of

\textsuperscript{130} Please see my short-video \textit{Delhi in Movement} to see my own preliminary and cinematic exploration of heterogeneous experiences of mobility and space-time modalities in Old Delhi, New Delhi and Neo Delhi. The experimental video seeks to construct sound-image assemblages that do not seek out the “truth” of urban transport in Delhi, but rather seeks to provide (conceptual/cinematic) vehicles for experiencing the city differently. The video can be streamed at: \url{http://vimeo.com/16778056}

\textsuperscript{131} “Know BRT”, \textit{Express India}, March 20, 2008.
democratizing road space and access to urban mobility in a fashion that is decidedly non-car-centric.

In Delhi, HCBS was first conjured in 1996 as a solution to the increasing number of cars and high levels of traffic congestion in the city. It was formally discussed in 2001 at an international workshop organized by Delhi Transport Corporation and the Infrastructure Development Finance Company Limited (IDFC), where a number of potential corridors were identified for BRT conversion. Five corridors were selected in 2003 after feasibility studies were conducted by RITES, a Government of India enterprise that researches and reports on urban infrastructure. In 2005, HCBS turned into BRT, and was given formal approval by the Delhi government. “The 14.5 km-long corridor between Ambedkar Nagar and Delhi Gate was taken up for construction in October 2006. 5.6 km of the stretch, till Moolchand flyover, [was] expected to be functional in April 2008.”

The design concept and specifications for the Delhi BRT system were drawn up at the Transportation Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Delhi, under the leadership of two professors there, Dr. Geetam Tiwari and Dr. Dinesh Mohan. Their design had several features that were common with other BRT systems, although the Delhi design was not a complete replica of the Curitiba model. Like many BRT systems in South America, however, the Delhi BRT featured central bus lanes in order to avoid conflict with left-turning traffic, as well as to ensure safer lanes for bicycles and pedestrians, who would have lanes at the sides of the road. All other motorized traffic would fill two lanes in-between the central bus path and side pedestrian/cycle lane. Access to

132 Ibid.
central bus lanes would be provided through special arrangements for commuters to cross the road safely with signalized pedestrian crossings, foot-bridges or underpasses.

Introducing a new fleet of low-floor buses to Delhi’s otherwise aging public buses was also a part of the BRT design. In these new buses, the entries and exits would be completely level with the platforms at the bus shelters, making for safe, convenient, and fast boarding and disembarking. In addition, bus stops were to be located close to intersections, as this was determined by TRIPP to be the safest place for commuters to cross the road, and would also increase the catchment area of the bus system. According to Tiwari, “traffic lights will be synchronized so pedestrians get ample time to cross roads and the vehicles at no point will have to wait more than 70 seconds.” Finally, and unlike the majority of South American BRT systems, but like those designed elsewhere in Asia, Delhi’s would be an “open BRT system,” in which buses could move in and out of the dedicated bus corridor as per their route requirements. In a closed BRT system, buses cannot move outside their central corridor. In a special “TRIPP Bulletin” that explained much of the rationale behind their BRT design, TRIPP argued that “it is easier to integrate the existing city bus service with an open BRT system,” and that closed systems were better suited to longer trip lengths and specific land use patterns, neither of which were the case for Delhi and other Indian cities (TRIPP 2008, 4).

The Delhi BRT system opened for a trial-run on Monday April 21, 2008, with a 5.6 km-long corridor from Ambedkar Nagar to Moolchand in south Delhi. In the first week of its opening alone, there were over 70 articles featured in Delhi’s

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major newspapers, featuring headlines like the following: “BRT nightmare for school kids on way home,” “Delhi bus corridor: Fiasco continues,” “BRT corridor chaos worse than ever,” “Traffic chaos continues on Delhi’s BRT corridor,” to select just a few. The image below was widely circulated and depicted in striking-visual form the precise problem with the BRT: it was inhibiting automobility.

Images were featured extensively in Delhi’s most widely circulated dailies, both in English and Hindi. They clearly show the central bus lanes nearly empty, with buses presumably moving swiftly up and down the corridor, while cars, motorcycles and auto-rickshaws seem backed-up as far as the eye can see. Stories that accompanied these images featured the testimonies of those who had been most adversely impacted by the BRT corridor, namely the car-driver. “Usually it takes about 30 minutes for me to reach my office in the morning, but since the operation of the corridor, I am being forced to wait for as much as two hours because of jams,” lamented Naveen Mital, a marketing executive whose statement was included in one representative article.134

*Times of India (TOI)*, India’s most popular English daily, presented a special feature entitled “What Delhi Wants,” shortly after the BRT opening, where readers wrote in their opinions on the BRT. “Fix BRT,” H. Mali wrote, “I’m unable to describe the pain and agony which BRT stands for.” “Remove BRT. It’s no good and only makes the traffic situation more dangerous and chaotic. Make flyovers at all bottleneck crossings and road intersections in the city,” suggested Shekhar.135

The same week that BRT opened, *Live Mint*, a subsidiary of the *Wall Street Journal* in India, featured an article by one G.V.L Narasimha Rao, who reiterated

Shekhar’s suggestion above to build more flyovers and continue with road widening schemes in order to ease the flow of traffic in the nation’s capital. The BRT corridor in south Delhi, Rao argued, “has caused huge traffic snarls, leading to public anger as commute times for people using private vehicles has increased to a minimum of 45 minutes.” Furthermore, Rao asserted, “the ‘modal shift’ [from personal to public modes of transport] envisaged is a pipe dream as the condition of public transport is so pathetic that you can hardly expect people who can afford private transport to switch to public transport.” In the TOI special feature, and in articles written by the likes of Rao above, one can discern the crystallization of an urban imaginary whose ontological basis is automobility. Within the public discourse of the English-language print media in Delhi, which gives expression to this becoming dominant imaginary, the BRT was clearly perceived as something that was getting in the way of automobility.

In the media reports immediately following the opening of BRT in Delhi, rarely were pedestrians or bus-riders included to share their experiences with BRT. Rather, the vast majority of testimonies came from personal motorized transport users, who universally condemned the BRT for the fact that it made their daily commutes longer than usual. Just as in the “Gurgaon Collapsing” episode analyzed in Chapter Three, in which elite residents of Gurgaon protested the lack of basic infrastructure in their gated neighborhoods and found in the Delhi print media a natural ally to amplify their protests, here once again the print media served to amplify the public voice of those wealthy enough to afford cars.

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Streetblog.com, which reports on BRT systems around the world, conducted a study on the way in which the Delhi media was framing the BRT issue in late April of 2008, and found that almost all of the 70 news articles that were printed in the major dailies were “sensationally pessimistic.” While Streetblog acknowledged several basic flaws in the design of the Delhi BRT, namely the lack of signage, signal systems not working properly, bus breakdowns, and motorcycles and bicycles entering the bus lanes,

these are problems that can be fixed with time and bus operations can be improved. What seems to be a bigger problem than the hitches and hiccups of the system itself is the destructive role that the media has played, unfairly skewing the coverage of the trial run to make the problem seem worse than it actually is.

Brad Aaron, a writer for Streetblog, criticized the media bias in a video of a cable news show that did a feature on BRT in Delhi shortly after the opening of the trial run in April 2008.

In the video, for example, you can see footage of cars, rickshaws and motorbikes snared in traffic alongside the buslane. What you can also see, however, is that in every shot with a passing bus, the bus is jam packed with people. It’s a clear indication that the system is popular among people who are using it.…When you watch the news footage though, you will notice that the journalist never interviews a single bus passenger to see what their satisfaction is with the system. All they show is disgruntled car owners who fume about what the bus rapid transit corridor has done to car traffic.

In an independent commuter survey conducted by Delhi-based Center for Science and Environment in late May of 2008, one month after BRT opened, it was found that commuters overwhelmingly supported the new BRT system in Delhi. Over 80 percent of bus commuters, pedestrians, and cyclists were happy with BRT and the

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
dedicated bus lane system. On the other hand, only 40 percent of car and two-wheel users were happy with the system.140

How do we explain this disjuncture, which could also be conceptualized as media bias? Before reaching the obvious conclusion (which is actually more complex than one might initially think), namely that the Delhi media’s middle class bias aligns it with the interests of car drivers rather than bus riders, pedestrians and cyclists, let us briefly consider a few alternative explanations.

One explanation is decidedly political. Indeed, the BRT in Delhi was closely associated with the Union Territory’s Chief Minister (CM), Sheila Dixit, a member of the Congress Party. In the face of BRT’s initial turbulence in late April 2008, in which design problems (which were major or minor depending on one’s perspective) seemed to doom the entire project, Dixit was widely attacked by political adversaries, primarily in the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), who made scrapping the BRT altogether a key part of their party platform for elections that were to be held the next year. BJP Chief Ministerial candidate V.K. Malhotra told reporters that Dixit acted “as if the existing traffic mess was not enough that the ruling (Congress) government thought of introducing BRT without any ground work to just add to the public woes.”141 If elected CM, Malhotra proclaimed, “We will not demolish the corridor on which the present government has already spent Rs 120 crore but free the lanes for all the traffic in the area. At least people will not have to suffer due to inordinate delays in the traffic congestion.”

141 “BJP to scrap BRT if comes to power in Delhi,” Indianexpress.com, November 24, 2008.
Just one day into the BRT trial-run, the initiative came under severe attack from members of Parliament, one of whom called BRT “one of the most ill-conceived transport schemes” ever witnessed.\textsuperscript{142} Later that week, Dixit responded to the attacks by acknowledging short comings in the design: “Is has been decided that till this corridor does not become perfect, we will not undertake any expansion of the project.”\textsuperscript{143} Dixit argued that traffic on BRT was satisfactory for buses, pedestrians and cyclists, with only motorists experiencing problems.

Anti-BRT stances thus often coincided closely with arguments against the Dixit government in Delhi. Rao, who scathingly critiqued BRT in \textit{Live Mint}, also pointed out that “the latest BRT mess—which is her government’s own initiative—has added to the Dixit government’s list of negatives. The unabated negative news coupled with galloping inflation has the potential to undo the uninterrupted reign of the Congress [Party] in Delhi for a decade in the ensuing assembly elections.”\textsuperscript{144}

As it happened, however, the Dixit government won its re-election bid in early 2009, and the supposed “BRT-mess” did not affect the Congress Party as adversely as was predicted in the media. This is not surprising given the fact that even if all car-drivers were against BRT and likewise against the Dixit government, this would still constitute less than 15 percent of the electorate, once again underscoring the problems of consensus faced within the discursive circuits that propagate the narrative politics of postcolonial capitalism. For her part, Dixit never wholly abandoned BRT in the face of so-called “public” opposition, arguing that Delhi needed time to learn how to properly utilize the corridor: “As BRT is a new

\textsuperscript{142}“Delhi’s BRT corridor gets berated in Parliament,” \textit{ExpressIndia.com}, April 22, 2008.
\textsuperscript{143}“Delhi CM gives green signal to BRT,” \textit{NewsAgency.thecheer.org}, April 26, 2008.
concept in the city, people are not much aware of using it. Whenever a new thing is introduced, it is natural people initially face some difficulties.”145

While much of the criticism was of a political bent, oftentimes opposition to BRT was articulated in language that was more technical and design-specific. In these arguments, the concept of BRT was not opposed as such, rather, its design and implementation was found to be at fault. In an article entitled “Abandon BRT,” Times of India reported in December 2008 that, “On BRT, this newspaper has been consistent—it has maintained that a good project has been awfully executed, resulting in traffic chaos in this stretch.”146 Besides the faulty design, many also found the corridor selected for the trial-run, a busy road in wealthy and car-abundant south Delhi, to be a misguided selection. In an editorial, TOI cited a report from a “recognized expert in transport planning” at the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, asserting that the latter’s “observations are a stinging indictment of the project’s implementation.

