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Playing Nativized Bodies: Performative Body as Disjuncture

In the Indian Liberalization Regime

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater and Performance Studies

by

Ameet Parameswaran

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Playing Nativized Bodies: Performative Body as Disjuncture

In the Indian Liberalization Regime

by

Ameet Parameswaran

Doctor of Philosophy in Theater and Performance Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Sue-Ellen Case, Chair

This dissertation takes the performative body as the site of analysis to critically interrogate the contradictions in the space-time of India in the liberalization regime. By the term liberalization regime, I refer to the unprecedented changes that have occurred in India starting from the late 1980s: the deregulation and opening up of the economy with the signing of "Structural Adjustment Programs," privatization initiatives, the rise of transnational media resulting in the proliferation of consumerist images in the public space, and the "free" flow of information across national borders. These changes have transformed India from a nation driven by state developmentalism to a nation organized by the "free market." Throughout the dissertation, I analyze diverse cultural objects that emerge from and embody this transformation, such as the popular performance form of mimicking called "Mimics Parade," the photo-performance project of the artists Clare Arni and N. Pushpamala, ad-films of Multi-National Companies on national television channels, and an Indo-Japanese theatrical production titled *Sahyante Makan: the Elephant Project*.

I read these cultural objects as instances of the performative use of the trope that I have termed "nativized bodies." I use the term nativized bodies to draw attention to a representational schema that, rather than invoking an already found authentic native or instituting a modern bourgeois humanist subject completely negating the specificity of the native, self-referentially highlights the complex intersections in the construction of native as recognizable bodies. I posit that the nativized bodies is a seminal way of illustrating the contradictions in the liberalization regime, as the trope foregrounds and brings into tension the "body" as constituted at the intersection of the theorizations of corporeality and deployment of "body" in state-practices, the nationalist discourse, and commodification.

The dissertation of Ameet Parameswaran is approved.

Susan Leigh Foster

Janet O'Shea

Carol Sorgenfrei

Sue-Ellen Case, Committee Chair

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2012

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The errors in this work are of course, mine.

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Introduction

This dissertation takes the performative body as the site of analysis to critically interrogate the contradictions in the space-time of India in the liberalization regime. By the term liberalization regime, I refer to the unprecedented changes that have occurred in India starting from the late 1980s: the deregulation and opening up of the economy under economic liberalization with the signing of "Structural Adjustment Programs," privatization initiatives, the rise of transnational media resulting in the proliferation of consumerist images in the public space, and the "free" flow of information across national borders. These changes have transformed India from a nation driven by state developmentalism to a nation organized by the "free market." Throughout the dissertation, I analyze diverging cultural objects that emerge from and embody this transformation, such as the popular performance form of mimicking called "Mimics Parade," the photo-performance project of the artists Clare Arni and N. Pushpamala, advertisements of MNCs on national television channels, and an Indo-Japanese theatrical production. I read these cultural objects as instances of the performative use of the trope that I have termed "nativized bodies." I posit that the idea of nativized bodies is a seminal way of illustrating the contradictions in the liberalization regime, as the trope foregrounds and brings into tension the "body" as constituted at the intersection of the theorizations of corporeality and deployment of "body" in state-practices, the nationalist discourse, and commodification.

The term "nativized" is generally used in association with the term nativization referring to the process of making a foreign object native or indigenous by adapting and changing the original. In the Indian context, the term is used primarily in the study of Indian English. These studies highlight the need to understand Indian English as a unique version of the language rather than as one of incorrect usages or aberrations. Thus, the term "nativization" of English sets the

language usage within the Indian cultural milieu, positing that the process of nativization of English in turn contributes to its "globality."[1] However, in this study, I use the term nativized bodies in a different sense to highlight a self-referential process of producing the category of "native" as marked and identifiable bodies. I will first discuss the category of native and then elaborate what I mean by a self-referential process of producing the category.

The adjective "native" puts the body in relation to notions of ethnicity and geographic boundaries. Further, it suggests cultural attributes that are in service to the inscription of essences or innate/natural traits onto the "nativized" body. While in a general sense, native may be conceived as a relative and value-neutral term as, everyone can be deemed as native to some territorial boundary, it is precisely the possibility of sliding between and linking notions of territoriality, cultural practices, and identity as an essence that makes the term central in the categorizations within colonial-modern knowledge production. The term native is invoked in the colonial-modern discourse for categorizing and demarcating the civilizational "Other." While the colonizer is universal and "human," the native is specific, marked by territory, caste, language, gender, class, religion, clothing, customs, and manners. This production of native as an "Other" in colonial discourse opens out a complex field that connects it to state-practices and govermentality, nationalist discourse, and commodification in transnational flow of images. Let me elaborate.

The very category of native as difference comes into existence as an effect of the production of ethnographic knowledge. Scholars have shown how colonial-modern knowledge production needs to be seen as linked to the formation of uneven colonial power structures employed in governing local populations, what Foucault has termed as the emergence of

[1] For studies analyzing Indian English as a process of acculturation and nativization, see Kachru and Smith, 2009; Downey, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2006.

"governmental rationality" (Foucault 1991; Scott, 1995). Within the taxonomies of documentation and "scientific" study of the natives and their "life-worlds" as part of governmentality, rather than ascribing individuality to the native in line with the ascription of interiority of the bourgeois humanist subject, natives were captured through their external traits. As distinct from Europe where nationalisms may be conceived as preceding the constitution of the state, in a colonial space such as India where, as Partha Chatterjee argues, colonial governmentality precedes nationalism, governmentality is formative and always linked to the emerging nationalist discourse (Chatterjee, 2005). To use the binary in Benedict Anderson's formulation of nationalism, the practices of "bounded" seriality of governmentality and its production of ethnic politics is a realm that the "unbounded" seriality of nationalism as "imagination" in India had to always confront, use, and negate, in order to imagine a sense of homogenous nation. As an umbrella term used to bring together the entire population within the spatial boundary of the colonies as an "Other" to the western civilization, the term was rejected within the Indian nationalist discourse. As Susie Tharu points, out the term is now regarded as an Indian version of "nigger" (Tharu, 2007). Yet the structure of production of the native-as-difference as a problem of "constructed ethnicities"[2] that the colonialism-modern structure inaugurates is at the heart of the independent Indian nation as a productive tension. For nationalist discourse and post-independent state-practices, the central challenge was how to transform the heterogeneities within the practices within the nation into an abstract concept of a nation. How can the marked bodies and their "life-worlds" transcend their specificities to make manifest a nation, a nation that is at the same time distinct from the colonial by the very difference of their bodies?

[2] Appadurai, 1990.

While the problematic of native-as-difference has been central in the different cultural practices that emerged in the colonial period such as theater, visual arts, and cinema here I limit the argument to the domain of modern Indian theater to set the problematic of native body.[3] In the domain of theater, scholars have shown how the dissemination of the European theater canon with the objective of "civilizing," and the study and classification of the "native" traditions of performance with the objective of regulation and control of the colonized, was critical in the rise of the popular "national" theater in India. The new popular theater in India emerged by departing from the existing dramatic traditions by using European traditions and canon "strategically," mixing them with reconfigured "indigenous" popular traditions[4] for "historically specific audiences" (Bhatia, 2004:18). While the proscenium stage in colonial cities such as Calcutta was a commercial enterprise working within the new modern logic of ticketed entry, it was simultaneously a site where the abstract conception of nation could be visualized, given an embodiment, a space of embodiment in which identities could be stabilized as also destabilized. Sudipto Chatterjee argues that commercial stage as a space connected "the *disembodied* fictive reality of the discourse of nationalism with all the appurtenances of an *embodied* factual

[3] In this short introduction, I am considering only one aspect of the problematic of the native, where native-as-difference is taken as the central issue. There is an equally complex practice of instituting a bourgeois humanist-subject based on aesthetic of realism. In fact, after the independence and establishment of the National School of Drama, the initial efforts in the state policy with the appointment of Ebrahim Alkazi as the director of National School of Drama was to construct a new national theater based on realism. But this state policy was a short lived one, and the 1960s saw the turn towards the "roots" with the state policy supporting the strategy of highlighting difference and heterogeneity as the essence of Indian nation. For more on complex uses and debates of realism starting with the socialist realism of Indian People Theater Association, and the contextualization of the marginalization of realism in India within academic studies based on a post-colonial framework, see Dharwadker, 2005. Also, see Madhava Prasad (1998) for a study of the period of the national emergency when he argues that realism in cinema becomes a "national political project" of the developmentalist authoritarian state. In this period, the ethnographic mode of realism, he argues, through instituting a modern citizen-subject in the figure of the diplomat, provides a mapping of nation for the state to intervene, take charge and transform. Since this dissertation explores the issues surrounding bodies that within representational schema are not bestowed with "interiority" of bourgeois humanist subject, I am not elucidating the question of realism here. In the chapters, whenever the frame of reference of realism arises, I will analyze it in detail.

[4] Nandi Bhatia rightly highlights the contradictory moves involved in this process as the middle class, basing itself on colonial taxonomical classification, eschewed popular performance traditions as "vulgar," and in turn efforts were made to "refine" the popular for creating an "Indian" aesthetic (Bhatia, 2004).

performance of elusive/illusive nationhood, giving it a certain believable, convincing, conniving autonomy." It was a space where the distinction of "peopled nation," a territory carved out as population state with heterogeneity could be conceived as that of a "people's nation"—a fixed and coherent identity based on value of nationalist self. The project of theater and the world it produced in the colonial period, according to Chatterjee, was to submerge the contradictions and heterogeneity of a peopled nation by visualizing a nationalist self based on a Hindu culture that would provide the base of unity for this diverse populace. The commercial stage in the colonial period made this national-cultural project, "available for popular consumption in visual and auditory terms, gave it popular appeal and turned it into an effective tool for manufacturing consent" (Chatterjee, 2007:272).

What is critical in analyzing the national is the contradictions between national as practice and the nationalist discourse. While the popular-national practices draw from both "Western" traditions and indigenous structures constructing the national at the level of the senses in a hybrid aesthetic, the nationalist discourse tries to provide an outright political aesthetic that is based on the notion of fundamental difference to the colonial-modern. In the post-independence period, these debates continue, with the additional complexity of the newly independent state itself engaged in construction of nationalist self even as it derives its structures of governing partly from its imperial predecessor. The iconic instance of staging native as "Other" to the "western" in terms of cultural essence to posit a possibility of "de-colonization" of the nation by tapping into the "uncontaminated" pre-modern tradition is the diverse theatrical experiments of the 1960s that have been often clubbed under the term "Theater of Roots."[5] The movement, which was started by practitioners mainly in the regions that were not centers known

[5] For an in-depth study of the movement, see Mee, 2008.

for commercial stage in India such as Karnataka, Kerala, and Manipur, with a modernist slant, took identity as located in the native performance forms itself as a way of countering the western/"colonial" theater. Suresh Awasthi, who played a significant role as administrator funding some of these projects through state cultural institutions, terming the works of many practitioners using "indigenous" practices as "back to the roots" (a term he himself popularized) articulates the perspective of decolonization by bringing together the trope of the "tradition," and the link of the present experimentation with the "great" Natyasastra tradition. Awasthi writes,

> The modern Indian theatre, a product of colonial culture, felt an intense need to search for roots to counteract its violent dislocation from tradition. Directors like B.V. Karanth, K.N. Panikkar, and Ratan Thiyam have had meaningful encounters with tradition and, with their work, have reversed the colonial course of contemporary theatre, putting it back on the track of the great Natyasastra tradition. It sounds paradoxical, but their theatre is both avant-garde in the context of conventional realistic theatre, and part of the 2,000-year-old Natyasastra tradition (Awasthi, 1989:48).

In this perspective colonialism is regarded as constructing "cultural amnesia," and Natyasastra is invoked as providing authentic Indian-ness. This perspective that follows the same taxonomic logic of colonialism and Orientalism in clubbing together forms and practices that are very distinct as authentic essence of the nation standing opposed to the Western has come under severe critique (Bharucha, 1989; Dharwadker, 2005). Here, I will add that the search for such uncontaminated rooted/native traditions does not recognize that the lure is based on the very modern structure of commodity logic where representations of the native are caught in representational schema of commodification as exotic. The representations of the native, even at the turn of the twentieth century were simultaneously tied to the flow of commodified images as

the documentations as representations got crystallized precisely in the production and circulation of Orientalist images (ethnographic paintings, popular oleographs, anthropological and anthropometric photographs) both in the space of the colony and the imperial center, and the display of live bodies in spaces such as International exhibitions.[6]

In this dissertation, I use the term nativized bodies to draw attention to a representational schema that, rather than invoking an already found authentic native or instituting a modern bourgeois humanist subject completely negating the specificity of the native, self-referentially highlights the complex intersections in the construction of native as recognizable bodies. Through the dissertation the reader will encounter myriad peformative enactments such as the dark "tribal" (Toda) woman posing with a camera in her hand, non-mainstream male bodies corporeally mimicking the sounds of percussion and advertisements in temple festivals, or mimicking iconic instances of masculinity from the cinematic world, a wheaten subaltern woman posing as ready to play cricket with a plastic bat in front of stumps made of bricks, a South-Indian woman wearing stretch-pants, holding a whip, and smiling at the viewer, dark ornamented Rajasthani servant bodies performing gymnastic yoga (*mallakhamb*) on chandelier while engaging in productive labor by chewing gum, and a female body wearing a *kimono* adorned with a golden caparison in the back presenting itself as a tusker from the Kerala temple festival. These bodies differ in terms of caste, class, gender, territorial boundaries, "structures of feeling," and even move across species distinctions. What unites them is that they are marked minoritarian positions in contradistinction to the bourgeois humanist subject with interiority. Yet, neither do they present themselves as authentic natives untouched by the modern. Rather than being native bodies, they present themselves as nativized bodies, reiterating and pointing to the colonial-

[6] For more on colonial exhibitions and colonial photography see Breckenridge, 1989; Cohn, 1996; Mathur, 2007; Maxwell, 200; Pinney, 2003.

modern representational apparatus that constructs them as native bodies through disciplining apparatus and commodification. The nativized bodies, in the dissertation, therefore pry open and foreground the intersection between governmentality, commodification, and nationalist discourse.

Through the dissertation, I will show that the intersection is not a singular one frozen in time that can be understood from an overarching vantage point whether it be analysis of colonial discourse, capitalism, or nationalist discourse. The dissertation also does not present the intersection as developing in a chronological and linear fashion. While I have highlighted one tendency of “back to the roots” in the post-independent India that stages the native, the nativized bodies in the dissertation will give multiple vantage points of the intersection that have different genealogical trajectories. Rather than holding on to one schema for staging of the nativized body, each chapter in the dissertation will unpack the specific intersections the enactments bring to the fore. Through the dissertation therefore I will show nativized bodies as complicating the relationships of such varied structures such as “parade” as the post-independent Indian state structure for highlighting state philosophy of “unity in diversity” put in relation to the production of difference in the newly emerging consumption regime, the theorization of gesture as transcendence in the nationalist discourse alongside the gestural regimes of the nation constituted by the popular visual culture, the articulation of a “somatic” nationalism based on psycho-somatic totality in “Indian” physical practices such as wrestling placed alongside the notion of productive and servile labour in the regime of neo-liberalism, the taxonomy of performing bodies in mainstream intercultural theatre practices alongside the use of animal body of the temple tusker in the spectacle of the ritual-festival space.

Taking body as the site of interrogation, this dissertation also highlights that the trope of nativized bodies and the representational schema they foreground are always caught in a gendered dynamic. By taking production of native as a site of problematizing, I do not put forward a perspective of "identity politics" where community or sub-national identifications can be read as resistant against the state practices or nationalist discourse. Here I agree with the analysis of scholars that even though the "communitarian thinkers" provide a critique of nationalist discourse and state practices, the analysis that places the "narrative of community" against an overarching state at once "conceal[s] its own patriarchal biases" (Bharucha, 2000). While positing the nativized bodies as opposed to the nationalist discourse and the citizen-subject, therefore, I am not presenting them as resistant subjectivities or as resistant structure in itself. In reiterating the norms, nativized bodies "play" with the regime of discipline and objectification in the dominant representations. Yet the dissertation will show that sometimes precisely through such a "play," a virtual can be made manifest that is patriarchal and equally invested in transcendence to categories such as homogenous nation. What grounds such "self-referentiality" and "play" as a strategy, I will argue, is the present historical juncture of liberalization itself, where a fundamental reordering of nation is brought about by foregrounding the domain of "consumption" as the most privileged site for channeling identification in contemporary India.

Body in the Space-time of the Present : "Disjuncture" in Liberalization

The complexities of liberalization process cannot be seen in terms of narratives of "liberation" from the state-driven "past," or start of a "post-national" era, or a narrative of homogenization through globalization. Instead, this dissertation pays attention to the ways in

which the transnational media and the new consumption practices channel identifications both by breaking away as well as reconfiguring pre-existing discourses of nation, gender, and community. Scholars have shown that the reconfigurations in liberalization of figures such as the middle class woman as a "consuming subject" through her "sexualization as an actively desiring subject" (Mary John, 1998:382), the Dalit and lower caste male (Niranjana and Dhareshwar, 1996), the figure of "youth" (Lukose, 2005), or the re-constitution of domains such as "erotics" at the intersection of "national belonging" (Mankekar, 2004), or the politics of Hindutva (Rajagopal, 1999;2001) have to be seen as reconstitutions where new consumption practices intersect with long-standing discursive structures and practices within the nation. I place the self-referentiality of nativized bodies as a structure as one that is at the heart of this complex reconstitution intersecting with the long-standing discourses and practices within the nation.

In their seminal analysis of the Tamil film *Kaadalan*, Tejaswinin Niranjana and Vivek Dhareshwar highlight the way in which the film brings together "signifying systems of fashion and violence" and posit the Dalit male body as a central "site and siginifier" of the "larger processes of resignification that is underway in the contemporary politics" (1996:15-16). In the film, they argue, Dalit male body as opposed to being marked as belonging to the tradition (conventional perspective of caste as a domain belonging to tradition) is shown as embodying the new urban popular codes. They highlight that the male body in the film, "mediates…[and is] being mediatized by the global televisual junk," as the body performs a version of rap (called *peta-rap* in the film), enacts "tradition" through virtuosic Bharatanatyam, and is subjected to state torture and in turn enacts violence. Though the film is based on "gender blindness," they argue that this male body constituted through consumerist cultural economy and framed as caught in two systems of exclusion and violence—caste and liberalization—puts forward a

disjunctive relation between body and the contemporary space-time. Pointing out the strategy in the film of equal focus on the body and the plethora of conflicting contemporary spaces such as traditional, urban, the contemporary politics in which the body moves, they argue that the strategy in the film is one of spatialization through body. The mediated and mediatized male body brings to fore the disparate spaces and creates tensions as it moves through them. In my analysis of nativized bodies, I derive from Niranjana and Dhareshwar's perspective of body caught in representation as a site mediating and bringing to fore the conflicting spaces of the contemporary space-time.

Niranjana and Dhareshwar argue that the body is able to traverse and make visible such heterogeneous and conflicting spaces because the film "refuses" the notion of a "natural" body in favor of body as a site of re-signification that can show the processes of signification. Deriving from Judith Butler's formulation of "disidentification," they frame the body in *Kaadalan* as raising questions of how to politicize disidentification—in Butler's words, disidentification as the "uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong?" (ibid.:24) In analyzing nativized bodies, I derive from their formulation of this disjuncture between the body and the regime of signification allowing for a spatialization. I extrapolate this structure in a more general manner and look at multiple ways such disjuncture is staged. Through the dissertation, I will also pay much closer attention to the claim of the "non-natural" body. Distinct from Romantic notions, where body was ascribed to the realm of nature, in the theorizations of corporeality in Indian nationalist discourse and philosophical basis of certain "Indian" body practices, body is precisely seen as a "non-natural" body. In the liberalization regime, the body is again put forward as "non-natural" body, one that is trained and disciplined. These diverging claims of body as "non-natural" complicate the structure of disjuncture as disidentification.

Rather than erecting a cultural essence of the "Indian body" as opposed to the "western," or positing "non-natural" body itself as resistant, the dissertation will probe how disjuncture as a structure of revealing the processes of signification, in certain cases, precisely puts forward transcendence, and involves its own erasures. In this sense, this dissertation is an exploration of the slips between body as a site of reiteration, virtuosity, and parasitism.

In Chapter 1, I take for analysis the performance form "Mimics Parade," a new popular performance form that emerged in the 1980s in Kerala, as a case of embodying consumption regime. Mimics Parade involve predominantly male performers who through corporeal mimicking provide exact reproduction of the sounds from the ritual spaces, cinematic world, political personalities, and other popular performance forms. I read the performative body of the mimic in Mimics Parade as a staging of the human body as "machinic," establishing a new relation between body and the virtual at the intersection of the new spatial logic inaugurated by a consumption regime, the new technologies of media, and the masculinity discourse. Kerala, a small deep south-western linguistic state in India, where metropolitan cities such as Bombay, Delhi, or Madras, or the new "hi-tech" cities that rose to prominence in the period of liberalization such as Hyderabad or Bangalore are absent, might be deemed as "strange" starting point for looking at the problematic of liberalization. I have already intimated that Kerala has been one of the centers of the new experiments of "theater of the roots" in the late 1960s. In political terms, Kerala is known in the post-independence period for electing a communist government in the very first election in 1957 after the state-formation, and the Kerala state is known for its social welfare policies due to the political demands placed on the state. By the late 1970s, though the state had "exemplary" levels of social indicators such as educational access, the state economy came to a point of crisis with absence of industrialization and extremely high

rates of unemployment. I read Mimics Parade alongside the transformation of the region resulting from the massive migration of labor to the Persian Gulf from the 1980s. I argue that Mimics Parade, which reiterates the "parade" structure of the post-independence state, reconstitutes a modern Malayali identity, contradistinction to articulations of a "rooted" "Malayali" or that of "internationalism" of popular performance space, as one that is emerging through the transnational flows and rise of a consumption regime. The nativized male bodies in Mimics Parade also offer me the opportunity to analyze the how the emerging consumption regime was based on an androcentric loop.

Chapter 2 analyzes a collaborative photo-performance project by N. Pushpamala and Clare Arni titled *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs* (2000-2004). *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs* (NWSI) through reiteration, irony, and parody interrogates the category of "South-Indian native women" represented in mass produced prints from the field of colonial anthropology, anthropometry, and popular visual culture over the course of last century. In *NWSI*, I read the relationship between image and gesture at the intersection of three inter-related elements: the nationalist discourse, the colonial-modern as emerging out of the movement of transnational capital, and gendered embodiment. Looking at the enactments of Pushpamala I argue that *NWSI* reveals the category of native as constructed and stabilized through codification and framing of "gestures." *NWSI* affords me the opportunity to analyze the theorization of corporeality in the nationalist discourse in opposition to the gestural regimes constituted through governmentality and popular visual culture. As opposed to nationalist theorization that was oriented towards transcendence based on the virtuosic body, I establish that *NWSI* shows that the nation, at the sensory level, is constituted through the gestures of the mundane and the banal. I will show in the chapter that *NWSI* by opening out the

possibilities of abstraction not simply residing in the "performance" body but also in the mundane and banal provides a gender critique of the national-popular. Rather than the body disappearing into the virtual world, or body frozen in the reified image, by precisely providing a surplus of the performing body, what I call a "corporeal refraction" of the space-time, the work points to the wider predicament of corporeality in the image-centric world.

From the regional spatiality of Kerala and South-India, in Chapter 3, I move on to analyze the deployment of nativized bodies in the ad-films of multi-national corporations. Here I analyze how nativized bodies perform a virtual "brand-India" at the instantiation of the commodity, enabling the flow of transnational capital. Through the chapter I look at the ad-films of "mass products" such as Coca Cola, mobile telephony (Idea), chewing gum, and the specific cultural artifact that focuses the chapter is the *Happydent White Palace* ad-film (2007) for the global chewing-gum brand Happydent White. Looking at the strategies of "humor" and hyperbole in these ad-films, I delineate three inter-related characteristics of the deployment of nativized bodies that produces a virtual "nation-India" as a brand. First, since these products rely on high turn-over sales, they base themselves on "mass" as the consumer. In addressing a wide spectrum of population—the middle class and the lower middle class—the ad-films invoke and displace the utopian programs of the Indian nation-state interventions in the past, thereby staking a claim for commodities in reorganizing the present. Second, the nation so produced rather than being bestowed the status of a "real" nation as in utopian programs is posited as a virtual nation fleetingly produced, and materialized only in commodities. Third, the transformation in liberalization from the state-driven to market-driven is presented in the ad-films as a problematic of masculinities. Once I delineate these general characteristics, I move on to analyze the specific *Palace* ad-film of Happydent White interrogating how the strategy of nativized body needs to be

theorized within global branding processes as based on the aesthetic of "super-flat." Closely analyzing the ad-film and its use of *mallakhamb* (gymnastic yoga) as "somatic nationalism" fused with the new labor regime of contemporary capitalism, I show how the aesthetic of "super-flat" allows the multinationals to construct a brand-experience, ironically by highlighting objectification itself. Objectification as brand-experience, I argue problematizes the division between material and immaterial labor and the assumption of body-technology relation underpinning the general theories of branding.

While the first three chapters analyze body within the realm of the "human," in Chapter 4 I analyze the issues involved in embodying the "animal" body, or precisely the male Asian elephant. I take for analysis the "cross-cultural" theatrical production *Sahyande Makan: The Elephant Project* by the Kerala based group Theatre Roots and Wings. I analyze this theatrical adaptation of a Malayalam poem *Sahyante Makan* in Malyalam, Japanese and English as an instance of "zooësis." The poem constructs the figure of a tusker, who runs amok in the festival space since it slides into fantasy in a state of *musth*.[7] Looking at embodiment of the elephant as an instance of nativized body, I argue that the performance necessitates a reading at the intersection of three critical perspectives: performing animal, gendered discourse, and intercultural practice in the space of India. It is precisely by placing the question of performing animal as intersectional, and an eschewal of the claim to represent the elephant from a fixed position of human that the performance challenges the human(ist)-centric discourse, and its assumed binary of human/animal. The theoretical frame that drives my analysis in the chapter is Donna Harraway's concept of "becoming with." Through the chapter I posit that the question of "becoming with" in a space such as India needs to be contextualized as linked to colonial

[7] In Asian elephants, musth is a physiological and behavioral condition that primarily male elephants undergo periodically. During musth, the elephant become sexually active, seems to lose control of its state, and shows heightened aggression.

taxonomies as well as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic practices in India that are caught in a gendered dynamic. The performance offers a perfect context to explore the heterogeneous cleavages, not simply of human and animal, but intertwined ones of Kerala-India-Japan through the critique of essentialism in mainstream intercultural practice, and the woman-tusker by contextualizing "woman" within the zoomorphic practices in India and tusker within the masculinity discourse in Kerala.

Before concluding this introduction, I will contextualize two inter-related aspects of the case studies in this dissertation that need more clarification. First is the marked divergence of the objects that are taken up for analysis and brought under the rubric of nativized bodies, and second, the difference in the spatial identifications reiterated in them. Each of the central objects taken for analysis in the dissertation is distinct in terms of its spectatorship and performative body. The first chapter deals with a popular performance form Mimics Parade performed in festival spaces, colleges, auditoriums across the region. Mimics Parade, though it is significant in televised form, has popular spectatorship in public spaces. The ad-films on the contrary are shown in English and Hindi televisions channels and are telecast in dubbed form in the regional televisions. Here the virtual is delivered to a wide spectrum of spectators in their "homes" through television. The photo-performance and the theatrical production can be seen following a much more limited art following audience—the photo-performance displayed as curated exhibitions in art galleries in India and abroad, and *Sahyante Makan* similarly performed in theater festivals across the country and abroad. In bringing them together as performative bodies, I move away from the binary of the "popular" versus "art," as well as conceptions of "performance" defined as the co-presence of live performers and spectators in the same space. While bringing all of them under the same rubric, as objects that can be placed in a relation to

each other, I do not negate the distinctions of the specific apparatus in each of these cases. In my analysis rather than taking body as given, I interrogate how these diverging enactments and representations bring together and foreground themselves as problematic of constitution of "body" in the contemporary space-time.

Even at the level of "body," these objects can be seen as providing very distinct and diverging perspectives. While the chapters will unpack theses strands in their complexities, here I will highlight certain basic distinctions. The Mimics Parade involves "live" bodies that stress the sonic through mimicking sounds, yet in the process present the performing body as "machinic." In the theatrical staging the interrogation is how to embody animal body. The photo-performance where the performing body is "frozen" and framed in photographic representation, interrogates the complex relation between visuality in image and the constitution of gestural regimes of the nation. In the ad-films at the level of representation, the performing body (*mallakhamb*) is completely taken over by the apparatus of moving image and body practices such as *mallakhamb* are represented as fused with the laboring body in neo-liberal regime. While this is at the level of representational body, the ad-films, as a part of wider branding processes as "evental," simultaneously put forward a specific relation between incorporeal and corporeal, where the consumption of incorporeal precedes corporeal consumption of the product. By maintaining these diverging frames corporeality in tension, I will show how body is constituted and reconfigured in new ways by bringing together diverging discourses, practices, and imaginations that are sedimented over a long period, and how these works posit a new complex relation between body and virtual in the contemporary space-time.

In terms of spatial metaphor too, the works analyzed in the dissertation diverge. Mimics Parade is based on a regional linguistic identity of Malayali, photo-performance foregrounds a

regional identity of “South-India,” the ad-films of the MNCs construct a “brand-India” for the “global” marketplace, and the theatrical adaptation interrogates interculturalism and the question of “beyond human.” In taking such diverging spatial categories, the dissertation moves away from a conception of homogenous Indian nation. Similar to my strategy in the case of problematizing “body,” I do not take any of these spatial categories as immutable and essential. Rather, the categories as boundaries are taken to make manifest the specificity of discourses, practices, and imaginations, and in turn are shown as most powerful constructs in themselves. In these shift between spatial categories, my critical perspective is resolutely transnational. The frame of the national has been seen in the last couple of centuries as the most dominant and almost the natural frame through which identities and imagination of change and resistance are/can be located and marked. The frame of the transnational on the contrary, as Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way argues (2008) denaturalizes nationalism, bringing into relief nationalism as an ideology, while simultaneously showing the contradictions within the deployment of nationalist imaginations. The “trans” of transnationalim functions as a critical theoretical lens that captures the actuality of transnational movement of goods, people, ideas, and capital without being mediated by the nation-state, and sometimes consciously opposing the frame and mediation of the nation, particularly in the context of explosion of communications technology and break down of barriers in this realm. But the “national” in transnational at the same time highlights the role played by the nationalist imagination and national interventions in channeling, facilitating, and controlling these apparent free transparent flows.

It is in this perspective of a “hyphenated” trans-nationalism that I analyze the global branding processes of MNCs as constructing brand-experience precisely by instituting a national as “super-flat” and will show how the critiques raised against MNCs for their discriminatory

practices (not simply at the level of labor practices, but at the level of the product quality itself) is displaced as a problem of national masculinity. Taking the “obvious” transnational or “global” practice of branding by the MNCs, and highlighting the power of the “national construct,” I critique the general theories of branding that do not take into consideration spatial configurations such as nation and “third-world.” Fredric Jameson’s controversial formulation that all third-word literature is an allegory of the nation (1986) can be seen as valid in an unconventional fashion in these ad-films as the MNCs, in channeling brand-experience of their global products, play on the awareness of audience/consumers of the categories of nation and “third-world” as linked to the spatial organization of contemporary capitalism. The argument here is not that of a cultural binary of East/West or a positing of exception in the Indian case. Instead, I posit that the transnational lens that simultaneously pays attention to the power of the “national construct” and its contradictions challenges the generalizations in global branding theories at a fundamental level.

To conclude the short introduction, this dissertation, taking corporeality or performative body as a fundamental site of analysis, hopes to foregrounds a contemporary space-time where, as Ella Shohat points out, there is a drive “to submit the world to a single “universal” regime of truth and global institution of power,” yet the “spatiality and the temporality of cultures as lived is scrambled, palimpsestic in all the worlds, with the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern coexisting and interlinked globally” (Shohat, 2002:78). With this general frame of the dissertation, I will now turn to the first instance of nativized bodies, the mimicking bodies in Kerala, who embody and “sound” the initial tremors of an emerging consumption regime.

Chapter 1: ***Embodying Consumption Regime: Mimics Parade and the relationality of the "machinic" body***

In the 1980s, the new performance form "Mimics Parade" emerged as one of the most popular entertainments in the Malayalam language region. The general structure of Mimics Parade involves a group of predominantly young male performers presenting a rehearsed and pre-set series of acts that mimic the familiar sounds of the non-human and the human. The sounds of the non-human include mimicking of "nature" such as the sounds of animals, birds, breezes, and waterfalls, or the sounds of machinery such as factory sirens, automobiles, and trains, or musical instruments and percussion. The sounds of humans include the mimicking of voices and physical traits of known film personalities and politicians. The Parade also mimics other popular performance genres such as *kathaprasangam*[8] or "professional" theater and presents enactments of "typical" characters such as drunkards, bureaucrats, politicians, or religious figures, in their interactions in public settings such as schools, hospitals, police stations, bus stops, or marriage households.[9] In spite of their performative differences these acts are brought together as a stage show interspersed with musical renditions.

In the popular title of the form, the anglicized concoction "Mimics Parade," the term "parade" is an iteration of the annual pageantry organized by the post-independent Indian nation-state. In her analysis of the annual ritualized commemoration by the state through Republic

[8] *Kathaprasangam* is a storytelling performance form of Kerala that was extremely popular till the 1980s. I will analyze closely the mimicking of *kathaprasangam* in Mimics Parade and issues it raises in the third section of this chapter.

[9] Marriage household as a setting generally presents the comic interactions, in the spaces such as that of the cooking tent, of the relatives or guests who are marked by differing class, status, and "morality." The household or location of the marriage is conceived only as a fruitful setting for comic interactions, and the bride and the bridegroom, and the ceremony of the marriage itself is generally absent from these enactments.

Day[10] celebrations (January 26th) undertaken primarily in Delhi but telecasted live to the entire nation, Srirupa Roy has argued that the parade as a structure foregrounds the role of "state in enabling, representing, and safeguarding national sovereignty" (Roy, 2007:102). The annual Republic Day Parades, Roy highlight, stages the continuities and difference or "newness" of the independent state from its imperial predecessor. What is most striking about the staging is the way the structure of the pageantry exhibits the "unity in diversity" philosophy of the Indian nation-state, where idenitifications based on sub-national affiliations were highlighted as critical for the Indian nation and where the differences within the nation are fore-grounded as held together by the state. The Republic Day Parades consist of three segments: military display, cultural display, and display of and by children. Rather than linguistic difference, which was the basis of the reorganization of the states in post-independence period, the cultural pageant consisting of floats presented by individual states highlight difference of these regional units in terms of dances and "folk" performances, "climate, topography, architecture, and plant and animal life" (ibid.:89). Deriving from the ""Lenin's paradox" that "the surest way to unity in content [is through the promotion of] diversity in content"" (ibid.:69), and similar to the Soviet state strategy of creating nation through "*matrioshka* (nested) doll effect" (ibid.:92),[11] the pageants presented the sub-national identities as cultural identities tied to land. As Roy argues, the cultural pageant "specifies the contours of the territory for different groups, and in doing so

[10] The Republic Day, celebrated on 26th January every year is the commemoration of the day, 26th January 1950, the date in which the Indian Constitution was signed and came into force. The date was originally chosen to bring into force the Constitution simultaneously to signify 26th January 1930, the day on which the motion for the declaration of independence, or *poornaswaraj*, was accepted by the Indian National Congress, and the civil disobedience campaign was formally launched against the British. (Roy, 2007:69-70). For an excellent analysis of the complexity of the choice of the date that brings together both "Republicanism" and "nationalist will," state and national community, see Roy, 2007:66-104.