His report says that even before the BRT corridor was built, the road space was inadequate to handle the traffic volumes—20,000-30,000 phpd (peak hour passenger direction) in the stretch between Ambedkar Nagar and Moolchand, and 40,000 phpd on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marh. “A major blunder has been to take away the 7 meter road width [for the two central bus lanes] from the already inadequate right of way on the road,” it adds.147 While the political opposition launched by the BJP ultimately failed to oust the Dixit government in the aftermath of BRT’s rocky public opening, even the technical argument that critiqued the BRT’s design specifications seems inadequate in light of a recent study that found that the BRT in fact successfully achieved one of its main

147 Ibid.
goals: “the 5.8 km corridor has reduced the average travel time of people traveling by buses by about 35 per cent. Also, the average bus speed on the corridor has increased from 12-13 km/hr to about 19 km/hr. More than 50 per cent commuters on this route travel in buses.”148 Once again, the judgement regarding BRT’s supposed success or failure had very much to do with whether one was consulting automobile drivers or bus passengers. Such findings have been corroborated in other studies that have reiterated the fact that “pedestrians, cyclists and bus users have praised the corridor and strongly advocated its replication to encourage use of non-motorized vehicles and public transport.”149 In fact, Indian Express reported in March of 2009 that Dixit’s government was to be awarded at a Pan-Asian conference in Taiwan for “hassle free and successful execution” of the Bus Rapid Transit corridor.150

Yet in that same month, local newspapers in Delhi were still sensationalizing the BRT’s ostensible “public failure,” with headlines like the following still appearing: “Delhi reeling under BRT mess.”151 If political opposition and critiques of BRT’s technical design do not suffice to explain such condemnation, then it is clear that the media’s car-centric imaginary is what explains the BRT episode. And yet, what does it mean for the media to display such a bias? And how does this relate to the concept of automobility that we have been discussing?

What our analysis needs to move towards is a way of linking three types of movement together: (1) physical movement across urban space, (2) upward class mobility through the displaying of signs of class distinction (in this case ownership

150 “Delhi’s BRT to be awarded in Taiwan,” Indianexpress.com, March 10, 2009.
of a car or motorcycle), and (3) the temporal imagination that activates narratives of postcolonial capitalism and its historical progress and economic growth.

Indeed, these three forms of movement are presented in Adiga’s *White Tiger* through the aesthetic subject of Balram Halwai, namely his inter-subjective experiences in fragmented urban spaces and movements across these spaces. We should apply the analytic that Adiga’s novel supplies to the BRT episode and the media’s representation of the same. For instance, when the media takes up the cause of automobility, that is, the ontological project of reshaping space-time modalities around the exclusive mobility of private, personal vehicles (even the “right” to such personal transport), what it displays is not simply a middle class bias, but rather the precise stakes that are involved in discourses and practices of postcolonial capitalism vis-à-vis urban space. Automobility functions as an imaginary order that distributes the value and intelligibility of the urban itself at the level of everyday discourses and spatial practices, linking spatial mobility to both upward class mobility and the broader historical movement towards progress, urbanization, modernity.

What is remarkable is how the car-driver as quasi-agent/subject of automobility emerges as an absent presence, a presence whose power in the discursive present is correlated with its absence from the political scene. In other words, through a politics that is de-politicizing, automobility conjures spectral/virtual subjects of mobility, hybrid car-drivers whose subjectivities are split between horizontal (trans-local) and vertical (upward class) trajectories. But the urban ontology of automobility works precisely by excluding other space-time modalities from the regime of intelligibility and value that is constitutive of postcolonial capitalism’s becoming dominant urban imaginary. The public
discourse that surrounded the BRT in Delhi, its immediate and unforgiving condemnation in the televisual and print media, points to the car-centric nature of the image-making machine of neoliberal urbanism. Other vehicles, other ways of moving through and experiencing the city, are excluded from this social imaginary. Automobility becomes a condition of possibility for such an aesthetic and political regime of urbanism.

To demonstrate this more clearly, we will turn to another episode of transport politics that actually occurred far from Delhi, yet powerfully demonstrates the conflict between temporal imaginaries of automobility and resistances to this imaginary. Like the absent agent of neoliberal urbanism (the postcolonial middle class), the car in this episode is physically absent, yet virtually present. It is this virtuality that is to be linked to automobility and the politics of neoliberal urbanism in postcolonial India.

6.5 The Tata Nano: the (Partitioned) People’s Car

In January 2008, the Tata Group, one of India’s largest and most powerful commercial conglomerates, dazzled the international automobile industry when it unveiled its designs for the Tata “Nano,” showcasing it as the most inexpensive production car ever built (valued initially at roughly $2300). The Nano was hyped internationally as “The tiny car with a tinier price tag,” with Newsweek International claiming that the car heralded “a new era in inexpensive personal transportation.” The Nano was hailed not only for its affordability for the new middle classes of India and elsewhere, but also its very compact size, ideal for city driving in increasingly traffic-congested cities.
In the mainstream Indian media, the Nano signified nothing less than the aspiration and increased mobility of the new urban middle classes. As the *Financial Times* reported, “If ever there were a symbol of India’s ambitions to become a modern nation, it would surely be the Nano… A triumph of homegrown engineering, the Nano encapsulates the dreams of millions of Indians groping for a shot at urban prosperity.”

But such postcolonial capitalist dreams seemed to come to a shattering end on October 2, 2008, when the West Bengal car-factory in Singur where the initial fleet of the Nano was being assembled was forced to close down after two years of protest over the process of state-led land acquisition for the factory. Trinamool Congress Party President Mamata Banerjee led the agitation in large part, and soon became the public face of it. Banerjee was representing approximately 15,000 farmers, peasants and agricultural workers in Singur who felt they had been unfairly coerced into selling their farmland to the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC), which then handed over the land to Tata. Close to one thousand acres in total were acquired through the Land Acquisition Act (see Chapter Two for more on this act and its contemporary politics in Gurgaon) for Tata’s car manufacturing plant. The plant had reached 90% completion by October of 2008 and the Nano itself was merely months away from being mass produced and unleashed on the market when an increasingly embattled and frustrated Ratan Tata, chairman of the group, decided to terminate the Singur project site and move the plant to the more “investor friendly” state of Gujurat.

In the mainstream Indian press, and the Delhi print media in particular, there was near universal condemnation of Banerjee for her stringent and unbending opposition to the Nano factory. Banerjee was variously called a “rebel without a
cause,” a “political opportunist,” “blind opposition,” an “enemy of development.” Indeed, Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress Party was a major rival of the long-ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) in West Bengal, but the protests in Singur actually preceded her involvement in the affair. In May of 2006, Ratan Tata announced that Tata Motors was beginning a small car project at Singur, a rural town of approximately 20,000 in West Bengal, and almost immediately, protests and demonstrations amongst farmers whose land was already being forcefully acquired began. The Tata factory was to require no less than 900 acres of land, and the Singur site was selected for its proximity to Kona Expressway, which according to a corporate head at Tata Motors, was “one of the best roads of West Bengal, easily making [Singur] the finest spot for setting up the car unit.”

It was not until two months after the first protests, in July of 2006, that Mamata Banerjee joined in, symbolically sowing paddy near the Tata factory site in Singur to display her solidarity with displaced farmers. Over the next two years, Banerjee rose in political fame and national notoriety while representing the grievances of the farmers, even going on a highly publicized 25-day fast in protest of the ongoing construction of the factory on the acquired lands.

On March 12, 2007, one farmer who was unwilling to part with his land committed suicide. This was the first of dozens of subsequent farmer suicides that occurred in Singur for similar reasons. Days later, a mob attacked the Tata factory fencing, exploding a small bomb that caused damage to the barrier. Throughout 2007, as farmer suicides and demonstrations continued, violence between demonstrators, security and factory workers increased. The forced land acquisition

was challenged legally with the help of Banerjee, but the West Bengal state
government, including its judiciary arm, continually sided with Tata, arguing that
the farmers were getting generously compensated for their land and that the
resulting car factory, which was estimated to generate around 10,000 jobs directly
and indirectly related to Tata, more than met the requirements of helping the
“common interest” of industrial development in West Bengal.

Indeed, from a purely monetary view, the farmers were getting compensated
quite handsomely, receiving Rs. 800,000 (approximately $16,000) per acre from the
state government, and farmers were to be given priority for jobs in the factory, as
well as training for those without the requisite skills.¹⁵³ But to many of the farmers,
the idea of parting with ancestral land that was theirs for generations, and entering
into an entirely different field of work was too difficult to fathom. As one farmer
who had to part with his land told a reporter in 2006, "What use is cash to me?
Putting money in the bank and earning interest is not enough, especially
looking at the rising inflation. With land, my asset remains intact and what I earn from selling
my produce is a bonus. Even if the government promises to give me a job, it fails to
secure my children's future."¹⁵⁴

In the mainstream print media, the Nano affair was largely portrayed as a
debate over the costs and benefits of industrial development. The Times of India,
for instance, featured a special report entitled “Singur Suspended” in early October
2008, just before Ratan Tata announced his decision to withdraw from West Bengal.
At that point, the Nano factory had already been closed for a month, and TOI
reported on the stalled “Nano Effect” in Singur. Since 2006, when construction on

¹⁵³ Ibid.
the plant began and subsequently production of the Nano was initiated, banks, businesses, and satellite economies that serviced the laborers who worked in the plant all thrived economically and grew rapidly, turning the sleepy rural town of Singur into an expanding hub for business and services. In an article titled “A Dream Ride Interrupted,” two TOI writers reported on the travesty of this “Nano Effect” stalled indefinitely: farmers that received compensation saw their buying power increase exponentially, as new consumer products were conspicuously on display in villages and in homes; several banks opened up shop in Singur in order to facilitate the increased liquidity flow. Arguing that “the Nano plant transformed lives for the better,” and that “a majority want the Tata’s to stay” (though no evidence besides anecdotal is presented to substantiate this claim), the two writers conclude that “Tata’s exit will adversely [effect] people in several ways.”

Following Tata’s announcement that the Nano plant would be relocated to Gujurut, a long editorial in the Sunday Tribune out of Chandigarh lambasted Banerjee as an “incorrigible rebel” who put personal and political vendettas over an above the “common good” of industrial development. Citing the job creating potential of the Nano factory more than the merits of the actual car itself, the Tribune argued that Banerjee had also irreparably tarnished the image of “brand Bengal,” while mortgaging the project of national development (qua postcolonial capitalism and its virtual consensus).