[11] The effect of "nested configuration of diversity" is one where diversity is "expressed at the level of the nation with the individual states coming together to display their cultural identities, as well as at the level of the state as a collection of smaller regional cultures." Roy succinctly describes the *matrioshka* effect as where "the display of…each level of identity contains within it other levels of identity anticipates[ing] future scenarios in which the subgroup can have a state of its own" (Roy, 2007:92).

shows that the state and its military [the first segment] protects" the heterogeneous differences of the regional displays such as "Naga dances, Keralite cash crops, the subway system in West Bengal, the Ladakhi marriage ceremony…the "harmonious architecture" in Goa." (ibid.:90). The Parade therefore is the structure that unites precisely by showing the fragmented cultures, regional peculiarities, and heterogeneities within the nation. If Republic Day Parades undertaken by the nation-state present the nation in its "glory"—military prowess and the cultural diversity—held together by the state, Mimics Parade, contrary to this nested configuration of diversity, presents an inverted order of authority where the parade is held together by nothing other than the technique of mimicry.

In a cursory reading of the form, it might be regarded as "solo stand-up routines" (Zarrilli, 2000:8). Yet distinct from stand-up routines, the most significant aspect of the Mimics Parade is the format of the parade as the structure for a group performance, its disinterest in constructing an individual-centric (comic) persona over the time of the whole performance, and the absence of any form of autobiographical narrative.[12] At a basic level, through the mimicking of sounds, Mimics Parade presents the human body, specifically the organ of mouth, as a perfect machine. The microphone and "close-mic" techniques lend this body the possibility of virtual extension, a perspective similar to one highlighted in musical expositions such as that of beatboxing.[13] Yet with the skill of corporeal mimicking, Mimics Parade isolates variegated sounds as fragments that are then put into relation to other fragments creating unfamiliar combinations as a pastiche. For instance, in terms of unfamiliar combinations as pastiche, one might hear a known film or political personality's voice turned into the sound of an automobile

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[12] For the basic characteristics of stand-up comedy, and the changes to the form from the 1980s, see Auslander, 1992;1993;2004.

[13] For more on beatboxing and the vocalization of the percussion, see Aisha S. Durham, 2002; Dan Stowell and Mark D. Plumbley, 2008.

or an act where a claim is made of "singing 16 songs in 2 minutes" wherein the performer links or "mixes" 16 popular songs in a continuous chain connected by a common word between one song and another. Another strategy is that of parody, where the parody is done through exaggeration of certain features of the original speaking style and the physical gestures or by mimicking the voices precisely but the content differing from that of what is expected of the original voices to say. In such movements away from the original, yet holding on to the exactness of the original sounds, the pastiche, parody, and the political satire of Mimics Parade gets a particular edge of the "potential" as "real."

The assimilation by the Mimics Parade of spaces generally assigned to other popular performance is a significant reconstitution of the space of popular performance in the Malayalam language-scape. The popular historical narrative of the Mimics Parade locates the "origin" in a performance done by the mimicry group of the cultural institution, Kalabhavan, in 1981.[14] Kalabhavan was founded in 1969 by Father Abel (1920-2001), a priest of Roman Catholic Church (CMI), with the explicit goal of offering art education to a wider public at a lower cost.[15] Bringing under one institution, a plethora of artistic practices of music,[16] dance,[17] acting, mimicry, visual arts, and "crafts,"[18] Kalabhavan has over the years become a significant cultural

[14] http://berlytharangal.com/?p=3229.

[15] The motto of Kalabhavan, and its intervention in the cultural scene is posited by the institute as follows: "Kalabhavan stands for the promotion of cultural talents, on a scale never before attempted by any other organization, government or public… There was time when art and culture were confined to the corridors of aristocracy. Kalabhavan made the realm of art and culture accessible to the common man at a cost lower than in any other similar institution anywhere in the world." (http://www.kalabhavan.org/about.html.)

[16] The music training includes vocal training in Karnatic music, training in instrumental music including Violin (Eastern and Western), Organ, Guitar, Veena, percussion including Tabla, Congo drums, Mridangam.

[17] Dance training in Kalabhavan include training in Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kuchippudi, Folk dance, and Cinematic dance.

[18] Kalabhavan also provides training in handicrafts, jewellery making, not normally categorized as "art."

institution in the region[19] staking a particular claim of de-linking art education from the "traditional" structures such as family lineage and the discourse of "*guru-shishya parampara*,"[20] as well as breaking down the divisions between high/classical, modern art, and low art/artisanal practices. In this institutionalization mimicry, far from being an amateur skill, is posited as a skilled practice situated in the same register as Bharatanatyam, or the playing of the Western or Eastern Violin.

As the Roman Church liturgy was still practiced in Latin in Kerala, the 1960s paved way for translation of liturgy into Malayalam, with Fr. Abel playing a significant role in the translation to the vernacular.[21] While initially musicians were brought in as part of recording and popularizing of the new songs, Kalabhavan established a repertory for maintaining the artists it brought together. Mimics started as a "filler" in the musical program (*ganamela*). The 1981 performance, the first one where Mimics Parade was presented as a full-fledged program in itself,[22] had a phenomenal success and contributed to the emergence of Mimics Parade as the most popular entertainment in the language-scape (dubbed in the region as the "mimicry wave"), and Cochin Kalabhavan as the most significant one[23] amongst the numerous mimicry troupes

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[19] Kalabhavan currently has 4000 students, and the institution has over the years trained more than 60,000 students establishing itself as an identifiable institution, with establishments also outside the space of the region such as in UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and London.

[20] The teacher-disciple relationship of training followed in most Indian classical performance forms.

[21] Fr. Abel published twenty volumes of religious books for the use in the Church, and more centrally, in an effort to popularize religion, he wrote new devotional songs, more than 250 in number, and has brought out 30 Audio cassettes that became extremely popular.

[22] The performance was scripted by the duo Siddique-Lal, who in late-1980s through 1990s became one of the most significant "hit-makers" and trend setting writer-directors in Malayalam cinema industry.

[23] Kalabhavan can be seen as a brand or giving an identity to mimicry as a form in the sense that it bestows an already defined (respectable) value and identity to the performers who stake a claim via the name of the institution. In the region, the artists taking the name of the local area from which they originate, or the name of the institution they are trained, as a pre-fix to their names is a common practice. When Kalabhavan is taken by mimics who have been part of the troupe as a prefix to their name, and they continue to be recognized with that pre-fix even after having left the troupe (for instance, Kalabhavan Mani), in this offering of a mark of value and identity, Kalabhavan continues the practice of organizations such as Kerala Kalamandalam, which trains students in classical arts (for instance Kalamandalam Gopi, the famous *kathakali* actor) or KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club), the Kerala theater

spread across the state. The form is performed in such diverse spaces as fairgrounds at the time of festivals, in auditoriums in the cities and the towns, in colleges, traveling as Mimics Parade or "comedy shows" in places where there are considerable number of non-resident Malayali population, specially the Persian Gulf countries. With the rise of the television, the form quickly moved into the new visual medium, done either as presentations much like the stage shows[24] or the popular mimics using their skills to become anchors for the TV programs.

The role of the missionary activities in the nineteenth century India, specifically in South-India, in opening the access of education to the subordinate groups has been well recorded,[25] as also the link between missionary activities, print-capitalism, and the emergence of complex identifications in the newly emerging public sphere.[26] In the context of Kerala, G. Arunima has shown that the translation of The Bible was indeed, as in Europe, a central aspect driving the

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organization that is aligned with Indian People's Theater Association (for instance, KPAC Lalitha, the popular film actress who was in KPAC earlier in her career).

[24] The link of Mimics Parade with the television has been right from the start of the first satellite television channel in Malayalam, the Asianet in 1993, with the production of the weekly show *Cinemala* that was started to provide an alternative to the *Chitrahaar* model of presentation of songs in the national television. Started as mimicking of cinematic world, and moving on to cover the full expanse of the form presenting political satire and commentary on current events, the program continues till date, while numerous other popular shows have come up over the years with the establishment of competing television networks. For an interview with the producer of *Cinemala,* Diana Silvester, see Nair, Shilpa, "No laughing matter this". *The Hindu*. Friday, Aug 05, 2005. In cinema, on the other hand, the influence has been on individual terms, as many significant mimics have moved on to become important actors and stars in the commercial cinema.

[25] For the role of missionary activities in impacting the educational sphere of Kerala see E. T. Mathew, 1999. In the article, analyzing the key factors leading to high literacy rates in Kerala, E. T. Mathew argues that rather than the common belief that it is the state-induced programs (with the "native princes" coming out as modern benevolent educationists) that contributed to high literacy in Kerala, it is the missionary (mainly, activities of Protestant missions), and the social reform movements by the subordinate groups that led to the opening of educational sphere in a wide scale in Kerala. Also see Dilip Menon, 2002, for the analysis of the emergence of the new public sphere through the mediation of religion. In the article, he argues that the articulation of self in Christianity, which was distinct from the caste rubric of "Hindu" framework, made Christianity appear "as the mediator of modernity to those who were wrestling with the problem of a subordinate identity. Religion proved good to think with." (Menon, 2002:1666).

[26] In the specific sphere of theater, the problematic opened out by coming together of colonial governmentality and missionary intervention in the translation of the play, *Neel-Darpan*, the controversy surrounding the arrest and the trial of Long who translated the play into English, and the central role of this controversial trial in the formation of the rubric of the nationalist theater has been studied in depth. For more on the politics of translation of *Neel-Darpan*, and the emergence of the nationalist framework of theater, see Nandi Bhatia, 2004:19-50.

emergence of print-capitalism. Arunima's comparative study of religious tracts and literary genres at the turn of the twentieth century, reads the difference in language of the religious tracts from that of the new literary language as evidencing the not fully "secular" public sphere, a space that cannot be easily assigned as an imagined community of the nation (Arunima, 2006). Problematizing the notion of a "region" by placing Kerala within "the wider social geography of the Indian Ocean," and analyzing the "origin" stories of the four major religions that have strong presence in Kerala,[27] Arunima posits that even at the turn of the twentieth century, religious identity and ethnic identity were not seen as "oppositional categories."[28] The "ethnic" identity of a Malayali "as one who lives in Kerala wherever one's ancestors came from and speaks Malayalam" has a long-duree history and she points out how it can be seen as "unconsciously developing through the medieval period" (Arunima, 2006:54). Yet significantly print-capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century constructed a standardized language that came to be perceived as a distinctly 'modern' spoken Malayalam—what Arunima posits as "a coming of age of Malayali" (ibid.:52). In this opening out of the region, Arunima highlights the sphere of language itself as a site of multiple contestatory articulations of identity, so that the "experience" of divergent ways of laying claim to language itself created a difference in a single notion of Malayali. The post-independent enterprise of Kalabhavan carries on some of these aspects of the earlier mode, by staking a claim for non-state actors in opening access to (art) education and breaking down the established categories of high/classical/modern/popular art.

[27] The "origin" stories that Arunima takes for analysis are the "arrival" stories of Judaism, Christianity, Islam (the stories stressing how these religions were welcomed in the region) and the hegemonic Brahmanical myth of Kerala in which Kerala is conceived as a land brought from the ocean by the sage Parasurama for the Brahmins.

[28] Arunima argues that it was precisely the openness and "the ability to see 'identity' as something that is layered, and multiple, was what probably at the time allowed for a greater space for inter-religious interactions in Kerala" (Arunima, 2006:54).

Yet in the post-independent moment, rather than print-capitalism providing the driving force for identification, I argue that Mimics Parade reconstitutes a modern Malayali identity, distinct from other articulations, as one that is emerging through the transnational flows and rise of a consumption regime. Mimics Parade, where the performative body stages the human body as a "machinic" one, draws out a new relation between body and the virtual at the intersection of the new spatial logic inaugurated by a consumption regime, the new technologies of media, and the discourse of masculinity.[29]

I. ***The Soundscape of Consumption: Pooram, Migration, and an exploding firecracker***

The performance sequence that I am analyzing here is the first sequence of a stage show done in 1997 in the city of Kochi, Kerala as a part of "people's recognition" to Fr. Abel. For the particular event, the group provides a reconstruction of what used to be the early 1980s shows of Kalabhavan Mimics.[30] Seven male performers are on stage, dressed in what seems ordinary, though "non-traditional" Kerala fashion, pants and T-shirts or shirts. With the stage mikes as their only aid, and no sets and props, the performance starts with the introduction of the performers. To the accompaniment of the mimicking of the sound of band music by the performers, each performer is introduced, acknowledging his introduction by a brief wave to the crowd, as the group continues "playing" the band music with their mouths. Once the

[29] I will point out that though significant, in the present chapter, I am not undertaking a historical analysis of the development of the form in terms of skills, or the expanse of the form in terms of its mixing of varied kinds of performative techniques such as the skits. Instead, I restrict my analysis to the body of the mimic.

[30] I am analyzing the performance sequence from the video recording of the stage show available in youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHT-9RuMtGs.

Performers on-stage include Siddique and Lal who scripted the early shows, Sainuddeen, Nadir Shah, Ashokan, Nissar and K. S. Prasad, who were all part of the early days of Kalabhavan Mimics. While taking for analysis this reconstruction of an earlier style, I am not staking any claim of the performance as an authentic reconstruction. I am taking the performance as one tendency that gives an entry point to think through the larger question of the emergence of the form and the space of transnational.

introductions finish, the narrator asks: "Isn't Kerala the land of temples?" The familiar melodic sounds of wind instrument *kombu*, and the percussion rhythm of *cenda* and *elattalam* (cymbals) from the ritual-festival space (*pooram*) are heard, as the narrator carries on speaking: "The festival rush in the Kerala temples has already started. The Thrissur Pooram—isn't it the festival of all festivals (the festival that provides flourishing finish to all festivals). Thrissur Pooram—its melodic fusion of the percussion and rhythms, and the playground advertisers who spring up in such events like *pooram*…though, once they burnt to ashes even human life…the ground shaking fireworks!" [Sound of fireworks start]. "We start our mimics parade, every time, from the Thrissur Pooram ground that brings together all of these." While the narrator pauses, the sound of such a *pooram* is heard in all its noise and messiness: in the background of *kombu*, *cenda*, and *elattalam*, a voice unclear at first but emerging in significance announces: "Visit…visit… for the best spectacles, visit Ajantha Opticals. Ajantha Opticals, visit today itself, Ajantha Opticals. For wonderful wonderful spectacles, Ajantha Ajantha Opticals." Another voice slowly emergences and takes over, and the advertisement recedes to the background: "The fireworks are starting… [Request you to] dim all the lights on the ground. In the surrounding of the fireworks, no one should light a match or a *beedi*.[31] Here…the fireworks are starting." The sound of firework (*amittu*) that slowly rises up to the sky and explode in multi-colors is heard. After repeating thrice the slow rhythmic sound of fireworks rising to the sky and the consequent explosion, with a stress on the singular explosions, the soundscape now changes to the non-rhythmic and chaotic explosions that fill the sky. The flashy fireworks are in full flow. The sound of explosions recedes, and in the ensuing silence after all the noise, one hears a "sweet" (nasal) exclamation by a child "*Haai* (Wow!/Gee!) yellow. *Haai* blue." Another child's voice says "not

[31] *Beedi* is South Asian cigarette, hand-rolled on *tendu* leaf.

blue, it's green." "Oh, is it green!" "*Haai*, I got a firecracker… here here, got one… Don't take it, it might explode. Will it? Of course! It is a firecracker—it will explode. Don't know… you you, you smell it. No no, what if it might explode… No no, it won't. I won't. It won't. Okay, then I will smell it." Sound of explosion. The audience claps.

The recent work on sound studies has stressed the significance of the sonic as a central structuration of the experience of modernity. While, the sequence described above might come across as a "reconstruction" of the *pooram* (ritual-festival) or even as a random pastiche of various sounds heard in a Thrissur Pooram, taking a cue from the recent sound studies and their critique of ocular-centrism, I will analyze this performance sequence as an articulation of the new "soundscape" of the region. By using the term "soundscape,"[32] I wish to highlight the performance itself as a way of "collecting," ordering, and structuring the sounds emerging from the landscape, in the process staking a claim for "sound as an index of identity" (Keeling and Kun, 2011:448). Connecting spatiality to sound, the term also allows one to listen to the sounds historically, foregrounding that sounds that may be isolated and presented as sounds to be heard do not have a fixed signified. In our case, for instance, the sounds isolated and presented from the "traditional" spaces may not be in fact making manifest a "tradition" at all. While the short sequence, just over four minutes in duration, might not be deemed as the emblematic of Mimics Parade in terms of mocking or parody, in the act of structuring and establishing a relationality through mimicking the variegated sounds of the *pooram*, the sequence provides an opportunity to look at Mimics Parade as articulating the emergence of a new spatiality grounded in the sonic.

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[32] In his seminal work, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Murray Schafer, analyzing modernity through structuration and "transformation of sonic phenomena and sonic experience" (Keeling and Kun, 2011:448) uses the term "soundscape" to "think about the enculturated nature of sound, the techniques available for collecting and thinking about sound, and the material spaces of performance and ceremony that are used or constructed for the purpose of propagating sound" (Quoted in Keeling and Kun, 2011:447).

In this opening sequence of the Mimics Parade, the Thrissur Pooram as the "festival of all festivals" is represented through a soundscape that is metonymically standing in for Kerala. If the narrator had not named it as Thrissur Pooram, this soundscape could have stood for any *pooram* in Kerala, because of the musical combination of the percussion (*cenda*), wind instrument (*kombu*), and cymbals (*elattalam*) mark it as a "Hindu" *pooram* space, and the fireworks is a staple of most festivals in Kerala. The marking of the referent mimicked as Thrissur Pooram is significant because of its iconic status in imagining Kerala. The Thrissur Pooram, a 36 hour long variegated event, is a combined *pooram* of ten temples in Thrissur.[33] Over the years due to the spectacle involved in its staging, the event has been marked out as one of the poster events for the Kerala Tourism, the event presented as offering both spectacle and the experience of the exotic to the tourists. The spectacle includes parading of highest number of decorated caparisoned elephants,[34] the instrumental musical exposition by different ensembles each consisting of a few hundred (male) artists playing together the percussion, the wind instrument and the cymbals,[35] the ceremonial change of multi-colored umbrellas in the elephant pageant consisting of 30 decorated tuskers lined up in a row, flashy fireworks, and the trade fair and exhibition.[36] While indexing the *pooram* as metonymy of Kerala is not striking in itself, and the "Hindu"-centricity of the dominant discourse is what allows an easy unmarked move to the general, what is significant is the divergence of the event produced in mimicking from the event

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[33] http://thrissurpooramfestival.com/thrissur_pooram.html.

[34] In 2011 Thrissur Pooram for instance, 96 elephants were involved in the festival, of which 30 elephants were involved in the pageant, decorated and lined up for the special change of umbrella ceremony. (*The Hindu* May 10, 2011, http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/article2005809.ece?css=print).

[35] The number of instrumentalists in Thrissur Pooram is famed to be more than any *pooram*. For a report on various ensembles in 2011 *pooram* see, "A feast to the ears of percussion lovers". http://www.hindu.com/2011/05/13/stories/2011051363560300.htm.

[36] I will take up for detailed analysis the spectacle of *pooram* itself and its link with globalization more thoroughly, offering a critique from the theoretical perspective of "zooësis" in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

as highlighted in the Tourism narrative of the experience of the spectacular and the exotic. The soundscape through the art of mimicking puts in relation the human sounds emanating from the ones who control the technology/capital of sound dissemination in a *pooram* space—the sounds of advertisers, the organizing committee members—and the sounds produced in musical expositions, and the "ground shaking" explosions. In terms of the fireworks, the Kerala Tourism narrative highlights the spectacle of the multi-colored explosions in the sky as an experience to behold for the tourists, an experience that the neo-liberal states have eschewed citing noise and air pollution.[37] The soundscape produced in mimicking, on the other hand, indexes the possibility of explosions much closer to the bodies on the ground, a possibility or threat taken up as constitutive and the "fun" aspect of the space. Though "we" are prone to do it, "Don't light your *beedi*" or keep in check your curiosity, it seems.

It is pertinent to raise the question of what a Mimics Parade makes manifest through mimicking such a soundscape, with a complete absence of the visual spectacle (both the decorated bodies of elephants as well as fireworks), and the actual complex musical exposition. What does the isolation of the variegated sounds from the space of the *pooram*, such as those of advertising, voices of committee members, the music, the sound of fireworks and the voices of "children"—all of them brought into proximity with one another, as equally attractive and significant sounds—make manifest? Is it a delivery of the "real" event, a "Kerala-ness" or "Kerala culture" to an audience that is displaced from the actual event, or a performance

[37] The issue of noise and air pollution, as well as mistreatment of elephants, is a contentious issue in the regional space as the recent Court orders try to curb the activities in the *pooram*. Since the *pooram* provides huge revenue to the economy, and is conceived as "traditional" and central for "Kerala culture," even in the court orders, special exemptions are provided for the *pooram* in exceeding the limit of decibel levels in the case of both firecrackers and the musical exposition, *panchavadyam* (the latter having more leeway as it represents the "traditional culture.") For a report on a recent court order on limiting the noise pollution in Thrissur Pooram and Kerala State's response, see "Court order puts Pooram in a fix: Minister." *The Hindu*. Wednesday, Mar 21, 2007, http://www.hindu.com/2007/03/21/stories/2007032114370100.htm.

invoking a sense of "loss" and nostalgia, or is it making manifest something completely different?

<u>The consuming bodies of the region</u>

It is the "familiarity" of the signification for the audience—the sounds of the basic rhythms of *cenda*, *kombu, elattalam* and the fireworks—that allows the thirty-six hour variegated event of *pooram* to be indexed in just over four minutes in mimicking. While the mimicking involves a show of skill in producing the sounds (and I will analyze in detail the virtuosity aspect of the performance in the next section), here I will point out that the issue at the heart of the soundscape is not one of an exact same-ness of the event mimicked to that which is produced in mimicking. Rather than the *pooram* itself, what the mimicking makes manifest is a spatiality of the region that is emergent in the new processes of consumption. This spatiality is produced in the sequence as a new soundscape, familiar but also not the same as the mainstream. Let me elaborate the twin inter-related aspects of mimicking (in this case, producing a soundscape) and what I call the spatiality emerging in consumption.

In the last two decades, the term "mimicry" has become almost synonymous with post-colonial theorization, as mimicry as a model and "hybridity" as a resulting liminal state, has been invoked to capture the very condition of "post-coloniality" or to posit even a "post-nationalism." I will analyze the idenitificatory strategy of mimicry in post-colonial theorization and the critiques of it, with the objective of delineating how they set up the question of spatiality. The most significant theorist in such deployment, Homi Bhabha, uses the term "colonial mimicry" to refer to an ambivalent form of authorization of colonial discourse where mimicry reveals a complex process of "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference

that is *almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1984:126). Taking a cue from the Foucauldian paradigm of power as constituted through the very structures of subjectification, colonial mimicry as a "sign of double articulation", for Bhabha, is "a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power" (ibid.:126). In Bhabha's postulation, mimicry is therefore categorically distinct from the scientific logic where the worlds of mimic and the model are never intertwined. On the contrary, what opens up the strategy of colonial mimicry is precisely the network of power of colonial discourse that links the model (colonizer) and the mimic (colonized).

The identificatory strategy based on difference proposed by Bhabha rejects any stable position for the mimic. Distinct from the Althusserian framework that posits identification or counter-identification to the hailing of a dominant ideological apparatus, the position of the colonized within the colonial discourse is that of "ambivalence." In the identificatory process of mimicry, for Bhabha, what is significant is the excess or slippage produced by the "*ambivalence* of mimicry… [it] does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but become transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence" (ibid.:127). The colonized is in this sense hailed by the voice of the master, the apparent foundational logic of colonialism as a civilizing process—a humanist and a progressive project. Yet this hailing if answered by total identification by the colonized makes the discourse fail. The "inappropriateness" and partiality of identification in Bhabha's terms is part of the discourse itself.[38] Therefore rather than the problematic of "representation," what is at stake in colonial mimicry is repetition, where the mimicry involves a process of "erratic" and "eccentric" inscription of the colonial text

[38] Bhabha argues that the very emergence of the "colonial" subject is "dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself." The success of colonial appropriation depends on the "proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha, 1984:127).

(ibid.:131). Rather than a question of identity, what colonial mimicry strategically produces is "conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity-effects'" (ibid.).

The model of colonial mimicry and Bhabha's later formulation of "hybridity" has become a central analytical tool in post-colonial analysis in offering a way of rejecting the claims of "indigeneity" and nationalism. Rather than a establishing a coherent fully established subject position with an "essence" against colonization, the colonized identification in such a framework gets articulated as inappropriate repetition of the ideal, calling into question the very status of the ideal itself. While it is significant to reject essentialized categories, by positing an overpowering colonial discourse—an overarching apparatus of power that proliferates the objects of mimicry—the transnational articulation of colonial mimicry and hybridity, as scholars have pointed out, does not address historical specificities. In this vein, scholars have offered the limit of colonial mimicry by addressing the space of the nation, specially the post-independent nation-states, in more complex and nuanced manner, whether the nation is construed as a site of conflictual and non-homogenous space yet offering a possibility of resistance to global capitalism (Pheng Cheah, 1997; Geeta Kapur, 1997; Bharucha, 2000), or a national construction as a hegemony to be reckoned with in the space of ex-colonies (Chatterjee, 2007).[39] Specifically, scholars have critiqued the valorization, in Bhabha's works, of the unspecified categories of mobility and exile as articulating a perspective of "metropolitan migrancy" (Cheah, 1997) or as an already arrived utopian metropolitan cosmopolitanism (Kapur, 1997), without taking into consideration the socio-political economy of multiple kinds of exiles.

[39] Sudipto Chatterjee in his work on Bengali stage in the colonial period, while using Bhabha's theorization of colonial mimicry, also points to its limitation. He argues that the "nationalist self was not founded on mimicry alone" as it was importantly "informed and elucidated by the alterities of an invented identity of native-ness" (Chatterjee, 2007:272). Chatterjee points to the need to look at the "inter-textualities" in the "native's enactments" even as it is open to "inter-(con)figurations of the Other" (ibid:272).

The sequence of mimicking of Thrissur Pooram and the spatiality it makes manifest need to be analyzed in terms of these wider debates on mobility and spatial relations. While I will hold on to the categories of "ambivalence" and "excess," distinct from formulations of colonial mimicry and hybridity, what one sees in Mimics Parade is not a stress on the colonial discourse as the overarching framework. Rather, the performance assumes it significance as it signals the language-scape of Malayalam emerging in the transnational flows and consumption practices resulting from "out-migration" and the liberalization process. The performance requisites one to eschew the easy opposition of "hybridity" and "indegeneity"/nationalism or a (sub-)nationalism of the region. While liberalization process is regarded as the opening out of the Indian economy from the late-1980s, in the context of the complex structural changes occurring in the region of Kerala, I am linking liberalization to out-migration due to the massive shift of labour to the Gulf Region and the ensuing increase in consumption practices arising from what has been called the "Gulf boom" in Kerala from the late 1970s. As I will discuss shortly, it is precisely the new, emerging consumption practices, transforming the state to that of an "ultimate consumer state," which allows Mimics Parade as a form to take over the spaces of "tradition" and the "popular" as a parasitic form, without instituting a counter (utopian) "metropolitan migrancy."

While the Gulf countries had been a hub of migrant Kerala workers for over a century, with the 1970s oil boom attracting large number of migrant labor, Keralites constituted almost half the population of Indian migrants in the Gulf (Osella et al., 2006:119), and the early migrants of the 70s belonged to the "lesser educational and social status…employed in the unskilled sector or in the skilled sectors where they worked as wiremen, masons, carpenters, plumbers, welders, drivers" (Radhakrishnan, 2009:231). This out-migration to the Gulf has been conceived as central in supporting the region in the wake of an absence of industrialization and

economic growth, marking both the "failure" and a change from the earlier state driven welfare policies (Tharamangalam, 1999). With high literacy rates in the state, while the unemployment in Kerala still remained the highest in the country,[40] the remittances from the "Gulf boom" led to a rise of per capita consumer expenditure in Kerala, "to be in excess of 41 percent above the national average by the end of the nineties…By the end of the nineties remittances reached such levels that they were well above the total government expenditure, value added in manufacturing and even the value added in industrial sector as a whole" (Kannan;Hari,2002:4).

In material terms, scholars have noted that the "Gulf boom" led to the proliferation of consumer goods in the region,[41] as well as increasing expenditure both in the "traditional" spheres of religion as well as the new industries of the cinema and the media. Rather than globalization wiping out rituals, as Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella have shown in their analysis of commoditization of ritual, the migrant identity became closely linked to expenditures in rituals, in the process increasing the scale of spectacle in rituals even while unsettling the existing power and caste equations in the region. Analyzing the phenomenon in relation to the festival of *Kuthiyottam* in North Kerala, Osella et al writes,

> By donating money to local temples and sponsoring public festivals, Gulf migrants have also been able to take on positions of responsibility in the management committees of mainstream temples, often disrupting existing power structures based either on lineage seniority or customary ritual rights. Public religious activities-especially temple festivals are therefore often local sites of

[40] Tharamangalam articulates the complexities of Kerala's crisis as a "'Nation' of migrant population" by pointing out that accounting for only 3.14% of the population of India, "Kerala accounted for 16% of the country's unemployed" even as there is a shortage of labor in such activities that are no longer deemed as "worthwhile" in terms of status (Tharamangalam, 1999:183).

[41] While the most significant material indexing the Gulf boom was gold, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan points to the "increasing number of travel agencies in the state, the spread of private telephone connections and public telephone booths as early as the mid-1980s and the growing availability of consumer goods like music systems, video cassette recorders and video cassettes with English and Arabic subtitles, rechargeable torches" as part of the Gulf boom (Rathakrishnan, 2009:218).

struggles for precedence, prestige and status through which individual and collective/caste projects of social mobility are articulated and given expression (Osella et al., 2003:118).

In the fields of cinema, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan points out that the Gulf migrants were "prominent among the new entrants as producers and distributors" and that the new investments, and the opening of Gulf countries as a site of distribution of the films, led to almost doubling of the number of films produced in Malayalam from 1975-80 onwards in comparison to the earlier period, making Malayalam cinema account for 16% of the films produced in India (Radhakrishnan, 2009:118).[42] While in terms of per person newspaper consumption Kerala has been the leading state in India from the 1960s, after the liberalization process, one witnessed the proliferation of Malayalam language 24-hour channels. Having the first private 24-hour satellite television in the form of Asianet in 1993, currently there are 29 Malayalam language 24-hour channels,[43] with a further 24 channels expected to be launched over the course of the year. These are shared both by global media giants such as STAR who bought the major shares of the channel Asianet, as well as "regional" (Tamil Nadu-based) media-political forces such as the SUN TV, and all the significant political parties, religions, and newspaper tycoons of Kerala. Rather than positing the spheres as counter to each other, the sphere of rituals representing the "traditional" and the new representational mediums as the "modern" and the transnational, in a narrative of one negating the other, Mimics Parade indexes the need to look at these spheres as complimentary, emerging and changing from the structural changes brought in by a consumption economy.

[42] As highlighted by Radhakrishnan, in fact, in the year 1978 (and 1979), the number of Malayalam films was greater than the number produced in Hindi film industry (Radhakrishnan, 2009). For the figures, see Rajadhyaksha, 1999.

[43] These consist of two older Government channels (that no one seems to watch anymore), seventeen private entertainment channels, five 24-hour News channels, five "spiritual" channels.

Perceived in the light of these transnational flows and reorganization of the region, the sonic performance of the Thrissur Pooram as "the festival of all festivals," marks the rejection of any notion of a region steeped in "tradition" and purity. In fact the *pooram* is significant, as the narrator says, because it brings together spectacle, advertisement, and the violence of explosion. These three aspects represent the *pooram* as a festival that is produced by, and merged with acts of consumption. In the short performance sequence, in the soundscape of the *pooram*, any references to goddesses and gods are conspicuous in their absence. Kerala might be perceived as the "land of temples" (also that of mosques, churches and synagogues), but the space that the performance makes manifest is that of a fairground where spectacle and consumption practices structure the space. Rather than the bells of the temples, it is the rush of the crowd, the sounds of advertisements and the voices of the "organizational committee" members that are foregrounded. Yet the sequence does not lament the complete assimilation of the space by a homogenous capitalism; both the sounds of advertisement and of committee members are produced as indexing an open space where variegated processes are at work. In the jokes around the lighting a *beedi* or a matchstick in the festival space, the performance depicts the people involved in the structures, highlighting the emergence of a new and more "democratic" ethos involved in practices of consumption.[44] The space is not the already defined space of the traditional, where all the voices emerge from a pre-established position of authority; but it is an open space, where variegated sounds enmeshed in power, sensually appeal to the listeners.

[44] Though, in the present context of US-centric export of the neo-liberalist rhetoric to the world, wherein all the problems of the world seemingly can be dealt by the twin rhetorical wars that has real effects (the war on terror and the war on tobacco), the injunction for not lighting a *beedi* and its linkage to biopolitics, might sound ominous, I am reading it in a more open way. Also, I am holding on to the significance of *beedi* as an object used by a much wider populace before it was strictly demarcated as an object indexing a categorical lower status in comparison to cigarette in the period after the 1990s.

<u>The Materiality of the explosion</u>

While I have so far highlighted the spectacle and the "adult" voices in the soundscape indexing capitalism and organization of the *pooram*, it is ironically the figure of the "child," presented in the performance sequence through the quick move from the general spectacle to the seemingly local interactions of two children in the space of the *pooram*, which hones in the spatiality as one constituted in consumption. It is precisely these "naïve," "curious" children as a figuration that presents a "pure" and "untainted" perspective of consumption. What is at stake is not that they are, like probably the crowd of adults in a *pooram*, enchanted by the multi-colors of the fireworks. If one looks at the short interaction as a "real" scene, with realism as the frame, their naivety and curiosity might make sense, and the final explosion can be seen as a continuation of the threat of explosion on the ground, which I have examined earlier. Still, the question as to why is it that the explosion in the face of the child "smelling" a firecracker (revealing a more embodied/corporeal and a "local"/"non-modern" experience of figuring out a new or suspicious object by touching and smelling it) standing as "fun" rather than as an adversity or accident, a rupture in the spectacle, might need more explication.