Most analysts are of the view that the development consensus that had acquired a certain unanimity in the country, with even the recalcitrant Communists coming around, has been fundamentally disturbed. If you can drive out Tata and a potentially world beating product, then really what do politicians care for development?

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The editorial went on to praise the pro-business investment environment of Gujurat, pointing out that “Gujurat currently has a GDP growth rate of 12.5 percent and is the state in the country with the maximum number of SEZs and notably the only state in the country with flexible labor laws. As Tata said on record, ‘if you are an industrialist you will be foolish if you are not in Gujurat.”

Within this pro-business discourse that concerns itself with the image and brand of states for investment, Gujurat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was hailed as an enlightened leader and positioned as the polar opposite of Banerjee. Though West Bengal CM Bhattacharya was often described in sympathetic terms (as a pro-development politician who unfortunately lost out to the cynical political games of Banerjee), Modi, ever the shrewd politician and an exemplary figure and practitioner of postcolonial capitalism, quickly added insult to injury to the West Bengal CM by writing two letters. One was for Chief Minister Bhattacharjee and the other was for Mamata Banerjee. To the CM, Modi described a fundamental difference between Gujarat and West Bengal:

In Gujarat, we have a consistent industrial policy. Marxists like you had once opposed industrialization. You had resisted entry of computers and now you are talking about industrialization. Neither your party nor the administration is providing whole-hearted support. We have created a land bank and have an industrial map ready. We acquire land in advance through discussions with farmers. This is a continuous process. I admit that your state has much more cultivable land than we have and acquisition is difficult. Therefore, it is important to keep the opposition in the loop and continue discussions throughout the year. We do just that.157

And to Banerjee, he further expounded on this postcolonial capitalist difference: “In Gujurat, opposition parties don't oppose for the sake of opposition. We don't play

politics over industrialization. When it comes to development projects we are all together."

And here we get to the crux of the connection between the Nano episode, which is ostensibly about cars but more so about the politics of land acquisition and industrial development as a “public purpose,” and automobility. For what Modi’s discourse does is de-politicize the very thing that was politicized in the Nano episode. Indeed, even anti-Banerjee media reports admitted that the way in which WBIDC acquired land from farmers was hasty and bullish in its dealings with the farmers’. And yet, it was precisely for the “public purpose” of industrial development that the land was forcibly acquired by the state, and it was the constitution of this “public” that Banerjee and the thousands of mobilized farmers were contesting. But such contestations were marginalized in several ways. On one level, stories that carried the farmer’s perspectives in newspapers were quite often literally located at the margins of the paper. For instance, in the special report “Singur Suspended” in TOI just before Tata announced his decision to re-locate, the majority of the one-page spread was devoted to a story that unequivocally sided with the cause of industrial development, arguing that “Tata’s exit will adversely effect people” in Singur, and interviewing myriad farmers, bankers, business men, and service workers who all shared stories of how they benefited from the so-called “Nano-effect.” But below this story, at the very bottom of the page, was another smaller one that told a much different tale. Entitled “We want land, not cheque,” the short article reported on farmers in Singur who refused to take the money that was offered them in compensation for their land. “Money comes and goes but land is forever,” the article explains. For “rural folk” who have refused compensation from the state, “the land is a recurring deposit that offers slow steady growth. But that’s
not all. The land, to them, is also a safety net during emergencies and an emotional crutch that cannot be fully understood in the logic of money.”

Farmers’ alternative temporality to that of industrial development and postcolonial capitalism was marginalized in other ways as well. Indeed, it was rendered invisible in the discourse of pro-business investment branding and image-making for cities and states. For instance, the *Tribune* editorial cited earlier argued that there existed a “development consensus” that had reached “a certain unanimity” in India. But then how to square such a “consensus” with the fact that, even in the midst of all the agitation going on over the Nano factory, Banerjee’s Trinamool Congress Party won no less than 15 of 16 village elections within the Singur district. As we have seen consistently throughout this book, such an economic consensus regarding the “public purpose” or “common good” of industrial development and postcolonial capitalism can only emerge through the marginalization of the views of the farmers and villagers who were mobilized and agitating against the Nano factory.

How does this politics of marginalization, which renders the intelligibility of economic consensus, relate to the concept of automobility? To answer this question we need only revisit the advent of the concept itself. In James Flink’s seminal 1972 piece, the author reaches a rather somber conclusion. Whereas automobility had in the first part of the twentieth century radically transformed the urban landscape and imaginary of America, it had by now (early 1970s) lost its revolutionizing potential to mobilize people and introduce new experiences. Flink sites Jane Jacobs, the urbanist who argued that “accommodation to the automobile played a major role in the

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destruction of the urban neighborhood as a true community and as a viable place in which to live” (Flink 1972, 470). This destruction of communities took place through a de-politicizing rhetoric, which I earlier cited in the words of Ford, one of the principal architects of automobility: “We shall solve the city problem by leaving the city” (456). Automobility’s de-politicization of space through a politics of abandonment and middle class flight allowed for the creation of stable suburbs, “normal” middle class lifestyles of consumption and discipline, while all but eliminating the possibility of opposing or even questioning the socio-spatial system of automobility and suburbanization that accompanied it. As Harvey points out in this context, “The evident social discontent of the 1930s has largely been defused by a government policy that has created a large wedge of middle-income people who are now ‘debt-encumbered homeowners’ and consequently unlikely to rock the boat” (Harvey 1985, 70).

The Tata Nano, the tiny car with an even tinier price tag, was directed to a similar purpose as that of debt-enabled property ownership and automobility in mid-century America, in order to constitute a stable middle class that was de-politicized by its very nature. Automobility becomes an even more interesting phenomenon to explore when we consider the nature of this de-politicization. To return to Flink’s grim conclusion, after arguing that “Automobility is no longer an historically progressive force for change in American civilization,” the author ends on this note:

The new generation’s energy promises to be channeled into coping with unanticipated consequences of the automobile revolution: environmental pollution, urban sprawl, the decay of the center city, the decimation of our remaining wilderness areas and free-flowing streams, the malfunctions of oligopoly. Solving these problems will require the collective political action that an earlier generation of American’s sough to escape through automobility. (Flink 1972, 473)
And here we reach the tragedy not only of automobility, but perhaps of modernity itself: the very urban/collective politics that automobility killed through the creation of the suburbs as escapist environments of virtual “consensus” and stability was precisely the kind of politics required to fix the problems of automobility, to challenge the ways in which automobility frames and transforms urban life, everyday discourse, and spatial practice. In India, the imaginary of automobility operates an urban narrative of progress towards neoliberal urbanization, towards global belonging and recognition, but such progress can only be imaged and imagined by excluding to the margins those who move at slower speeds, those who have different temporal imaginaries and relationships to land. If Flink’s pessimism regarding political solutions to automobility’s de-politicizing problems seems apt to describe the contemporary situation in the United States, then the fervent protests of farmers on the frontiers of the global economy in neoliberal India, that practice alternative temporalities of being and becoming, as well as urban dwellers who move at speeds and in ways that are rendered unintelligible from the insides of an air-conditioned car with tinted windows, are perhaps a sign that the “inevitability of automobility” will always be haunted and contested by the exclusions that make its imaginary possible.
CHAPTER 7. GLOBAL SIMULACRA, VIRTUAL POLITICS, AND CINEMATIC CRITIQUE

The cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world.

-Gilles Deleuze\textsuperscript{159}

\section*{7.0 Introduction}

While this book has mapped the various ways in which the neoliberal urban present is re-distributed through different forms and practices of mediation, including and mobilizing particular groups, signs and representations while excluding others, what has been stressed throughout are the ways in which these mediations are continually haunted by what they cannot transform, the remainder that persists despite mediation and performative interpretation. I think of the gap that arises between the becoming dominant narrative of postcolonial capitalism and the excessive and spectral elements that haunt this narrative as a virtuality indicative of the radical potentiality of the global. The virtual is often used simplistically as a degraded copy, or a somehow less-than-authentic (even if nearly exact) simulation of the real. In this last chapter, I want to depart from the urban as the primary conceptual and analytic focus, and place it in the background as I further develop the concepts of the virtual and the global, and theorize their inter-relation in an era of postcolonial capitalism.

\section*{7.1 Global Simulacra}

If taken literally, the global signifies nothing other than itself; it is a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1983; Deleuze, 1990), a conceptualization that is far too broad to be understood empirically, let alone quantified. Its referent is not a tangible space or

\textsuperscript{159} (Deleuze, 1989b: 68)
reality that exists independently of its concept. Rather, the global constitutes it’s own content in the various fields in which it gets deployed. This impossibly wide term, including everything, signifying nothing, is as flexible as it is pervasive. These days, the term seems to be deployed everywhere: from global warming, to global pandemics, from the global war of/against terror, to the global financial crisis. In each case, far from signifying a coherent reality, the global becomes actualized in discourses that affirm certain images and representations, while excluding others. Perhaps the only thing truly “global” is the post-modern media itself, a de-territorializing distributive apparatus comprising multiple and overlapping interpretive/performative sites that circulate images and discourses, producing the very thing they are supposed to re-present. If the global is a simulacrum, then the simulacrum is itself global.

In this chapter, I attempt to approach the term cautiously. But the global inevitably becomes a placeholder for a kind of thinking that wants to move beyond inherited political categories and cartographies. In this sense, the global designates a kind of newness, a potentiality, one that is impossible to separate from its virtuality: its images, discourses and signs. I therefore approach it as a simulacrum, but not in the way that this term is usually understood. As Massumi (1987) and Durham (1998) have argued, there are two ways in which the simulacrum has been approached. The first and more familiar is Baudrillard’s rather cryptic sense of the hyperreal: “a real without origin or reality…a map that precedes the territory” (Baudrillard, 1994: 1). With “hyperreality, signs no longer represent or refer to an external model,” but instead refer only to other signs and representations (Massumi, 1989: 90). The other sense of the simulacrum is less nostalgic for a lost referent—the real—and owes much to its Deleuzian (qua Neitzschean) re-inflections. Here the simulacrum embodies the
performative and transformational “powers of the false,” and constitutes a radical morphology of the metaphysical ideas of truth, origin, and presence (Deleuze, 1990). Through “falsifying” images, narratives, and descriptions, the simulacrum “does not so much derealize its objects as ‘counteractualize’ them, drawing from the image which it at once repeats and falsifies a potential for metamorphosis already immanent within it” (Durham, 1998: 8).

It is this latter sense of simulacrum that I want to link to a concept of the global. The term will not be evaluated in terms of its resemblance to a pre-existing model (the planet, “America”, the international, etc.), but in terms of its ability to mobilize critical thinking that illuminates disjunctures and disagreements within inherited discursive and spatiotemporal (dis)orders, introducing to common sense perception something uncommon, something that disturbs and haunts the assumed stability of dominant imaginations and hegemonic discourses of the global.