Yet rather than raising the question as one of "realism," if one looks at the part as a figuration of "child," it is not simply the explosion at the end that needs explication. Instead it is their naivety or confusion of the actual fact that firecrackers might explode in a tangible way, and the ensuing *staging* of curiosity, excitement, and a material engagement with the firecracker itself that needs to be seen as striking. It is a staging of a new relationship to the object of firecracker. For, it indexes a disconnect of the figure of the child to the materiality of the object of firecracker, the enchanting object seemingly coming across in front of the "child" only as it is consumed, as a singular one that has fallen out from the full splendor of flashy fireworks on their

(and "our") behalf. The "explosion" at the end is not a scene from a world of *Tom and Jerry*, an unmarked world of explosions after explosions not effecting in a rupture in the "real," or a simple slapstick. Instead staging of the "disconnect," and the enchantment of the figuration of the child to a firecracker is a specific enactment of the region. One needs to keep in mind that the time of the performance is the 1980s and child labor was one of the most debated phenomena within the country, with the matchstick-making and firecracker factories in Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu in the neighboring state of Kerala, being earmarked as the iconic site with the highest density of industrial/urban child labor.[45] These are industries that cannot sustain themselves without the cheap and hazardous economy of child-labor. It is the seemingly attained "freedom" from child labor, a claim of Kerala to have achieved "exemplary" levels of eradicating child labor through its long duree stress on education, political demands placed on the state welfare policies, and the state policy of providing free school lunches, which makes possible to stage an explosion of a firecracker right on the face of the "child."[46] In making the figuration of child as innocent, curious, and enchanted about the possibility of firecrackers exploding, and staging the engagement with the materiality of the firecracker as an encounter, consumption is freed from labor. The labor involved in staging the spectacle is only in the present, and is already part of consumption. To paraphrase a (sensationalist) title of an anti-child labor article published in 1983 that I have referenced, there seems to be no (our) blood on the firecrackers *before* it explodes in the space of the *pooram*. It is pure consumption in this sense that makes the children survive with

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[45] On the discourse around Sivakasi as the site with the highest density of child labor, employing child labor in the matchmaking and its extended firecracker making units, see Kothari, S. "There's Blood on Those Matchsticks: Child Labour in Sivakasi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1983; Kulkarni, Manu N. "Match-Making Children in Sivakasi. *Economic and Political Weekly* , Vol. 18, No. 43 (Oct. 22, 1983) pp. 1855-1856.

[46] Though Kerala is marked out for such "exemplariness," it does not mean there was total eradication of child labor from all the sectors in the state. For a less rosy picture of the conditions in the state in the time-period, see Leela Gulati's paper, *Child Labor in Kerala's Coir Industry*. Working Paper:42. Center for Development Studies, Trivandrum, 1980.

humor within the representational world without being dead. Consumption seemingly has a naïve enchantment at its heart and unfettered consumption might produce an explosion.[47] While it produces some accidents, it is a part of the experience of consumption itself, furthering rather than impeding it—there is no trauma or loss in the soundscape of consumption.

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[47] The aspect of how the new emerging consumption regime presented the engagement with the world and objects around as an encounter, and how certain figurations allow this possibility is understudied in India. In terms of Kerala, for instance, I stake the figuration of the "child"—as consumption freed from labor, based on the claim of the state of its "success" in the educational initiatives and eradicating child-labor—rather than as a one-off case, as a figuration with a much wider significance in the emergence of the consumption regime. The vital aspect of this figuration is that it allows a special possibility of moving away from realism, and to "explore" the world of objects without pre-established limits and ordering—a troubling of the "real" as given at the outset itself—due to (naughty) curiosity, "naiveness," and the capacity for imagination bestowed in children in such figuration. As I am not analyzing the figuration in detail in the dissertation, I will just sign-post two films that were national award winning films made in Malayalam, and extremely successful box office grossers: the iconic first 3D film made in India, *My Dear Kuttichathan*, originally made in Malayalam in 1984, that went on to become one of the all time biggest box-office grosser, later dubbed and remade in Hindi and Tamil in different upgrades with scenes added, and arriving for the third time in Malayalam in digitized 3D avatar in 2011, and the (humorous) national award-winning Children's film, but an extremely successful popular hit in Kerala, *Manu Uncle* (1988). The first film is a more obvious one as it, through the "child" figuration, stages technology itself and show the new 3D cinematic technology taking over of the fantasy world of the pesky genies and black magicians of the "traditional" world, and even more elaborate "transformation" of the "adult" to "child" in the very act of viewing the film in its promotion and framing of wearing 3D specks to watch the film. Here I will stress the latter, *Manu Uncle*, as an iconic instance of such a figuration as in the latter, the "other side" of the child figuration, the laboring child, is marked out and expressly overcome to establish the figuration as consumption freed from labor. In *Manu Uncle*, the newly emerging modern spatiality is phenomenologically explored by a group of children through the film's technique of continuously staging and breaking the formal logic of realism. In the film, the engagement of a group of children, specially, the engagement of smallest one in the group, Ikru, to the "modern" space of the city, one constituted in transnational movement of objects and ideas, is staged as an encounter, troubling fixed identity and established gaze with the sensual engagement structured by pure enchantment, naughty curiosity, and imagination. The world of encounter here includes: the world of Phantom and Lothar (from the Mandrake comics); the (humorous) "Manu uncle" of the kids, who has completed MA, Law, and Engineering degree, but rather than working "wastes" his time aspiring to become a scientist, sitting with a telescope looking into the outer-space, terrified by a cockroach planted by the kids before the telescope lens as an extra-terrestrial insect that is coming to eat the earth, at the same time ecstatic at finally having a discovery in his name, sitting with a self-made radio in his room, constantly listening to and tuning for unexpected sound waves, establishing German imported alarms in his room; the modern space of the museum, the museuological interface of which is broken by a smuggler of antiques (alias, "magic uncle") who not only commits murders and steals antiques, but crucially, is the ultimate imposter and the "villain" of this modern world as he performs the "non-modern" theatricality of simple magic, melodrama, and keeps on showing off his "style" in the space of the modern (museum as well as the realist art form of cinema); a police inspector who keeps claiming he is the "terror," but whose gun sprays water instead of bullets when required; a cameo appearance of an actual star film actor as himself, shown as clandestinely moving around the city only to be misidentified by the group as the antique thief; bicycles as the ultimate aid of spatial mobility; cricket balls, torn away from its original purpose, becoming in their new use, objects defying logic of matter.

II. *Emplotted in Mimics, or Body-virtual as Inter-Fetish Object Relation*

The term "mimicry" has assumed a significant and contentious place in philosophical and scientific knowledge production. The term is at the heart of explication of Darwinian evolutionary logic based on the theory of natural selection, where mimicry as a model makes possible the rejection of notions of life as a symbolic manifestation of the divine or ascribing a "destiny" for the species apart from the "vitalism" involved in natural selection in evolution.[48] In philosophical parlance, while the term has been seen sometimes as synonymous and exchangeable with mimesis (Taussig, 1993), it is also invoked in stark distinction to mimesis as standing for an archaic character of mimesis that is relevant to early stages of human civilization (Adorno)[49] or as distinct from mimesis, denoting the physical, exterior imitation of the model with clear distinction between the model and the imitator (while in mimesis, the mimetic world is itself symbolically constituted) (Gebauer;Wulf, 1995). In my analysis of the Mimics Parade, I posit the act of mimicking as positing of relationality itself, and will draw on three theoretical sources. First, the use of the trope of mimicry by Roger Caillois in the seminal essay by "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," where he posits mimicry to offer a critique of Batesian model of "vitalism," and open up the phenomenon of mimicking as a spatial problematic. In the essay, positing a critique of the utilitarianism of Darwinian logic, Caillois deriving from Freud's

[48] In Batesian mimicry model, the term refers to an advantageous imitation by one species of the external characteristics of another in natural selection, with the prime objective of survival. The scientific discussions deal with phenomena such as the case of certain butterflies successfully mimicking the external characteristics of another with the object of fooling its enemy, or the imitation of the natural surroundings by a lizard to avoid being attacked. What is important in the scientific discussions is the non-relationship between the imitator and its model, and the non-intermingling of the worlds of the imitator and the model. The butterfly imitating another does not enter the world of the model, and does not influence the behavior of the model itself. Therefore, mimicry in scientific parlance is generally regarded as a phenomena restricted to the study of the mimic. The basic method in these studies has been a functional approach, concluding that mimicking, as a process is primarily oriented towards the objective of self-preservation. A corollary of this way of looking at mimicry is the imitation of adults by children in their process of learning and education. Here also, mimicking is generally thought as advantageous, and the mimic seemingly does not in any way influence the symbolic world of the adult.

[49] For an excellent analysis of Adorno's perspective on mimicry and mimesis, see Gebauer and Wulf, 1995:281-293.

concepts of pleasure principle and "death-drive" posits mimicry as an "instinct of letting go," an "anti-utilitarian luxury" (Claudine Frank, 2003:89). While the central object driving Caillois' analysis, the "praying mantis" that held a special place within the surrealist imaginary, is framed within a masculinist perspective of the "castration complex," and Caillois' specific theoretical extension of the phenomenon of mimicry and the idea of a luxurious "waste" beyond human to insect world is a restaging of German Romantic notions of breaking the binaries of human and nature (ibid), Callois' articulation of mimicry as a "veritable lure of space" (Caillois, [1935]2003:99) offers a starting point for analyzing Mimics Parade. Relating mimicry to spatiality, Caillois argues that the "the goal" of mimicry "is indeed to become assimilated into the environment" (ibid.:98), and with this conception, he offers a critique of individualism as well as collective sense of identity. Instead, he argues that mimicry as resemblance involves a "depersonalization through assimilation into space" (ibid.:100). Yet rather than Caillois' position of articulating an exterior reality of space, I take the problematic of space itself constituted in the historical emergence of new technologies and representational media.

In her analysis of the recordings of comic mimicry or *vikatam* through gramophone at the turn of the century in the colonial city of Madras, Amanda Weidman argues that the commercial sound recordings of mimicking through gramophones is intertwined with of the emergence of the new spatiality—the modern city-space—and the rise of the new middle class. Looking at the sounds mimicked in these recordings, Weidman argues that language, or precisely the multilinguality and dialects play a crucial role in the city soundscape and the "miscommunication" or failure of the language of communication is a central driving force of the recordings. Analyzing how the fine distinctions in spoken language provides a taxonomy of bodies marked through caste, class, and gender, she argues that the "play with the sonic elements

of language" of the *vikatam* artists reveal for the listeners "how the effort to communicate across social gulfs can result in the breakdown of the communicative and referential functions of language altogether" (Weidman, 2010:303). Central to her argument is the relation she draws out between realism, parody and mimicking, and the recordings of sounds as a staging of technology itself. Looking at the range of voices mimicked, she argues that the recording of "voices of beggars, the calls of hawkers at the railway station, the chanting of Brahmins doing their daily prayers" as a claim to the "realistic presentation of language as pure sound" (ibid.:304). What is critical in these recordings is that sounds isolated in such a manner (rather than the content of what is spoken) in itself sets up a relational space where each sound makes sense in terms of the other sounds isolated. As Weidaman points out, "the specific voices become recognizable, culturally elaborated, aestheticized voice types, identified more by their sound than their content. Continuing the process of objectification, recordings introduce the possibility of both repeatability and intimacy, a dwelling on the sounds and qualities of the voices through repeated listening in the context of one's own home" (ibid.:309).

The isolation of sounds in Mimics Parade such as that of festivals, living being and objects, popular forms, film personalities, and politicians, in this manner, needs to be seen as setting up a relational space where sound itself is objectified, each sound vying for attraction sensually because of its assumed uniqueness vis-à-vis the other sounds. The short sequences in the performance where the performers mimic the film personalities one after the other,[50] plays with the possibilities offered in mimicking body as a staging of technology. On the one hand, these stagings makes no distinction between personalities belonging to the "old" and the "new" in cinematic history, the distinction between the dead and living, or the binary of "stars" and

[50] In the show the performers mimic the following film personalities: Thikkurissi, M. S. Trippunithara, Babu Namboodiri, Jayaram, Sankaradi, Jagathi, Kuthiravattam Pappu, Prem Kumar, Alammoodan, Asis, Innocent, Indrans, Balachandra Menon, Janardanan, Ummar.

"minor" figures. On the other, while all the personalities mimicked are aestheticized by showing how their speaking is caught within marked performance of "ethnic" styles such as Namboodiri Brahmin, Muslim or Christian, further cut through the plethora of sub-regional regional variations and dialects such Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur, or Kottayam style of speaking, and are caught in their overarching state of emotions such as "melancholy," "comic," what is critical is that Mimics mark these uniqueness with their specific voice modulation and gesticulations. Isolated away from the narrative context of the films, these enactments ask the spectators to listen to them simply as sounds competing with each other, in the process celebrating cinema itself as the ultimate "archive" of sounds and gestures that constructs these differences. The differences and subtle distinctions of the varied base voices, the varied nasal ones, the varied ways in which the air is let off, is presented as what is at the base and what is most attractive sensually appeals to the audience.

While Weidman's work on *vikatam* provides an entry point into the study of Mimics Parade, I will make two distinctions that need to be accounted for, which changes the context of the specific staging of the relationality. Since Weidman's work deals with the commercial sound recordings of mimicking, she rightly points out that the performer's body becomes "invisible" in the gramophone recordings, thereby *vikatam* "shifted attention away from the performer as mimicry artist and toward the objects of his mimicry, which were now brought within close range and made repeatable" (ibid.: 307). In case of recordings she points out that while the mimicry as already-a-mediation objectifies and removes sounds from "everyday" social contexts, the technology of sounds recordings extend this process. It is in this double remove whereby gramophone could carefully arrange the sounds that can be heard from an omniscient subject position of the middle class, the sounds of the city, isolated and made "non-threatening" for

consumption in the safety of the home (Weidman, 2010:307). In the case of Mimics Parade, on the contrary, what makes the performances significant, is precisely the performer's body on-stage or in visual media, foregrounding the play between the disjuncture of the referent mimicked and the performing body. Here as distinct from gramophone recordings, the self-referentiality is already set up and is critical in the production and the reception. Therefore while cinema, or representational media of television that presents the politicians, is presented as an "archive" in Mimics Parade, the reproduction via bodies in its self-referentiality reveals the performative aspect of representational media as an "archive": rather than an archive that simply records and presents the "real," an archive that constructs the differences. Its radical possibility lies in the aspect that, as distinct from the mainstream cinematic reception that centers itself on "stars," there are no already defined "stars" in these shows. In objectified sounds and gestures competing with each other, or as fetish with no basis in reality apart from the representational world, the "real" bodies familiar to the audience through screen are shown as nothing but attractive and unique sounds and gesticulations with the distance in the resemblance of the actual body mimicking to the virtual body providing a self-referential interface. In case of the male super-stars, the iconic moments of their performance of masculinity is quoted now simply as a particular variation of air column in competition with other "minor" figures within the cinematic hierarchy, thereby, undermining the authentic position of the star by converting them to a "sound" rather than a "voice." As in the joke where the Italian soldiers non-responsive to their commander shouting in a clear voice the order "Soldiers Attack!" and the third time of the call, a "tiny" voice "appreciatively" saying "What a beautiful voice!," the joke with which Mladen Dolar starts his work on voice (Dolar, 2006), the moments of performance by the stars authenticating masculinity is isolated and revealed in its simple "aesthetic" quality.[51] That the

[51] As for instance, the expletive-ridden anglicized monologues of the superstar Suresh Gopi (the English itself

mimicking bodies on stage to start with are mostly within the cinematic terms "marginal" or non-ideal bodies, evidencing their "subalternity," and in the act of mimicking revealing the "labor" of mimicking—the extension and the strain on the neck, the contortion of the face and twitch of the body, and the gaping mouth—and therefore unsuited for the spectacle of masculinity only increases the disjuncture.

The body within Mimics Parade can be seen in relation to what Elin Diamond has argued about theater and the role of body within the representational world of theater, where the objectified repeatability is not fully fixed, as the "the same play – and the "Same" theory – can be played not only again, but differently" (Diamond, 1989:70). Putting in dialogue Irigaray's perspective of mimicry-mimesis and Brechtian gestus, Diamond stresses that "as praxis" the repeated mimesis and its referencing of sign can become "excessive to itself, spilling into mimicry that undermines referent's authority" (ibid.:62), and the foregrounding of performer's body and its own gender provides a possibility of radical distantiation. The distinction in the case of Mimics Parade from Diamond's formulation is that while the distantiation and "spilling" of mimicry-mimesis calls into question the truth claims of "real" and "natural" of the apparatus of realism, in Mimics Parade, the distantiation is achieved precisely by the capacity to establish the "natural" through a perfect staging, and simultaneously revealing the labor of producing the "natural." The more there is perfection or virtuosity in the performance, the more it destabilizes the naturalness of the original. Unlike the listeners of *vikatam* in their doubly removed space, accepting the sounds as the real city, the more "real" is achieved via virtuosity, the more the body before the spectator stands out and comes to the fore in its disjuncture. The relationship so established, and its staging of "machinic" and the "social," can be theorized as "inter-fetish

offering the star stature as compared to the other "ordinary" voices speaking in Malayalam) that always ends with the word "shit" and the macho showing of the "finger" with his entire right-hand, in its extremely popular mimic version, is shown to be a "nasal," high-pitched release of air.

object relations," following Sue-Ellen Case's work on avatars in cyber-space. Case puts forward the concept in the context of the corporate structuration and "promotion" through cyberspace, to point out how "data and functions congeal around an avatar" making it "acquire the seductive quality of a fetish" (Case, 2007:33). While in the context of her analysis there is no actual body on-stage, the concept in its stress of relationality between objects in the commodity regime, and move away from subject-centric analysis, offers a way of analyzing the logic of Mimics Parade as not located in specific spatial logic such as the emergence of the city. Instead, the relationality of the "machinic" and the "social" as staged through bodies, make manifest the spatiality of consumption regime itself, linking both the spectacle "on the ground" such as *pooram* that I analyzed in the earlier section or "politics," and the new emerging media.

It is also pertinent in this context that the relationality of the consumption regime so made manifest is also a predominantly male world. It points to the gendered structure of the newly emerging consumption regime, both in representational world of cinema as well as "on-the-ground" spaces of spectacle and politics. In terms of cinematic production specifically, the overbearing presence of male voices points to the specificity and the "investment" in a gendering process wherein, rather than simply the content and narrative is caught in a gendered discourse, more pertinently, the gendering more strongly works at the level of sensuality of sounds itself. Cinema, with its possibility of splitting the image and the sound, has an instability of "authentication" at its heart in the technological possibility of breaking down of the direct relation between the body *seen* and *sounding*, or in other words, an instability/possibility of breaking the logic of an authentic "voicing." Yet the possibility of the split has been used in a gendered manner in Indian cinema in general, and Malayalam cinema in particular, as it has been used to structure and present an "ideal" femininity. The emergent scholarship on Hindi film

songs, analyzing the codification of the "thin," "falsetto" voice of Lata Mangeshkar as standing for the ideal Indian femininity as opposed to more tonal spread in the male voices in cinematic music world (and more tonal spread in female voices in performance traditions), has been subject of earlier analysis (Srivastava, 2004; Sundar, 2008). In Malayalam cinema, this possibility of the split between the image and sound and construction of an ideal is caught in an extreme gendering, not simply in terms of playback singing, but in splitting the sound and the image of the heroines, where only certain rare heroines, not metaphorically "voice" themselves, but literally "sound" themselves. While the split gave possibility of breaking borders of language, allowing actresses who do not speak Malayalam to become stars in the industry, the split and the construction of an ideal woman's voice (almost as a taboo for the heroines to speak in a different tonality)[52] as distinct to the heroes who have much greater spread of voice ranges, yet ultimately fixed to their own bodies, points to the gendered investments at the level of sensuality in this play between "machinic" and the "social" in the new emerging consumption regime.[53] The contradiction can be presented as follows. While on-stage male bodies embody the "machinic" without any fixity, linking the body into the unlimited transformations and the transcendence offered by the virtual, while in the virtual constructed via technology of cinema, their voices are authentically fixed to the unique body. The female body, on the other hand, in the virtual is,

[52] The logic of this practice in Malayalam cinema has not been studied, and not being a film scholar, here I am not offering the historical and discursive logic of the practice.

[53] The most significant event in which this split broke out, as a controversy, was when the actress Sobhana won the national award for best actress in her rendition of the "hysterical" character in the national award winning (for most popular film) "psychological thriller" cum comedy film *Manichitrathazhu* (1993), which has been remade into Tamil and Hindi much later. While Sobhana, a star in the Malayalam film industry for a long time, was lauded for her overall acting and dancing in the film, one of the most iconic moments of the film that stages psychoanalysis as fused with ritualistic tradition, was the transformation of her character in the moment when she speaks in Tamil, embodying the (dangerous) spirit of a dead dancer. Since this "voicing" of the hysterical and the transformation of her from the "normal" to a base voice in a completely different language was so central in the film, the controversy arose as to what is the contribution of the "dubbing artist" who gave voice to Sobhana in the film. Does the award for the best actress have to figure in the "voice," which is so crucial, yet split from it and provided by a completely different body that the audience never sees?

using the best technology of split in cinematic apparatus, fixed to an ideal femininity irrespective of the specificity of the body in display.

While Mimics Parade in no way challenges this structuration, in its fetishistic revealing of sensuality of sounds in display, it participates and points to the gender problematic of the world of the referent. In the earlier section I linked Mimics Parade to the consumption regime emerging from the outmigration to the Persian Gulf. The recent studies on migration have highlighted the gendered organization of this migration. Though more educated among the migrants, women constituted only 9.3% in 1999 and 16.8% in 2004 of the total migrant labor, one-third of this being in the sector of nursing (Percot and Rajan, 2007). Yet even in the case when women do not constitute a significant part of the migration, scholars have argued how the structural change in the economy has transformed the status of women's work in the region. Irudaya Rajan has argued that the problems faced by "Gulf-wives" such as "loneliness" and expanded "domestic duties" in this case has the "long term benefits" where opportunity has arisen for these women to have higher decision making powers with the absence of husband at home, increase in economic resources available, as well as the ability to communicate quickly because of technological developments. In this perspective, though there is an acceptance that there is increased "domesticity" demarcated for women, the changes brought by migration can be seen fundamentally to have transformed the "shy dependent girls into a self confident autonomous managers with status that is equal to those of any men in the neighborhood" (Rajan, 112). Contrary to this perspective, more critical feminist scholars have highlighted how the large scale changes in Kerala, both the earlier state driven welfare policies in the post-independent period and the changes escalating from the 1970s have reconfigured the space of the region within a dominant patriarchal mode, where women have been increasingly tied to domesticity.

Analyzing the lowering of women's employment, "retreat from paid manual or informal work" in upward and mobile families and the choice of working restricted to "respectable" work, "marriage as dominant framework shaping women's property rights," an escalation in "modern dowry," and increasing gender violence, Praveena Kodoth has argued convincingly that the changing landscape was well ordered within the dominant patriarchal frameworks (Kodoth and Eapen, 2005).[54] The absence of women as mimics partly is based on the taboo of the display of women's body, as in the debates of entry of women into theatre at the turn of 20th century, with mimicry compared to theater having an increased value of "non-respectability" (a debasement at the level of the form itself) attached to it. More critically, Mimics Parade as embodying the consumption regime itself, though breaking the established caste/class positions within the region, also embodies in it the gendered hierarchies of the spaces it takes for mimicking. So the Mimics Parade, constituted solely by men, stages and parades the exclusive androcentrism of the newly emerging public sphere.

To draw the specific contours of such a gendered relationality of the emerging consumption regime, in the next section, I will analyze the new authorial position staked by the popular Mimics Parade in the region.

III. *The authorial position of the mimic, or mimic as nativized body*

While Mimics Parade shares its space (as entertainment in festivals, celebrations, marriages, colleges) with the older popular performances, it also stakes a claim of bringing in a new authorial position, a radical displacement of the earlier established conventions of authorial positioning. In this section I analyze how such an authorial positioning posits a "new."

[54] Also see J. Devika (2007), for a critique of transformation of women in the mainstream narratives as the productive agents and managers of development based on nuclear family set-up and its centrality in the conception of the state identity with the concept of development.

In the sequence that follows the mimicking of Thrissur Pooram, Mimics Parade move to a strategy that is more emblematic of the form, of parody and excess in mimicking. The object so taken for mimicking is another icon of the language-scape, the storytelling performance form, *kathaprasangam*, the space of which (as the narrator says in the reconstructed piece) has been (now) taken over by Mimics Parade. *Kathaprasangam* (lit: *katha* means story, and *prasangam* means speech/discourse, as one that is given on a podium) was an extremely popular story-telling form in the public space, where generally a single story teller, with the accompaniment of instrumentalists, narrate a story interspersed with a lot of songs. Possessing characteristics constituting what Walter Benjamin theorized as the (now vanished) "incomparable aura" of the storyteller ([1955] 1968), the performative body in *kathaprasangam* uses the techniques of hyper-theatricality and melodrama, the direct address to the audience and varied practical "counsel" to the listeners, unlimited divergences from the central narrative, relating or contextualizing the big narrative with the "local" and contemporary, and the long expanded duration of the storytelling, almost epic in quality eschewing the sense of purpose to isolate one central "through-line" or action to the narrative. In the sequence of mimicking *kathaprasangam*, Mimics Parade presents itself as a perfect parasite, isolating and foregrounding through embodiment these formal characteristics of *kathaprasangam* in extreme adherence to details, while negating the very performance structure it embodies.

The sequence starts with the mimicking of the start of performance in the "indigenous" tradition—rather than the "beginning" of a modern performance—the preparation for the performance in front of the audience. Interspersed with sounds of "throat clearing," the "tuning" of a stringed instrument is heard. The notes are plucked in ascending scale, and as the notes move up the scale, the "tuning" gains in rhythm and becomes progressively unmelodic and shrill.

The tuning, rather than setting up the base scale by ending in the "harmony" of the three notes (*sa, pa, sa*) that Indian music uses as its base, ends abruptly on a shrill note as the storytellers starts speaking, indexing both the travesty and non-melody that is to follow, and simultaneously highlighting the hierarchical precedence of voice over instrumental music in the Indian musical hierarchy. The storyteller goes on to say, "Art-lovers, esteemed people." "Let us first introduce to you, ourselves." Pointing hands to the audience, he abruptly says, "[you should] take care not to waste current [electricity]." The sound of tuning of the string instrument is once again heard. "Art-lovers, Esteemed people; Esteemed people, Art-lovers. We are introducing ourselves. We are the world-famous story-tellers, Chingambazham brothers." Sound of striking of cymbals. The storytellers, with the full accompaniment of the drums and the string instrument break into a full fledged song, sung in the Karnatic[55] music style, starting and ending at a high pitch, and using the speedy rhythm of an invocation song: "Oh, painted towers of the Goddess of beautiful arts, let the beautiful music play… let the beautiful music play." [Sound of cymbals]. "Our story… the story that we are presenting… is the story by the world-famous literary figure, Michail Sholokhov's, *Don is stuck on the way*." [Sound of cymbals]. Once again, they break into the two-line invocation song, "Oh, the painted towers of the Goddess of beautiful arts, let the beautiful music play… let the beautiful music play."

In this travesty of Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, the mimicking isolates the space of *kathaprasangam* as one based on hypertheatricality. This hypertheatricality is highlighted in the simplest formal strategies such as the breach of the frame of the narrative and direct address to the audience as in the case of the "counsel" to the audience, a characteristic Benjamin isolates as critical in a "storyteller." While Benjaminian storytellers' counsel is related

[55] The South-Indian classical music.

to activities of an agrarian community, here the advice to save electricity, presents the storytellers as giving such generic counsel from a paternalist state position. This humorous and abrupt break from the narrative is played out not simply at the start, but comes up again even as the storytelling progresses. The popular conventions of melodrama are similarly highlighted in the strategy of striking of the cymbals to index a "dramatic" and "shocking" moment. Yet the acts of mimicking the conventions of "dramatic" moments in popular genres do not adhere to any logic of the action or narrative of the story. The moment of striking of cymbals includes the "sensational" introduction of the story-tellers as the "world-famous" storytellers, the story being one penned by the "world-famous" figure Michail Sholokhov, and the various dramatic moments within the narrative itself. Later in the mimicking, as the narrative unfolds, the one in charge of striking cymbals misses to strike them at a "dramatic" point in the story—when the "hero" places his hands on the shoulder of the "heroine." When the sound of the cymbals never arrives, the instrumentalist in charge is rebuked by the storyteller with an explanation that "Haven't I told you that when shocking news comes, you should strike the cymbals." The story-tellers announce that therefore, the assistant who has missed this crucial point will have ten rupees cut from his fees for the show. This news again provokes a striking of cymbals, now the explanation from the assistant striking the cymbals that this, indeed, is "shocking news" to him. This parody on the non-fixities and open-ness, and the play of hierarchies in the performance space does not stop here, and is carried forward to a hyperbolic level, with an order from the story-teller to the assistant instrumentalist to strike the cymbals once more. And the explanation is given after the sound that "now another ten rupees is cut from your fee." Rather than any Romantic notions of a community, the space of the local is shown as one that is invested in the display of "ordinary"

hierarchies, both that of cultural and economic power derived from the division between the storyteller and the instrumentalists.

While I highlighted the characteristics of *kathaprasangam* as to be conceived within the Benjaminian notion of aura, the parody can be seen as displacing any sense of "aura" to that of a "charm," highlighting the "ordinariness" of the people. In short, rather than the auratic storyteller exuding the intangible light, the space of the local is presented as one of "posing," where the "local" poses as the "international." While the humor involved in the sensational introduction by story-tellers of themselves as "world-famous" sets up the sense of "posing," and the transformation of the original title *And quiet flows the Don* to *Don is Stuck on the Way* makes it into a travesty, the delineation of the performance space is undertaken in certain cases in extreme fidelity to details to present the structure of feeling. In fact the introduction of story as one written by the "world famous literary figure," and hailing of the populace repetitiously as "Art lovers, esteemed people," thereby "upgrading" both the audience and the performers to the level of high art categories, is strategy that is emblematic of *kathaprasangam*, and indexes the claim of the latter in delivering the international or the "world" to the local.[56] Rather than a homogenous space of popular seemingly remaining within the ambit of tradition and rituals, to be jolted by tourism in the mainstream narrative of globalization, the embodiment rigorously draws the modern contours of the popular in post-independent space, only that its claims of the "political" is erased, and the claims of being truly "international" is parodied.[57] The parody highlights the

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[56] The performances of the most renowned and popular exponent of *kathaprasangam*, V. Sambasivan (1929-1997), included apart from his own original stories, "classics" of world literature (announced by him as such at the start of the performance) *Anna Karenina*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anisya* (based on Tolstoy's character), and different works by Indian authors such as Bengali writers' Bimal Mitra's *Twentieth Century*, Savitri Roy's *Harvest* Song, Vallathol's *Kochuseetha*, Cherukad's *Devalokam* transformed into the unique story-telling form.

[57] *Kathaprasangam* in the preceding decade of the 1970s, the time of turbulent political unrest in India, specially that of peasant unrests and the declaration of the national Emergency in 1975, was one of the most politicized popular performances forms in the space of the region. V. Samabasivan himself, being an activist of Progressive Artists Association, was one of the significant artists who was arrested during the Emergency for his extremely

posing of the "local" as international as ultimately a failed enterprise, with the local structures usurping at critical points. The invocation song precisely posits this perspective. It does not simply highlight the breach of realism, a staking of difference of "Indian" as averse to realism; instead, it specifically highlights the contradiction of moving into a full fledged Sanskritized and traditional invocation to the Goddess for the narration of a tale sensationally presented as an international one. The critique is honed in the later parts of the mimicking when the "actual" story starts, as one realizes that the story is simply one of a "love story" with the strategies of storytelling harking back to traditions of vivid descriptions of nature, village and the "pure" beauty of the young heroine (all three in the same register), who is in love with the lower class hero. Imbued with the flavor of the local, the vivid descriptions, after setting up the break of the dawn, present through lyrical songs the "sweet" walking and gait of the heroine, kochammini, as she ever so slowly trods to the temple in the morning with a vase of flowers, and the sudden move to vivid descriptions of a door opening at the same time in the shanty (*chettakkudil*) in southern side of the village, the home of the hero, Sajan. Without any further narrative build-up the mimicking cuts to the melodramatic moment of kochammini "missing," and to the rhythmic chants the storytellers search for her all over the village, ending with the moment of

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popular telling of the *Harvest Song*, an adaptation of the Bengali novel based on the peasant struggle in Bengal in the 1930s. The political appeal and the spectacle of the form was not antithetical, and the space of popular as conjoining the political and the spectacle need to be seen in the context of popularity of the political themes in the wider public space of the 1970s itself, as for instance, highlighted by an advertisement in the newspaper (January 15, 1975, *Deshabhimani*) for *kathaprasangam*. The advertisement goes as follows:

> "Narrator- Cherthala Sugunan
>
> P.O Cherthala
>
> The story that encapsulates the political emotion of the era:
>
> *Itu Poloru Nariya Bharanam* (Such a stinking Rule), By Ezhacheri Ramachandran
>
> For festival occasions, another story
>
> *Satabdam*."

kochammini's state of utter confusion staged through a song whether she should go with Sajan or do as her father says.

Amidst this travesty of the claims of international of the popular, Mimics Parade posits its own space as a self-referential "transnational" in two related manner. First, at the level of language, and second, by positing a different kind of excess distinct to the excesses of the existing popular. Let me analyze these one by one. At the level of language, Mimics Parade foreground a self-referential, an-already arrived transnationalism through a rejection of Sanskritized and indigenous structures shared both by high art and the popular. This is indexed in the use of an anglicized term Mimics Parade, a peculiar concoction, for the form itself, rather than an "indigenous" term such as *anukaranam*.[58] The anglicized usage indexes the colonial-modern framework, with English working as the modern global language being nativized in the Kerala context. When highlighting the anglicized usage, I am not marking it as a stark existential act of demarcating Malayalam and English, with the naming indexing a lost purity of indigeneity. In fact, it is precisely the opposite that is at stake. It is the mundane-ness of the usage that is at stake, and what is being claimed. Malayalam language, with its base in Tamil and

[58] The Malayalam word for describing the act of mimicking is *anukaranam*, a direct derivation from Sanskrit word *anukarana*. The term *anukarana* is made up of two distinct terms, *anu* and *karana*. *Karana* literally means "activity" and "*anu*" refers to that which has been in accordance with something else. In the Sanskrit texts, the word is used with a considerable openness in meaning, and the comparativist studies of Greek and Sanskrit texts highlight the term as one that is closer to "mimesis" or "representation" (Poonam Trivedi, 2005). Significantly it has a wide scope and is used for referring both to artistic/aesthetic context as well as to social phenomena. For instance, in Natyasatra, the word is used with prefixes that define the specific aspect that is being mimicked such as *bhavanukarana* (*anukarana* of *bhava*), *lokavrittanukarana* (*anukarana* of world matters), or *saptadvipanukarana* (*anukarana* of the seven islands/worlds) along with other words such as *anukriti* or *sankirtana*. Therefore Natyasastra scholar Bharat Gupt argues that for *anukarana* to happen there must be an original that has to be followed and the relationship to the original is a point of consideration. In the current dominant Malayalam usage, the term is used to refer to a simple "mimicry" of a model/original, both in artistic/aesthetic practice as well as social sphere, with a stress on the derivative aspect involved in the act of mimicking. Though not maintaining any original or pure sense of usage, the term does belong to a family of ideas which gives a specific frame of associations in its usage. While describing certain acts within or about the form, the term *anukaranam* might be used, the use of "Mimics Parade" instead of an "indigenous" term such as *anukarana* as a title, and act of naming can be seen as demarcating a "new." In the case of the modern form "theatre," arising in India in the colonial period, one sees a distinct nativization by deploying the term "*natakam*," associating it back to Sanskrit aesthetic parlance, and distinguishing it from other usages such as *kali, koottu*, *tullal* or *attam*.