Following the recent work of Michael J. Shapiro (1999, 2008, 2009), my argument is structured cinematically, relying on conceptual montage and thinking through juxtaposition more than by explicit argumentation. In the end, “the aim is to engage in political thought without closing the question of the ‘political’” (Shapiro, 1999: 1). I begin by looking at the early history of film as a haunted scene of representation, where the moving image did not merely act as a copy of an original model, but quickly became a performative transformation of the model itself: mobilizing images and signs that have become the conditions of possibility for global simulacra. I then draw a comparison between the specters of representation that haunted the early cinema and a “phantom discourse” of neoliberal globalization that is actualized in contemporary India through a new aesthetics of globality (Mani 2008). I draw this comparison in order to show how a cinematic mode of thinking with respect
to the simulacrum offers a way of interpreting globality beyond the Marxian problematic of false representation (ideology), which, as I will show, remains a seductive, yet limiting, way of critiquing dominant ways of perceiving the global. Finally, I revisit the history of cinema to position documentary film as a potentially radical form of simulacra, and present a recent work from India that uses an unorthodox mode of documentation to connect the simulacrum of the documentary image with the simulacrum of globality, illuminating, in the process, a global politics of intelligibility.

7.2 Ghostly Images and Early Film

Before the advent of film, there was animated photography. A series of projected images was designed “to present the totality of an action unfolding in an homogeneous space” (Clarke and Doel, 2007: 592). As techniques and technologies for capturing movement through the cinematographic apparatus were being developed at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, animated photography gave itself “the task of rendering true motion within the confines of the image” (Clarke and Doel, 2007: 596), where “the aim was to be as objective and accurate as possible in these depictions” (Rose, 2001: 20). The earliest films inherited this preoccupation with rendering true motion. For instance, the Lumiere brothers in 1895 depicted everyday movements and events through their cinematographe device, showing people exiting a factory at the end of the work day, parents feeding a baby, old men playing cards at a table, people boarding a train. But in each of these depictions, the camera was fixed and showed action unfolding across an
homogeneous space, seemingly replicating as transparently as possible an individual’s perspective of these events.

For early audiences of film, “moving” images were treated not as mere metaphors for real movement, not simply life-like, “they actually seemed to be alive,” so “that contemporary trade journals, exhibitors, and the public often referred to animated photography as ‘living pictures’” (Doel, 2008: 89). In another one of the Lumiere brother’s early films, entitled “Arrival of Train at La Ciotat,” a train is shown approaching and running past the (once again fixed) camera. It was reported that at screenings of this film, some audience members jumped out of their seats, thinking the train would emerge through the screen and run them over!

But even at the very dawn of the era of film, skeptics were already questioning the relationship that the Cinematographé and its projected images had with the physical movements and spaces they were supposed to capture and re-present. These observers noted that the relationship seemed haunted by a perceptible gap in the representation, a certain absence or disjuncture. Maxim Gorky, the Russian dramatist, stated that the cinematographic image “is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its sound-less spectre,” after he experienced the Cinematographé at the Nizhni Novgorod Fair in 1896 (Clarke and Doel, 2007: 592). Two years later, Wordsworth Donisthorpe—who invented his own early motion-picture device, the kinesgraph—warned against confusing the moving-image with the reality it was supposed to depict, even while recognizing that such images would hold a seductive power over future audiences in times to come, as the motion-picture apparatus improved, and such images and movements became more and more realistic.

Shall we ever be able to glide back up the stream of Time, and peep into the old home, and gaze on the old faces? Perhaps when the phonograph and the
kinesegraph are perfected, and some future worker has solved the problem of colour-photography, our descendents will be able to deceive themselves with something very like it: but it will be a barren husk, a soulless phantasm and nothing more. (Clarke and Doel, 2007: 592)

The fear of these early critics was that in the cinematic transformation of physical and spatial movement into moving images, something would be irrevocably lost in the translation. A living actuality of movement in space would be replaced by a ghostly apparition in two-dimensions. But perhaps what really haunted them was that, beyond this purported loss, something might actually be gained as well. Indeed, there seems to be an unspoken realization that if the filmic image came to be confused with reality itself, then the “soulless phantasms” would no longer be limiting their haunting apparitions to the projection screen alone. For it was a testament to the peculiar extra-representational power of these moving images that a ghostly life would be conjured back into the very thing that was supposed to be represented: reality itself. With the advent of the moving image, an event captured in the past would no longer be merely past, but would conjoin with the present as a spectral, virtual double. Perhaps what haunted the earliest observers of film, then, was the possibility that the cinema could constitute a new way of thinking about time and the present, where representation no longer referred to a stable past, but was the “organ for perfecting the new reality” (Deleuze, 1989a: 7-8).160

7.3 The “Phantom” Discourse of Neoliberal Globalization

160 Deleuze (1989a, 1989b) includes Bergson as perhaps the most important of the early prophets of the cinema. Bergson almost immediate recognized the cinema as a critical “thinking apparatus” in itself, and not merely a representational medium. The cinema did not merely mimic the processes of human perception and affect, but actually intervened in these processes in order to radicalize them. Of particular note is Bergson’s (2005) Matter and Memory, published originally in 1896.
Writing more than a century after the likes of Gorky and Donisthorpe, the venerable Indian historian Lata Mani invoked a similar vocabulary of “phantasms” and “illusions” in critiquing the discourse of neoliberal globalization in India. In “The Phantom of Globality and the Delirium of Excess,” published in the popular critical journal *Economic and Political Weekly* out of Bombay, Mani targets the new discourse of globality that has increasingly come to dominate the post-liberalization landscape of India.161 This “phantom discourse,” Mani argues, is required by neoliberal globalization to “mediate its disruptive effects,” making available new global life-styles and practices of consumerism for the most privileged social classes, and constituting an imagined form of escape that spares them “from the burden of having to engage the actual material realities” which confront them everyday in a poor and underdeveloped country like India (Mani, 2008: 41-42). The “phantom discourse of globality” not only disarticulates the real relations between neoliberal globalization and the material realities it enters, transforms, or destroys. It also offers a mode of affiliation for its chief beneficiaries who are required to feel global in conditions that are a far cry from what the term supposedly denotes. (Mani, 2008: 41)

Examples of such disarticulations between image and reality have already been presented in the previous chapters about Gurgaon. The elite activists of Qutab Enclave in Chapter Three, for instance, in alliance with the English-language media, 

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161 There are varying accounts of when India’s economic liberalization begins. Mainstream sources focus on 1991 as a watershed year, because that was when India most visibly began a structural adjustment program at the behest of the World Bank, in order to avert a fiscal and balance-of-payments crisis (Sachs, Varshney and Bajpai, 2000). This set of policies was aimed at reducing social spending and curbing aspects of state intervention into the economy, privatizing and de-regulating many public sector industries, and liberalizing trade and financial restrictions in the domestic economy. But many Marxists and others find ample evidence of “liberalizing” economic policies beginning from the mid-1980s under Rajiv Gandhi (Kholi, 2006). In this paper, when I refer to “neoliberal India,” I am referring to the broad social transformations that have come with structural adjustment. Similarly, “neoliberal globalization” refers to a “global” set of policies structured around the so-called “Washington Consensus,” roughly mirroring the kinds of reforms imposed upon India’s economy (Stiglitz, 2002).
bemoaned Gurgaon’s backwards regression from the “first-world” to the “third-world,” without questioning the fundamental disjunctures and exclusions that are necessary for such an imagined “regression” to even take place. For Mani, “Globalization as cultural ideology actively fosters this misrecognition” (Mani, 2008: 42, emphasis added).

Mani conceptualizes the manipulative power of such a phantom discourse as virtual. For instance, with respect to the sense of belonging and recognition that elite and middle class Indians feel with their imagined counterparts in the West, Mani points out that “since one is aspiring to live in one place as though it were an elsewhere, the virtual can attain the status of reality, thus generating and sustaining illusions about both locales” (Mani, 2008: 42, emphasis added). Here, the virtual is understood as an illusion, an escape from the here and now, to elsewhere.  

“Trafficking in the virtual,” we might say, implies a complex and dispersed regime of seemingly unconnected discourses and images that closely maps onto what Jean Baudrillard (1983) called the simulacrum, where: “in postmodernity it was no longer possible to make a distinction between the real and the unreal; images had

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162 See Ashraf (2007) for an eloquent and critical analysis of the “new urban experience” emerging in Indian cities, particularly New Delhi: “shoppers and strollers at Connaught Place in New Delhi have literally gone elsewhere, abandoning the old commercial center for more exclusive, air-conditioned enclaves that are spread out as a matrix of hyperspace in the familiar landscape…most new malls are hermetically sealed interiorized enclaves that are in complete visual and attitudinal denial of their surroundings. The city is held at arms length through a series of barriers, by the virtually resplendent architecture, by the curtailling of interaction with the surrounding city, by the inevitable motorized access, by the spectacular security befitting a royal precinct—all of which work towards intimidating groups that are not participants of this new urban experience. The residential enclaves are also similarly policed and truncated off the continuum of the city. The metrosexual citizen can now travel from home to mall, bypassing the rest of India” (Ashraf, 2007: 69).
become detached from any certain relation to a real world with the result that we now live in a scopic regime dominated by simulations, or simulacra” (Rose, 2001: 8).

Mani’s argument similarly approaches “postmodernity” as an “unanchored discourse” that mediates the disruptive effects of globalization through images and forms that are detached from reality. Yet, whereas Baudrillard insists that the age of the simulacrum “threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (Baudrillard 1893: 5), Mani’s concept of the virtual is clearly to be distinguished from that of the real. This is why, for Mani, the secessionist subjects of neoliberal India (i.e. the new middle class and urban elite) actively “misrecognize” themselves in their life-style obsessions and brand name-driven realities, and feel a “false sense of confidence” in the “New India,” when “actual material realities” and “facts on the ground” starkly contradict these delusions of globality (Mani, 2008, 43)

This virtual discourse of globality becomes recognizable under a familiar categorization: it is a cultural ideology, one whose ideological subjects misrecognize it for reality. Such a derivative position for the cultural as ideological implies that critical politics needs to intervene primarily at the “base-level” of material reality, and decidedly not in the “superstructural” sphere of images, signs and discourses that are mere expressions of the material. But if the phantom discourse of globality names a virtual simulacrum, then this hard distinction between the ideological-discursive and material-real needs to be reexamined. This is not to repudiate Mani’s argument, which is invaluable as a cogent critique of neoliberal globalization in contemporary India. But it is to ask, if “Globalization is fundamentally an economic phenomenon” (Mani, 2008: 41), how is “the economic” also a function of discourse (Mitchell,

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163 See Spivak (2000) for a description of this secessionist class in contemporary urban India, which uses “global electronic capitalism” to create separation at an everyday level between itself and the other, poorer, classes that surround it.
1998), and how do “economic phenomena” become intelligible at the level of everyday life, that is, at the level of culture, discourse and ideology? How is the global economy assembled not only through material processes such as production, labor, and the distribution of surplus accumulation, but also through images, discourses and distributions of experience and subjectivity? How is the global economy not merely a mode of production, but also a mode of seduction (Baudrillard 1991), producing and distributing not only goods and services but also desires? How do images and discourses proliferate beyond their material referent in order to intervene in the production and experience of material reality itself? Such questions need to be thought about seriously if we are to practice a “counter-discourse” to neoliberal globalization, as Mani suggests we do at the end of her essay (Mani, 2008: 47).