Sanskrit, is known for its extensive use of loan words from various languages such as English, Portuguese, Arabic, and Syriac. With English, it becomes more complex as the colonial history and the power of English as the administrative language of the State, as well as the claim of English to globality in the present, frames the use of loan-words. As scholars have noted, the widespread use of English loan words in Malayalam is based not on a "lack of lexical items," but is "conditioned by socio-linguistical factors" or what can be called a matter of "style" (Jiang, 2010:60). In many a context, it indexes "being modern," with conservative scholarship in linguistics lamenting the absence of indigenous linguistic patriotism and a complete surrender to English.[59] While the aspect of indexing of "style" and modernity is central, and is a factor not limited to the Indian languages, the specific derivation in our case rather than an indexing of class, or a "civilizational" rupture, is more an emphatic claim to the ordinariness of an already arrived distinct modernity, and the possibilities of transnational connections,[60] and identification and mis-identification at the level of the mundane.[61]

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[59] For instance, after recording the wide array of English loanwords in Malayalam, and making the English accented compares (and it has to be women compers to make the conservative position more strong), as the final straw, the author goes on to lament about the absence of linguistic patriotism: "it is inevitable that, in a post colonial era, there should be strong reaction against continuing to use the language the former colonial power, and in favor of promoting the indigenous languages… However, this is not the case with the speakers of Malayalam, and the speakers of Indian languages in general" (Girish. "Language In India." Volume 5:5 May 2005. http://www.languageinindia.com).

[60] It is not a coincidence that it is precisely this strategy which is used by the first script-writers of the Mimics Parade in their later foray into the world of cinema. The titles of all Siddique-Lal films, all of them "box-office hits" and some of them breaking all established records of screening and box-office collections in Malayalam film industry, use mixed languages, mainly English, as the titles for its films: *Ramji Rao Speaking*, *In Harihar Nagar*, *Godfather*, *Vietnam Colony, Hitler*, *Kabooliwala*. While in some of the films, the external reference is worked to an extent within the story such as naming of the colony of the poor held together by goons to which the Brahmin protagonist, hired by a the company who owns the land of the colony, arrives to evict/liberate the people as Vietnam Colony, or Hitler as the teasing name given by opponents to the main character for his "dictatorship" over his sisters, the global film reference such as Godfather stands just random, bringing into play associations that is not even tangentially related to the film. Asked about whether such anglicized titling of the films were deliberate, Siddique responds, "this style was adopted with the film *Ramji Rao Speaking*. It was not a deliberate attempt initially. But later, I made many films with English titles. And those were deliberate attempts to make a pattern. And by God's grace, all turned out to do well at the box office." (http://personalities.jeevan4u.com/siddique/chitchat.aspx).

[61] While I have not gone in depth analyzing the language, I will just sign-post the instances within the mimicking of *kathaprasangam,* where the humor is done through the strategies of language mixing. For instance, in translation of

The mixed language as "real" spoken language stands in stark contrast to the theatrical experiments in the preceding decades articulating or searching for a post-colonial "rooted-ness." It is significant for our purpose that part of these experiments involved a complete eschewal of the ordinary "hybridity" of the Malayalam language, though they can be seen as moving between different extremes of either constructing an extremely Sanskritized Malayalam language in the plays such as that of Sreekanthan Nair (the proponent of *tanatunatakavedi*)[62] or less-Sanskritized, and more "rural"/"folk" language in the plays of K. N. Panikkar. The latter has been seen by scholars recently in theoretical terms of "hybridity," as scholars have argued that that they are done by urban practitioners for an urban audience (Mee, 2008). While the characters do come in these plays in complex manner, even as "capitalists" in such figuration as such as that of a Portuguese *teyyam*[63] in plays such as *Teyyateyyam*, the purified Malayalam along with the stylized bodies on stage rather than indexing hybridity, evidences a nostalgia for a pure language of the "community" that has never existed. It is in these contexts of the search for

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the place-name (traditional practice of names needing to have a meaning) "Malabar" as meaning a land of *mala* (mountain) and bars (Kerala is also famous for its alcohol consumption) or the word "tempo" is misidentified by the assistant as the vehicle tempo in which they have come rather than the tempo of the music points to these play with the language. Yet these mis-identifications are not in the register of marking out a "subaltern" who does not know the correct language, viewed from the vantage point of a fully Anglicized and knowing position. Instead the play with the languages itself is part of the Malayalam language's popular way of using and mixing up and giving new nuances to the loan-words when they are used in Malayalam.

[62] The term *tanatu* in Malayalam means indigenous/native, and *natakavedi* means theater. The term was first used by Sreekanthan Nair in his clarion call in 1967 towards a new theater that will be rooted in Malayalam traditions.

[63] *Teyyam* is a North-Malabar ritual-healing form where the performer embodies the diety for the duration of the performance. Teyyam performance is structured around stories that where "lower and upper caste persons who infringed caste restrictions or notions of morality and were punished with death. To atone for this excessive and 'unjust' punishment they were deified. During a performance, a lower caste performer is possessed by these deities and may criticize upper castes for their misdeeds or failings" (Menon, 1993:189). In Panikkar's play *Teyyateyyam* (teyyam of teyyam), a contemporary lower caste teyyam performer embodies the teyyam of a dead *Paranki* (foreigner, specially Portuguese) who is a trader with a considerable military prowess, a reference on the arrival of Vasco De Gama in Kappadu in Kerala in 1498. The play works with a complex intertwining of "transgression" as the lower-caste performer in the contemporary time has infringed the caste restriction in falling in love, and "defending" his lover by murdering the landlord, but is poised to be transformed onto *paranki* who is a capitalist and becomes Ravana "stealing" Sita within the story of the teyyam performance. The play undertakes a philosophical probing of concepts such as "transformation," deification, caste taboos and crime as the teyyam performance of *paranki* is placed in within a conflicted "community" that debates on the transgressions and crime of the performer/*paranki*. For more on *Teyyam*, see Menon 1993.

the pure "native" that mundane "reality" of modernity is articulated in language by a popular form that traverses the length and breadth of the Malayalam languagescape, delivering a different "modern" spoken language than one constructed at the turn of the century.

Second, Mimics provides a fundamental critique of the excesses of the popular as a "waste" that cannot be "sustained" in the present moment. The travesty of details of the *kathaprasangam* as devoid of any logic of narrative is honed in and taken to the extreme towards the end of the sequence, when the performance ends without any logic of the narrative itself. After the dramatic point of heroine's confusion that I dealt with earlier, one hears sound of a rooster crowing, indicating it is break of the dawn, and the artists are troubled that the story has not been completed. A forced solution is quickly arrived at when the one of them suggests to the storyteller that as of now you are holding a knife, and "just run it through your heart and finish the tale." This rejection of the temporality of *kathaprasangam* as so expanded and a "waste"—a rejection by positing it as an "older" mode of temporality that is not in pace with the newer modes—at the same time is a contradictory position. For, Mimics Parade rejects the popular form for its waste, and its non-adherence to conventions of realist narrative, yet as an alternate posits an even more visible form of temporality of excess and waste. As a parasitic form, what it posits is not a counter space of non-waste and professionalism. Instead, staging the infinite "present" of the consumption regime itself, and an ironic distance from the narrative, it gives a distinctly "post-modern" distancing from the traditional.

Chapter 2: *Body, Visuality, and Gendered Space of Contemporary Capitalism: Play of "Gestures" in Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs*

Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs (2000-2004) is a collaborative "photo-performance" project between Indian visual artist N. Pushpamala and Scottish-born and Bangalore based photographer Clare Arni. Consisting of photographic friezes and tableaux directed and enacted (primarily) by Pushpamala[64] and photographed by Clare Arni, *Native Women of South India: Manners and Customs* (from now on *NWSI*) circulates as curated exhibitions of the photographs in (art) galleries, in photo-book format, and in picture-postcard format as cheap purchasable prints.[65] The photo-performance selects a set of images drawn from a lexicon of images that has traditionally constituted a representation of "India" and meticulously reconstructs them through enactment. Using the strategy of setting into motion a representational world by inhabiting the official and traditional discourses through enactment, irony, and parody, and as Geeta Kapur points out, by precisely creating before the viewers the very object it takes for enquiry and critique (Kapur, 2007), the photo-performance interrogates the category of "native."

In the photo-book format the work is divided into the following four sections:

I. The Native Types: A Series of Photographs illustrating the Scenery and the Mode of Life of the Women of South India.

II. Ethnographic Series: An Exhaustive Scientific Analysis and Anthropometry of the Female Inhabitants.

III. The Popular Series: An Album of Picturesque Scenes of Native Beauties.

[64] Clare Arni herself, as well as other collaborators, perform in certain group sequences.

[65] Sinha, Gayatri. "Heroic or the mock heroic". *The Hindu*. Friday, February 25, 2005.

IV. The Process Series: A Complete Record of the Procedures and Systems used for the Study.

The above section-titles, rather than simply describing the subject matter, cite three inter-related realms of representation in the colonies: anthropometry, ethnography and popular visual culture, and place them in relation to each other. Anthropometry and ethnography, a significant part of the colonial apparatus of knowledge production, produce the notion of truth by highlighting the “scientific” processes through which the “other” is classified and presented as the object of study. While anthropometry stresses the apparatus capturing the biological and “racial” aspects of the objects of study, where the objects are stripped to bare body, ethnography produces the knowledge of the object through the study of “culture” where the objects of study are presented in their own “environment.” The representations in popular visual culture, on the other hand, are based on the trope of unmediated naturalness of the subject matter being represented. As titles, the terms in the citations such as “exhaustive scientific analysis,” “complete record,” “picturesque scenes of native beauties” condense the wider strategy of iteration of the official discourses. This iteration of the official discourse also means that the defining terms in *NWSI* are set up in English, rather than any Indian “regional” language. While in Pushpamala's other works such as *Sunhare Sapne, Dar-e-Dil*, one comes across inhabiting of the representational world through specific regional language/ “culture” (Urdu) (that is also intertwined with the structures of feeling created in the cinematic world), in *NWSI*, the frame itself is set up in the official language of colonialism and post-independent state administration in India, i.e., English. What does the interrogation of the category of “native” at the turn of the 21st century in India achieve?

The use of the term in the title of the work is a citation of the categorization from the colonial discourse. Yet the production of native as a category through enactment in *NWSI* revitalizes the term with a different set of characteristics from the category in the colonial discourse. While in the nationalist narrative, the category native is negated or loses its significance as the native becomes fully "Indian" through political independence or a successful "voicing," in *NWSI,* the category of the native is inhabited to simultaneously foreground two critiques of colonial-national framework. First, *NWSI* inhabits the category showing the continuities of the colonial taxonomy even in the contemporary period. *NWSI* thereby moves away from the narrative of "freedom" from the condition of colonial governmentality with the attainment of political independence. Second, and more importantly, this continuity over the time period is traced through enactment of diverse types that break the inherent assumptions that bring into existence the unified category of the native-as-Indian in the nationalist narrative in the first place. Maintaining this double critique, *NWSI* provides an interrogation of the category of the native through the relation between nativized body and image. Let me lay out this problematic more closely.

In the photo-book format one is able to make a precise connection between the four sections. The first section establishes ten base types of native women. The native types of women are reconstructed through enactment from actual images taken from diverse realms of "portraiture" in India over the span of a century, all of which have been in circulation in the form of prints. The images selected include an anthropometric photograph of a Toda woman (an "aboriginal tribe") from the colonial archive, a photograph from a newspaper that shows two women caught and photographed by the police for the crime of chain-snatching[66] in the

[66] "Chain-snatching" literally refers to the act of stealing by snatching necklaces from the peoples' necks.

contemporary period, the oleographic prints issued by the Ravi Varma Press in the early twentieth century, a cover-page of magazine showing a "whip-cracking" Jayalalithaa,[67] and certain free improvisations of contemporary votive images.[68] The second section, *Ethnographic Series,* places the base types in anthropometric frames of scaling and measurement of the body and diverse scenarios of ethnography. In the second section, therefore, the types can be seen as "migrating" from their base contexts and start enacting familiar and established scenarios of ethnography. The third section *Popular Series* playfully engages the representations in popular visual culture scenarios. While some of the images in the section break the logic of the typical representation through witty and humorous juxtapositions, others develop on the very same stereotypical representational framework to offer a multitude of new scenarios of enactment and visualization. The fourth section claiming to record the "complete processes and systems of the project," are photographs of Pushpamala and her collaborators as they are engaged in creating the project. Here, the promised making visible of the back-story of the project is served in its seductive attractiveness as images, as the viewer is returned to the logic of reification in representation by providing more reified images of Pushpamala and her collaborators. So, even if one follows the logic within the photo-book format, by the fourth section one realizes that there is no progressive development such as that of "showing" us the taxonomy and reification involved in representation, leading to a counter-identificatory positionality, and finally a category of "authentic native woman" emerging from and against the reified images of the representations in colonial ethnography and popular culture.

[67] Jayalalithaa is the erstwhile superstar of Tamil film, who later became the leader of the political party, All India Dramida Munnetra Kazhakam, and is currently the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

[68] We will look at these images individually in detail later in the chapter.

The absence of a development of the coherent narrative of resistance or freedom from the world of representation is even more striking in the exhibition format where one does not follow the order among the sections. In the exhibition format, even the distinction between the base types and the enactment of types in new imaginative contexts itself is let off. The actual or "historical" types, the imaginative scenarios of ethnography, the *Popular Series*, and the record of the process, all seek attention in a similar fashion. Geeta Kapur in her analysis of Pushpamala's work highlights that the phenomenology of Pushpamala's exhibitions does bring in a specific aspect that complicates viewership, as she argues that the display while creating a sense of overall "emptiness" through the iterative scenarios at "certain points in the semiotic grid... condenses into a reified image" (Kapur, 2007). It is this enmeshing of identification and the sense of emptiness of space produced through enactment in the exhibition space—as the defining feature of *NWSI*—that needs our attention. What does such production of reified images of native women through enactment perform? What is a category of a native woman, if all of them are visibly distinct, and placed in relation to each other, yet embodied via a "singular" body of Pushpamala? Are these enactments of diverse scenarios of "native" across the century laying a claim of transcendence or construction of an essence of a "South-Indian woman" in the manner of construction of an essence of a "human" in the global exhibitions such as *Family of Man* (Barthes, 1957)?

In the present chapter I argue that by taking a sub-national territorial category such as "South-India," and tracing the long duree link between governmentality, transnational flow of images, and the production of the category of native through female bodies, *NWSI* opens out the complex structure and contradictions within the identification of the nation. In the reconstruction of the images through enactment and the imaginative "migration" of the types from their

original, *NWSI* reveals the category of native as constructed and stabilized through codification and framing of "gestures." The critical study of the photo-performance, where corporeality and gendered embodiment become the critical node of revealing the framing of the image, necessitates a consideration of the relationship between image and gesture at the intersection of three inter-related elements: the nationalist discourse, the colonial-modern as emerging out of the movement of transnational capital, and gendered embodiment. I will show in the rest of the chapter how *NWSI,* by conceiving the nation and its constitutive heterogeneity as a gendered play of gestures, points to the ambiguous, arbitrary, and yet potent relationship between image and gesture. Rather than the body disappearing into the virtual world, or body frozen in the reified image, by precisely providing a surplus of the performing body, what I call a "corporeal refraction" of the space-time, the work points to the wider predicament of corporeality in the image-centric world.

II. ***Gesture, Virtuosic Body and the Nation***

The term "gesture" is a significant theoretical category in academic thinking, and has been used to serve different functions in various disciplines. Carrie Noland in her "Introduction" to the work *Migrations of Gesture* lays down how in various disciplines the term gesture is used in a general sense or in a very specific manner depending on the ways in which corporeality and body movement is involved as the object of study. In dance studies, Noland points out that the term is used to isolate "a body movement that occurs in the limbs" as distinct from a "posture, which is static, or ambulation, which involves traversing a space." While dance studies deploy the term to stake a specific claim for corporeality by conceiving gesture as a "nonverbal form of communication that expresses specifically that which words cannot," in art history due to the

static aspect of the medium under study, the term gesture is used most generically, rarely making distinctions such as in dance studies. In performance and film studies the term gesture is used to highlight "gestural regimes," "codes of expressive movement with a particular meaning in a consistent and readable way." Noland points out that this use of the term gesture allows for making distinction between "gestural regimes- everyday gestures and histrionics, styles of acting such as melodrama and naturalism" (Noland, 2008:XVII). When I categorize the photo-performance[69] in *NWSI* as a play of gestures, I am using the term for highlighting the gestural regimes as used in performance studies. In its enactment of the historical images and playful elaborations of the underlying codes, *NWSI* brings into view the gestural regimes that hold the image/imagination "India." Though it is images that are the central entry point of *NWSI*, the enactments highlight the static aspect and "postures" in the images as gestural regimes. The gestural regime brought into view becomes clear when seen in the context of the definition of an "authentic" Indian-ness in representation based on theorization of corporeality in the nationalist discourse. While scholars have critically analyzed how the nationalist discourse on Indian art has been based on the thematic of Orientalism,[70] for our purposes here, I will quickly move through these debates with the specific intention of laying down how the issue of corporeality was framed in it. It is such a framing of corporeality in representation that *NWSI* addresses, and destabilizes.

In the early half of the twentieth century, the centrality of codified gestural-language (*angikabhinaya*) in Indian (or "Oriental") performing and visual arts had drawn considerable attention from the nationalists. The codified system of representation and the stress on the

[69] Pushpamala herself calls the work by the name "photo-performance". I am maintaining the term in this chapter as I regard the work as highlighting the image-gesture relationship that I elaborate through the chapter.

[70] For realm of visual arts see Mitter, Partha, (1992;1994), Guha-Thakurta, Tapati (2004).

corporeality of the performer in Indian art was foregrounded as the central element distinguishing the aesthetics of Indian art as distinct from the "Western". Natyasastra classifies four different kinds of acting- *angikam* (gesture), *vacikam* (voice), *aharyam* (costume) and *satvikam*. When Natyasastra was established, through translations and interpretations, as a "canonical" Indian text on Indian performance in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and the early half of the twentieth century, the equal stress on different aspects of performance was seen in contradistinction to the dichotomous proposition of mind-body split in Cartesian thinking, as also the effacement of the performance aspect in Aristotle's theorization. The stress on performance was also read against the Romantic philosophical positions in which body was regarded as a site belonging to the realm of the "natural" and "spontaneous" that can valorized or disparaged in itself. What was highlighted as the characteristic of Indian/Oriental art was the skill of the trained performer performing the clear and specific gestures drawn from the system of representation in front of a knowledgeable audience, or the clarity of the gestures in the iconic images in the visual realm that makes manifest beauty/spirituality/*darsan* in the knowledgeable, imaginative, or a devoted spectator.[71] Body, it was recognized, belongs to the realm of "culture" than of "nature."[72]

Corporeality based on traditional systems of body training/practice and aesthetics therefore offered a way for nationalists to reject naturalism, and to uphold "tradition" as a realm untouched and to be preserved from the influences of the Western/modern. Ananda

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[71] Gesture, used in its evocative power, as against naturalism and lyricism, became central in the "Bengal School" of painting and was one of the central categories for exploration in the "pan-Asian" contact and interaction between Okakura's student Taikan and Abanindranath Tagore. This inflection of Orientalism, where a pan-Asianism was envisioned, allowed to look at the frescoes such as those Ajanta and Ellora as work of gesture.

[72] Here I am putting together both the "secular" or "aesthetic" debates as well as debates in the context of religion, since that is how one encounters the debates of the period. It is this conception of a homogenous religion standing for India – the "Hindu" religion – and its clubbing with debates of "aesthetics" that allowed the colonization of discussions on "Indian" art as specifically that of a "Hindu" one, erasing the heterogeneous practices within "Hinduism" and simultaneously Othering "Islamic" art.

Coomaraswamy, one of the most significant theoreticians of Indian art in the first half of the twentieth century, for instance, points to the centrality of the codified gestural-language system and the place of corporeality in Indian performing arts. In *Introduction* to his translation of the text *Abhinaya Darpana* (Mirror of Gesture), he writes,

> Indian acting or dancing...is thus a deliberate act. Nothing is left to chance; the actor no more yields to the impulse of the moment in gesture than in the spoken word. When the curtain rises, indeed, it is too late to begin the making of a new work of art. Precisely as the text of the play remains the same whoever the actor may be, precisely as the score of a musical composition is not varied by whomsoever it may be performed, so there is no reason why an accepted gestural-language (*angikabhinaya*) should be varied with a view to set off advantageously the actor's personality. It is the action, not the actor which is essential to dramatic art... in fact the amateur does not exist in Oriental art. (Coomaraswamy, 1917:3)

The thrust of the argument of Indian acting and dancing being a "deliberate art," not influenced by chance, and the visualization of an actor as "disciplined," is a response to Gordon Craig's argument for the eschewing of the physical body from the stage due its proclivity for natural, uncontrolled and spontaneous actions. In his famous postulation of the "Ubermarionette," Craig, drawing on the fundamental distinctions between mind and body, author and actor, argues that "nature in man will fight for freedom, and will revolt against being made the slave or a medium for the expression of another's thought" (Craig, 1911:60). Even if the actor presents only the ideas that he himself composes, Craig argues that "his body would have to become the slave of mind; and that...is what a healthy body utterly refuses to do" (ibid:60-61). The conclusion from this proposition is therefore that the actor's body is "by nature

utterly useless as a material for art" (ibid.:61). Coomaraswamy, responding to this theorization,[73] presents to Craig a scenario where in Indian art, body rather than being "accidental" and therefore "inartistic" functions like an "automaton" (Lyons, 1964:267).[74] Rustom Bharucha, in his critique of intercultural practices, analyzes the response of Coomaraswamy to Craig's theorization and rightly makes the connection between Craig's theory of Ubermarionette and Coomaraswamy's classification of the Indian actor. He points out that in fact both propose similar ideals–"an avoidance of personal emotions, a craving for perfection and absolute control, an absence of ego" (Bharucha, 1990:17). Bharucha points out that in spite of these similar ideals, there is one crucial difference between the conclusions that they draw from such envisioning. While Craig rejected the actor's body for achieving the ideals on stage, Bharucha points out that "the Indian theater accepted the body of the actor as the means of theatrical expression" (1990:17). While Bharucha's objective is the critique of "mythologizing" of India by specific Western theater practitioners, or what he calls "instances of cultural imperialism," he seems to easily disassociate or is disinterested in the Coomaraswamy's theorization as a problematic based on Orientalism.[75] The corporeality of the Indian actor in the nationalist discourse represented by

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[73] The response of Coomaraswamy to Gordon Craig was first published in *The Mask* in October 1913. For the influences of Coomaraswamy's critique on Craig's conceptualization, and the latters' subsequent theorization of a "Durable Theater" that could provide a way through Coomaraswamy's critique, see Lyons:1964.

[74] Coomaraswamy, gives the following description of the Indian performer in control of her/his gesture, "The perfect actor has the same complete and calm control of gesture that the puppet showman has over the movements of his puppets; the exhibition of his art is altogether independent of his own emotional condition, and if he is moved by what he represents, he is moved as a spectator, and not as an actor" (Coomaraswamy, 1917:4).

[75] A clarification is needed on my use of the term Orientalism. In fact Bharucha's use of the term cultural imperialism is a specific disassociation with the theorization of Orientalism by Edward Said. He writes, "I do not believe that there is an overriding Western view of the Indian theater that can be summarily categorized. Certainly, I do not discern any pervasive "orientalism" (as defined by Edward Said) in the attitudes of Western theatre practitioners and theorists toward the Indian theatre, no systematized cultural imperialism that undermines the philosophical premises of Indian culture and life" (1984:2). Here I tend to agree with Bharucha in that one does not need to view Orientalism as a pervasive attitude of a 'West' from time immemorial (from Greece to the present). Critically, the narrative construction of a unified and homogenous 'West' from the Greek period to the modern itself has to be seen as a powerful modern construction that needs to be critiqued. In fact, Coomaraswamy's theoretization of the "Oriental" plays with this historical construction as he does not see a unitary history of the 'West' opposing, and always othering the 'Oriental'. For him, Oriental is one that is not based on 'modern' sensibilities brought in by

Coomaraswamy, while involves an acceptance of the possibilities of corporeality in moving away from psychological realism, is at the same time a specific negation or sublimation of the materiality of body.

In her analysis of Euro-colonial reception of Sanskrit poetics, Sue-Ellen Case points to the specific knowledge production surrounding the Sanskrit language, and the text of Natyasastra in particular, where the Sanskrit texts were elevated to the status of a "classic" based on an inclusive-exclusionary logic. While the notion of the "classic" offered "appropriate mental constructs for imperialists" and trained "their imagination and thought for administration" (Case, 1991:115), she demarcates the specific process in the comparative model where assimilation of Sanskrit as a classic was precisely based on a change of the frame of reference and the system of meanings to a Euro-centric one. Therefore when Sanskrit was established as a classic within the new system of knowledge production, she argues that it came into existence as a "negative" and a vacant "Other" (ibid.:111-121). For our purpose here, what is central is that when Indian art is constructed as a negative "Other," as in Coomaraswamy's theorization, it is the materiality of the performing body that gets excluded. Importantly, it is precisely this specific denial of the materiality of the performing body that allows the construction of a category of an authentic India in the emerging nationalist discourse.

Central to the project of the construction of the category of Indian art by Coomaraswamy is the critique of naturalism and the rejection of aesthetic pronouncements based on the model of evolution of "human art practice" as a narrative of growth, from abstract in the early stages of human history, to real as the most advanced. In opposition to the "real" as imitation of observable reality, Coomaraswamy defines Indian art as based on the traditional system that is

capitalism and scientific rationality, and therefore Oriental is in the same league as the "Christian philosophy of art." For more, see Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art,* [1943]1956.

not based on verisimilitude, and charts out a space for creativity/imagination that is non-subjective. Gestures, part of the trained actor's specialty, here, are not based on the real as in mundane everyday gestures, nor are they instances that can allow the possibility of "exhibiting" the self of the actor. Rather than privileging "innovation" and "originality" of Romanticism, the argument highlighted "tradition as practice," the goal of art/performance being ultimately to make manifest *rasa,* and the spectator's (inborn) capacity for imagination as seemingly affording the space for creativity. By envisioning the body as a vessel, though a superbly trained and disciplined vessel, which can make manifest the transcendental/Absolute, or articulate the perfect evocative gesture, the nationalists took the other extreme of the polarity. And it is in this context of a shared epistemological lens between the two factions that it is not surprising to see that the "loop-hole" or "the way out" proposed by Craig for actors to "escape their natural condition" is also through gesture: "They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolic gesture" (Craig, 1911:61). I am not suggesting here that the varied systems of artistic practices in India were in fact denying the place for the corporeal. Instead what we need to pay attention to is that within the nationalist discourse on Indian art, which was built on the thematic of Orientalism, the major tendency was that of denial of the materiality of the corporeal for making a case for the transcendental and the Absolute. Even if kinesthesis was recognized as central, the materiality of body was articulated as one that needed to be ultimately transcended. It is this transcendental in conceptualizing performance that allowed the shift to another transcendental conception, the nation.

In the realm of visual arts, this problematic becomes even more complex. Coomaraswamy points to the need of eschewing the real as imitation for a different form of practiced visualization:

No manual dexterity or analytical knowledge can compensate for the original deficiency of visualization. And it is precisely in the cultivation of this power- partly as the result of the practice of drawing always from stored memories rather than from still life (*the posed model, from this point of view, is but little superior to the plaster cast*), but still more from the regular practice of visualization, alike in the private practice of religion and in the artist's preparation for any work he may undertake – that the East, and particularly India, has something of importance for Western artists. To put the idea very simply, the true work of creation must be completed before the brush or pen is put to paper; and what is of most importance from every point of view is the reality of the original creation." (Coomaraswamy, 1919:18-19. Italics mine)

Here our project does not necessitate detailed inquiry into the contradictions of this theoretical construction. What is critical is the impact of the nationalist discourse on the realm of visual representation that Pushpamala takes on in *NWSI,* i.e., popular visual culture. The production of Indian art as the inverse category of "Western" placed popular visual culture in a paradoxical position. Popular visual culture (as we will see in detail in the next section) was the product of the contact with the "western" practices of perspectival drawing and colonial ethnography. Yet in its adaptation of the myths, legends and production of the iconic using "western" structures and techniques, popular culture became one of the alternate and hybrid sites for the constitution of the national with a material, visible basis. Distinct from the skilled, trained, virtuosic actors as imagined by the nationalists to be ideally filling the Indian performance space, or ideal abstracted bodies making manifest *rasa*, popular visual culture, through its strategy of presenting the gestures of "everyday"/"mundane" and the iconic simultaneously, provided the base for an alternate sensory national. *NWSI* takes on such sensory

constitution of the national that the official nationalist discourse does not recognize, and critically reactivates it by enacting the figure at its heart–the posed body of an "Indian woman," constructed, framed and naturalized to look familiar and identifiable.

NWSI eschews the division between the everyday/mundane gestures and those of performance, and ways of categorization where only the latter is regarded as capable of abstraction. For, the images that constitute the nation are shown as precisely those that represent bodies in their everyday, naturalized gestures, many a time masking the frame, artifice and staged aspects of such depictions. If identification through interpellation also has to be seen in its sensory route, then *NWSI* highlights the image of India constituted by the mundane and the banal. What is critical in the selection of types in *NWSI* is that the world taken as base are not images that represent the virtuosic bodies, for instance the dancing bodies of Bharatanatyam or Kathakali, or the iconic images of *Nataraja* (dancing Siva) or Kali, the bodies that are often deployed in nationalist discourse to chart out the essential difference (and "greatness") of "Indian culture." What is "inspiring" the enactments in *NWSI,* on the contrary, is the contradiction between the mundane-ness of gestures and their iconic significance. In *NWSI* the simplicity and everyday-ness of gestures such as that of *varada mudra,* the angels holding the garland, of a Toda woman facing the camera with her arms stretched out to the scale, the whip-cracking type of woman holding a whip in her hand, or the Ravi Varma plebeian woman holding a pot on her head, with the other hand placed on her forehead as if avoiding sun rays hitting her eyes, are all opened out to their metonymical import and highlighted as most powerful abstractions in themselves. Let us now turn to this world of the non-virtuosic.

III. *The Base Types, or the heterogeneous space of the colonial-modern*

In the first section in the photo-book format "The Native Types: A Series of Photographs illustrating the Scenery and the Mode of Life of the Women of South India," the images are accurately reconstructed as three dimensional (theatrical) sets in a studio set-up with the use of painted backdrops, props and costumes, and are photographed as friezes posed/enacted by Pushpamala. Two types are selections from the genre of portraiture within the realm of the colonial and post-independence Indian state in its disciplining function–the photographic image within the matrix of knowledge/power. The type, *Toda*, is a reconstruction based on a nineteenth-century British anthropometric photograph of an "Andaman Islander" woman standing in front of a rectangular grid composed of black and white squares, her left arm stretched out horizontally on to a wooden scale. While she stands nude, wearing jewelry and a belt around her hips, facing the camera, the photograph also reveals two hands on either side holding the scaling grid upright, the rest of the body cut off by the frame of the photograph. *Criminals*, the other type, is a reconstruction of a police photograph published by the newspaper *Times of India* in 2001, and depicts two women arrested for the act of "chain-snatching". Both hold up in front of them slates that have information about them written in chalk: name, w/o (wife of), age (60 and 45 years), place and the date of the photography.[76] The selections, one from the colonial ethnographic archive and the other a reproduction in the newspaper in the post-independence period, draw out continuities of representation in the colonial-modern state apparatus across the time periods.

The photographic base type "Andaman Islander" indexes the intricate connection between the new technology of photography, emerging ethnographic knowledge production and colonialism. The rise of the practice of photography is closely related to the rise of colonialism,

[76] While Pushpamala plays the role of sixty year old Gowramma gazing down in the shot, Sreelata Rao Sesadri plays the role of the second criminal with her eyes closed.

and photographs as documenting the exotic served both a commercial function as well as the function of disciplining the population through knowledge production.[77] By the 1850s commercial photography was well established in British-India and the calls by scholars and administrators were for a more specific use of photography as a scientific medium that will provide the much needed base for successful administration of the populace. Rather than the commercial "popular" and "picturesque" photographs delivering the Orient through panoramic frames of the monuments, land and the people, urgent calls were made for specific use of photography that would help in scientifically recording the life and custom of the people. In the post-1857 revolt scenario, and the rise of scientific classification in anthropology based on virulent racism, this assumed a particular urgency. The photographs it seems, could serve the dual function of scientific study as well as giving the feeling of imperial presence and control by the "truthful" representation of the situations on the ground to the populace in the imperial center. In their display in international exhibitions and through publications, it was argued, the photographic image as "document," while helping the objective of administrating the diverse populace in the colony, would also serve the "democratic" function of delivering the "Other" to the wider general audience in the empire who may not have the opportunity themselves of "witnessing the life among the untutored races". The large scale image-collection of "remarkable tribes" of India starting from 1861 based on the direct request from "Her Majesty's Government" with the intended objective of display in the forthcoming London International exhibition of 1862 captures this historical urgency of colonialism (Manhais, 2000). Even the huge projects undertaken such as the eight volume *The People of India* consisting of 468 photographs illustrating the "Races and Tribes of Hindusthan" published by the India Office in London

[77] See *India Through the Lens: Photography 1840-1911.* Ed. Vidya Dehejia, Freer Gallery of Art; Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Pinney, Christopher.

(1868-1875), though started with this objective, in the context of rise of racial anthropology will be therefore under critique for being more "popular" and "picturesque" than giving a more direct scientific base (Falconer, 2000:82). Pushpamala's enactment of the type Toda woman maintains the tension between photography in its role of exoticization of the "strange" as commodity, and the increasing racialization in scientific study.

From the base type "Andaman Islander",[78] Pushpamala's enactment takes the element of the increasing racial typology brought through photography. The rectangular uniform 2 inch grid backdrop giving exact and proportionate measurements of the body, was first advocated in 1868 for "comparative study of different races"[79] and soon became a common method in scientific photography along with other scaling devices. The long robe that Pushpamala wears is the most common way in which the Toda population was represented in the photographs.[80] For our purposes here let us look at the specific "significance", or indeed the "attraction" that the Toda tribe held within the racial construction, and how Todas, a "primitive tribe", becomes a part of an "originary" problematic in the spatial imagination South-India. In his Preface to one of the earliest anthropological studies on the Toda tribes, enticingly and "holistically" titled *A Phrenologist Amongst the Todas or The Study of a Primitive Tribe in South-India: History,*

[78] The connection between interest in the "vanishing" Andaman tribes and post-1857 imperialist control cannot be anymore direct. The documentation of Andaman tribes by transporting them to Indian metropolises such as Calcutta and capturing them for eternal history through photographs, first started in 1857, assumed increasing intensity. For, these tribes were "vanishing" precisely because they started to "come into contact" with the "force" of the "superior civilization" when Andaman Islands, for its advantage of reclusiveness, was converted into the place where the prisoners of British-India were now sent by the imperial government (See Falconer, 2000).

[79] Falconer, 2000:83.

[80] The long robe of the Todas though visually stunning was also perceived in many quarters as a "hindrance" for scholars. For it does not show clearly the "naked" body from which the scientists could deduce his own conclusions about the "beauty" of Todas. Marshall's illustrations, which we will look in detail in the main-text, use the rectangular grid in certain cases behind people wearing the long robes. But it also had photographs that were commended for showing the bodies in the "naked" form. For more See Mahias, 2000:143.

Character, Customs, Religion, Infanticide, Polyandry, Language,[81] W. E. Marshall talks about the attraction that the Todas held,

> "I heard much of an aboriginal race living in the neighborhood; which infanticidal and polyandrous, was said to be fast dying out...I had long been curious to understand the mysterious process by which, as appear inevitable, savage tribes melt away when forced into prolonged contact with a superior civilization" (Marshall, 1873:v).

Lest this curiousness be misunderstood as just a happy coincidence of an as yet "unmelted" aboriginal race happening to live by in the neighborhood where the scientist, the superior race, is roaming around, he contextualizes the singular significance of studying and recording these "dying out" population of the Nilgiri hills. He explains to the readers what "witnessing" this population and their practices really mean: it is to realize "justly and without exaggeration, what it really is, and—by analogy—what it must have been in the pre-historic era, long ere "Adam delved and Eve spun", *before man had developed much in manly qualities*" (ibid:vii. Italics original). When one witnesses in this pre-history of human civilization the "primeval" qualities—"ultra-domesticity", the absence of the Darwinian logic of survival of the fittest, not being "vigorous", and a disregard for sensibilities of "gain" and "thrift"[82]–it seems questions just pop out, "...have we come on the tracks of an aboriginal reign of conscience? And was man originally created virtuous as well as very simple?" (ibid:87). In the context of the construction of the "race" of "Aryan," the study of the "primeval" Toda tribes contributed

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[81] The following description by Marshall gives a good understanding of the "theoretical" assumptions of his method of phrenology: "Visit one of these very primitive endogamous tribes, and we at once find ourselves in the presence of a crowd of individuals all of the same type, whose temperaments are in their least complex forms, the general size and configuration of whose skulls is very uniform and easy to read, whose figure, voice, and carriage, are similar, and whose circumstances of daily life, whether they be the cause or the effect, or the joint-cause and effect similarity, are throughout alike ; who in fact differ in outward appearance only in modifications—generally slight—of a few single organs" (Marshall, 1873:13).

[82] Marshall, opct, 88.

directly. As Marie-Claude Mahias points out, Todas for Marshall belonged to a branch of "Dravidian race which came from Western Asia," and is a "race" living in India before the arrival of the "Aryans." In this account they are the "living specimens" of the "Turanian race in its primitive stage close to Ethiopians to judge by their style of life, to the Jews and Chaldeans by their appearance" (Mahias, 2000:142). Further, as they reside in hilly areas of Nilgiris that are difficult to access, the Todas and their "primitive" practices for these anthropologists became a "godsend" gift, the comparative inaccessibility further proving the unadulterated condition of the "race" (ibid:144). It is precisely this classification, based first on language classification, but quickly morphing into a full-fledged racial classification that provides the base for categorization of the "South-India" as Dravidian.[83]

The second type *Criminals* similarly indexes the role of the image in capturing the mysterious, and pertinently the "savage." The act of "crime" by the women after all is not any kind of crime. It is one of direct attack by the "perpetrators," of snatching chains from people's necks, and the "violence" involves direct bodily confrontation. In Pushpamala's enactment, the dark Toda woman marked out in ethnography can be seen as sharing the similar space with the dark-skinned criminals who are outside the mainstream developmental logic of the post-independent Indian state. While the presence of the scientific/surveillance cataloguing process—the rectangular grids in the Toda type and the women holding the information about themselves on the slates—their "skin-color," and the "submission" to the apparatus through body indicates a certain commonality in enactment, what is also highlighted by the enactment is the function of mediation and staging. The extraction of these bodies and an open staging of them within the scientific and disciplinary apparatus, rather than taking away in fact adds to the truth value and

[83] We will look more closely in the next section how the notion of Dravidian, derived from this problematic, but in a different formulation becomes significant in the post-independent identity politics in India.

force-effect of power-mechanism. Like the first part of Marshall's title of his work *A Phrenologist Amongst the Todas*, it is precisely the apparatus that is being staged in the bodies being captured.[84]

From the circulation of the images of the "native" from the visual routes charted out by the disciplining apparatus, three other types of *NWSI* present a different configuration of visuality arising from the same historical juncture. Three types are selections from the oeuvre of popular Ravi Varma paintings and oleo-graphic prints, a significant component of what Christopher Pinney terms as "visual-print capitalism" in India in the first half of nineteenth century. The Ravi Varma paintings and the production of the nation through depictions of women in his oeuvre has been often marked as the moment of the birth of Indian modernity in the realm of visual representation. Ravi Varma [1848-1906], an "autodidact", was one of the earliest painters to "master" the technique of the oil painting in India,[85] and attained unprecedented fame in his life-time. The special awards and recognitions he received at International Exhibitions shot him onto the national scene,[86] and his patrons included the

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[84] Keeping in mind the need for the "democratic" function of dispersal of "critical" information about special human history, and at the same time maintaining the mystery, W. E. Marshall, the scholar-scientist, after laying down the "significance" of the study of Todas in the preface suddenly transforms himself into Bottom of *Midsummer Night's Dream* (sans latter's' context of humor). He assures the readers and the viewers (of the sixteen photographs in the book), and the troubled Quinces' of the world out there, that he has primed and toned down the content: "I must say that great and especial pains have been taken to render as large a portion of work *as the subject permits*, attractive and, and suited for ladies' reading" (vii. Italics mine). So the mystery is still there, for the heavy theory and the object of study—"to use an analogy"—has to be still rated *AMG* (Aryan Male Guidance).

[85] Geeta Kapur in her analysis of Ravi Varma's work, with a poetic flourish, refers to Ravi Varma's learning process of the technique of oil painting and the "fact and fiction" surrounding his struggle as a struggle "not only … of an artist to gain a technique but also the struggle of a native to gain the source of the master's superior knowledge and the struggle of the prodigy to steal the fire for his own people" (2000:148). While systematic instruction of British art was available from the 1950s in Madras, she points out that the self-instruction Ravi Varma undertook for learning the technique (being allowed the opportunity to learn by watching the Dutch painter, Theodore Jensen paint) is a "mythology in making: … a native, once he has been initiated into western techniques, proceeds with the redoubled pace of a prodigy and overcomes all hurdles. What is at stake is not only native talent but national destiny" (2000:149).

[86] The awards and recognitions that Ravi Varma got at Exhibitions included the Governors' Gold medal of the Madras Fine Arts Society Exhibition in 1873 for his painting 'A Nair lady at toilet', the 'Certificate of Merit' at the

significant princely courts of the time such as Mysore, Baroda, Travancore and Maratha courts. In the International Exhibition at Chicago in 1893, where another landmark event for Indian nationalism, the address of Swami Vivekananda to the Parliament of World Religions occurred, “ten of his finest, most sensitive figure studies were sent to represent India” (Guha-Thakurta, 1986:185).[87] Importantly this acceptance within the establishment of the time only contributed to his foray into a very different realm of visual culture in India – the realm of the popular. Through establishing the earliest lithographic press in India, and the production and distribution of oleographic prints of his paintings, and the widespread (many a time pirated) imitations of his paintings, particularly the depictions of deities, Ravi Varma's aesthetic played a central role in the formation of urban popular art in India at the turn of the century.

From the representation of the deities such as *Lakshmi,* the depiction of episodes and *nayikas* from the epics and *puranas* such a *Sakuntala*, *Nala Damayanti*, to the plain secular themes mostly in the style of ethnographic realism such as *Here Comes Papa, Galaxy of Women, Lady in the Moonlight, Gypsy Family,* Ravi Varma connected the seemingly distinct spheres in the colony in a continuum in terms of the aesthetic by linking it to the emerging processes of commodification. Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her analysis of Ravi Varma's works points out that his paintings of deities “directly paved the way for a new kind of popular, urban art- 'calendar art’, of the kind that continues to flourish today in film posters, hoardings and, most of all, in

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International Exhibition at Vienna, the Gold Medal at the Madras Exhibition 1874 for the composition, 'A Tamil lady playing the sarabat’ (Thakurta:1986). I have dealt with the special awards at the Chicago exhibition in the main text.

[87] The ten studies at Chicago exhibitions were all of women from different parts of the country and different ethnicities. Patricia Uberoi highlights the way these paintings served the Orientalist project of delivering India in its opulent diversity and the narrative of India progressing as a unity under the British occupation. The citation for the award, as Thakurta points out, rather than commenting on the “artistic excellence” of Ravi Varma's works, highlights the double problematic of Orientalism. As the special award puts it, the works are of high ethnographic interest because the “series of well-executed paintings give an idea of the progress of instruction of art [in India]...They are true to nature in form and colour, and preserve the costumes, current fashions and social features.” (Uberoi,1990:WS44; Thakurta, 1986).

religious prints and pictures" (1986:189). She highlights that the marked features in Ravi Varma oleo-graphic prints such as theatrical visualization, the "painting of backdrops, the loudness of colours, and the crude, heavily shaded naturalism of the divine figures" that entered the popular realm were critical as "potential, saleable ingredients" in later calendar paintings (1986:189). Ravi Varma's position therefore was controversial in nationalist history–where even though he seems to have produced for the nation the first visual conception of the nation, his aesthetic was decried and rejected within a decade after his death by the later nationalists for its continuation of the principles of the colonizer as opposed to a truly indigenous, "authentic" and overtly political aesthetic.[88] His aesthetic, a hybrid based on pastiche,[89] therefore occupied a zone where ethnography met with the commercial (both the emergent middle class aesthetic as also a wider popular demographic), "western" (naturalism, oil painting) met with Indian classical and popular structures and principles, the regional particularities in sync with, contributing to, and seamlessly moving to and fro from the national, to produce a modern national-popular.[90] And at the heart of this early "literary imagination" of the territoriality of the nation, as Arunima notes, stood "the lovely, luminescent women reaching out to capture the viewer's imagination" (Arunima, 2003:57).

[88] The popular "unrefined" aspect was also one of the facets that led to the decrying of Ravi Varma's art by the later nationalists who pushed for an authentic and pure Indian art. Yet as Tapati Guha-Thakurta points out, Ravi Varma's own effort was also derived from a sense of "refining" the realm of the popular as these paintings for him provided "an alternative to the 'atrocious' 'Poona Pictures'." Thakurta points out that this refinement ironically "laid the groundwork for another model of popular, urban art, that was to be easily debased and cheapened in the oleograph prints (as compared to the Ravi Varma originals), pirated in many multiple and distorted versions of Ravi Varma, and repeated in similar prints and paintings by other artists of the time, especially in Bombay and Calcutta" (1986:189).

[89] The term pastiche here needs to be seen as distinct from the use of pastiche in the post-modern sense. As Arunima argues, the term pastiche, in the formal sense, precisely constructs a world of authentic Indian.

[90] Apart from his inclination for realism and his study of the oil technique by watching Theodore Jansen, what needs to be noted is that Ravi Varma was inspired to illustrate the gods not by following the miniature techniques prevalent in Indian, but what attracted him were the illustrations of gods in Edward Moore's *Hindu Pantheon.* For a detailed analysis see Mitter opct. Thakurta opct. At the same time hailing from an aristocratic family, Travancore court, entrenched in Karnatak music and the "classical" arts such as Kathakali, his conceptualization of the paintings differ from the western technique that he is deploying. For further on this aspect of his work see Anurima, opct.

For our purposes here what is significant is the linkage of the rise of visual-print capitalism in such complex manner in the establishment of a modern national-popular through unprecedented visualization, codification and popularization of gendered gestures. These images of women visualized in varied poses/gestures derived from the "everyday" could travel across varied realms, eliciting multiple responses and identifications. In a space with mass level illiteracy and multiplicity of languages, for the emerging nationalist identificatory project, the power of the image to signify "across" the barriers of language became extremely significant, both as a possibility and as a threat. What was significant in such a scenario was to codify and make a direct, one-to-one connection, or an established system of signification between the bodies on display and the "ethos" of the nation. After the initial phase of experimentation with diverse ethnicities, Ravi Varma himself went on to abstract and codify a female type, a face of the nation so to speak, which even within the diversities could stand in to signify and make manifest a unity. G. Arumina, pointing to the three kinds of women in the early Ravi Varma paintings–the generic Gujarati face-type, the Nair lady and the generic Maharashtrian face-type–argues that "even these blend gently into one another in a group portrait like *Galaxy*, where the lasting impression is one of eleven almost identical, and placid, women, distinguished only by a deliberate act of contrasting apparel" (2003:67).

Yet even this conception of the nation through image was not a fully-defined one laying down a specific one-on-one "political" relationship between the nation and the virtual bodies. The example of Ravi Varma's painting of Sakuntala,[91] for instance, will provide a glimpse of the extent of traversing of realms made possible by image as commodity in mechanical reproduction beyond the popular reception of his religious prints themselves: from the international Orientalist

[91] Due to the huge demand for the paintings, before the establishment of oleo-graphic press, Ravi Varma used to re-paint the images, and paintings such as Sakuntala had different versions.

reception leading to the selection of Ravi Varma's painting of *Sakuntala Patra Lekhan* by British Orientalist scholar Monier Williams for reproduction as the front piece for a later edition of the latter's acclaimed translation of Kalidasa's *Shakoontala or Lost Ring* to English, to *The Birth of Sakuntala* image becoming a poster for advertisement of baby food and used as a matchbox label.[92] This floating of the images presented the issue of what was India for the emerging nationalist discourse and at the heart of it were the "everyday" gestures that these women seem to be making. In a passionate critique of Ravi Varma women, sister Nivedita highlights the denigration of the national in this aesthetic by pointing towards the problematic of "woman as a temptress" embodying the nation. About Ravi Varma's Sakuntala, she says, "In a country in which that posture is held ill-bred [and nowhere is it decorous to stretch on the floor] every home contains a picture of a young woman lying full-length on the floor and writing a letter on the lotus leaf" (Mitter, 1994:258).

Pushpamala's selection of the images from Ravi Varma's oeuvre indexes this complex role played by visual-capitalism in constructing the popular-national as it highlights the emergence of the hybrid popular-national by traversing both the 'secular' and the 'sacred' realms of representation through the body of the women. In the secular mode, two of the native types are reconstructions of Ravi Varma oil paintings titled *Returning from the Tank*, and *Lady in the Moonlight* [1889]. The third type, *Lakshmi*, an oleo-graphic print from the Ravi Varma Press released in the early twentieth century, depicts the deity of prosperity and wealth. While all three wear a uniform red saree, the difference in the class of the plebian woman *Returning from the Tank* is marked through the texture of the saree. In the two paintings of the secular realm one can see the common trope of an isolated woman in lonely surroundings—*Returning from the Tank* on

[92] See Thakurta,1986:184 for Monier Williams' use, and Mitter, 1994:plate XX for the baby food poster.

a lake-shore with a pot on her head, while *Lady in the Moonlight* sitting on the rocks on a lake-side. Sitting in profile, trying to adjust her falling drape, and showing her legs, the latter looks at the viewer, directly indexing the eroticization involved in the allegory of the nation.[93] *Lakshmi* depicts the goddess Lakshmi with four hands, standing on a lotus in a river, gesturing *varada mudra* and looking directly at the viewer in the *darsanic* mode.

Continuing the linkage to the popular world of representation, two other types reference the world of popular films, the technological development on the visual-print, with a foregrounding of the region/"local" within the national. The type *Whip-cracking* is a reconstruction of a Tamil film still reproduced as a cover picture of *India Today* magazine (1998), depicting a young Jayalalithaa posing in an action role, wearing stretch pants, shirt, belts tucked with a set of knives, and holding a whip in her right hand. Jayalalithaa, the former superstar of the Tamil film industry (from the late 1960s to the 1980), is the general secretary of the regional political party AIADMK of Tamil Nadu, and twice Chief Minister of Tamil of Nadu.[94] In 1998, she was the opposition leader of Tamil Nadu and an influential ally of the then ruling coalition at the center.[95] The magazine uses the photograph of the playful crack whipping Jayalalithaa from the world of films of the past to comment on the power and arm-twisting tactics that Jayalalithaa of the present, is exercising over the ruling coalition at the center. Here the base type itself is a parody and presents the way images float in signification. What is

[93] Pushpamala in an interview highlights the fact of this eroticization in the picture and refers to it as one of the moments that intrigued them and gave a direction to more playful performances of the types. She says, "When I was trying to pose as Ravi Varma's..."Lady in the Moonlight" we realized that it was a strange picture, where this woman was sitting alone at a lakeside at night quite immodestly, with her drape falling off and her sari hitched up to expose her calves. It was an early "cheesecake" picture, using the mythological story of Radha waiting for Krishna as a pretext to paint a sexy woman! So we collected images from calendar pictures and advertisements for an extra shoot, where we had the Lady pose in a series of "glamorous" images which formed the popular series of the tableau" (*NWSI*, p 137).

[94] AIADMK – All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

[95] The ruling coalition NDA – National Democratic Alliance – was led by the Hindutva right-wing party, Bharatiya Janata Party.

significant in the use of the image by Pushpamala is that the historical/real referent of Jayalalithaa involves another realm of irony as this playful former avatar of Jayalalithaa can be read in relation to her present image in the world of politics, as *Amma* (mother) for her followers. The disjunction is between the playful whip-cracking Jayalalithaa as an image in special costumes, and the strong political leader of the present but completely adorned in a saree. Certain images in the *Popular Series*, though not specific, do play with this connection, for instance the images where Pushpamala dresses in a saree much like the actual Jayalalithaa and is shown seated on a kitschy golden throne. Yet the stress of Pushpamala's use is the non-individualized possibility of citation of the image. As the base type starts its migrations to new contexts, the initial reference of 'historical'/'real' Jayalalithaa does not matter anymore, and one receives the type in the same sense of seeing the familiar, but non-individualized figure from the world of representation.

The other type from the film-world, *Flirting,* is a reconstruction of a 1990s Kannada film still depicting a man and a woman in the act of flirting. The woman shows the gesture marking flirting, but at the same time being "modest" and "embarrassed" as the man offers her a rose. Imbued with the familiarity of the "local" in gestures, costumes and the painted architectural backdrop of the room, the studio set-up highlights the artificiality/fake-ness of the frieze, and the significance of the objects that constitute this world. The "real" objects—a stool between the couple that organizes the symmetry of the image with the central position on it taken by a bottle of Kingfisher beer, flanked by two small bowls of chips—is juxtaposed against the painted lamps and the painted backdrop of a more "traditional" door way. With the commodity placed at the center of the scenario, the image rather than highlighting a "local" in opposition to the modern

capitalist processes, reveals the “feel” of local to be precisely produced at a specific instantiation of the commodity.

From these realms of popular commodification, the last three types move away in their stress as they brings into view images that are less visible in the mainstream. The *Yogini,* a reconstruction of a sixteenth century Deccani miniature painting printed on the cover of *Islamic Heritage of the Deccan*, Marg Publications and *Our Lady of Velankanni*, based on “contemporary votive images” collected by Clare Arni from a church, and the photographic performance involving a free staging of the images in a constructed set, add new segments to the national in terms of religion. Diverging from the narrative of "Hindu" enactments having performative possibilities, the Lady of Velankanni brings to light the extremely popular performative realm of the “minority.” The last type *Circus*, based on Mary Ellen Mark's photograph of circus children and Pushpamala's reconstruction, is further based on Clare Arni's photography of children in Rajkamal circus. These images of a circus once again return us to the problematic of ethnography and the production of the native as in the nationalist discourse and its conception of corporeality. Circus, a “global” entertainment, is treated as an abject body practice that does not figure anywhere in the narrative of the nation. While “Indian theater” was conceptualized as practiced by a fully “trained body” (“no amateur exists”), and “traditional” body practices such as *kalaripayattu* was deemed as presenting the Indian ethos, the *kalari* and other “Indian” physical body practices themselves are easily disassociated from their contribution to the emergence of the “modern” circus in India. Pushpamala's enactment of circus adds another slice of “native” bodies emerging in transnational capitalism, ambiguous in its citation of this “performing community.”

The Performance "Score"

Except for certain reworking, the strategy involved in *NWSI* is to embody these figures and inhabit the world of the image with utmost verisimilitude. Rajadhakshya in his analysis of Pushpamala's work points to the "extreme fidelity" to the original in certain aspects. For instance, pointing to *Lady in Moonlight*, and the reconstruction of minute details, such as that of the light source through filters in original Ravi Varma works, as a significant art-historical contribution in itself, and the fetishistic care for detail in jewelry and props in the work, Rajadhyakshya points out that *NWSI* shows "fidelity" to the "physical circumstances of the *shooting* of the work" (*NWSI:*83-84). In an interview when asked "if you are really interested in "types", what is the point of being so faithful to the original picture down to the smallest detail?", Pushpamala responds "its a kind of discipline. If one gets sloppy, the picture loses its rigour" (*NWSI*:136). Yet precisely with the act of enactment and embodiment, as opposed to say a strategy of cutting and pasting her face on to already established images, Pushpamala's work draws a significantly different relation to the original. What does one see in these enactments of the types? Rather than a simple flattening, the enactment seemingly produces/points towards a "live." In his analysis of *NWSI* Ajay Sinha, developing Ashish Rajadhyaksha's argument, argues that *NWSI* makes visible what he calls the "unconscious" of the original image in small details, such as shadows that are present in the original image but are brought into light in enactment in *NWSI* (Sinha, 2011). Apart from these, what is also central is that most of the ten base types have a "live" moment of interaction at their heart—women whose lives, contexts mostly unknown acting as models who have been reified within the representational apparatus.[96] Yet while

[96] In Ravi Varma paintings, one knows that the Nair Lady face is a version of his daughter who used to model for him, the generic Gujarati look is based on Maharani Chimna Bai and Anjani Bai, a dancer from Bombay, though one lacks substantial evidence for who is supposed to have become his model in 1903 who provides the base for the Maharashtrian face (Arunima, opct. 63).

pointing to this moment of original liveness, in Pushpamala's enactment the live moment is again reified and captured once again, in the process producing an ironic and ambivalent surplus of the performing body. What does this notion of "live" perform?

The enactments through the "singular" body of Pushpamala, whose face keeps on changing from the "wheaten" in *Lady in Moonlight*, to the dark *Toda,* the *Criminal,* and the angel, to the blue colored face of *Yogini*, brings into view the heterogeneous space of the nation marked through representations of women's bodies. Rather than a monolithic construction of nationalism of an "authentic" and pure nation through the metonymical figuration of a homogenous woman's body and face, Pushpamala's selection and enactment excavates the archive of the nation to present a wide range of figures as nativized bodies that point to the constitutive heterogeneity of the nation. It is this constitutive heterogeneity and the establishment of a relationality between these realms that are often seen as discrete, which allows Pushpamala to playfully destabilize the representational world and open more complex questions of feminist post-colonial practice. In following such a process, *NWSI* displaces the nation as an *idea*, and opens out the nation as a problematic of a *network of practices.* There is no single "native woman" even as caught in an image; instead "native woman" as a category is shown as brought into existence through specific, shifting interlinking network of power and representational apparatus.

In the last section, we looked at how *NWSI* stakes a claim of the nation by refusing to accept the sublimation of materiality through transcendence in the nationalist narrative. Let us look at the historical type *Lakshmi* that *NWSI* enacts to see how it opens the visual field and resists this actor, gesture, action paradigm in the nationalist discourse. The original base for the type, the oleo-graph *Lakshmi* issued by Ravi Varma Press in the early twentieth century, is an

extremely popular, and importantly a familiar image in circulation. It depicts *Lakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity and wealth, standing on a lotus in a river. While two of her four hands hold lotuses, the second right hand in the front, with the palm facing downwards, shows the *varada mudra* (the gesture of granting boons) while the other left hand is raised to chest height with the palm facing the viewer. She is crowned and bejeweled, and wears a rich red sari with golden borders. It is also important to note that Lakshmi is a figure and an idea invoked in common parlance to refer to women as “light and source of prosperity of the family/household/nation.”

In her staging, Pushpamala takes position between the painted backdrop of the river, flora and fauna and a lotus in the forefront, to give an effect of her standing on the lotus. The only difference from the original in her enactment is the absence of the two arms holding the lotuses; Pushpamala enacting *Lakshmi* with only the two hands showing the *varada mudra.* This difference from the base need not be seen as one of anthropocentrism, of simply scaling down the non-human to human. For, in another base type, one comes across Pushpamala as an angel, with two visibly artificial wings and in one of the images in the *Popular Series* Lakshmi sits on a lotus with four hands. Clare Arni, who is not visible to the viewer, holds the lotus in her two hands that are joined to Pushpamala hands to give the effect of the four hands. Importantly, the subtle change in the enactment of *Lakshmi* can be analyzed in the context of what her base reconstructions posit about “familiarity”. Rather than defamiliarization due to the difference, the difference from the original here can pass off, as the image is still recognized as 'familiar' Lakshmi. Much like the optical illusion games where one reads a word even when the spelling is wrong, the all-too familiar aspect of the image seems to bypass the difference when the other details of the landscape are present. Without wings, an angel is probably not an angel; but even without those two arms holding lotuses, Lakshmi is identified as Lakshmi.

The enactment in *NWSI* moves the image from the realm of "iconic," and this engagement has to be seen in relation to what has been articulated by scholars as "alternate" sensibilities of the non-modern in India. In recent studies of Indian popular culture, the category of the "non-modern sensibilities" is often posited as diverging from the modern/western scheme of representation. Analyzing the gaze of Indian nationalism as distinct from the model of "imagination" proposed by Anderson, Dipesh Chakrabarty gives a more thorough perspective on the possibility of the "non-modern" sensibilities creeping in and structuring even the modern. Taking the visual practice of *darsan* and reading Tagores' poetry, he points out that "one does not have to be a believer to have *darshan*" (1999:202). Arguing that pre-modern practices are part of the modern as habitually embodied practices, Chakrabarty argues that when Tagore "sees the lovely *murati* of Mother Bengal," it is "his language that refers to darshan as almost an unconscious matter of habit" (ibid.:202). So rather than needing to "erect a category of mind," he points out that the viewing practices in Indian (or peripheral) nationalism can be seen in Deleuzian terms of analysis, where the "moment of practice is a moment that bypasses–and not just dissolves – the subject-object distinction" (ibid.:203). If, as Chakrabarty argues, the nation is not just imagined but "darshaned as well," then Pushpamala's enactment clearly stalls this bypassing of subject-object distinction. Pushpamala raises the question of the body of Lakshmi in its relation to the landscape it occupies, and the horizontal continuities and differences with other representations of women in discrete practices such as films, ethnography, and framing by disciplinary state apparatus. Pushpamala's reconstruction and further playful imaginations in differing contexts points to what Geeta Kapur highlights as neutralizing of the iconic (Kapur, 2007). The reconstructions in these myriad contexts does not "lead to an iconic," a transcendence or a bypassing; instead they are a ways of neutralization and stalling. What Pushpamala's

enacting of the Lakshmi highlights, as Geeta Kapur notes, is the fact that Lakshmi shares her "score" with film actresses and the migrations are simply that of enacting the score rather than a distinct crossing of the realms. We saw how Coomaraswamy's conception of the actor was also a conceptualization of actor enacting a "score." The body performing the score in *NWSI* while connected to the nationalist conception of body performing the precise score is distinct as it is the transcendence from the materiality of the body that Pushpamala's enactment resists. The "score," in other words, as revealed through the enactment rather than a *rasa*, *darsan,* or uncomplicated nation, is precisely the gender constitution.

What is the materiality of body in the photo-performance in *NWSI?* What is critical in *NWSI* is that it takes the seemingly "static" category of posture/pose, which is "little more than the plaster cast" in Coomaraswamy's terms, as the starting point for the purpose of infusing it with movement, only to be frozen once again. It is this "originary" "live" moment of interaction that gets bypassed, or reified that *NWSI* takes as the point of departure in photo-performance. Peggy Phelan in her analysis of photography argues that "all portrait photography is fundamentally performative." Arguing against the logic that photography captures and presents the authentic real, she analyzes the fraught relationship between reality of the corporeal body that is captured in portrait photography. She writes,

> "Portrait photography tries to make an inner form, a (negative) shadow, expressive: a developed image which renders the corporeal, a body-real, as a real body. Uncertain about what this body looks like or how substantial it is, we perform an image of it by imitating what we think we look like. We imagine what we might see when we look at people we believe we resemble–beggars, sultans, dog owners" (1993:36).

Extending the logic of the ambiguity of the present within reification in the present of photo-performance, *NWSI* seems to make visible the ambiguity at the heart of the original abstractions.

Pushpamala's photo-performance while can be read in such a light, also marks its position as different in its specific feminist post-colonial positioning. Pushpamala's reconstruction of photographs of the colonial-modern state, both colonial and post-independent state, derived from ethnographic practices provides a way to look at the issue. As scholars have noted, the discourse of colonialism in relation to the identity of the colonized has ambivalence at its heart. According to the discursive logic of colonialism, the colonized do not have, or are not fully formed Subjects with a fixed, developed and essential interiority.[97] It is therefore the outside/surface, the "manners," which is captured and framed into categories of classification based on ethnicity/class/gender. The apparatus of construction of the type *Toda* woman in the colonial archive is therefore not about expressing the interiority of this woman as an individual. What Pushpamala's work highlights through placing such colonial disciplinary state practices alongside popular culture is the continuation of the very same logic when it comes to deployment of women's bodies in the imagination of the nation. G. Arunima in her analysis of Ravi Varma's aesthetic highlighting the homogenous women–a homogenous female face-type, wearing a unified costume sari,[98] lacking any form of individuality, and seemingly standing outside history–in Ravi Varma's later paintings argues that the figuration of women in his aesthetic are "paradoxical." While in following the "post-Renaissance techniques of representing the body in

[97] The central theoretical position in this context is put forward by Homi Bhabha in his theorization of mimicry where he notes that colonized has only a "partial presence" and rather than a fully formed and fixed identity, subject constituted in the very matrix of power can only have "identity effects". For more, see Bhabha, Homi (1984).

[98] Ravi Varma's use of sari as a costume that stands for the Indian woman, as Arunima rightly notes, was a prescient conception on his part. Sari was not, and is still not a uniform dress in India.

three dimensional ways" she is "real," the figure is also "unreal" because "she has no autonomy, or authentic individuality that was the hallmark of European portraiture" (Arunima, 2003:71-72).

While one can read *NWSI* alongside the performative aspects in portrait photography as described by Phelan, and particularly aligned with the strategies used by Cindy Sherman whose work Phelan analyzes in detail, their strategies are also very distinct. Pushpamala's embodiment, at the first instance, seems to return these familiar images back to their "live," theatrical contexts. Yet as distinct from the early feminist practice where the effort was to embody the representations with the objective of infusing them with subjectivity, the enactment of Pushpamala does not look for a subject "Woman." The selection of images in *NWSI* points to the heterogeneity in the representation of women as they are marked by ethnicity, race and class, offering different possibilities and limits to these types. As scholars have argued, Pushpamala's work does not share the perspective of violence of representation and the effort to "go beyond representation itself" by Sherman epitomized by the fragmented, surrealist bodies in Sherman's oeuvre (Kapur, opct). Moreover, rather than performance highlighting the absence or "femininity as masquerade," and pointing to the non-visible as highlighted by Phelan, Pushpamala's enacting gives stress to the visible aspect of performance and the tensions and possibilities offered by such politics of visibility.

IV. *Bodily Gesture and the Refraction of Space-Time*

For understanding the specific play of gestures that *NWSI* undertakes, let me quickly move through the three sections where the base types are put into play in a wide array of contexts. In the second section, *Ethnographic Series*, a relationality between the ten base types

are established as the figures migrate from their own contexts to inhabit the scenarios set by ethnography. The *Series*, a “scientific analysis” as the subtitle points out, brings into play the tension between the “picturesque”/“popular” and the scientific, as also the binaries of “extracted” and “natural” contexts. The section starts with a set of images with the 2 inch black and white rectangular grid that provide the background for the “Toda” type. All ten types are individually recorded and “scaled” and captured in black and white photographs as they pose in front of the screen in frontal view and in profile, with their arms stretched out to scale. The scientific analysis further moves to the exploration the anthropometric framing of the plebeian– the Toda woman, the Woman returning from the tank, the Criminals, and the whip cracking Jayalalithaa perform mundane and everyday gestures as captured by the scientific apparatus. One encounters a series with Toda woman posing with a sickle and branch–posing frontally; in profile; posing as “scared”; posing with a buffalo; Toda woman amidst “flora”/nature. The type Woman returning from the tank is shown in the everyday gesture of cleaning rice as she sits with her leg folded in front of the backdrop of the *Lady in the Moonlight.* This plebian woman being assimilated into the modern is indexed through images of her with bicycles, the woman working with a camera, the photographed “object” claiming the modern technology, ready to bat holding a plastic cricket bat in front of stumps improvised from bricks on a lonely pathway. Another image shows the woman resting on a *charpoi* embodying the famous figure from the painting by Amrita Sher-Gil.[99] Two other images are of the woman posing as the matriarch standing erect, her hands on the shoulders of a submissive Clare Arni; woman sitting cross legged on the ground in an arid

[99] Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) was one of the earliest and most significant woman painters of India. Portraiture was a significant aspect of her work, and in her paintings of the women of different ethnicities, regions and class, and self-portraiture she can be seen as drawing on but also redeploying the ethnographic framing to mark out a space for “women”. For an excellent analysis of her work and its feminist positioning, see Kapur's *When was Modernism*, 2000. In the analysis, Kapur places Sher-Gil's practice in relation to the latter’s contemporary Frida Kahlo and contextualizes her deployment of the personal, the ethnographic in the Indian context as well as in international modernism such as the self-portrait as a Gauginesque woman.

landscape while Clare Arni stands beside her in an 'Anglo-Indian' dress. The indexing of "modernity" and "liberation" brought about by modernization as represented through images is carried forward with regard to other types such as the image of *Criminals* along-side a white scooter. The other images in the "Ethnographic Series" consists of series of images presented as film stills (contact films) involving the type Cracking the whip posing frontally, in three quarters and in profile, posing with various props: the branch, the scale, a hammer, the cricket bat. Through this wide assortment of contexts, *NWSI* indexes multiple layers of discourse of modernity through ethnographic representation–its claim to capture "manners" as identity of different ethnicities; the scooter, camera, indexing modern advancement in the developmental state discourse; feminist art history itself and its continuation and subversion of the ethnographical framing (enactment of Amrita Sher-Gil's painting).