7.4 Trafficking in the Virtual

I want to resuscitate Mani’s idea of “trafficking in the virtual,” but instead of reading it as an ideological distortion or misrecognition, I link the virtual to a “new thinking of the ideological” (Derrida, 1994: 58)164, beginning with the assumption that discursive and material processes intertwine virtually and are mutually constitutive in

164 Although not conceptualized explicitly as such, Derrida’s work in Specters of Marx connects the “ghostly simulacrum” of neoliberal ideology to a politicized concept of the virtual. In describing a “neo-liberal rhetoric” that in the post-Soviet world is “both jubilant and worried, manic and breaved,” (1994: 70), Derrida describes a hegemonic ideology that is “haunted by what it excludes” (68) from its ideological vision. Moreover, such an exclusion implies that such ideologies “would like to hide from the potential—force and virtuality—of what we will call the principle and even, still in the figure of irony, the spirit of the Marxist critique” (68, italics mine). Derrida seems to find in Marxism not a homogeneous political ideology, but rather a heterogeneous “emancipatory desire,” which is “the condition of a re-politicization, perhaps another concept of the political” (75).
shaping inter-subjective experiences of neoliberal globalization.\textsuperscript{165} I have implicitly practiced this conceptualization of the ideological throughout this book, but now I want to explain why I do this. In particular, I take to this concept of the virtual and link it to the inter-subjective production of the global for two reasons.

First, the virtual, as I approach it, does not signify the opposite of the real, nor does it simplistically reduce to the artificial or the simulated. Instead, “the virtual is the mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials” (Massumi, 1998: 16). Shapiro frames the concept of the virtual with respect to a thinking of the event: “events have a virtual structure that is never captured in any particular determination” (Shapiro, 1999: 21). In this way, the virtual can be thought of as a surplus of pure potentiality, crystallizing in excess of hegemonic materializations in the present, so that “the potential of a situation exceeds its actuality” (Massumi, 1998: 17).

Secondly, a critical concept of the virtual makes possible a return to the early history of the cinema, where, as Deleuze finds, “there is a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual” (Deleuze, 1989b: 68). The cinema’s radical discovery of the virtual image can help to complicate our reading of neoliberal globalization as merely a cultural ideology, and as I will subsequently show, a rather unorthodox documentary film coming from contemporary India helps us move critical thinking about globality beyond the limits of Mani’s rather orthodox framework, but otherwise prescient argument.

\textsuperscript{165} In addition to Derrida’s (1994) intervention in \textit{Specters of Marx}, this reformulation of the virtual owes something to Zizek’s critique of commodity fetishism in Marx’s writing and the relationship between the ideological and the real: “this reality itself is already conceived as ‘ideological’…the reality cannot produce itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence” (Zizek, 1989:28).
7.5 Animated Photography, Film, and Documentary

It was not very long before animated photography’s initial preoccupation with “objectivity” and “accuracy” in re-presenting an actual event became anachronistic with respect to new technologies and procedures that were being developed for capturing movement and light through the camera. What enabled the evolution beyond animated photography’s concern for rendering “true motion” in homogeneous space was “the advent of editing techniques” such as “stop-motion, slow-motion, speed magnification, reverse action, parallel action, point-of-view shots, reaction shots, continuity editing, and a host of others” (Doel, 2008: 95). Deleuze links the newly mobilized camera and use of new editing techniques to “the emancipation of the viewpoint, and, most significantly, to a privileging of time over space” (quoted in Shapiro, 1999: 23). This enabled the film camera “to stop slavishly re-presenting an actual or staged instant, and to start functioning as an apparatus that could both manipulate and manufacture space and time. In doing so, animated photography ceased being a referential medium, bound to the Real, to become a simulacral medium, free to fabricate a reality-effect” (Doel, 2008: 96).

If new cinematic techniques and technologies freed the camera from merely trying to re-present actual or staged events, their immediate and widespread embrace in mass-produced Hollywood fiction in the first half of the twentieth century generated critical reactions early on from those who were suspicious of the popular cinema’s complicity with dominant forms of power, such as patriarchy, white-supremacy and capitalism (Dixon and Grimes, 2004). Dixon argues that “as a counter-point to mass produced fiction film, documentary film offered an alternative perspective on the world, one that could even serve to challenge hegemonic attitudes and prejudices” (Dixon, 2008: 69).
Documentary’s renewed attachment to the “truth” of “alternative perspectives” also served to attach it to a particular politics of representation, one that all too easily slips from one concept of representation (representation as a proxy—as in an elected representative “representing” her constituency) to another (representation as a portrait—as in film as a form, or language) in the interest of re-presenting the marginalized perspectives of excluded, or subaltern groups. Channan, for instance, argues that “the documentary idiom”—despite the manipulations of the camera and now digital editing—“encourages us to believe that the fact that one is seeing something amounts to evidence that it must have existed in the first place” (Channan, 2007: 4). This “evidence” positions documentary as a particular kind of “public address,” communicating “facts” to “citizens,” rather than “fictions” to “private individual subjects,” like in mass-produced Hollywood drama (Channan, 2007: 16).

At a broader, historical level, however, documentary films should be understood as fitting within a modern epistemological matrix of knowledge/power that begins in the eighteenth century, where “the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process” (Foucault, 1995: 224). This is not to say that all documentary films are simply pawns of power, but rather that prevailing modes of filmic documentation intensify this circular epistemology by placing the camera either in the position of “objective observer,” or as a “neutral investigator,” where the documentary film “is meant to instruct through evidence; it poses truth as a moral imperative” (Rabinowitz, 1994: 18).

One style of documentary that emerged in the politically charged 1960’s, *cinema verité*, or direct cinema (as it was called in the United States), used “an

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166 See Spivak (1988) for a more detailed delineation between these two forms of representation.
unobtrusive camera” to directly capture the “truth of reality” through “vignettes of intimate life” (Rabinowitz, 1994: 130). The documentary camera of direct cinema attempted “to position itself like the fly on the wall and invisibly observe the activities taking place before it” (Rabinowitz, 1994: 20). In contrast, other styles of contemporary documentary more readily embrace the investigative role of the camera and use the documented interactions between subjects and the camera (or a journalistic host/narrator) to provide evidence or testimony in reporting “the truth” of a given event or situation. But in both styles of documentary—unobtrusive and interactive—the documentary form itself becomes embedded within “practices of investigation” that seek to “establish the truth by a number of regulated techniques” (Foucault, 1995: 226). In critiquing these techniques, Deleuze finds that documentary films paradoxically “preserve and sublimate an ideal of truth which is dependent on cinematographic fiction itself” (Deleuze, 1989b: 149).

But as we will soon see, the co-presence of fact and fiction, the actual and the virtual, is hardly a contradiction in film; it is a condition of possibility for the cinema to mobilize a kind of critical thinking that goes beyond the false problematic of “misrepresentation.” In what follows, I use a recent documentary film from Bombay to demonstrate how the documentary idiom itself can be used to re-think the relationship between reality and its representation, and conjure cinematic worlds that index the simulacrum of globality.

7.6 Cinematic Images in John and Jane

Ashim Ahluwalia’s documentary film, John and Jane (Future East Films, 2005), on call centers in neoliberal India, is not your typical documentary film. The style and
presentation of its images seems to belong more to dramatic and fictional genres than to the documentary idiom that Channan outlines above. Moreover, far from presenting a linear narrative or structured argument regarding call centers, or even contextualizing these economic spaces within the broader global phenomenon of “outsourcing,” the film consists of fragments and non-linear sequences that disorient the viewer, presenting more questions than answers. And, like the documentary *I am Gurgaon* analyzed in Chapter Three, there is no omniscient narrator to provide an “objective” context for the image-sound assemblages that the viewer encounters. The film thus generates an intense aura of ambivalence with respect to the subject matter it addresses. Instead of providing a clear statement on the ‘truth’ of the reality it depicts, *John and Jane (J&J)* forces us to question the very status of reality in the virtual/global space of the Indian call center.

The film opens with a haunting prelude to this de-territorialized world, introducing in a quite disorienting way, the very subject matter the film will claim to “document.” We are presented with dizzying images of bright, blurry lights seen from the de-stabilized view of a moving car. We can soon discern that the vehicle is navigating the streets of New York City, with a shaky lens trained on the passing urban nightscape—Times Square, a Loes Theater, McDonalds, high-end fashion stores. We hear from off-screen the sounds of a distant classroom, a “linguistic training” course for call center workers in India, we find out later. These workers are being taught to speak English with an “American” tongue, so that their potential customers located on the other side of the globe feel comfortable conversing with them. The “American” instructor instructs the “Indian” students:

My name is John Doe.
This line is repeated by the class, but their native accents persist in the repetition.

Even though all the words that we hear in J&J are spoken in English, they are always accompanied with subtitles, in English.\textsuperscript{167} Indeed, Ahluwalia wants to underline that the native’s linguistic mimesis always bears the mark of dissemblance, that the \textit{repetition} is always already a \textit{difference} (Deleuze 1995).

As the lights of New York City blur into a distorted haze the camera cuts suddenly to a brightly lit bedroom. As opposed to the shaky camera and disorienting perspective of the opening drive, here the shot is stabilized and fully composed. The lighting and the setting are almost too perfect, as if they are staged for the camera.

Ahluwalia already breaks with the documentary idiom by using one of the oldest tricks in the history of documentary, the “fiction of cinematography,” which includes not only the staging of “actual” events for the camera, but also editing techniques and juxtapositions allow the camera to pursue an extra-representational vocation.\textsuperscript{168} We

\textsuperscript{167} This fact underlines two fairly obvious things that require only parenthetical consideration (one, the film itself is addressed to an English speaking and reading audience; two, Ahluwalia must have realized in editing that some of the words were unintelligible without subtitles). More interestingly, this “imperfection” in post-colonial mimesis (an inability to mimic the “American” tongue) connects to earlier “imperfections” in colonial mimesis (the native’s inability to “authentically” mimic British English) (Bhabha 1994). This imperfect mimesis further underlies the Deleuzean mode of simulacrum that, in part, animates this film, where the imperfect “copy” refers not so much to an original or authentic “model,” but rather subverts the very relationship between copy and model in order to create something new and potentially resistant to the hegemony of the west as model: the virtual subject of neoliberal India in the form of the call center worker. Seen from this perspective, it is not so much that the Indian call center worker is an imperfect copy of an American worker, but rather that the call center opens up a potentiality for a transformation that is already immanent within the globalized networks of transnational capital. As I argue, it is a credit to Ahluwalia’s direction that this transformation is left open-ended in the final part of the film, even if the conclusion is haunting and disturbing to the viewer. Such a directorial stance is much more in line with a Deleuzean thinking of the virtual as an excess of pure potentiality that resists closure in the actual.