The third section, "The Popular Series" promising to deliver the "picturesque scenes of Native Beauties," brings in color literally and metaphorically to present sets of pictures, at times humorous and parodic in their juxtapositions, and at times simply citing familiar and clichéd images. The series includes circus women photographed in their act; Pushpamala as a circus artist wearing a grotesque mask; *Woman returning from the Tank* seated on a golden throne; yogini showing simple dance moves; yogini in the gesture of reading *namaz* in front of her painted backdrop; in front of her painted backdrop, yogini wearing a red colored dark glass lying on a sofa made in the design of elephant feet; Toda woman holding a gun; Toda woman as an "artist," painting a realist female figure from art-world; Toda woman working with an "Usha" sewing machine; Lady in the moonlight standing beside her scooter; Lady standing beside the rocks in her painting but the rocks now holding radio and cosmetics, or wearing yellow and black dark glass and holding a phone in her setting; the angels rather than holding garlands being

garlanded before the Velankanni's image; Criminals riding the scooter, their heads thrown upwards indexing liberated “carefree joyousness”.

The fourth section, *The Process Series* claiming to be “a complete record of the procedures and systems used for the study” pushes further the ambivalent play and excess. The series shows a set of photographs of the work process, highlighting the people involved in the process of arranging the sets, directing the shoots, the sets, lighting and framing devices. Like the “live” bodies that Pushpamala enacted from the originals, infusing life to the (often unknown) original actresses/models only to be caught again in reification, the *Process Series* raises the question of fetishization of the live-bodies of the actress Pushpamala, and her collaborators in the present (of) photo-performance. The play involved in the *Popular Series*- where the lived body and the juxtapositions of the mundane gestures in varied costumes offer a possibility of failing the norm, seemingly offering a way of “disidentifying” with the norm, is precisely what is problematized in the *Process Series.*

While we have highlighted the mundane/everyday-ness of the gestures, here I will look at what materiality of body *NWSI* bring into view in these enactments. Let me look at one specific image in the *Ethnographic Series* where the series of contact film stills gets “playful.” In one of the stills, the whip-cracking type is shown in a series of sixteen contact film stills, divided into four sections arranged in rows of four. The first row has two stills where the type looks directly at the camera, and in the next two she poses in three quarters. As if she is turning, the next row records her back turned to the viewer and head in profile, and subsequent two images showing her perfect profile. The third row breaks this logic of continuous representation as one encounter, the sudden appearance of a still of the whip-cracking type in a “happy dancing” posture from the world of calendar art. The figure is in profile, standing on the toe of her left leg while her right

leg is bent and raised, and both palms are held open parallel to the side of her chest. Her face gives out a wide smile. The next two images show the type in profile holding the bow of Toda type, and the last one in the row is a repetition of the still with her back faced to the viewer in profile. Three images of the last row are blacked out and the last image in the row once again has the "happy dancing" pose. The "happy posture" breaks the repetition of the logic of representation, as it is a sudden break of a "filmy-ness" of popular culture into the frame of ethnography. How can one see this playful destabilization and bringing to attention the body within the reified image? It is not simply the problematic of inhabiting differently, or disidentifying, if the inhabiting is regarded as born out of a free choice of the actor. What is critical is that the body that is breaking the logic of representation is precisely a reified one, much like all other images in NWSI.

Is the strategy in *NWSI* one that of "mimesis" as Elin Diamond deploys the term, where rather than representational, mimesis can also refer to a "mode of reading that transforms an object into a *gestus* or a dialectical image" (Diamond, 1998:v)? With this broader use of the concept of mimesis, Diamond puts in dialogue Irigaray's concept of mimicry-mimesis (*mimetisme*) with the concepts of "social gestus" of Bertolt Brecht, and the Walter Benjaminian concept of a dialectical image, "to lay out a female body in representation that resists fetishization" and offers "a viable position for the female spectator"(1988:83). In a Benjaminian conception of dialectical image, by bringing the dialectics to a stand-still, and opening out a temporality where the linearity of past, present and future gets annihilated, the image opens an unmediated temporal moment of truth. Placing it in relation to Irigaray's conception that if "women were such good mimics" then it is because "they also remain *elsewhere*," Diamond points to the potential of "*non-identical* similarity to the other" (1998:173). In some of the

enactments of Pushpamala, the play of temporality and a production of "elsewhere" even within the fetish/cliché is recognizable. The best example is the rather curious image that stands out in the *Ethnographic Series* in its quotation of the familiar where the plebian woman returning from the tank is "playing" cricket on a lonely pathway. The cricket bat does come in a number of contact stills as one of the props alongside others objects such as sickle, wooden stick, gun and whip. In this image we see the bat not simply as a prop but in the context of an "actual" cricket playing plebian type. While we have seen that *NWSI* works with the "non-virtuosic body," this image also points to the way *NWSI* deploys the non-virtuosic in the sense of "non-identical similarity to the other" in the very conception of the new image-world produced. While cricket passion has become synonymous with "India" with the rise of technological capitalism,[100] in the present moment of globalization, cricket alongside Bollywood has also become one of "cultural peculiarities" that seemingly provide an identity, "India", in the globalized world. In *NWSI* what one encounters is not simply the strategy of selecting and inserting a body that is usually outside the mainstream to the existing realm of representation. The enactment, in other words, does not simply represent the plebian woman—a figure doubly marginalized in the actual context of the masculine space of cricket for being a subaltern woman—as playing cricket. It eschews the twin possibilities of such a narrative. First, of expressing oneself virtuosically, where the actor is bestowed with individuality. As different from the usual representations in cricket *NWSI* does not show the woman as playing a "great shot": caught in the "action" and expressing oneself virtuosically. Second, where rather than the individual, a "community" is constituted through

[100] Here I agree with Madhava Prasad in his argument that there is nothing specifically "Indian" about cricket where by the Indian "mythical structures" find a conjoinment in cricket (Ashis Nandy, 1989) nor is it an "indigenization" of a "Western" game (Appadurai, 1995). Cricket in India is much closer related to the rise of technological capitalism and the case of cricket rather than offering a difference to a "West", points to the complex ways of constitution of modernity. As Madhava Prasad argues rather that modernity being "something Indians were merely consuming," it offers a "dynamic with far-reaching effects, in which Indians as well as others (like the South Africans) are active participants" (Prasad, 1998:1021).

cricket. In the image even at the level of desire for representation, it does not involve a "community." The plebian woman is "playing" cricket as she poses with the cheap plastic bat usually given to toddlers; yet there is no-one standing behind the stumps as a wicket-keeper or any other fielders. And in fact even the cricket ball is absent. She is "playing," much like her original referent, in a lonely path-way. It is as if the only other person is the viewer of the image, who assumes the position of the bowler who can kick-start a play by the viewing. This is specifically a play within the representational apparatus, enticing the viewer into the temporality, almost eliciting the viewer to throw the ball for any form of "action" at all. In short, being not an imagination of an actual cricket playing plebian woman even at the level of desire, it is non-identical to the image of a "Plebian woman playing cricket" as a successful event of representation of modernity or a "free" space-time. In itself, the image creates a temporal "elsewhere"; but one that is very definitely within the problematic of mediation. Rather than the negation of mediation, a temporal "elsewhere" in such cases, is produced precisely through highlighting and playing on the aspect of mediation.

The Brechtian concept of social gestus offers another productive tool of comparing some of the strategies in *NWSI.* For Brecht, not any gest or gesticulation is a social gestus. Instead Brecht defines a social gestus as a gest that is "relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances" (Brecht, 1964:104-105). What is critical for Brecht is that a phenomenon or gesticulation should not be left for itself uncritically; but the art work needs to take a definite position vis-à-vis the depiction in the form of "criticism, irony, parody... propaganda" (ibid.:105). Some of the images of *NWSI* do in fact seem to directly employ such a strategy. When in the *Popular Series*, one encounters the *Yogini* sitting in front of her backdrop on a sofa with her legs resting on leg-rests made in the design of elephant legs, or

when one sees the *Lady in the Moonlight* standing in front of her background wearing a dark glass and holding a telephone, the irony and parody can be seen as transforming a gesture/gesticulation into a social gest. The transparent image of “authentic” “traditional” Indian woman, which metonymically produces the pure Indian nation uncontaminated by the “western,” is broken through these gendered enactments of modernization/“westernization.”

Yet what is significant in the overall display of *NWSI* is that these gestures are also derived from the world of fetishistic/cliché representations. Rather than the gest as social gest providing the definite critique, the reified images ambiguously draw us back to the world of representation and away from any “real” outside that can outrightly critique this 'false'/fake world. For instance, how is one to view the many images from *Popular Series* where one sees the actors create varied tableaus: the image showing *Yogini* facing the viewer in the pose of reading *namaz* in front of her Deccani background, Pushpamala and three others offering namaz before the background of the *Yogini*, or six people, three men and three women, standing in front of the camera, their faces covered with black plastic covers pierced at the spot of the eyes. Or the tableaus of the Circus, where one encounters Pushpamala and her collaborators standing in a line as in a tableau, posing to the camera with their arms stretched out as if at the end of their act, or the circus figures caught in their “acts” such as posing on a cycle, hanging from the rope etc. Bringing to mind the widely popular marriage photographs where illusion is created of the bride and the groom standing and sitting on lotuses and being transported to exotic lands, the images such as Pushpamala and Claire Arni sitting and standing on the lotus do not give a definitive critical position vis-à-vis the type and the representational framing. Rather they stand for themselves, ambivalent in the “fun” of performance before the camera. They do not lay down a clear position as to whether one needs to read the original representational scheme of fetishism

and oppressiveness into these 'repetitions with a difference' or one needs to see them as echoing the "freedom" of popular culture, a desire for representation already created before our eyes. In her analysis of *NWSI*, Susie Tharu touches upon this particular problematic in relation to the *Process Series*. Analyzing *Process Series*, she points out how it involves a mystification rather than a Brechtian defamiliarization. Showing how the *Process Series* signifies "obscure labour and technologies of repetition/citation and meaning making more widely," she points out that "there is a heightened drama to the process as it is documented in this show." What does such mystification and "heightened drama" mean and how should one approach the body constituted in ambivalent surplus by the representational apparatus in *NWSI*?

Since it is the visual realm that is our primary concern here, rather than mimesis as defamiliarizing, one can best describe the overall process in *NWSI* and the role of body in its relation to space-time as "refraction." Just as when passing through a medium with a different optical intensity, the light wave or sound wave changes its angle, the body of Pushpamala seems to refract as it moves through these different representational realms/mediums. It is in fact the body in its enactment that can point to the structuration of the medium or the representational schema. If one looks at singular images, and make a series of these images, in fact one can follow a narrative of embodiment as en-framed in each genre/medium. Yet in the overall work, one sees the profusion of images in juxtapositions, contradictions, differing mediums of embodiment, highlighting the frame and possibilities of each, and in the whole oeuvre we are given a possible world of typical embodiment that is ambivalent in its relation to the stereotypical.

Let us investigate the specific space-time bodies as a central element of refraction and what it makes possible. What is the space-time of *NWSI?* Is the insistent enactment of the iconic

and familiar images in *NWSI* a performance of the past, where a clear demarcation can be made with the present of globalization? Why cite and enact the questions of "native" and the logic of colonial anthropology in the present moment of globalization? What does the specification of a geographical region such as South-India offer in the age of globalization? Is it a regionalist/parochial imagination of space-time of the present?

"South-India" is a significant, though undefined part of the regional-national problematic in India. India is sometimes seen as divided on a North-South axis.[101] South-India as a geographical conception involves the four recognized states Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, with their distinct languages and dialects.[102] The different states were formed after independence in the nation-wide linguistic re-organization of states in 1956 as a result of contestations and assertion of their own unique languages, as well as demands on the basis of economic and cultural inequalities in the pre-independence administrative structures.[103] Susie Tharu, placing the category somewhere between the "constitutional endorsed 'India' or 'Karnataka'" and the "academic/political category "South Asia" of Area Studies in USA," points out that the territoriality of South-India is a "soft one" that is "political and imaginative." While the states themselves are officially recognized as independent entities and are involved in long-standing disputes among them,[104] what gives this geographical space a seeming unity in the national imagination is a distinction drawn from the "North." South-India as distinct from the

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[101] The East-West axis is less invoked in imagination in India. While anything over Karnataka and Andhra is therefore 'North', one sees the specification of 'North-East' in the case of east.

[102] Apart from the five languages of the states, there are also languages such as Tulu and diverse dialects.

[103] This process of assertion and contestation is in no way a complete or 'finished' project in India. More states such as Chattisgarh were given recognition after 1956 and many claims such as the burning issue of the claim for a separate Telengana state in Andhra Pradesh in South-India, the assertions for Bundelkhand etc make it still a lively issue. And these claims are apart and distinct from the demands of secession from the Indian nation-state itself.

[104] For instance, the endless river water sharing dispute over Kaveri river water between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

“North” has been often regarded as “Dravidian” or non-Brahmin while the North is sweepingly marked as “Aryan.” This distinction is derived from both categorizations of language clusters in study of languages started by the Indologists and is also based on a sweeping characterization of a racial typology which we saw when analyzing the case of Toda type. In her interview, Pushpamala provides typology and the norm of beauty in the national imagination, and the question of native, as the reason for choosing the geographical limit, South India. Pushpamala says,

> While we were tossing around ideas, she [Clare Arni] said since I had earlier worked on images of Indian women, why not work on South Indian women? I loved it. For one thing, most typical images of Indian women are from the North, the North is the norm. And then we were both South Indian women. I am a Kannadiga from Bangalore, and Clare is British but has spent most of her life in South India (*NWSI*:135).

The types of women, as we have seen earlier, are all taken to represent different regions and cultures within this seemingly non-normative South : the national norm but produced by the Ravi Varma who hailed from Travancore; the film industries of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka drawing distinctions to Hindi-film/Bollywood; or even a different political culture as in the early letting go of national politics by the regional parties of the South, bargaining and aligning with the national parties for their own 'parochial'/regional interests.[105]

[105] The regional peculiarities of the political culture in the South-India, and its divergence from the national wave, is often highlighted as significant. Among other characteristics, the early emergence of Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu and the articulation of critique and difference to Brahminical dominance, as also the phenomenon of popular political leaders emerging from film world in most parts of South-India is regarded as typical of South-Indian politics. The early displacement of the Congress Party in South India by regional parties (Communist Party in the case of Kerala) and the periodic significant divergence from the 'national wave', epitomized by the case of re-election and 'consent' to Indira Gandhi's emergency regime by all the South-Indian states in the 1977 elections when Indira Congress was defeated elsewhere, highlights some of this complex problematic of region-nation.

Susie Tharu argues that in *NWSI* the category seems to pass-off as an "official geography, on par with the typology it purports to document" (*NWSI*:13). What is significant in such a passing-off is that it is not a construction of an imaginative geography that can stand independent and self-contained. While very much entrenched in the complexities of the national in India, it is not a simple continuation of the very same logic of nationalism in terms of the formulation that India is a nation "with different nationalities," with the regions having autonomous claim to sovereignty. Though the North is set up as the hegemonic other, the moment one starts an interrogation of the sanctity of the south, nothing–the history, language, culture, or even non-visibility in the national—seems to provide the region with any claims for its own independent status as against a common hegemonic order. In fact what *NWSI* puts forward, even as it makes visible non-normative bodies, is the particular significance of "native" in post-independent India, where fundamentalism, along with its construction of Islam as Other, is equally invested in regional articulations of authenticity. What unites the category of the South-India amidst all these specificities is investment on gendered visualization of identity.

Here one need to also take into account the suggestion that *NWSI* makes to enactment as a social practice in contemporary India. About the process of her work Pushpamala says,

> You know, when I was working on the project, and borrowing things from all sorts of people, old family friends said this reminds them exactly of my mother. There was one story by an uncle who said that when he was newly married – this was in 1950s – there was a knock on the door and when his young wife opened it, she found a holy man standing in the dusk. He barked at her that she was insulting him by not greeting him with proper rituals. When she went back with all the *puja* things, she found him laughing uproariously – it was my mother in a yogi's costume! She was a keen amateur actress and

we grew up doing "Great Women of India" and "Costumes of India" pageants – this project is a bit like that." (135)

In looking at enactment as a social practice within the space of India, Pushpamala gives a different stress to the theatrical. It is not only the "live"/theatrical as in the case of the posed body at the heart of the image that she seems infusing with movement. The process as a whole and specifically the *Popular Series* points to enactment as a social practice in constituting identities. The ambivalence of *NWSI* is in not sign-posting these practices as belonging to the past and "lost." It is through marking the creeping in of these eclectic practices in the heart of modern, and a corporeal engagement with them that *NWSI* raises the question of the complex space-time of contemporary capitalism.

The collaborative effort in the process of reconstruction moves beyond the director-actress Pushpamala and photographer Clare Arni to include a whole gamut of networks involved in the contemporary popular industry.[106] The aspect of the network of the popular industry is something that needs to be analyzed closely. It could be seen in two inter-related ways. First, the work provides a documentation of the improvisatory and collaborative nature of the project. The project points towards the process of improvisations, with the objects being loaned from people the artists know personally, and as a gesture of the artists to record the "invisible labor" involved in the art work. Rather than the "genius" artist with the idea placed in opposition to manual work of artisans, the very act of recording and documenting the labor of multiple people and nexus of

[106] The work documents and archives in detail in the case of each of the reconstructions the names of the stores from which the materials have been bought, the artists involved in the process such as backdrop painters, carpenters, costume designers, make-up and light artists. As an example, I am citing here the recorded details of one of the types, "Lady in the Moonlight" as provided in the picture-book: "Set painted by G Ealamalai, Rajarajeshwarinagar; Painted thermocol rocks, painted tarpaulin floor cloth; sundry props from Gandhi Bazaar market; Studio lights from Prakash Movietome; Make up: Ramakrishna; Shoot asst: Surekha; Studio asst: Manjunath; Costume: Mysore silk sari borrowed from Ashwini Rao, Basavangudi; Blouse: RK Dress Makers, Basavangudi; Jewellery hired from Prabhat Stores." (Pushpamala N., Arni, Clare. *NWSI.* p 38).

practices critique the notion of art-practice as a solitary individual vocation. Second, beyond this immediate politics of making visible the "invisible labor" in art-making, the documentation of the network of practices constituting the popular culture industry in the present also makes a specific claim to spatiality in the contemporary moment of globalization. It points to the continuity as well as the break in the popular industry in the rise of capitalism.

Popular industry in India is often conceived as "traditional" and out of sync with contemporary moments–both the period of modernization as well the contemporary moment of globalization. Critiquing such a conceptualization, *NWSI* highlights the nexus of the artists who work across popular culture traversing religious representation, film, and advertisements, and that marks that aesthetics and actual practices of these discrete realms that are often regarded as distinct and competing are often more connected. Pushpamala in an interview talks about her first painter and how he worked across the entire gamut of popular culture and this has resulted in his use of eclectic aesthetic as he moves between these realms. She says:

> Cinema hoarding painters, who are Tamilians who have moved here [Bangalore] from the film industry in Chennai painted the tableaus. My first painter G. Ealamalai does the set design for... a Kannada film company, but he is also employed by the painted Madurai-style Rajarajeswari temple nearby, where he has a small studio to create festival tableaus and decorations. His work ranges from religious art, film sets, and hoardings to popular architecture...he designed the kitsch architecture forming the entrance to my suburb. The ideas are a strange mix taken from the traditional iconography to comic books (*NWSI*:139-140).

As different from a teleological narrative where a "traditional" that is "authentic" is produced by the modern only to be relegated to the past, the visual realms of religion, mass

culture, and politics, co-mingle to produce the “experience” of the contemporary organization of space. Partha Chatterjee, drawing on Guha Thakurta's analysis of popular culture, point to the fact of how Indian popular culture as a category has become central in the contemporary times in global discourse because of its assumed divergence. In these narratives, Indian popular culture is read as providing a space of “freedom” in its distinction to the high modernist aesthetic as also from the “prison-house of realism” (Chatterjee, 2008). As against this marking of the popular, he argues that when one deals with popular culture what is significant is a critical position-taking rather than an assumed stance of neutrality. In his work Chatterjee analyses popular culture through its own tensions in the practice rather than a pre-conceived divergence from the history of ideas. In *NWSI*, where one sees an engagement with the *practice* of popular culture, but with the entry point being the gendered space-time, allows a distinct “non-neutral” critical engagement. In *NWSI,* performance in its potential of reiterating as well as failing the norm, opens out the space-time of the contemporary India as a gendered play of gestures, thereby opening the field of popular-national to a critical non-subject centric positionality that do not fall into the binary constructs of colonial discourse analysis.

Chapter 3 : ***Superflat Aesthetic and Brand-experience : Performance of Happydent White Palace Ad-film in/as "Brand-India"***

Emerging scholarship on the cultural aspect of liberalization of the Indian economy since the 1980s has highlighted the sudden expansion of the spread of commodities, and the hitherto unseen representational possibilities and consumption practices distributed globally by the transnational media. One central element that has been under considerable scrutiny in such studies is the role of national identity as the primary category of identification in these systems of representations. Scholars have argued that rather than the nation as a category facing dissolution or disintegration in the face of a homogenizing globalism, the category of the nation itself is seminally re-constituted through the transnational practices (Rajagopal, 1999;2001, Mazzarella, 2003; Mankekar, 2004). The nation is in fact constituted through the flow of global capital. In this chapter, I will analyze one significant facet of this process of identification tied directly to commodities and branded images designed specifically for the global marketplace: the deployment of what I demarcate as "nativized" bodies that perform a virtual "brand-India" at the instantiation of the commodity. In earlier chapters, I have analyzed the category of nativized bodies in relation to the emergence of a consumption regime, where the new emerging space is not conceived as a homogeneous one based on the nationalist construction or a homogenizing capitalist system. In the present chapter I will analyze nativized bodies as enabling the flow of transnational capital and argue that the nation so produced needs to be seen as "Superflat." The specific cultural artifact that will focus the chapter is the *Happydent White Palace* ad-film (2007) for the global chewing-gum brand Happydent White.

I. ***The Virtual Nation and commodities***

In the present context of Indian liberalization, scholars have argued that the processes of branding and advertising practices play a central role in restructuring the inter-related domains of erotics, pleasure, politics, and national identification. A new class of advertising specialists who work for transnational corporations has emerged to construct a virtual brand of "India" that creates a new image of the Indian and constitutes a new "Indian customer" in the process (Mazzarella, 2003). A new gendered "subject of consumption" is constituted via transnational media and commodities by reconstituting the "disparate structures" of "erotic longing" and "nationalist belonging" (Mankekar, 2004). One might even argue that the logic of branding has played a crucial role in connecting politics and market, and playing a crucial role in the emergence of a chauvinistic, and violent Hindu nationalism (Rajagopal, 1994;1999;2001). This chapter will demonstrate one facet of the relationship between nation and branding processes, focusing on the emergent practice of deploying images and narratives of nativized "Indian" bodies. Before moving on to a detailed analysis, I will note that the chapter is isolating only one tendency within the wide field of branding within the nation. The chapter takes for analysis what can be seen as "national" advertising, and does not attempt to include in its scope the "regional" language advertising industry, even though part of the arguments made here might fit into latter.[107]

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[107] The ad-films that I analyze in the chapter are primarily geared towards Hindi and English television channels, and usually come up in regional television channels in dubbed form. But the use of language, and the relation between the national and the regional, as I will explain later in the chapter, is complex within this field of advertising as their effort is to make manifest the national by playing on difference. The language itself, as I will argue, comes in as already marked. The regional advertising industries themselves have an alternate existence, especially for the products that have a greater regional demand. For instance, in the regional industry that I am familiar with, the Malayalam advertisement industry, one can see specific ad-films for products such as gold jewelry, umbrellas, and silk sarees that have much larger demand than in the national scenario. By distinguishing the regional language advertising industry, one is not suggesting that they are either secondary in terms of strong brand-wars, or that they

The use of strategies of “humor” and hyperbole has emerged as key in the increasingly visualized vocabulary of contemporary global advertising strategies, and the twin strategies in combination have been particularly significant in the Indian advertising industry to represent bodies that are marked as standing outside of the paradigm of a modern citizen-subject. The use of the twin strategies can be seen in the recent image constructions such as that of the "*jatt"* (farmer from Punjab) displaying rural machismo in the ad-film of Coca Cola, or the "*madrasi*" (a male dressed in a *mundu*,[108] and speaking with a stereotypical Tamilian accent) in the Fewikwik ad-film, or the dark servile bodies chewing gum and flashing up the world around them in the Happydent White chewing gum ad-films. All such bodies are marked through difference—whether of ethnicity, class, or culture—against a modern subject. What is critical in this new strategy of marking bodies through difference is that these bodies are presented as perfectly entrenched within the world of commodities. So in the Coca Cola ad-film, while young urban girls driving through the country-side in Punjab come asking for water, what they encounter is a young *jatt* playfully showing off his machismo and flirting with the girls, and drawing out Coke stored in the depths of the well in the place of water, or the stereotypical Tamilian in Fewikwik ads, in contrast to the modern urban old man who is fishing, who is shown as singing along to a Carnatic music[109] tune, breaking all established conventions of the “art” of fishing as he puts Fevikwik on to a rod and simply catches the fishes that get stuck to the rod. In these cases, the heterogeneity and the “non-modern” status of the figures do not serve as a strategy to mark them

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are local, and not transnational. The gold jewelry branded shops that traverse from Kerala to various transnational sites such as UAE, Dubai etc is a case in point. Regional valences also do not preclude the functioning of national politics with a regional intensity. For instance the Hindutva communal rhetoric of “Love Jihad” and its particular manifestation in advertising of Kalyan gold jewelry is a case in point. For more, see, Agasthyan, Anu. “Visvasam Atalle Ellam”. *Dillipost*. January 15, 2011.

[108] A one piece garment worn around the waist in parts of South-India.

[109] South-Indian classical music.

as abject bodies, against which a modern subject of consumer emerges. Instead, it is precisely these bodies, what I call nativized bodies, as distinct from the modern citizen-subject that channel the identification.

The representations of these bodies as already well-entrenched in the world of commodities indicate a specific change in the claim of the reorganization brought in by commodities within the country. The recent advertisement campaigns of IDEA Cellular are an excellent case to look at the specificity of this claim. With the popular tag line, "What an Idea, Sirji!," the series of IDEA campaigns included the ad-films such as "Walk When You Talk," "Championing a world without caste," "Championing a world in which no one suffers from the disability to communicate," "Education for All," "Participative Governance," "Use Mobile, Save Paper," and the recent IDEA 3G campaign for "Controlling the Population Explosion." "Sirji" is a combination of "sir" derived from the honorific in English (colonial language), and "*ji*" the honorific in Hindi (the "national" language), and the term is used in common parlance in Hindi as a slang indexing an informal relation to authority. In the campaigns, the "Sirji" played by the Bollywood superstar Abhishek Bachchan identifies what can be seen as "ailments" that India is suffering from—the absence of health (consciousness), caste divisions, population explosion, illiteracy etc—and offers an "idea" involving the use of the cellular connection that will "solve" the problems.

How can a cellular connection have such fascinating and fantastical effects? By walking while talking on the phone, and making everybody else around do the same, the ad-film proposes that one can build a health regime and a healthy country where the doctor who provided the idea as "Sirji" becomes jobless. Following the global narratives of development made possible by technological advance, the ad-film *Education for All* presents that the issue of illiteracy and

difficulties in the access to education can be solved by using IDEA cellular as an extension from an urban class room to the rural "school" space under a banyan tree. Since caste issues and violence are supposedly springing up due to people having specific caste-names, the issue seemingly can be solved by taking away the caste-based names of people, and rechristening people with phone numbers. The framing and the "solving" of the problem of population explosion is more elaborate: the absence of electricity and possibilities for entertainment has seemingly created a condition where people get bored, and can do nothing other than have sex. IDEA 3G provides entertainment as television, ability to video call, play games etc, thereby getting people engaged in other entertaining prospects than having sex, with one of the last shots of the ad-film showing a vasectomy clinic being declared as abandoned since the "control" has been arrived at.

Receiving the "Best Celebrity Endorsement of the Year" at the first edition of NDTV Tech Life Awards (2009), the IDEA brand ambassador Bachchan said, "I am happy to associate with a brand which is young, humane and is a Champion in its category. IDEA's communication is simple, effective and appealing to the masses and classes. It has given me an opportunity to connect with my countrymen and offer simple solutions to complex issues prevalent in our society. It is encouraging to see that my role in this communication has inspired people, and is recognized by the industry."[110] IDEA Cellular chief marketing officer Shrivastava adds, "This recognition reflects the success of our campaign with our Brand Ambassador, which is aimed at demonstrating the power of an idea by looking at mobile telephony and what it can do, in a way that's fresh, imaginative and elevating".[111] Even though these comments and the campaign lines may indicate a presentation of "responsible corporate" intervention leading to the development

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[110] http://telecomtalk.info/ideas-abhishek-bachchan-campaign/3382/. Accessed: September 17, 2011.

[111] ibid.

or "elevation" of the country and its people, when one analyses the strategy of construction of this virtual-India closely, one realizes that the issue is not that direct. For, these representations do not simply articulate a (competitive) take-over of the responsibility of the nation-state by the corporates, or what can be seen as an articulation of corporate governmentality in liberalization. Instead, the representational practice involves a "playful" or ironic negation of the very structures that provided the base for state-intervention in the post-independent India.

The strategy of these ad-films of constructing a virtual nation by presenting "ailments" of the society and a solution which cures the ailments needs to be contrasted with what Jameson has demarcated as the "utopian program." Jameson, doing a close reading of Bloch's analysis of utopia, points out that while the negativity of the utopian impulse—a non-realization of the utopian—is one way to look at the imagination, there is also a different negativity at the heart of the content of the imagination itself. Jameson argues that even utopian programs that base themselves on totality and closure do not provide a fully established positive world. Instead they in fact isolate an issue, a problem that is deemed as constitutive of the present world, the removal of which will provide the fundamental change (Jameson, 2005:xi-22). The IDEA campaigns, in a generic manner, seem to index such utopian programs. In each series they isolate one issue of the body politic—caste divisions, population explosion, absence of health consciousness, illiteracy, uneven development etc—and present IDEA products as the solution to remove the specific ailment, resulting in the new changed "India." Yet rather than a "serious" take-over of the nation-state's project, the ad-films in fact offer a critique of the authoritarian tendencies involved in utopian programs by providing hyperbolic solutions, and trivializing them.

The seemingly bizarre and hyperbolic presentation of "population explosion" and the solving of the ailment with new entertainment best capture this aspect of critique of the utopian

program of the Indian state. The issue isolated—population explosion—was in fact one of the central planks of the most authoritarian regimes in the history of Indian state, the national emergency of 1975-77. One of the central agendas taken up under the developmentalist vision by Indira Gandhi's dictatorship regime was "family planning," with the vasectomy clinics serving as the symbols of a new "purposeful" India. As Emma Tarlo, in her brilliant ethnographic study has shown, family planning under the national emergency was in fact less about birth control than a reorganization of power and property relations. As sterilizations to be performed were assigned to varied governmental institutions as goals to be achieved for evaluating their efficiency, sterilization became a requirement for people to even retain and gain housing allocation and property rights (Tarlo, 1995:2921-2928). The penultimate shot of the closure of the vasectomy clinic in the ad-film is pertinent in this context. The scene shows a room full of chairs, and the chairs vanishing one by one. The shot moves to the outside of the building, and one sees on the building a huge board with "Vasectomy" written in English. Two Sikh teenage boys point to this board and perform a short celebratory Bhangra dance, gesturally declaring it to be closed. Rather than the issue of population explosion being cured, the shot brings back the symbolism of the ruthless moment in Indian history that set up the agenda of population control in the first place. The declaration being made by two Sikh teenage boys only amplifies the critique because of the Indira regimes' relation with the community, as Indira Gandhi's army entered the Golden Temple in Amristar breaking down the Khalistan movement, and the riots against Sikhs in Delhi undertaken by Congress workers after the death of Indira Gandhi.[112]

While I have highlighted the ad-films as providing a critique of the "serious" utopian programs, they also simultaneously create a virtual nation. Let me elaborate on the virtual nation

[112] One of the guards who shot Indira Gandhi is believed to be a Sikh, and this was taken to be the incitement for the riots in Delhi by Congress workers against the Sikhs in 1984. The people who led the riots still hold key positions in Congress, contesting and winning elections, and the judicial system has still not ruled against the perpetrators.

created through these hyperbolic solutions to highlight how the virtual is distinct from a simple articulation of a corporate governmentality. As distinct from the utopian programs, the ad-films do not posit an "authentic" or "real" nation that is made manifest through representation. Instead it constructs a virtual that does not stake a claim to authenticity, and is fleetingly materialized only in commodities. What is critical to note in the ad-films that we discussed is the disjunction the solutions create between the actual uses of the products and the virtual nation that is made manifest. One can see an element of the actual use-value of the products such as in the case of cellular network, the wide connectivity even in the rural areas, or IDEA 3G providing new applications on the mobile phones. Yet the thrust of these ad-films in making manifest a virtual India is not on the direct uses or the use-value that the products provide. Contrary to the direct one-on-one link established between the use of the product and the identification to the virtual India, what the campaigns highlights is the non-commonsensical "idea" arrived at by the "Sirji"—almost an epiphany—that can momentarily, fleetingly, envisage a new India. The hyperbole and humor of the solutions do not provide a sense of "reality" and "seriousness" to the claims as in usual advertisements.