\textsuperscript{168} As an example of how the fiction of cinematography is central to documentary film, one of the first “official” documentaries (it was christened as such in a newspaper review at the time of its release) was Robert Flaherty’s (1922) \textit{Nanook of the North}, an ethnographic look at the harsh life of Canadian Inuit Eskimos living in the Arctic. In order to present his subject in a way intelligible to audiences, as a pre-modern culture fantasized in the western imaginary as impervious to history, some of the film’s scenes of obsolete customs were staged. Flaherty radically intervened with the very subject matter he was trying to “document” in order to achieve a dramatic effect, recreating “actual events through staged performances with tools and techniques never used by Nanook… Flaherty [thus] manipulated reality to give a picture of reality” (Rabinowitz, 1994: 18-20).
see a young man sleeping, eyes shut tight despite the bright lights of the daytime and the camera right in his face. From off-screen we hear the sounds of his mother:

Glen! Get up! Its time to get up! Are you going to sleep all day? What is this nonsense?

Then we get a broader, establishing shot of Glen’s room, with Glen sprawled out on his bed, and his mother enters. She repeats her shrill wake-up call, and her piercing alarm-clock-of-a-voice is as disquieting to the viewer as it must be for Glen, who must try to sleep during the daytime because he works every night in the call center.

Before we can see if he manages to open his eyes, however, the camera cuts to a backseat shot of Glen and a friend driving through downtown Mumbai. Glen’s opening lines are spoken not in the car, but as a pre-recorded narration that comes from off-screen: “I can’t take this fucking shit anymore.”

Glen Castinho,\(^{169}\) Ahluwalia’s first subject, angrily negotiates the spatio-temporal alienation of call center work, armed with plenty of curse words and smoking hash in his time off. As Aneesh (2006) notes in the context of Indian call centers, the alienation of call center work is but the flipside of “spatio-temporal integration.” Call centers are part of an “emerging paradigm of transnational labor that allows workers in India to connect to corporations and consumers in the United States with high-speed satellite and cable links, performing through globally accessible data servers a range of work activities” (Aneesh, 2006: 1). But workers in India frequently have to work at night, in order to “synchronize” with the American workday, so that “night work in software companies is putting workers out of phase with their own society” (Aneesh, 2006: 93).

\(^{169}\) Glen is his birth name; other call center workers with more “Indian” sounding names will adopt “American” names.
This dialectic of spatio-temporal alienation/integration is precisely what Ahluwalia wants to document in *J&J*, in all its heterogeneity and complexity. When he is not shown languishing at the call center, we see Glen rolling joints of hash mixed with tobacco, smoking frequently in his time off from work. He curses profusely in his narrative, telling us that he chose to work at the call center “only for the money,” that he hates his job, and that he wants to “fuck [his] boss’ wife,” just to let him know “what it feels like to get fucked.” As Glen tells us his frustrated story, Ahluwalia deftly syncs his pre-recorded narrative with shots of him at work, interacting with customers on his headset, so that it looks as if Glen is telling the customer his most intimate and depraved fantasies of white-collar revenge.

*J&J* is made up entirely of mobile portraits that show six different call center agents in their everyday lives: at work, at home, and in other spaces. Only rarely do they speak directly to the camera; instead, accompanying images of these subjects are intimate narratives spoken off-screen that sometimes provide a context for what is seen, but other times produce a radical juxtaposition of different experiences in the call center.

Ahluwalia’s six cinematic portraits are presented in three pairs, though shots of all six at work are interspersed amongst one another in montages throughout the film, so as to juxtapose their experiences more directly. Glen is paired up with Sydney, whose narrative also testifies to the extreme alienation of call center work. If Glen’s escape is cannabis, Sydney’s is dance, and his mother tells us that Sydney often performs at weddings and other functions. In the first third of the film, during Glen and Sydney’s narratives, the two are frequently shown at work, interacting (mostly unsuccessfully) on the phone, trying to make sales calls but dealing with constant rejection and verbal abuse from their Americans customers on the other end.
of the line. The pressure to meet ambitious sales goals is high, and leads to a high attrition rate for workers at call centers (Aneesh, 2006: 93). Sydney’s narrative attests to the disciplinary techniques put in place to ensure “productive” labor—the virtual panopticon:

They record you, if your call is bad you lose your incentive [commission] for the whole week.

But the panoptic power of the call center is not merely limited to the work space; it seems to follow Sydney and Glen in their everyday lives even outside of work. In one scene shot in Glen’s kitchen, Glen complains to his already introduced mother about the lack of vacation days at the call center. Far from expressing sympathy for her son’s work schedule, however, Glen’s mother dishes out a lecture on corporate logic, informing him that “this is the system,” that call centers exist for “the customer’s convenience” and that the customer is always in need. If he doesn’t like the job, his mother says, “then leave, and go tell your Indians to give you a job!”

Meanwhile, Sydney’s narrative supplies a more somber assessment of the omnipresence of the call center in these workers lives:

The only thing I think about is work. The only thing I do is work. The only people I meet is working people. The same people and the same work to do.

But if the first pair of subjects (Glen and Sydney) darkly depicts the spatio-temporal alienation that results from global integration through call centers, the second and third pairs complicate matters further by showing us how one person’s alienation can be another’s rebirth. Two call center workers (Nikki and Osmond) constitute the second pair of Ahluwalia’s subjects, and they are shown as using the call center as a space of opportunity to re-invent themselves, discovering a new kind of corporate “family” in the process. And the third and final pair (Nicholas and
Naomi) becomes so absorbed into this world that they become “virtually American,” essentially escaping from “India,” it seems.

Ahluwalia explained in an interview his thinking behind presenting these contrasting pairs of call center agents in succession:

The film was structured as a transformation process from someone who really hates his job to someone who really loves it; there’s an underlying journey that’s happening from an Indian boy and girl to a final sort of ‘John’ and ‘Jane,’ virtual American characters…In a strange way I think of all six of them as the journey of one person.\[170\]

But this virtual transformation is wrought with dizzying ambivalence. During the film’s disorienting opening stanza, after being introduced to Glen and his macabre discourse of economic alienation, the film cuts suddenly to a corporate training video, ostensibly one that would be shown to new employees upon entering the corporate world of call centers. Against an image of a rotating, digitally produced globe, we hear a soft, quasi-robotic voice with a curiously discernable Indian accent. The strange voice articulates what will become a haunting conceptual motif for the entire film:

Who would have thought that workers in India would be selling insurance, sim cards, mobiles, to customers in America? The call centers have made the virtuality into a reality.

The virtual becomes a powerfully mobilized concept in Ahluwalia’s film. At one level, there is a narrative trajectory from “actual Indian” to “virtual American.” But following the conceptual motif supplied in the corporate video above, there is also the parallel process of virtuality taking on a reality of its own. In J&J this process is depicted in the everyday lives of the call center workers. As Ahluwalia stated in an interview:

\[170\] Quotations from Ahluwalia’s recent interviews regarding his film can be found at the film’s website: http://www.john-and-jane.com
For me, the idea of virtual ‘call agents’ with fake American identities who talked on the phone all night seemed straight out of science fiction…I imagined that this job must have some odd psychological side effects, because it is quite a bizarre job if you think about it.

But as we can already see, Ahluwalia’s treatment of this bizarre virtual reality actively departs from the dominant idiom of documentary film. For all the diversity of documentary forms and styles to be found within the genre of non-fiction film, most function primarily through a particular regime of the image. Thinking schematically about the relationship between the camera and the material it captures, Deleuze calls this the “organic regime” of the image, in which the relationship between an *afilmic* reality (the world as it exists independently of the camera) and a *profilmic* reality (the world that is presented on the screen because it is captured by the lens and exposed to the film) is approached as strictly representational. As we saw earlier, this was the approach that was used in the earliest films as a matter of technical limitation. But the thinking behind such an approach persisted long after non-representational techniques were fully developed and utilized in film (both documentary and fictional). In the organic regime of the image, “the setting described is presented as independent of the description which the camera gives it, and stands for a supposedly pre-existing reality” (Deleuze, 1989b: 126). In contrast with this organic regime, Deleuze poses the “crystalline regime,” where the description does not so much seek to re-present subjects and objects that belong to an afilmic reality, rather the “crystalline description stands for its objects, replaces it, both creates and erases it…and constantly gives way to other descriptions with contradict, displace, or modify the preceding ones” (126).

Building on this Deleuzean framework for thinking *with* the two regimes of images, Jacques Ranciere articulates the coalescence of the organic and crystalline regimes as the “cinematic image,” which means “two different things. There is the
simple relationship that produces likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produce what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance” (Ranciere, 2007: 6).

Ranciere’s concept of the cinematic image (or Deleuze’s “crystalline regime of the image”) is suitable to a critical reading of Ahluwalia’s film, which does not seem concerned with faithfully recording the world of call centers as it exists independently of his camera, nor as a “virtuality” that has now become a determined and fixed “reality” in India. Instead, what Ahluwalia documents is a reality that is always already virtual, populated with subjects who are actually Indian but virtually American. Yet the actual and the virtual are never fixed, as we will see, but are rather in ambivalent inter-relation, so that the two terms are mutually transformed and ideas of “Indian” and “American” are radically de-territorialized.

We see wide-angle shots of the call center floor, it’s maze of cubicles and agents busily talking on phones, with fluorescent lights providing a synthetic tint to the space. The perspective is akin to that of a security camera, and in the foreground are signs of spatio-temporal integration/alienation: a digital clock in the corner reads 3:43 am; placards over cubicles read “New Jersey” or “New York.” Then we get a montage of different call center workers trying out their “Americanized” English on customers located on the other side of the globe. Following Durham, we might say that Ahluwalia’s film shares in the singular prerogative of postmodern art: “that of articulating the experience of a deterritorialized humanity” (Durham, 1998: 186). As one reviewer of J&J notes:

Ahluwalia, shooting in antiseptic 35mm, films [the workers] lives like a purgatorial sci-fi horror show with no discernible delineation between waking
and dreaming states. Time and again the director cuts back to his subjects sleeping during harshly bright daylight hours, amid Bombay’s perpetual hustle and bustle: they’re androids dreaming of distinctly Western electronic sheep (Uhlich, 2005).

Ahluwalia forgoes handheld cameras and digital video (more germane to contemporary documentaries) and opts for highly controlled and composed 35mm film. This gives the images a more polished and dramatic, almost fictional feel, even though the actual content of the film is decidedly “non-fiction.” But rather than presenting this non-fiction material as if it would exist independently of the camera, thereby associating it with an afilmic reality, Ahluwalia deploys the crystalline regime to replace actual spaces and subjects with virtual ones: the de-territorialized call center worker that exists at the very margins of intelligibility. Indeed, the use of a dramatic and highly composed visual style allows Ahluwalia to inhabit a zone of indistinction between waking and dreaming states—without telling us when the dream ends and reality begins—as seen in the opening shots of Glen’s sleeping face as well as those of the other agents (indeed, all the agents are shown at various points sleeping [or pretending to be asleep] in the daytime). Moreover, since the documentary has no objective narrator, no detached voice to provide a context for the images and sounds we see and hear, the subjective imaginations of the six subjects are all we have to gauge their experiences. Here, vivid imaginations become impossible to separate from the “agency” of the workers themselves, whether it is the frustrated Glen “fucking” his boss’ wife out of revenge, or the angelic Nikki Cooper, who as we later see, incredibly describes the “love” that she feels for the customers she interacts with on the other end of the line. If cinematic images are primarily “relations between the sayable and the visible, ways of playing with the before and the after, cause and effect” (Ranciere, 2007: 7), then J&J becomes political in a Rancierean sense when Ahluwalia gracefully contrasts images of Glen utterly lost in isolation at work with
the optimistic narrative of Nikki. With the camera trained on a despondent Glen, we hear Nikki tell us in an exceedingly blissful tone:

In the call center I was introduced to a new person: myself…a new part of me…In the call center I excel. I am one of the best in my team. The relationship I have with everyone is so beautiful.

We are forced to juxtapose the liberation of Nikki, who, as a woman in the call center can attain degrees of freedom and financial independence not imaginable elsewhere in India, with the emasculation of Glen, who tells us that the discipline of the call center makes him feel like a neutered dog:

I’m getting to be tamed, you know? Sit boy, sit!

Rather than making a general comment on whether call centers are “good” or “bad,” whether workers are “happy” or “unhappy,” Alhuwalia poses a more critical thought: in the call center (and in neoliberal India more generally) one woman’s “liberation” quickly becomes another man’s “castration” (Oza, 2006). Moreover, by contrasting and bringing together through juxtaposition radically different imaginations and subjective experiences of the call center, Ahluwalia’s film begins to express the ambivalent inter-subjective space of the global.

7.7 The Virtuality of the Global

Recalling Lata Mani’s critique of the virtual discourse of globality in neoliberal India, the critical historian described the virtual as an illusion of “elsewhere” that nonetheless materializes in the here and now of the present. But rather than evaluating such existential escapes through the virtual in terms of their fidelity or infidelity to a fixed referent (“America” or “India”), the cinematic critique that is
practices in *J&J* allows us to think about how such referents become de-territorialized in fundamental ways. In one particularly powerful example of this, Ahluwalia plays the naïve narrative of Nicholas, a call center worker who is enamored with the idea of “America”:

I have never been to America but I imagine this country to be a beautiful country, with snow, cold…the signals...big, huge highways where cars zoom up and down, up and down. No dust, no bad air, those beautiful buildings.

The power of imagination to familiarize a never-seen-before landscape is crystallized in this scene, where instead of showing us images or representations of America, instead of providing a solid geographical referent to contrast with the imagination of Nicholas, Ahluwalia shows us metropolitan Mumbai, with stunning images of modern high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums, towering office and business structures, postmodern architectural design, all from the perspective of a moving vehicle on an expressway. The point, we might say, is to show how an imagined elsewhere does not need a solid referent, but crystallizes ambivalently in the here and now of the urban present.

But existential escapes from the present need not be strictly spatial, they are also temporally performed. At one point in the film, Ahluwalia trains his camera on Osmond, as the latter is sleeping during the daytime, and we hear the sounds of a motivational tape that Osmond listens to everyday, a repetition of the line “I am now wealthy” over and over again. Osmond tells us that his dream is to buy his own house by October 26, 2006 (roughly two years from the time of filming), a date that he has circled on a calendar with a picture of a model home attached by a thumbtack.

Speaking directly into the camera (one of the few times this happens in *J&J*), Osmond articulates his determination to acquire:
There is no power on earth which is going to stop me; because I’m going to be working very hard towards it, and I want to get out of this.

Osmond’s desire is not only for material acquisition, but also the existential escape from his lower-middle class background that such acquisition would signify. He tells us unabashedly:

Certain parts of India, they’re not quite civilized.

And it becomes clear that this part of India, and perhaps a part of himself, haunts Oaref Irani as he transforms into Osmond.

Rather than pushing us to judge these characters and their preoccupations, rather than evaluating them according to a fixed moral criteria, Ahluwalia’s film urges us to think the conditions of possibility for such escapist desires to become intelligible realities. The simulacrum of globality that comes in an American package captivates these subjects, and drives them to change their lifestyles (Nicholas tells us that before working at the call center, he used to speak in Hindi, but now he speaks only in English), their personalities\(^1\) (Osmond boasts that the call center has “made me a principled man…I make goals and I think positively”), and even to transform their own bodies.

\(^{171}\) Here, Ong’s research on call center workers in Asia seems especially relevant: “labor arbitrage not only finds substitutable but cheaper labor overseas, it also requires Asia-based workers to assume virtual American personalities” (Ong, 2006: 169). These virtual personalities are performed not only at the level of accent-neutralization and cultural learning, but also at the level of subjectivity, where multinational corporations actively “‘reengineer’ local attitudes and behavior to conform to global corporate norms” (220). Of all the subjects that Ahluwalia presents, it is Oaref Irani (Osmonds) that internalizes this global business culture the most.
Indeed, it is this last, physical and bodily transformation that is most haunted and haunting in *J&J*. Paired up with Nicholas (who informs us that if it was up to him, he would never leave the call center, he would eat and sleep there just to avoid the “hustle-bustle” of the outside world) is the even more enigmatic Naomi. She is introduced after an eerie montage of shots taken from security cameras set up all over the call center. The images are blurry and in black and white, with lines of distortion running across. But it is not the *resemblance* of these images to actual events that is demanded from this montage. Rather it is the *dissemblance* of the security camera’s images, the blurry panopticism of 24-hour surveillance, that is used to render “the perception of an idea more complex” (Ranciere, 2007: 6).

Born Narmata Pravin Parekh, Ahluwalia’s final subject tells us that when she started training for the call center,

Namrata totally became Naomi.

But it was not only her name that changed. Ahluwalia introduces Naomi with a long, intense shot of her face, closing in at times, drawing back at others. We see that she has incredibly pale skin, not brown or tan like the other workers, but a pinkish-whitish complexion, bleach-blond hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes. The camera’s visual meditation on Naomi continues as her narrative is gradually introduced. She addresses her own singularity head-on when she informs us that her co-workers do not know what to make of her, constantly asking her:

Where are you from?
Indeed, as we see Naomi’s face, its mysterious and ghostly artifice, and listen to her strangely twinged mid-western American accent, we begin to ponder the question ourselves, even as we might fear the answer.

But before we can get a response from Naomi, Ahluwalia cuts back to the call center training class, where images and imaginations of the “virtual American” get reincarnated into the very souls of Indian call center workers, making Naomi possible, even if she remains unintelligible:

_Teacher_: “Who is John and Jane Doe?”
_Class_: “The average American.”
_Teacher_: “And what are their values?”
_Class_: “Individualism, achievement and success, pursuit of happiness, patriotism…”
_Teacher_: “Very good!”

We return to a shot of Naomi at work, and as we see her speak with an American customer, one who is no more real than imagined for her, we realize that it does not matter where she is actually from. More profoundly, we begin to recognize that the social transformations productive of neoliberal India cannot be dismissed as merely “cultural ideology.” By bleaching her skin and hair, and transforming not only her personality and her identity, but her body itself, Naomi’s apparition reminds us that every specter and phantom that haunts representation does so precisely by “taking on a body” (Derrida, 1994: 141). For it is this discursive materialization that obliterates the separation between body and spirit, matter and memory, the real and the imaginary.

The artifice of Naomi’s body is substantiated by a series of self-interpellations. We see her shopping in a crowded market, where her narration proceeds:

Don’t mistake me for anything else. But I’m totally naturally blond.

She repeats:
I’m totally naturally blond.

And reconfirms:

I just want to make it officially clear: I’m totally naturally blond.

With each repetition, Naomi attempts to secure her own intelligibility through a discourse of the natural. She continues:

I like to be just me…I like to be the ‘me’ of me. I am totally Americanized…very much into today’s world.

As we puzzle over the ambiguity that surrounds Naomi and her words, J&J’s concluding shots are trained on Naomi dancing by herself in a dark club. She talks in her narrative about “looking for an ideal man,” someone “light skinned,” with “light eyes.”

Blonds are naturally attracted to blonds. That’s very natural of course.

The camera pans out to reveal the entire dance club, with lights flashing and bodies moving to an electronic beat. From here we fade to black and roll the credits. The End.

Indeed, it is fitting that J&J ends with Naomi’s strange discourse on the natural. What Ahluwalia’s film does is disrupt the “natural,” or organic regime of cinematic resemblance that guides the thinking of most documentary films. The dissemblance practiced through Ahluwalia’s camera, the artifice that we notice, is impossible to separate from Naomi’s phantasmatic body that exists at the very margins of social intelligibility. If these workers are becoming “virtually American,” then built into this virtuality is an irreducible dissemblance and difference that is productive of something else, a different trajectory. At the end of the film, we no
longer know what to believe as “real” or “imagined” in neoliberal India, what we can “make sense” out of, and what is “the wordless, senseless materiality of the visible” (Ranciere 2007: 9). But this is because Ahluwalia does not seem concerned with producing a common sense articulation of “reality” in the Indian call center. Rather than attempting to secure such consensus on the present, Ahluwalia practices a cinema of dissemblance and disensus, that is, he supplies an uncommon sense of globality and postcolonial capitalism, one that remains open in terms of the conclusions one might draw regarding the cultural and economic processes that intertwine virtually in a globalizing world, producing Naomis and Osmonds right next to Glens and Sydneys. Moreover, Ahluwalia’s haunting, open-ended conclusion to J&J is an invitation to think critically about the politics of experience in neoliberal India, how mediated and fragmented experiences become intelligible through new distributions of value and intelligibility. That such distributions must be negotiated and re-negotiated in order for a sense of globality to become “common,” to materialize as an “actuality,” already presupposes that value and intelligibility are always subject to re-distribution, opening the door to different imaginings of the global.

7.8 The (Art)ifice of Documentary Film

In creating J&J, Ashim Ahluwalia’s desire was to put together a style of documentation that did not attempt to represent the totality of the world of call center workers, nor did he want to make a definitive political statement regarding this aspect of globalization, whether it benefits India or the world or not. First of all, he wanted
to explore the distribution of value and intelligibility that partitions fiction from non-fiction genres of film.

Certain things are seen as documentary and certain things are seen as fiction based more on the medium that you are using and the style of the shooting than the actual content. For example, you shoot something hand-held and it becomes documentary; you shoot it static and it becomes fiction. So I was interested in just what happens if you shoot something on 35mm film and static and it’s the same material that you would otherwise shoot on DV [digital video] and hand-held. It was a challenge to see if we could do something on 35 mm that could be intimate and the same time still fall in this strange liminal space between fiction and non-fiction… These guys [call center workers] are also faking who they are; they are fictionalizing themselves, they have fake names, fake identities within this fiction/non-fiction space.

So Ahluwalia set out to make a documentary film that, as Shapiro puts it in a different context, “does not seek ‘the truth’ but seeks instead to provide vehicles for experiencing the world differently” (Shapiro, 1999: 22). Fundamental to this critical stance is the Nietzschean realization that “the ‘true world’ does not exist, and, if it did, would be inaccessible, impossible to describe, and, if it could be described, would be useless, superfluous” (Deleuze, 1989b: 137).