The joke on the "Sirji" as a "visionary" who produces these ideas yet turns out to be the one who seemingly "loses" or is ambivalently placed at the end in relation to the idea that he has come up with and followed by the populace, plays on this "in-authenticity." In the case of the *Walking and Talking* ad-film, the "idea" that people should talk as they are on the phone transforms the mass into a panopticon, as the populace starts to not simply "walk while they talk," but in fact make everyone they meet around them talking on the phone also follow the dictum. Yet the ad-film ends with showing the "Sirji" as a doctor losing his job since everyone is seemingly fit and healthy now, reminding one of the bizarreness of the expectation of such a

drastic change. In the last shot of the "population control" ad-film, the ambivalence is taken to the extreme by playing on the awareness on the part of the audience of Abhishek Bachchan's status in the "real" life as one who has just recently become a father, with the much publicized pregnancy of superstar actress Aishwarya Rai. The friend to whom "Sirji" had originally given the idea of population control asks in the end, "and what about your child?," and Abhishek Bachchan, with his head down, not looking at the camera, sheepishly and quickly responds with a wave of hands—"before 3G." As the hybrid concoction "Sirji" in the IDEA tag line indexes, it is a "self-conscious" play that does not stake a claim to the authentic. It is not a coincidence that all the products that I have discussed so far—cola, cellular connections, adhesive, and chewing gum—belong to the category of "mass" products in India, cheap products that are used by a wider segment of population, where turnover in terms of number is crucial, more than for the high end consumption products such as cars, or even the high-end products within the "mass" category such as Nike shoes. It is the "mass" as the consumer (or both the "masses and classes" as Bachchan puts it) which allow these representations to make a foray into the space of the nation-state, providing a commentary on the post-independent Indian nation state's history, and staking a claim for commodities in organizing the new world of liberalized India. Yet the virtual nation so fleetingly envisaged while linked to the post-independent "developmental aesthetic" established in the period of the national emergency (Prasad, 1998) does not simply stage a transfer of the responsibility/possibility of the transformation of the nation from the nation-state to the corporates.

In stressing the "in-authenticity" and "play" in representation of the heterogeneous body I am not suggesting that in the Indian advertising industry there is no investment in the use of the strategy of the homogenous modern subject in the construction of the national. In fact, the latter

strategy of representation can also be seen as widely used. What is critical to note, however, is that the category of the homogeneous modern subject is not the only way of channeling the nation in the moment of liberalization. In fact, the nativized bodies are a more seminal way of constituting the national in the age of liberalization. Let me elaborate the point by analyzing responses in the way of ad-films of two multi-nationals—Tata (an "Indian" MNC)[113] and Coca Cola[114]—against critiques of their actual practices that emerged in the Indian context. These responses present starkly the distinction between the homogenous modern subject and nativized bodies as two distinct modalities of constructing the virtual nation. The distinction between the two approaches also highlights the aspect that the virtual nation envisaged through the strategy of nativized bodies is also a gendered problematic, where the reorganization through nativized bodies in liberalization is presented as a problematic of masculinities.

Tata had been in the midst of controversy for the last few years as the proposed starting of their factory for the new *Nano* car (a "hundred thousand rupee car" for the lower middle classes) in Singur in West Bengal became the site of struggle and confrontation. The communist government that took over the land for the project for Tata came severely under critique for its

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[113] Tata was started in 1868 in India and is one of the largest corporate groups in India in terms of market capitalization and revenue. Named after its founder Jamsetji Tata, the group is to a large extent still controlled by the family. Currently "the Tata group comprises over 90 operating companies in seven business sectors: communications and information technology, engineering, materials, services, energy, consumer products and chemicals. The group has operations in more than 80 countries across six continents, and its companies export products and services to 85 countries." The total revenue of Tata companies, officially, was "$83.5 billion in 2010-11…with 57.8 per cent of this coming from business outside India…Tata companies employ over 425,000 people worldwide." The major Tata companies include Tata Steel (tenth largest in the world), Tata Motors (among the top five commercial vehicle manufacturers in the world), Tata Consultancy Services (a leading global software company), Tata Power, Tata Chemicals, Tata Global Beverages (second-largest player in tea in the world), Indian Hotels and Tata Communications. (http://www.tata.com/aboutus/sub_index.aspx?sectid=8hOk5Qq3EfQ=).

[114] Coca Cola , which was operating in India as a branch from early 1950s wound up its operations in India in 1977 when it decided not to accept the requirements of the then Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) of India. The FERA required the foreign equity share to be limited to 40% in the case of consumer goods. Rather than accepting the regulation, Coca Cola decided to wind up its operations and this became a symbolic statement of its "foreignness." The re-entry of Coca Cola to India in 1993 was part of the liberalization policy adopted by the Indian government. Now Coca Cola operates in India as the company Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited. See, Subramanian, K., 2002.

neo-liberal policies, "land-grabbing," and authoritarian actions in Singur, and lost power after 34 years in the recent elections (2011) in the state of West Bengal. While the factory itself moved into the state of Gujarat, where greater concessions were given to the corporate, Tata has started a new campaign for re-instating its brand. As it was the take-over of the land from the marginalized that was at the center of the controversy, the new campaign works with the emancipatory potential offered by Tata as an employer for the marginalized in India. With the tagline "This is not advertisement, This is Life," the *Tata Steel* ads present the new "Tejaswini Project" started by Tata as empowering and ushering in "light" in the lives of 23 marginalized and tribal women. Showing how Tata has employed the women as operators and drivers of heavy-duty machinery and vehicles, these ad-films follow the styles of socialist realism or utopian programs, telling the sad tale of poverty of the women, and the transformation brought about by their new employment. The marginalized, in this manner, is brought into the mainstream as a fully emerged modern subject.

Coca Cola, on the other hand, had been under fire in India[115] as tests conducted by an environmental NGO, Centre for Science and Technology, showed that the pesticide content in Coke distributed in India is much higher than the limit set out, and that therefore Coca Cola follows discriminatory practices in the space of the "third-world."[116] In response to the wide

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[115] The Coca Cola factories have also been sites of struggle and confrontation, for instance the long drawn struggle in Plachimada in Kerala. But this has not grabbed the national attention like the issue of pesticide content. For more on struggles against Coca Cola on the issue of pollution and ground water loss, see Aiyer,2007; Ravi Raman 2005;2007. For a collection of news report on the agitations, see Campaign to Stop Killer Coke, http://killercoke.org/crimes_india.php.

[116] The controversy over the presence of unacceptable levels of pesticide content in aerated drinks came out first in the nation-wide study of 12 brands, and the concluding report presented by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), an environmental NGO based in New Delhi. In their study CSE shows that aerated drinks in India have four kinds of pesticides in them, and the Report gave the following conclusion: "Total pesticide residues in the 36 soft drink samples manufactured in India was…34 times the EEC limit for total pesticides. Total pesticide residues in all brands of PepsiCo products (India) were 0.0180 mg/L, which is 36 times the total pesticide limit and in all brands of Coca - Cola Co (India) were 0.0150mg/L which is 30 times the total EEC limit for pesticides" ("CSE Report: Analysis of Pesticide Residues in soft drinks". 2003:13. Electronic document. Accessed from,

spread critique that grabbed national attention, Coca Cola brought out an ad-film which tried to "argue" its case out. The ad-film works with the trope of the "Bengali babu" and shows the effeminate *babu* telling his wife and kids that you cannot drink Coke, because "there is some problem with it" or in fact more aptly "there is something fishy about it" (*kucch gadbad hain*). The wife argues with him, representing the case for Coke. It becomes clear quickly that the *babu* does not know beyond some hearsay: an undefined "they have told," therefore he concludes that it has some problem. The wife rebukes him by asking whether he will do whatever "they" say, and goes on to present the global consumption of Coke as the justification for Indian consumption. "Use your head, it is a 100 year old company, and people in 150 countries drink it…from Netherlands to India." The *babu* is irritated and decides to "test" it himself, and gulps down all the four Coke bottles that have been brought for the family. He is happy, and says the tagline for Coke "it is *thanda*" (*thanda* literally means cold). He springs into a dance, showing his happiness and love for his wife, with the last words of the song sung by him sitting in her lap and holding on to her. While one thought the trope of the *Bengali babu* as effeminate constructed

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http://www.cseindia.org/node/527 on 09/25/11). With a comparison of standards followed by the brands in US and India, the report also highlighted the discriminatory practices and "dual standards" adopted by the global brands in following the health and environment standards in their operation in the "third world". The study concluded, "Comparison of Indian soft drink samples with US samples, The Indian Coca-Cola had pesticide residues 45 times higher than the EEC norms, while no pesticides were detected in the same product procured from the US. Similarly, the Indian Pepsi had pesticide residues 37 times higher than EEC norms while its US counterpart was without any pesticide residues" (ibid.). The conclusion of the report grabbed national attention, and highlighted the fact that in India aerated drinks is totally unregulated by any health standards. This led to the establishment of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to study the issue, and recommend health standards and regulation. The JPC after confirming the presence of unacceptable levels of pesticide content banned aerated drinks in the cafeterias and canteens of the State. In the international scene, as AnathaKrishnan Aiyer points out, the issue got exacerbated with John Vidal publishing the journalistic piece "Things grow better with Coke" in *Guardian* (Aiyer,2007:644). In the article Vidal provides interviews with farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in India where farmers claimed that Coca Cola and other aerated drinks are "invaluable" to them because they are used as pesticides in their farms for growing cotton and chilli (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/nov/02/india.johnvidal. Accessed 09/25/11). The farmers claim that "their cola sprays…are safe to handle, do not need to be diluted and, mainly, are cheap. One litre of highly concentrated Avant, Tracer and Nuvocron, three popular Indian pesticides, costs around 10,000 rupees (£120), but one-and-a-half litres of locally made Coca-Cola is 30 rupees. To spray an acre would be a mere 270 rupees" (ibid.).

in the colonial discourse[117] is dead, dusted, and has been "thrown into the Arabian sea" to use an agitational slogan in the Indian context, in the ad-film, one sees the return of the trope (as with other things thrown into the sea) as it is deployed by an MNC in its "vulnerable" moment.

The distinction between the two modalities of constructing the nation cannot be starker. Tata was critiqued for its corporate structure of "land-grab," and answers it by highlighting the logic for its practice: in return for displacement, the establishment of factories will generate employment, and Tata is a "concerned" and "good" employer. Coca Cola, on the other hand, is under fire for its product quality in the space of the "third world," a critique that goes against the very logic of brand—"Coke is a Coke is a Coke," whether it be Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Chhattisgarh or the moon! If the test results get acceptance, it goes against the global narratives where Coke is regarded by the first world travelers as their only solace and hope in the turbulent, bacteria and pesticide filled waters of the "Third world." It is precisely this point that makes the response even more striking. The "test" conducted by the *Bengali babu* is a test of drinking, with the happy conclusion that "it is *thanda*" (cold).[118] It does not try to address the critique by giving actual test results from a laboratory; instead, with the trope of *Bengali babu*, the critique is displaced as a problematic of masculinities, a specificity of the "Indian" psyche. To critique or challenge the brand, it seems, is to show that the "old" India remains, an India of reticence to consumption. It is therefore for nothing that the *Bengali babu* is brought back for "testing" Coke. On the one hand the *babu's* "hysterical" and seemingly "baseless" nationalist worry based on only "hearsay" about this global or foreign product being "fishy" and discriminating, indexes the post-independent history of (nationalist) action against Coca Cola that led to Coca Cola

[117] Sinha, Mrnalini, 1995.

[118] I will analyze the campaign of *Thanda matlab Coca Cola* (lit: Cold means Coca Cola) in detail later in the chapter, and what this takeover of a generic term for "cold" in Hindi by Coke involves.

withdrawing and winding up its operation in India in 1977, only to re-enter in 1993 with the deregulation in the liberalization process.[119] On the other hand, ultimately, even with all the shackles, the *Bengali babu* is indeed effeminate, and can be coerced (or one can say, instigated or even duped) by his wife to consume. Once the effeminate starts consuming, all reticence and "ideas" are let off: he will happily gulp down four Cokes at a stretch, and will break into a dance.

To recapitulate my isolation of the tendency of nativized bodies constructing the virtual nation, I have argued in this section that it is three inter-related characteristics of the practice that produces the virtual nation-India:

a. With a conception of "mass" as the consumer, the strategy provides a critique of Indian nation-state interventions in the past and stakes a claim for commodities in reorganizing the present.

b. The nation so produced is not a "real" nation; instead it is a virtual nation fleetingly produced, and materialized only in commodities.

c. The transformation in liberalization is presented as a problematic of masculinities.

With these broad characteristics I have delineated, I will now move to the specific case study, the *Happydent-White Palace* ad-film, to hone in the arguments, and to lay out how the practice can be seen in the wider context of branding and globalization.

[119] And, it will not be way off the mark if one gives another layer to the *Bengali babu* in the post-independent period, with the change of Bengal from being the center of colonial India and therefore the literati and the nationalist movement, to the margins of the "national" by becoming the bastion of the left from the 1977. The earlier left position on anti-imperialism and sovereignty of the nation makes Bengal a symbol of nationalist resistance (or reticence within the narrative of the ad-film) in the moment of liberalization.

II. ***Happily Denting*: *"Nativized" Body and "Somatic" Nationalism***

The *Happydent White Palace*[120] (from now on *Palace*) ad-film of the chewing gum brand Happydent White created a furor when it went on air on Indian television in April 2007, and has won national and international acclaim in the form of advertising awards.[121] In addition to the wide appreciation of the creative aspect of the commercial,[122] the ad-film also had a phenomenal impact on the sales of the client. The director of the ad-film notes that *Palace* that was "released over two weekends had to be taken off-air because the product was sold out," and the client had to install a new factory.[123] The success provides an opportunity to see just how the images worked and how they created a consumer. The ad-film is significant in *Happydent White* brand history in India because the film was geared towards altering the brand from the segment of children, to that of teenagers, or "youth." It is in this shifting target consumer to the "youth" that the ad-film takes a move towards a new virtual-India, which can place itself in the new liberalized context.

Let us look at the ad-film closely. The one and a half minute film starts by setting up a "dark" figure, in an arid, bushy, rural landscape. The first shot depicts a turban-clad figure

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[120]The brand Happydent was launched by Perfetti in 1970 along with Alpenliebe and Big Babol. The Happydent White right now holds the second spot in terms of quantum of sales of chewing gum in India, next to the global brand Orbit. While analyzing the brand, and specifically one of its ad-films at such length and marking its significance, I am not making any claims for the outright success of its brand construction in India.

[121] The awards won by *Palace* include the award of Grandprix in Advertising Agencies Association of India, the London Awards 2007 TV Cinematography Gold, the London Awards 2007 TV confectionery/ Snack, Silver, Gunn Report 2007, Cannes Lions 2007 Film Silver.

[122] Responses to the advertisements in cyberspace is filled with expressions such as the "best ad ever to come out of India," or "The Palace campaign by McCann-Erickson was truly the first creative from India that took the international ad fraternity by storm. What makes HappyDent Palace ad's international success truly glorious is that it was entirely an ad by the Indians, for the Indians."

(http://www.indianexpress.com/pictureStory.php?galId=968&pg=1&view=1,) or "Palace ad is one of the best television ads I've ever seen. It's been running since a long time, with svelte music and an awesome concept, it's seems hard to ever get tired of watching this ad" (http://www.conetrees.com/2008/11/linkblog/a-fantastic-creative-the-happy-dent-palace-tv-ad/).

[123] http://www.boardsmag.com/articles/magazine/20070901/Madhvani.html.

wearing a *dhoti*, his upper body covered by a shawl furiously riding a bicycle in the dusk to the background of a glowing red sun. To the rhythm of the *dholak*,[124] the next shot shows him riding the bicycle over a long bridge. He loses his balance half-way through the bridge as the front tyres of the cycle break, the tyre rolling into the river eluding his effort to catch it. A close-up shot shows his face for the first time, and we see him slapping his fore-head in disgust. While his body is covered by the shawl, his curly hair and thick golden colored bangles get highlighted. These long and medium shots of the figure in the landscape riding a bicycle, and the cut to a close up of the figure slapping his fore-head resembles a cartoonish setting of a typical scene, much reminiscent of illustrations of rural India such as those of R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*. The bicycle indexing modernity in the rural setting and even his sense of urgency (has anything happened in the village, for which he is a messenger?) fits into the schema of the typical scene. Yet even with the first close-up a tension is set up precisely in the body of the dark figure: the darkness and the "subalternity" of the figure, the aridness of the landscape, stand in contrast to the shine of the hair, and the glow of the ornaments and clothes adorning the body.

Leaving the bicycle, the figure starts sprinting. The shot cuts to a green Rolls Royce car coming from the rear. He moves to the side of the un-tarred road, giving way to the car even while attempting to hitch a ride. With the shot of the car, the paradoxical characteristic of the figuration gets crystallized. One realizes that in place of the headlights of the car are positioned two figures similar to the figure we have been watching. Bare-bodied, wearing only green turbans and a *patta* around their backs, and positioned as the headlights of the Rolls Royce, one of them turns his head without losing the posture to give a scornful stare to the central figure as the car passes. To the repetition of the words "*tera dil roshan tera mann roshan*" (when your

[124] A popular double ended percussion instrument.

heart is bright your soul is bright) by the chorus, a succession of shots sets the world inhabited by these figures as he continues his run to assume his own position- as a 'servant'- in a Rajasthani city of the early twentieth century. He runs by the side of a line of pillars, acknowledged by similar figures who have stationed themselves in *mallakhamb*[125] poses on the top of the pillars, holding the perfect posture in the air of being parallel to the ground balancing on to the top of the pillars with their hands. He reaches the central gate, but it gets closed, as we get a glimpse of two figures doing *namaste* perched on the spot of lamp-posts on both sides of the gate. After jumping the wall careful not to draw any attention to himself, he passes through the side of a tennis court that has figures positioned in pillars while a young aristocratic woman leisurely plays tennis. The exterior of the palace is complete with a shot of him passing through the side of a swimming pool into which an old aristocratic woman is diving, while dark legs of figures with thick metal anklets protrude out from the water.

A succession of shots sets the interior of the palace. Continuing the highlighting of leisure of the class the figure seems to be serving, the *raja* is presented as an old man, bejeweled, and dozing on his throne in front of a register. The raja is woken up by a servant ringing a bell. As the *raja* walks slowly, the central figure reaches the top of the stairs having crossed a series of *jharoka* with a line of figures holding dance poses wearing lamp shades on their heads, and a man bejeweled and wearing a red turban perched on the lower part of the stairs showing his displeasure to the late arrival of the central figure. Just managing to beat the *raja*, the figure throws away his shawl, revealing the thick glass necklace covering his chest, and jumps down a chandelier to take his place at its tip, as other similar men already positioned on it watch him. He falls down on to the center of the chandelier, arching his back, and balancing on it with his hands

[125] *Mallakhamb* is a North-Indian body practice, a form of "gymnastics yoga." I will elaborate the form and what its use in the ad-film involves in much detail shortly below.

and feet, and pops something into his mouth and chews in an exaggerated and fast pace. He opens his mouth throwing light to the plate of the *raja*. To the angry stare of the *raja,* as he fails initially to throw the light on the perfect spot, the figure adjusts his head, moving it in different angles, and finally gets the perfect angle by jutting his neck out. A succession of shots shows the lit up chandelier, as all others positioned in the chandelier have followed this procedure of lighting up. The "event" of the chandelier lighting up is "deified," using a camera angle that visual studies scholars have called the "Darsanic": the camera placed lower, and looking upwards capturing the chandelier through the frame of two white Greek cupids acting as *dvarapalaka* on each side—their arms stretched and pointing towards the lit up chandelier.[126]

Let us stop here and analyze this lighting-up with respect to the body practice deployed in the ad-film. Rolls Royce, Greek cupids, "dark" servants performing exotic *mallakhamb* on chandeliers and pillars, their darkness even more pronounced in the lighting up, the *raja* and *rani* involved in their "leisure" activities...is it the colonial gaze? The frame of colonial discourse as a colonial taxonomy of bodies seems to be there. While there are distinctions between the aristocracy and the servants, the staging of the space of a Rajasthani city involves a staging of the 'natives' as a whole. How different is this from the notion of Oriental India as the land of *Maharajas*, snake-charmers, and bare-bodied magicians performing rope tricks?[127] Yet it is not the colonial gaze, the all-powerful gaze that stands outside, and frames the whole scenario, which gives the structure for these bodies. Let us look at the specific body practice of

[126] For the "Hindu" concept of "darsana," a concept of looking where the power lies in the image rather than the onlooker, and how popular Indian cinema uses a reconstituted "Darsanic," see Vasudevan, Ravi S. (2000).

[127] The colonial discourse comes up as a significant reference in popular responses to the ad-film. In these cases, the representation is seen as a continuation of the representation of India over the years. For instance, one respondent asks pertinently how the representation in *Palace* is different from the "Indiana Jones and Temple of Doom movie where they showed Indians eating monkey brains and eyes in soup?" http://shalinjain.com/index.php/2006/08/14/happydent-white-india-ad-brilliant-execution/. And pertinently the world captured by the latter film is also that of the Rajput aristocracy, which the *Palace* stages.

mallakhamb, and what this arguably "unique" "Indian" body practice contributes to the hyperbolic world.

The postures that the figures are performing on the poles, the pillars, on the walls, and the chandelier are postures from the popular North-Indian body practice (gymnastic yoga), *mallakhamb.* Mainstream history tells us that *mallakhamb* as a body practice originated as a complementary practice to Indian wrestling, but at present has "evolved into a sport in itself" (McDonald, 1999). Like wrestling, the references for *mallakhamb* are available in medieval Sanskrit text *manasollas.* The sport assumed a centrality in the colonial period, and was revived in late nineteenth century.[128] *Malla* means wrestler, and *khamb* means pole, and the body practice is a kind of pole gymnastics, a competitive version of which is part of the Indian National Gymnastics Championship from the 1950s onwards. The sport gives stress to physical training and balance, as performers perform yoga poses balancing with their hands and feet on a fixed, or a hanging pole, or a hanging rope. Like Indian wrestling, *mallakhamb* is pre-dominantly male-centered, and of the three central types of *mallakhamb,* in the competitive version, women perform the rope *mallakhamb.* Performed both individually, as well as in groups, the different versions of *mallakhamb* are also part of popular circus acts. In the *Palace*, the postures that the figures perform—being perpendicular to the ground on the pole, or stretching on the chandelier hanging upside down, are familiar *mallakhamb* postures. Yet what is significant in *Palace* is that the body practice is invoked not in the familiar manner of display of skills. Instead, the bodies skillfully performing *mallakhamb* practices are transformed into servile and productive bodies, lighting up the world at the instantiation of the commodity chewing gum. What does such a transformation of *mallakhamb* performers as embodying the condition of objectification under

[128] One of the central figures for the revival was Balambhatta Dada Deodhar, the physical instructor to the King Bajirao Peshwa II.

capitalism itself signify? And critically, why *mallakhamb*? To understand the valence of the revised deployment of the body practice, we need to contextualize it in relation between physical culture and the conceptualization of the Indian nation. It is precisely one facet of imagination of an Indian nation, what scholar J.S. Alter has termed as "somatic nationalism," which *Palace* invokes and deploys, only to displace it, and to be brought under the problematic of nation under liberalization.

In recent years, a great deal of scholarship has come out on the relationship between physical culture and nationalism in the Indian context.[129] These studies have highlighted the contradictory production of the colonized (male) in the colonial discourse: both as "effeminate" with no physical prowess, and also its opposite, as "savages," who are uncontrollable. Modern nationalisms in the colonized space such as in India therefore had a project at their hearts of inventing, and re-inventing physical cultures—athletics, martial arts, sports—that could embody, and create the national "spirit" and the essence of the nation. Arguing that physical cultures and corporeality should not be "seen simple reflective mirrors of hegemonic culture" (Alter, 1994:558) or a by-product of ideology, J. S. Alter's analysis of Indian wrestling as "somatic nationalism" argues that the corporeality in Indian wrestling constitutes an "utopian" possibility of the nation, a process standing in contrast to the European-based physical cultures such as imbibed by the Hindu-right wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In *Palace*, the use of *mallakhamb* (though the practice also has an independent status from wrestling) can be seen as setting into motion, though in a paradox, similar conceptions of Indian wrestling as affording an alternate possibility.

[129] See, Sinha, Mrinalini, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly' Englishman and the 'Effeminate' Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century*. 1995; "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India". *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4, At Home in the Empire (Oct., 2001), pp.489-521.

Contrasting Indian wrestling to the Hindu right-wing physical culture of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Alter argues that both share philosophical assumptions to a considerable degree as they base Indian nationalism on "Hindu" philosophy. Yet he points out that one need to make a subtle distinction, a distinction that makes the Indian wrestling a critique of Hindu fundamentalism from within the framework of Hinduism. The RSS, Alter argues, basing its philosophy on an "action-oriented" interpretation of Bhagavat Gita, derives its training and organization in *sakhas* from a "western" form of physical training (PT drills and exercises), where there is a "loose connection between body discipline and ideology." In contrast, Indian wrestling, "is a somatic ideology in its own right," and is geared towards the holistic "psychosomatic" development. Therefore, for Alter, wrestling offers a "utopian vision of nationalistic reform that takes the body as a primary object of discipline and reform, rather than as a simple tool for the organization of a militant ideology" (Alter, 1994:558-559). Rather than simply being a sport, Alter argues that the somatic practice of wrestling is a "way of life," and "creates an icon of the individual self." In analyzing *Palace* one needs to precisely hold on to this discourse of "discipline" and "reform," and a regimentation that the wrestling bodies undergo and embody as something beyond the familiar notions of a sport. It is against the backdrop of the alternate "utopian" nation, brought about through "regimentation" and "discipline" that the *mallakhamb* performers performing yoga poses in contradiction—a simultaneous utopia (lighting up), and dystopia (servile labor)—proposes a displacement in liberalization of the lived body and the conception of transformation of the individual self into an icon. Let us look at this alternate construction of self involved in Indian wrestling to hone in the pop philosophical displacement *Palace* undertakes.

Alter's central argument of wrestling being a “way of life” is based on the conception of a totality, and the direct connection between somaticity and ideology in wrestling. Every act involved in the life of the wrestler—eating, exercising, playing, sporting, sexuality, leisure (or its absence, such as in the case of watching television, and cinema)—Alter argues, is linked to, and is directed by a wider philosophy of discipline and reform that is based on an “ethical” position. In wrestling, “the body is developed for moral and ethical ends, and the moral enemy is every man’s inner susceptibility to “sensual seduction.”” The primary organizing practice that allows for such totality and direct relationship is the practice of *brahmacarya* (disciplined celibacy), a practice that supposedly allows one to control the “inner susceptibility” to “sensual seduction,” and helps one control consumption and “lust” thrown open by modern society.”[130] Let me quote from Alter at length to hone in this argument of celibacy—which has at its heart a strategy of control of consumption—that wrestlers seemingly involve in their life practices. Alter writes,

> “the first step of any exercise begins with the question: Who am I, and what am I put on this earth for? It proceeds along a direct path of regimentation to a subjective experience of self as whole and healthy. Far from being clones in the growing ranks of the merely physically fit, wrestlers develop their ability to translate a bethak, a dand, a glass of milk into self-realization, and this into the subjective reform of moral problems. Such a fit person, as described by Atreya, is “free from egoism, desire, anger, vanity and attachment. Everything is under his control—the body, mind and speech. All his selfish interests get merged with the

[130] Alter argues that *brahmcarya* involves taking on "specific attributes of the brahmachari, or adolescent disciple in the classical four-stage Hindu life cycle scheme: absolute devotion to one's guru, respect for one's elders, a serious attitude toward learning and knowledge, devotion to God, and keeping company with like-minded youth. The brahmachari wrestler must not go to cinema halls and watch films, he should not loiter on the streets or promenade in public, he should not snack on salty and spicy foods sold by street-side vendors, and he should not smoke, drink, or chew tobacco. The idea behind these injunctions is that all young boys, but the young wrestler in particular, must be protected from the seduction of modern life where consumption, sensuality and lust threaten [draw on this for above issue] to undermine discipline. A film with sexually suggestive scenes, taken in conjunction with the 'mental tension' created by caffeine, nicotine or alcohol intoxication, is thought to have a powerful deleterious effect” (Alter, 1994:573-574).

social interest. He is engaged in bringing about social welfare without any selfishness. He is really a model of ideal and pure behavior. He is not governed by anybody, but his very nature is ethical. Right actions are performed naturally by him"" (Alter, 1992:258).

While such a full-fledged claim of "naturalness," and "utopian" nationalism based on moralism is problematic,[131] what is critical for our purposes here is that the figures in *Palace* invoke through embodiment precisely this position; only that it is done in a paradoxical fashion. The figures chewing the gums and lighting up the world, and more specifically the last shot of *Palace* where an individual figure is perched up on the lamp post in the darkness of night, jutting his neck out, and lighting up the world around him while insects fly around his face, seems to be strictly playing with the following ideas in Alter's proposition about making icon of individual self in wrestling: a clear perspective of regimented body, translating consumption (chewing gum) and body practice into "self-realization," and a (hyperbolic) perspective of "social welfare without any selfishness." The second part of the ad-film stresses the effect of such individual construction in the "collective" in its presentation of a celebratory production of a "collective" world as the camera shots revisit the spaces that one saw earlier in the dusk- the tennis court, the *jharoka*, the line of pillars, the swimming pool, and a new space of a *pandal*. All of them are

[131] In Alter's analysis, one can notice an empiricism that limits, and precludes a critique of the role such constructions of masculinities undertake. As Mrinalini Sinha argues, such method takes for granted an already "found" masculinity in a defined space or "cultural ethos" as "what one comes across manifestations of masculinity (and femininity) can always already be found in the 'home', 'the workplace,' 'the neighbourhood', and so on. While providing illustrations of a certain masculinity (and a certain femininity), such an approach may not exhaust the political efficacy or ideological significance of masculinity. It risks assuming an underlying continuity of real women [and real men], above whose constant bodies changing aerial descriptions dance'" (Sinha, Mrinalini, 1999:453). The limit moralism involved in defining the "social ills" as set out by the "cultural ethos" takes over as the limit of the critical analysis itself, as for instance, when Alter talks about the imagination in wrestling ideology of starting "*goshalas*" (cowsheds) in the nation in places of temples, mosques and churches. He writes, "To be sure, this is a very Hindu solution to the problem of communal disharmony; but it is, nevertheless, a Hindu critique of Hindu chauvinism, which is *perhaps as much as can be expected for the time being*. Since the *goshala* is a metaphor for both the nation and the akhara it is possible to see how wrestling is envisaged as an alternative to nationalistic Hindu dogma; as a return to something more basic than chauvinistic 'Hindu sentiments.' Less of a rallying point than a remedy for social ills, the akhara/goshala can, as one wrestler put, 'build up a tower of national strength' that will not insulate itself against the modern world, but will restructure that world in somatic terms by giving rise to a generation of Gandhian wrestlers" (Alter, 1994:584. Italics mine).

now fully lit up by people throwing light by opening their mouth. The music has fully moved into the celebratory tone with the chorus singing "*jagmaga de muskura le*" (light it up, shine it up, smile!). The entire city is lit up by the figures in the position of lamps, and as the music ends with the shot of the *pandal*, in the silence of the night one sees the solitary man perched up on a lamp we discussed above. A voice in a high pitch says "Happydent white chewing gum for sparkling teeth" with an image of the city and the palace lit up in the night in the frame.[132]

Yet the alternate world of somatic practice is brought about at the instantiation of the commodity, and the Television and the brand image guide the pleasure of watching such bodies. Rather than the structure of individual self setting an "example" leading to a collective change in Gandhian philosophy (Akeel Bilgrami, 2003) or the self-contained psycho-somatic totality in wrestling, the regimentation and assumed control seems to be inextricably linked to an even more powerful disciplinary apparatus. The urgency of the central figure is presented as a run to be on time, the failure of which is scorned by the others from his class. Further, the "utopian" nation where self-realization meets the social—a lit up Rajasthani city as "India"—is more than anything a direct play and spoof on the political vision of liberalized India in the mainstream: the construction of brand-India with the terms "India-Shining" in the rhetoric of the economic right-wing. The term "India Shining" was initially a coinage created by the advertising firm Grey Worldwide (India) for a 60 second video campaign highlighting the achievements of the then Indian government led by the Hindu right-wing party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).[133] It later became the central catch-word for the election campaign for the BJP in the national assembly polls of 2003-2004. The campaign was controversial both for its claims for the idea of "India-

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[132] The scenes were filmed in Panvel, near Mumbai, by Ram Madhvani via Equinox Films, the entire set, including the bridge, was created artificially with the twelve of the twenty actors doing the martial art poses coming from Kerala, while the rest were from Mumbai.

[133] http://www.rediff.com/money/2004/apr/02shining.htm.

shining" primarily based on the IT boom, GDP growth figures, and the claim of India's "arrival on the world-stage," as well as for the blatant use of public money for political campaign. In the polls, in spite of (or in fact, possibly due to) the immense media campaign, and use of the term in interventions such as the "India Shining" *yatra* (procession/journey) across the country by the BJP leader L. K. Advani, the alliance, National Democratic Alliance, led by BJP, was spectacularly defeated.[134] How can a global brand base its brand-experience on what seems to be a paradoxical use of the "Indian" body practice, as well as a spoof on the claims of liberalized "India-Shining"? How can such a paradoxical embodiment elicit identification without rupturing the virtual imagination of the liberalized nation?

III. *The event of brand and the Super-flat nation*

Naomi Klein in her seminal work *No Logo* sets up the historical context of change from commodity-based organization to one based on brand-making within the rise of capitalism, and the large scale changes the latter brought about in organizing production, consumption and the distribution of products. Noting the centrality of branding as providing the "core meaning of the modern corporation," and the practice of advertising "as one vehicle used to convey that meaning to the world," she highlights that in the context of "manufactured sameness" with the rise of mechanical age, branding became a fundamental part of corporate commercial survival. With the sense of same-ness of mass produced products in the factories, the companies along with producing products, simultaneously manufactured an autonomous "image-based difference" (Klein, 2000:26). The critical shift with the rise of branding, Klein argues, is therefore a shift

[134] The phrase is still in circulation, and is often used in the positive sense by the proponents of neo-liberal reforms to represent the "resurgence" and the "feel good" factor in the mythology of India's arrival on the global stage. Much like the infamous coinage "shock and awe," the term is invoked in the critiques of Indian neo-liberal regime to highlight everything wrong in the vision of the Indian ruling class.

from the centrality of commodities to that of brands "as experience, as lifestyle" (2000:42).

The centrality of brands as experience brings in a shift in the form of advertising, what Maurice Lazzarato in his article *Struggle, Media, Event* foregrounds as the "event" in advertising. Lazzarato argues that rather than the established notion of "representation" that is based on "subject-work" paradigm where "images, signs and statements have the function of representing the object, the world" one needs to posit brand as an "event" whereby the "images, signs and the statements contribute to allow a world to happen" (Lazzarato 2003:1). Critiquing the production-centered paradigms of analysis of commodity and the assumed notion of passivity of consumption in such frame-works, he argues that "consumption is not reduced to acts of buying and carrying out a service or a product… but instead means, first of all, belonging to a world or a universe" (ibid.:3). The sign regime in contemporary capitalism does not represent the world, but is a "prompt, command, representing per-se a valuation, judgment, a view of the world, of themselves and others" (ibid.). What he highlights through this articulation is the distinction of this condition from what is theorized in classical Marxism through the concept of commodity, and the illusory effects of ideology. As different from classical Marxian formulations, the sign regime rather than having the real world as its referent is "an incentive, a prompt to assume a form of living, i.e. a way of dressing, eating, communicating, residing, moving, having a gender, speaking etc" (ibid.).