Is such a critical stance incompatible with the dominant perception of documentary films in contemporary society, that is, as serving a public function by educating citizens about the “true world”? If such a perception of documentary speaks to a particular politics of representation (where the documentary literally represents some afilmic reality), then it is clear that this politics itself works by limiting and closing off the question of the political. In one review of J&J in the American entertainment magazine Variety, for example, film critic Robert Koehler reproduced this limited understanding of the political by opposing the striking visual form of Ahluwalia’s film to its decidedly “apolitical” content. Koehler notes the distance that Ahluwalia takes from “many of the elements commonly associated with
nonfiction film…and opts for highly controlled and composed lensing in 35mm.

Some viewers may be lulled by the picture’s sheer elegance into thinking it’s a drama…The film’s classy surface, though, conceals a lack of depth, as it fails to provide a greater understanding of the hot-button issue of outsourcing. Indeed, ‘John and Jane’ is perhaps most notable for how non-ideological it is in its basic mission to observe six such Indian workers on the job and at home...[The picture] overall lacks the revelatory moments of top-notch cinema verite, just as it takes no position on whether or not globalization promises to expand world economic opportunities.

Clearly Koehler is uninitiated in the Derridean arguments I presented above regarding a “new thinking of the ideological.” In Koehler’s articulation, the role of documentary film is to “provide a greater understanding” of some decidedly “hot-button issue.” But we can already see in Koehler’s language that this “issue” is colored by a particularly American bias (it is far from clear that Indians call center workers perceive themselves as “outsourced” labor [Aneesh 2006]), so that the very terms of the debate are already coded in a particular (political) way, to the exclusion of other possible meanings and articulations. Instead of treating the issue of “outsourcing” as a debate between expanding “world economic opportunities” or not, Ahluwalia’s film goes to work deconstructing the various terms themselves, de-territorializing ideas of what is “American” and what is “Indian,” what might be considered a purely “economic phenomenon,” and what is decidedly a matter of “cultural identity.” Ahluwalia’s film is less interested in taking positions than in showing us the distributions of value and intelligibility that produce radically different experiences and imaginations of globality in contemporary India.

In direct contrast to most documentary films, which deploy organic images to produce evidence that testifies to the “truth” of a particular situation or phenomenon, Ahluwalia utilizes what Deleuze calls the “powers of the false” in cinema to render
globalization in India as a veritable simulacrum, where “the simulacrum is not simply a false copy, but...places in question the very notations of copy and model” (Deleuze, 1990: 256). Whereas most documentary films ultimately refer to a preexisting model or afilmic reality, Ahluwalia’s film seems to function more by intimately interrogating the cinematic present of neoliberal India, connecting the simulacrum of globalization to the simulacrum of documentary film, and connecting both of these to the simulacral work performed by call center workers themselves. But in each of these simulacra, what is emphasized are the transformational potentials that materialize but are never fully determined, that remain virtual, that is, subject to further transformation and redistribution.

The simulacrum is conceived here “as the edge of critical modernity,” and immanent to its virtual structure is an immanent critique of modernity itself: “Modernity is defined by the power of the simulacrum. It behooves philosophy not to be modern at any cost...but to extract from modernity something that Nietzsche designated as the untimely, which pertains to modernity, but which must also be turned against it—in favor, I hope, of a time to come” (265).

My point is not that Ahluwalia’s film aims to fulfill these Deleuzean requirements. But his film documents call center workers and presents aesthetic subjects who are variously captivated and captured by inter-subjective discourses and imaginations of globality, in which the workers’ own lives are lived in relation to an imagined elsewhere (i.e. “America”) that may or may not have an original referent. Ahluwalia’s documentary style itself provides a connection and a corrective to the false problematic of discursive and/or cinematic misrepresentation, allowing him to move seamlessly between the “soulless phantasms” and “ideological illusions” that haunted Mani as well as Gorky and Donisthorpe at the outset of this chapter, treating
them not as illusions but rather as simulacral *effects* that are the materials of a more complex reality. *J&J* steadfastly refuses to make an optimistic or pessimistic statement regarding call centers and globalization in India. What it does instead is show us how discourses, images, and imaginations become mobilized to shape inter-subjective experiences of globality, opening the door to re-imaginings of the global.
CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation by placing my research in the context of the global financial crisis of 2008, emphasizing the way in which this existential crisis in late-capitalism underlined both the contingency of the economy as a discursive strategy, as well as the contingency of finance and speculation-fueled urbanism in Gurgaon. The frozen temporality of urban development in the Millenium City in the aftermath of the global financial crisis presented an opportunity to think through the ways in which the becoming-dominant narrative of the present in neoliberal India was continually beset by contradictory temporal trajectories and counter-imaginations of space and time. One way of understanding my book is as a critical analysis of these alternative temporalities and the ways in which their absence from the dominant narrative haunts the intelligibility of the so-called “new India.” Insofar as spatial and discursive strategies of exclusion, including the partitioning of the economic and the political, the present from the future, the new from the old, are never fully stable and never final, politics remains open-ended, and the narrative of neoliberal India is one that is fundamentally contested. I conceptualize this contested terrain as the *virtual politics of neoliberal India*.

Chapter One introduced the concept of postcolonial capitalism, which is not necessarily a coherent discourse or ideology, but more of a *virtual consensus* that speaks through heterogeneous interests and subject-positions, attempting to suture together a coherent narrative of the present, one that has obvious ties to financial and economic interests. Such a virtual consensus, I argue, is actually foundational to the theory and practice of liberal capitalist democracy. Liberalism continuously interprets dissent and transforms it into a “democratic consensus,” one that polices the political
by delimiting what counts as an intelligible political experience and what is excluded as unintelligible. This model was then applied to the narrative of postcolonial capitalism, which I argue works through a similar regime of aesthetic partitioning of everyday political experience. Namely, what is partitioned is the idea of the postcolonial nation itself, and this is indeed the difference that neoliberalism makes in post-reform India. It is not so much that the discourse of postcolonial national identity was stable prior to liberalization over the past two and half decades, but rather that its contemporary spatio-temporal “out-of-jointness” (commonly referred to as the two Indias phenomenon: old and new) can now be mapped in a globalized and mediated (urban) space. I argue that the partiality of economic reforms and the fragmented urban topography of neoliberal urbanism in places like Gurgaon are intimately related because they are both ways of mediating between the (neoliberal) global and the (postcolonial) national. That is, the urban becomes a way of interpreting and transforming both terms, and these performative interpretations work in violently exclusionary ways.

Pursing the idea of urban mediation, in Chapter Two I analyzed the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which sought to make the urban intelligible to the global, and the global intelligible to the national. India’s leading postcolonial capitalist politician, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has explicitly said this much himself. I then argued that the capital city of Delhi is particularly targeted for such urban mediation through an aggressive “image-makeover” that is performed through slum demolitions, urban “re-development,” and other exclusionary spatial and aesthetic practices of “renewal”. More crucially for my argument, it is also pursued through the promotion of peri-urban satellite cities like Gurgaon which are literally built from scratch over the rural palimpsest of Delhi’s hinterland. Gurgaon’s
history of urbanization, however, reveals the high price to be paid for global recognition and intelligibility, as the politics of land acquisition becomes an increasingly salient problem from the de-politicizing narrative of postcolonial capitalism. The temporalities of agriculture and land politics present a persistent threat to the hyper-development and privatized urbanization of Gurgaon.

One effect of the rapid but uneven privatized urbanization of Gurgaon has been an inadequate public infrastructure in a city that features some of the most expensive real estate in India. Chapter Three began by examining the late-2008 episode of “Gurgaon Collapsing,” a media event that reveals the financial and ontological investments on the part of the English-speaking middle (elite) class in neoliberal urban spaces like Gurgaon. In the era of neoliberal reforms, the middle class performs a dual function here: while they have always been the privileged interpreters and performers of modernity, now they are increasingly also projected as normative citizen-subjects of this “new India.”

Architecture and urban design assist in the middle class’ secessionist politics, aided by a temporality of finance that emerges through its differentiation from bureaucratic and subaltern temporalities. The temporality of finance crystallizes new urban landscapes that are fragmented and partitioned by their very design, giving the narrative of postcolonial capitalism a seemingly stable material and visual base from which to project its abstract economic logic. In Chapter Four, I not only look at the relationship between neoliberal finance and new architecture in Gurgaon, but do so through the singular figure of Hafeez Contractor, DLF’s neoliberal architect for hire. Contractor’s fragmented designs take an unabashed turn away from the architectural ethos of postcolonial modernism, particularly in the city of Delhi. This rejection of postcolonial modernism and the turn to “global” architecture is accompanied with,
and gains intelligibility from, an increasingly de-territorialized sense of national self in the era of postcolonial capitalism.

This sense of national self and identity is not only partitioned by urban enclaves and fragmented architectural designs, but also by movements within and across these disjointed spaces. Crucially, as I examined in Chapter Five, experiences of urban mobility do not map on in a homologous fashion to the logic of class. Balram Halwai in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*, and Krishan Kumar in my own example at the beginning of Chapter Four demonstrate shared imaginaries of the urban and global in places like Gurgaon through movement in private automobiles, even though they are in many ways excluded from these spaces on the basis of their class position. But this does not collapse the distinction between classes in neoliberal urban India. Indeed, automobility becomes a re-distributor of difference and distinction in India, producing radically partitioned experiences of the global *qua* urban. This urban proliferation of differences in experience and subjectivity is played out and analyzed in the politics of urban transportation in Delhi and the controversy over the Tata Nano car production factory in West Bengal in 2008.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I used a cinematic mode of thinking to critically re-inhabit the present in neoliberal India. Following the work of Jacques Ranciere, cinema restores perception to objects and events. More specifically, “it does not reproduce things as they offer themselves to the gaze. It records them as the human eye cannot see them, as they come into being” (Ranciere 2006, 2). Cinema’s perception is not more objective than that of humans or other technologies of representation; it is rather *virtual*, restoring possible experiences that are otherwise evacuated in the actualizations of the present. Within the context of call centers in neoliberal India, which feature prominently in the corporate landscape of Gurgaon
(celebrated widely as a major center of outsourcing of producer service labor), the cinematic practice of Ashim Ahluwalia’s *John and Jane* allows us to re-conceptualize the experiences of economic subjects in the call center. Significantly, this re-conceptualization is engaged from an uncommon perspective.

The spatial practices of neoliberal urbanism, which fragment urban terrains in order to produce abstract economic zones, and the discursive practices of postcolonial capitalism, which narrates the spatial and economic transformations generated through neoliberalization in India, constitute strategies of actualization. They are geared towards rendering a common sense that is at once discursive and material, both a narrative temporality and a spatialized materiality. Virtual politics in neoliberal India, exemplified in the complex urban present of Gurgaon, exceeds this common sense in order to make possible *uncommon* experiences and senses of the present. The ethical ideal of *democratic development* necessitates that one keep a vigilant eye on how discursive and spatial practices seek to colonize the commons from above in order to partition and enclose the spaces and possibilities of the political. Postcolonial capitalism and neoliberal urbanism are anathema to such an ethics of democratic development.
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