The conception of branding as an event involves a change in the conception of the relationship between the corporeal and the incorporeal- the lived body and the body as an ideal. It is an "event," Lazzarato drawing on Delueze's notion of an event, that "first distributes modes of perception in order to prompt ways of living; it actualizes modes of affecting and being affected in souls, in order to realize them in bodies" (Lazzarato, 2003:3). Rather than the

corporeal consumption of the products, it is the incorporeal that first produces a "change in sensibility" and a "change in our way of making value judgments." Branding therefore involves a process of double consumption: first, the consumption of a virtual world of the "possible"- the incorporeal- and second, the actualization of this world through the material consumption of the product. As different from the surplus produced by labor forces in classical Marxist analysis, the fetishistic/metaphysical is the manufactured virtual world of brand experience already made manifest through advertising. Following the Deluezian argument Lazzarato notes,

> "…advertising represents the spiritual dimension of the "event", which the enterprise and the advertising agencies invent using images, signs and statements, and which must be *realized in bodies*. *The material dimension of the event*, *its realization, is completed when the ways of living, ways of eating, of having a body, dressing, residing etc are incarnated in bodies*: one lives materially among goods and services that one buys, in the houses, among furniture, with the goods and services one has seized as "possible", in the flows of information and communication, in which we have submerged ourselves" (Lazzarato, 2003:3. Italics mine).

The "spiritual" aspect of the event of advertising and more specifically the broader process of branding which it is part of, has also been noted by Naomi Klein and Sue-Ellen Case in the context of the practices of corporate take-over of public space and cyber space, and a de-centering of production from factories as they have been contracted and sub-contracted to the "third world".[135] The radical change brought about by this perspective of brand making is to

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[135] Naomi Klein discusses the spiritual dimension in the history of corporate practice highlighting that not only brands were produced around the comforting presence of "Aunt Jemima", but the notion of spiritual was articulated and theorized in corporate practice in more clear-cut religious manner. Klein notes that Bruce Barton, who constructed General Motors brand to one of "American family", in 1923 conceptualized the role of advertising as one that helps "corporations find their soul" and drawing on his religious upbringing theorized, "I like to think of advertising as something big, something splendid, something which goes deep down into an institution and gets hold of the soul of it.... Institutions have souls, just as men and nations have souls" (Klein, 2000:28).

change the old paradigm of marketing as selling a product to a new model where the "product always takes a back seat to the real product, the brand, and the selling of the brand acquired an extra component that can only be described as spiritual" (Klein, 2000:42). Expanding on the lines of the "corporate transcendence" in brand-making, Sue-Ellen Case notes two strategies-production of the virtual and 'avatar'—where following the corporate take-over of what were once public domains of the social and the cyber sphere, the sign systems no longer refer to a social "real" (Case, 2007:200).

Happydent White being one of the sixteen brands of Perfetti Van Melle, dealers in confectioneries who started their operations in India in 1994 with a single brand, presents an interesting case. As we discussed earlier, with the introduction of Happydent White the company was moving from its traditional market of children younger than fourteen years towards a new market of teenagers and youth, highlighting the "teeth-whitening" quality of the product. Prasoon Joshi, the executive creative director of the Happydent White film highlights the challenge involved in advertising the product: "Frankly the world is not waiting for a new chewing gum. We had to make an impact with the product and not sound too preachy while doing the same."[136] In this shift from children to the adult world, the branding raises the question of what happens when this "possible world" or transcendence effected is not to a sense of community based on notions such as freedom, comfort, or security and other emancipatory notions that one usually associates with brand experience. What territorial imagination is this virtual based on?

Superflat nation

[136] http://www.ndtv.com/news/videos/video_player.php?id=1085337

The critical issue in the imaginations surrounding the territoriality of India, like in the case of many other territorial imaginations, has been how to define the multiplicities and diversities marked by different languages and cultures within the national territory. This question of multiplicities of the nation is also the key concern for ad makers in India. Prasoon Joshi points out that the significant challenge in ad-making is to create an aesthetic that can move across the cultural and linguistic boundaries of this "layered country" with many different temporalities and spaces. The challenge becomes even more central in the case of mass products such as chewing gum that are based on high turn-over sales. What territorial imagination and market does the Rajasthani city in the Palace ad-film conjure up for the mass product chewing gum and how does this get marked as 'India'? Happydent White Palace while constructing a Rajasthani city in its specificity—the palace architecture, the dressing of people, the landscape—can be seen as constructing a nation in the present, which can be sensed and perceived by the viewers as different from the colonial/western. The director of the ad-film, Madhvani presents this construction of the distinct non-western nation in a direct manner when he says that while conceiving the film they decided that it "should be rooted in India, and we should do it like it's ours. Why should we borrow when we can borrow from ourselves?"[137] Let us probe this articulation of the virtual world of a "non-colonial" India and how this imagination is constructed.

Mazzarella in his study of advertising in India during the globalization process points towards the phenomenon of post-1990s India, where a narrative of globalization has been constructed in terms of "cultural revival." Pointing to the failure of the initial efforts of MNCs in achieving their sales projections, the narrative of globalization in India projected the "resilience"

[137] www.boardsmag.com/articles/magazine/20070901/Madhvani.html.

of Indian consumers, where as Mazzarella argues, the legitimation of Indian advertisers of their own roles led to a redefinition of the process of "consumerist globalization" as one instead of "bringing cultural imperialism- was being figured as the opportunity for a comprehensive revitalization of "Indian-ness"" (Mazzarella, 2003:247). Yet this revitalization of Indian-ness in the ad-world is not simply a direct one. In Madhvani's terms, the perspective they have tried to achieve through the ad-film is one he calls "ethnic/exotic"—"ethnic" standing for being Indian and exotic suggesting an approach to this ethnic from a "foreigners eye."[138] This articulation of a national as opposed to the colonial through an exoticization of the ethnic—a 'self-exoticization'—stands in contrast to positions that Indian art movements and modernisms assumed over the last century and is different specifically from theatrical modernisms that gave the call to "back to the roots" in the late 1960s. In Indian theatrical modernisms, the turn to incorporate tradition and find "roots" was a maneuver of finding the form that could signify a way of life that has been "lost" or displaced/marginalized due to the colonial encounter. This assumed different tendencies. While some tried to construct the roots to get away from the aesthetic of the proscenium space and realism,[139] others expressly invoked the multiple spatio-temporalities of the nation to bring to the fore the heterogeneity of the nation and political identifications that could be marked through their distinct cultural ethos. The 'self-exoticization' involved in the process of branding while linked to, and making use of these representational histories of "ethnicity" and "tradition" can be seen as following a different process. Self-exoticization links the question of "ethnicity" and "tradition" to the representational matrix of commodification in the present moment of globalization. As different from the questions of authenticity of tradition, and an effort to foreground the "real" alternate experiences associated

[138] www.boardsmag.com/articles/magazine/20070901/Madhvani.html.

[139] See Dharwadker, Aparna, 2005.

with the heterogeneties, the central reference that the ad-world works with is the received representations of tradition and ethnic, and the process of self-exoticization itself. Rather than the nation in its depth/deep structure and heterogeneity, the world of brands can be seen as deploying what has been theorized as the aesthetic of "superflat," which by moving through diversities can construct the sense of the national without allowing them to create a rupture in the imagination.

As an aesthetic, the term super-flat signifies a literal, flattening visual aesthetic, where three-dimensionality is converted into two-dimensionality. A prominent example of such literal flattening and a glossed up surface is the anime productions- the latest Japanese exports to global economy- which is derived from the Japanese popular visual culture of *manga*. As a concept, the term was first posited by Takashi Murakami to highlight a change in the national aesthetic of industrial Japan in the contemporary moment. As different from a total invisibility of any sense of Japanese-ness in the earlier commercial exports by Japan—as in the electronics and hardware that bases itself on 'neutrality'/ 'universal'—the exports for cultural capital accumulation in recent times has seen a shift to an aesthetic that highlights, and makes visible cultural specificities of Japan. The shift signified by the term superflat is therefore a shift from invisibility of any specificity of the national in the global, to one which is based on an aesthetic of hybridity: the hybridity of the aesthetic capturing and reflecting the dialectic and current valence of Japan in its historical encounter with the US. Foregrounding the centrality of "reflexive cross-cultural negotiation" and "intercultural hybridism" in the conception of superflat, Dean Chan notes that Murakami "harnesses the persistent local/global dialectic as a marketing strategy for Japanese cultural production" (Chan, 2007:786). What is central in superflat is therefore an awareness of the hybridity and a conscious play with perceived different worlds. Similar to what Murakami argues about superflat in Japan "[It is] a flattened, self-

mocking culture" (quoted in Chan, 2007:783), the ethnic/exotic in the case of Indian ad-films points towards this conscious play involved in the construction of a national aesthetic for the commercial market. Let us look at process of ethnic/exotic construction more closely.

The "ethnic" side of the construction of the nation as "non-colonial" is done through production of a "performatic"[140] of the non-colonial that even in such a small time- span as that of advertisements (in our case 90 seconds) identify itself as belonging to the specific ethnic, and thereby becoming part of the nation. Here the term "ethnic" is not referring strictly to ethnicity, though categories such as "*jatt,*" "*hyderabadi*," "*madrasi*" comes up again and again in the ad-world. The term refers specifically to identifiable worlds of familiar: spatialities, including the Hindi rural, the urban, the *muffasil* or small towns, the old cities within the mega cities; the spaces such as buses in the rural crowded with people and animals, the domestic, the joint family, the nuclear family, the market place. All these spaces as structures of feeling become "ethnically" marked through language, region, class, gender, and are mostly already established in popular imaginations as stereotypes. For the advertisements that aspire to the national, it is these familiar ethnic worlds as opposed to the limitations of individual languages that become the central component providing the experience of the virtual world of the nation. The ethnic, as different from language, is constructed by creating a sense of the world through visuality (costumes, gestures), music (as soundscapes within the ethnic world, as also extra-diegetic) and commonly shared and familiar structures of "myths," world of cinema, and the ad-world itself. When language comes in, it also comes in as part of the ethnic—as already marked and exoticized. In the case of Happydent White there is almost a complete absence of spoken

[140] I am using the term performatic as used by Diana Taylor to highlight a difference of stress from the term performativity as used by Judith Butler. While performativity in Butler's analysis is an effect of the discourse itself, Diana Taylor with the term performatic points out that while linked to discourse the term signifies performance in its "adjectival" form, offering a site of agency in itself for performance (Taylor, 2003).

language except the song in Hindi and the final statement of "Happydent White chewing gum…"

What is crucial in recent times in the strategies in producing the flavor of the ethnic is that the world of the ethnic is produced at the instantiation of the brand, where the event of brand prompts and brings into existence the ethnic. The Coke campaign "Thanda Matlab Coca Cola" (*thanda* literally meaning cold in Hindi, and the campaign says "cold means Coke") that stakes claim for a generic term for something cold to one that of brand experience is an epitome of the production of the ethnic at the command and prompt of the brand, where the global intrudes and takes over the local by instantiating it.[141] In the series of campaigns the superstar Hindi film actor Aamir Khan, the brand ambassador of Coke, staged the nation in its multiple ethnicities as he came one after the other as a "*Hyderabadi*", as a "*Jatt"*, as a "*Pahadi"* etc, and in "*thande ka tadka*" campaign as a *Japani,*[142] the latest one being an animated avatar of himself riding motor bike through the virtual world of video-games. As Appadurai, in his study of cook-books in India (Appadurai, 1988) has shown the construction of the national is achieved precisely through invoking regions in stereotypes, these staging of the 'ethnic' consistently work through the production of stereotypes that are already in circulation.

What makes these productions of ethnic in the contemporary ad-world different is the process of exoticization as a process of de-familiarization where the cultural eye of the public that can decode the ethnic is also failed (mainly through humor and hyperbole), and made to experience a de-familiarization or a "possible" ethnic that is not simply the received stereotype. While not undermining the power of the stereotypes in these depictions, and its urban, Hindi and

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[141] It seems after such a takeover, one may need to create a new word in Hindi if one has to use a generic term *thanda* as different from Coke!

[142] Here he comes into a restaurant holding a camera, being the stereotypical "Japanese" for the restaurant workers, who in at the end of the ad turns out to be Indian confirming the fact with his machismo that he only looked like a Japanese because his face was bitten by mosquitoes. Here, (the trust) in the national boundaries, allow the global brand such as Coke to present outright racism.

English speaking assumptions, and its outright racism in some cases, what seems to distinguish these staging of the ethnic from constructions of diversity by the nation-state such as cultural festivals and national parades is the notion of exoticization as a self-proclaimed aesthetic that disavows any link to a representation of the authentic or real from the outset. The self-proclaimed aesthetic therefore is an aesthetic that flattens these diversities by highlighting the mediated aspect of the representations in the forefront, thereby making the creative part of mediation a value of the experience itself. The creative mediation thus becomes the value of brand experience.

While looking at the "national" aesthetic of superflat as produced in the dialectic of local and global, Tadashi Uchino posits how social, economic, and political actualities of neo-liberalism has to be seen as the context and driving force of the new aesthetic. In this articulation, Uchino seems to be foregrounding two inter-related aspects. First, expanding on the arguments of death of originality and "unstoppable proliferation of simulacra in post-modernity," Uchino foregrounds the tremendous change that has been introduced with the process of commodification in embodying, and visualization of the body. Second, though acknowledging the fact that analyzing the new aesthetic in relation to the "local" provides an accurate description of part of this aesthetics, by contextualization these processes in it terms of globalization, neo-liberalism and commodification, one can move away from the discourse and imagination of a national "uniqueness." The ethnic/exotic of branding that constructs a superflat India needs to be seen in the context of such a dialectic of the local and the global.

In the case of Happydent White Palace one can see a play on the temporality of the present, by deploying the different worlds derived from discourse of colonization, and India's present position—"India Shining"—in the global where apparently the colonial history has been

shaken off. What would give us an entry into understanding the simulated character of the virtual world of Happydent White Palace is the technique of collapsing of the multiple temporalities of past, present and a "possible" ("made manifest" in Lazzarato's terms)—the commodity of chewing gum with its logo (en)light(e)ning a "past"—a science fiction in reverse. The bodies doing the *mallakhamb* poses are actual; but this actual is deployed as a seduction mechanism for the possibility of the virtual experience mediated through the technology and brand effectiveness. In analyzing the production of experience in heritage industry such as the Disnified world of Plimoth Plantation, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that in such heritage sites distinct from conceptions associated with museums, the ethnographic object is not framed as the object bestowed with authenticity. Instead she argues that the actual, the ethnographic object, is displayed along with the virtual to create truth effects for the virtual. What is central in such experiential world is that it is the mediation that is done through the "process" whereby it is the process—"the methods by which they are made and in a way of doing," which is "simultaneously a way of knowing"—which creates authenticity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998:195-196). Performance in Plimoth Plantation, for Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, is not one of finding the "surrogate" for a lost original, but a simultaneous maintenance of the actual and virtual, and the different temporalities through the performance of the site. Rather than looking for perfect substitutions where one gets lost in the pilgrim world, she highlights that in experiences such as Plimoth Plantation, it is precisely in the failures of "perfect time machines" and cross-overs epitomized by the gift shops, and canteens that the museological interface comes to the fore offering pleasure, education and experience. In Happydent White Palace, this process of holding on to, and deployment of the actual for transcendence to the brand experience seems to be critical. The use of music in the commercial in fact expressly works with this philosophy as

Prasoon Joshi notes that the music used in the ad-film—*Sufi* style—has been specifically used because of its association to the "spiritual", the "fantastical nature", which for Joshi "suspends all logic and makes you lost in that."[143]

As different from ethnographic objects in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett formulation, the actual itself in these cases are also simultaneously enmeshed in the world of representation that have converted notions of "tradition" and "India" into experiences—the historical films, received visual images of "native" body, and modernism's deployment of "non-western." With the explosion of commercial period films based on Mughal, Rajput and the colonial period, and the conversion of palaces into museums in the heritage industry, the sphere of "tradition" has been moved to that of visual consumption of various aspects. This includes the consumption of wealth and glamour associated with the erstwhile aristocracy, the indigenous cultural tradition of music, and alternate body practices such as *yoga*, *kalaripayattu,* and *akhada*-based wrestling. In the *Happydent White Palace* ad-film all these representational apparatuses are invoked, with Rajasthan serving as the ultimate metaphor of Indian-ness because of its centrality within the heritage industry. Yet *Palace* also provides a new experience- an exotic one- as it converts these different experiences into one image highlighting the aspect of commodification and visual consumption of wealth in all of these. We see the *dhoti* and turban clad dark men wearing necklaces, the aristocracy's leisure and wealth, the subaltern bodies performing *mallakhamb* poses. Yet when all of these are converted into one image of the bodies doing the *mallakhamb* poses on the chandelier to light up the palace, it calls into attention the invisible lure of consumption that one is involved in, calling attention to the very system of representation within the commodification regime itself. The paradoxical nature of the brand experience that *Palace*

[143] http://www.ndtv.com/news/videos/video_player.php?id=1085337

constructs is that one is not outside the world of objectification as a tourist who can consume this wealth and glamour. It is precisely through the objectified bodies of the "servants" of the past perched up on lamp posts lighting up the world around that one becomes part of the brand experience.

IV. *Body, Technology, and "Brand-India"*

To make sense of event, Delueze notes, "it would be necessary for the individual to grasp herself as event; and that she grasp the event actualized within her as another individual grafted onto her."[144] The male bodies in *Palace* who position themselves on the lamp-posts lighting up and the world around them can be seen as undertaking a literal counter-actualization of the event of commodification. Yet what is striking about this visual of counter-actualization is that in this grasping of the event as self and its actualization as another individual grafted onto self, the violence involved in the grafting is the moment of celebration. The ad-film in this sense, almost seems to parody the conception of event and its counter-actualization through a literal depiction. Here one does not encounter simply a "coolness" or "feel good" of the hybrid that denies the disjunction between lived body and body as simulacra by an ultimate transcendence to the virtual. Instead, the disjunction, and the forceful and violent realization of the lived body in simulacra is the central moment of euphoria and brand experience. This counter-actualization, not merely in the virtual world of advertisement, but also revealed by the intensity of consumption of the product of chewing gum in actual, has to be seen from the perspective of "labor" of making manifest and counter-actualizing the event of commodification and globalization in an ex-colony.

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[144] Quoted in MacKenzie, Ian, "What is a Political Event".

Chewing gum, like its "other" such as cigarette and betel leaves, the traces of which it tries to clear, mask, and cover-up, shares an ontology with them. The consumption of these take a visible form of action, gesture—a performance—that is construed differently in different places and times: it is a performance that is marked through gender, class and age. Apart from the notions of utility of chewing gums such as breath freshening, whitening, and helping one to be "alert" and "concentrate," the performance of chewing gums plays with the symbolic in the form of seemingly appearing "raw," "masculine,"[145] and being involved in unproductive indulgence and a potential for "anti-social."[146] The physical actions of the male bodies in *Palace* chewing vigorously and furiously, framed through the narrative of the central servant trying to avoid being late to assume his position, can be seen as effort to signify a change in identification surrounding chewing gums from the domain of masculinity, indulgence and rawness to that of labor under capitalist production. As different from the lazy meandering of cricketers with chewing gum in their mouth in a five day cricket match, the clear shift that *Palace* marks is the need to conceive the product as that which one has to pop into the mouth, chew as fast as possible and, forcefully, to produce the new lit up world. In this sense, it has moved from the sphere of personal identification and subjectivity to that of a collective production of a world—the world of globalized "India Shining"—where one finds one's own objectified, but successful

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[145] As a humorous blog commenting on the "absence" of masculinity in Indian cricketers puts it categorically, "Some will point out that Sachin's [Tendulkar] brutalisation of Shoaib [Akhtar] at the 2003 World Cup was as macho as it gets. No. You don't get it. Sachin may be the greatest batsman since Bradman, but he is no Viv [Vivian Richards]. No chest hair, no chewing gum." (http://www.cricinfo.com/page2/content/story/444066.html). In the conversion of Indian cricket team into "Team India" as a brand in the recent times, one can see at its heart a masculanizing of the team.

[146] In an extreme articulation of this, one can see the banning of chewing gum in Singapore to prevent the pillaging of property.

position. Shining, as a quality—both as value of "fairness" vis-à-vis body,[147] and the nation as shining—as already established and made possible.

In the discussions earlier in this chapter we looked at the context of branding processes in relation to the invisibility of labor in factories in the West, as the actual production of the commodities has been dispersed to the third world. The *Palace* with its targeted market of middle and lower class adults in India seems to work with the awareness among people of the actuality of production in the present moment of globalization and their own assumed place in the system. Rather than following the mythology of a future "universal" world in apocalypse of destruction, where technology has replaced human bodies, or completely displaced manual labor,[148] what we encounter in *Palace* is a perspective that foregrounds the "human" labor that contributes to the present moment of globalization. It is not an imagination of a world where technological advancement seems to create the distinction between humans and robots, where the former have been released from the line of production by the latter (with the allied fear of ultimate take-over by robots), and the enmeshing of their worlds- technology substituting bodies. On the contrary, in *Palace,* bodies take the place of or substitute for technology. This perspective of highlighting laboring bodies in globalization is similar to the conception of the production in the futuristic movie *Sleep Dealer* (Dir: Alex Rivera, 2008) where one encounters the image of labor as "human veins connected to the global economy". In the movie, the future world is constituted by robots doing construction in the US, but their movements being done by actual human bodies connected to the circuit, standing in the line of production in Latin America, performing their actions in thin air and resulting in absolute physical exhaustion. The fact that

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[147] The impact of beauty products such as "Fair and Lovely" and its tapping of both the non-colonial 'Hindu' obsession with color (as evidenced by term *varna* (color) to distinguish the four fundamental caste categories) and the complexity of race brought in colonial encounter has been studied by scholars.

[148] Just to name a popular filmic representation, *Wall-E*.

there is not a single shot of the product itself, the chewing gum, except the last shot of the cover of product with the name Happydent White taking all the space, forcefully highlights this transformation of the product. While initially the strategy of not showing the chewing gum sets up the suspense, the complete invisibility of the product in favor of the actions of popping "something" into the mouth, chewing forcefully, and an open mouth throwing light, transfers all the attention to the laboring body. While it might be "strange" to raise the "realist" question of what happens to the chewing gum after it is so chewed by people, it is striking how distant this "possible" world where the chewing gum seems to have become one with the body of the laborer, becoming the light emanating from the "soul" with nothing left of its materiality, is from the perspective of chewing gum as performance through making bubbles or the potential for pranks after chewing it. This scenario of labor indeed is not far away from the present actuality of the call centers where one is connected to the global through technology, incorporating the immaterial event of the "first world," yet feeling the disjunction of the reality of the third world India outside the "souls of institutions."

In *Palace* the divisions that scholars have articulated between creative/immaterial labor, and material labor can be seen as projected and fused within the same image. The paradox of objectification as brand experience, one could argue, is this paradox of the virtual made possible through bringing together both these aspects of labor. The creative labor of imagining a lit up world (brand experience as creative mediation that we noted in the earlier section) and the material labor (physical labor of being in the line of production) works simultaneously rather than one negating the other. It is not an imagination derived from the homogeneous march of the capital demolishing feudalism, and producing nomads in a complete de-territorialized, post-gendered, and post national world. On the contrary, it is based on a sense of capitalism

functioning precisely through the established boundaries, and creating new ones in the process of accumulation. The colonial-time, the time of the *maharajas*, aristocratic leisure, and their servants has certainly passed. The non-productive aristocracy swimming in wealth—the critique placed forcefully in *Palace* in the form of the figures of aristocracy missing to connect the tennis ball, *maharaja* dozing with the pen in his hand in front of a register, the woman jumping into the pool wearing gems on her forehead—has moved to the realm of history, and therefore of visual consumption for the middle classes in the new sign regime of capitalism. To the middle class that has been freed from the "abstinence" philosophy of a national (epitomized by Gandhi), and to which vistas of wealth consumption of the new Indian rich has been opened out, the small mass product chewing gum offers the possibility of the world as global at the scale of the body and the present. The aspiring middle class already having a glimpse of the possible wealth they can have and have the hope of belonging triggered with the mundane everyday mass object of chewing gum.

In making an assertion of the awareness of the systemic ordering and objectification as brand experience, I am not suggesting that the ad-film is caught in the grand notions of perception in the "Indian" context such as "karma" philosophy at work: the acceptance of fate and the stress of *Bhagvat Gita* on the philosophy of doing what is required without thinking of results, and the notions of karmic philosophy allowing people to hold on to such experience of objectification. Even if it played upon, it is certainly not in the register of the action of the hero Arjuna, an all understanding action, which is undertaken after he has been shown the full paradox of all the worlds by Krishna. If it plays with the part of traditional temporality, it is probably from that part of tradition that has totally normalized oppression as noted succinctly by

Avanthi Meduri in her trenchant critique of a liberal perception of tradition.[149] When the identification is channeled through the subaltern figures, what is being made visible is this continuation of the chain of oppression and its normalization in the Indian psyche—both in the "tradition"/history of the colonial time, as well as the present take-over of these by corporate logic.

While we looked at technology and bodies in a more general manner till now, the analysis of the specificity of the technology and the body chosen by the ad-film gives a more clear sense of the experience of objectification as marked through class and gender. The technology is that of electricity. Like fire in the narratives of "man," electricity presents a definite point that signifies modernity as ushering a complete change in lives world over. Electricity with its direct reach to the masses is at the same time the most qualitatively priced technology due to its absence or restricted reach in many parts of India. The lower middle class that is watching these performance of lighting up in their individual or collective televisions is part of this successful technological march having been more mobile (at least in the present moment though probably they may have got electricity after much contestation and still has to suffer the absence periodically) than those in darkness. With the mundane object of chewing gum, this class can visualize a qualitative transformation of the world of the present. And while imagining this qualitative transformation through a mundane commodity, the reality of non-accessibility of electricity and basic resources is displaced through a fantastic virtual of self-

[149] Arguing against the liberal assumptions in certain critique of intercultural contacts Avanthi Meduri writes, "The truth is that in India, especially in artistic endeavors, the end is all that matters. It does justify every means. We in India have very clear distinctions between means and ends. I remember sitting at the feet of my dance teacher one quiet evening, accusing him, in my Western way of thinking, of being less than human when he could have been more. He patted me benevolently on the head and said, "My child, you are youthful and therefore focus on irrelevancies. Every sorrow, every unhappiness evident here in the rehearsal process, in our institutions, is transcended, even negated, in the artistic expression of rasa, or creativity." I was chilled to the bones at this deafening truth of human reality and art. I fled the country and made a pact with the big fish of the West, but could not forget that quiet evening of deep fear and profound insight." Meduri, Avanthi, Phillip Zarrilli, Deborah Neff, 1988:14-19.

sufficiency.

In *Palace*, the possible world actualized is also at the same time a male world. Barring the two aristocratic women, one young and one old, the world of commodified tradition is inhabited by males, and not just as bodies but also as voices. At the level of the product chewing gum, this points to a specific moment. The eroticization of male bodies with the entry of visual culture of movies and television has been commented upon by scholars (Muraleedharan, 2005). The commodification in *Palace* as different from the dominant "fair" models for consumption is a specific deployment of subaltern male bodies in the world of tradition- the ornamented, dark, "native," skilled bodies performing *mallakhamb* poses. It might be coming from the effort to induce the male audience that is conceived in the dominant national rhetoric as the field of abstinence: as different from men, women being always already (and "dangerously" for Indian/Hindu cultural ethos) in the grasp of commodity.[150] And the call for male consumption of chewing gums through labor (consumption itself as labor) works on that level as a call to national subaltern masculinities to shake off its reticence to the new change. Therefore, while the product itself is moved away from the domain of personal identification and possibility of indulgence, and the male bodies themselves comes across as "non-masculine," the underlying philosophy of consumption is one of constructing a specific masculinity in the present. With the trope of tradition, this also highlights the way in which capitalism and commodification work within the nation, taking over tradition and its assumptions: feeding the stereotypes, rather than breaking them. Would representation of women doing *mallakhamb* or similar postures create a rupture in this ironic play of humor and objectification as brand experience? Would it break the

[150] While not denying the generic lure of commodity, Mankekar has shown how the dominant discourse of "Indian culture" in the moment of commodification relegates desire for commodities as specifically a female domain. (Mankekar, Purnima, 2004:403-431).

already naturalized *karmic* in not just challenging the received representations of tradition, and the place of women in such tradition, but even more so pointing towards the sexualized nature of labor both in colonial as well as present capitalist "brand-India"? The trope of tradition, as scholars have commented about the dominant discourse of technology within the ad-world, in this manner, follows a simultaneous process of making invisible women's labor. And, importantly, it reflects the gendered nature of assumptions of the narrative construction of the transformation of India from colonized to post-independent liberalized brand-India.

Chapter 4 : *To be or not to be an Elephant…That's not the Question*: *Zooesis and "Becoming with" in India*

Sahyande Makan: The Elephant Project (from now on *The Elephant Project*) is a "cross-cultural" adaptation of the Malayalam poem *Sahyante Makan*[151] in Malayalam, Japanese, and English by the Kerala based group Theatre Roots and Wings. Directed by Sankar Venkateswaran, the performance involves the established Japanese actress Mikari from the (now dispersed) Ku Na'uka Theater Company, embodying an elephant, for what some reviews have called a "sweeping solo."[152] The performance premiered in Thiruvananthapuram (2008), and has been performed in different parts of India and abroad as part of theater festivals.[153] The poem *Sahyante Makan* (1944) constructs the figure of a tusker that holds the deity on its back in the temple ritual-festival space (*pooram*) running amok in the state of musth[154] in the actual festival space, as in its fantasy state it sees itself in the wild. The poem ends in pathos as the tusker is shot dead at dawn after the carnage. The figure of the tusker, for the poem, at a basic level, is an

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[151] In the chapter, I am using distinct spelling for the poem and the performance. The poem is more commonly spelled in English as *Sahyante Makan* with a "t." But the performance, in its title, spells it as *Sahyande Makan* with a "d." The former will be generally regarded as a correct rendering, and the references for the poem in English will commonly come up with this spelling. The latter one with a "d," instead of the stress "t," is a spelling based on common oral stress of saying the word in contemporary Malayalam. I am maintaining the "t" for the poem, and "d" for the performance to help the reader locate the references easily.

[152] Majumder, Rishi, "Elephant Woman." *Culture and Society*, *Tehelka Magazine*. Vol 6, Issue 46, November 21, 2009. http://www.tehelka.com/story_main43.asp?filename=hub211109elephant_women.asp. Accessed. 10/01/2011.

[153] Apart from the premiere, the performance was staged in the following venues within the nation:

NINASAM Theatre Institute (Dec 2008) Heggodu, Karnataka; Meghdoot open air theatre (January 2009) New Delhi; Rai Umanath Bali Auditorium (January 2009) Lukhnow; Vyloppilli Samskriti Bhavan, (March 2009) Thiruvananthapuram; Prithvi Theatre Festival, Bombay (November 2009); and International Theatre festival of Kerala, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi (December, 2009). The one international show was staged in Gimhae, South Korea in April 2009.

[154] In Asian elephants, musth is a physiological and behavioral condition that primarily male elephants undergo periodically. During musth, the elephant seems to lose control of its state, and shows heightened aggression and has more successful chance of mating. I will expand on what musth as a factor achieves as a problematic in the poem in detail later.

exploration of the state of enslavement of the animal within the anthropocentric world of human and human gods. In the present chapter, I analyze the adaptation through performance as an instance of "zooësis," a term proposed by Una Chaudhuri, "to refer to the way culture makes art and meaning with the figure and body of the animal" (Chaudhuri, 2006:2), positing that the embodiment of the elephant needs to be seen as a problematic of the nativized body in the present moment of globalization.

In the previous chapters, I deployed the category of nativized bodies as enmeshed in the emergence of a consumption regime and enabling the flow of capital, as well as a critical category deployed for a gender critique of the national-popular in the photo-performance of N. Pushpamala. While constructing and playing with nativized bodies, and highlighting how they work within the contours of objectification in representation, in these works, the field of identification, though not humanist, was still in the sphere of what can be seen more broadly as the domain of "human" bodies. In the present chapter, I analyze the issues involved in embodying the "animal" body, or precisely the male Asian elephant (*elephas maximus*)—the tusker.[155] Looking at the "figure" of the elephant as an instance of nativized body, I argue that the performance, and the embodiment of the elephant by the Japanese actress Mikari necessitates a reading at the intersection of three critical perspectives: performing animal, gendered discourse, and intercultural practice in the space of India. It is by placing the question of performing animal as intersectional that the performance challenges the human(ist)-centric discourse, and its assumed binary of human/animal. By providing a "situated-ness" in the figure

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[155] The elephant population has broadly been categorized in two species, African elephants (*Loxodonto Africana*) and Asian elephants (*Eliphas Maximus*). While in the case of African elephants, both male and females have developed tusks, in the case of Asian elephants only male elephants have tusks. In the chapter, I maintain a distinction between the terms elephant and tusker to highlight the masculinity discourse that frames the practices surrounding a tusker.

of the elephant, and exploring the question of "becoming with," the performance posits what Donna Haraway has articulated as a practice of "alterglobalization."

<u>Zooësis in the space of India: Situated-ness of "companion-species"</u>

Let me start with a description of a scene from the performance. The performance space consists of a raised platform in the center with percussionists occupying the space surrounding the platform. Traditional lamps are lit on the rear, and the stage is a minimalist one, with the only properties onstage being two raised tusks at the back of the platform and a stool in the center. A figure, whose body totally vanishes behind the *kimono*, as the *kimono* is lifted over the head with both hands that are horizontally stretched out, is standing still, back facing to the audience. On the back of the *kimono* is a glittering golden caparison. With the human body invisible, the *kimono* geometrically indexes an "elephant," with the stretched out hands inside the *kimono* indexing the stationary elephant ears on both sides. The figure starts slowly moving and stretches from side to side, arching the spine without losing the geometric pattern. The music from the live wind instrument gives a feel of "wild," as it is played with more air than required for a clean note, breaking the "coherent" note usually used in ritual music. Arching the spine and moving slowly from one side to the other, the figure slowly (taking time) turns and faces the audience with the *kimono* still covering the face. Breaking the slowness of the movement till this point, in an abrupt movement, the *kimono* is separated from the face, and a white painted face of Mikari, her eyebrows highlighted by black color, comes to fore. Her arms stretched outward, she looks the audience with a sense of vulnerability and pathos. As a shout from the outside space is heard, relinquishing the stylization and slowness of the previous indexing of the elephant, she violently tries, and eventually succeeds in pulling out the caparison from her back. With arms stretched

out, she moves dynamically in fast circles, throwing away the caparison in one of the circular movements, even as she has reached one corner of the stage. The stage is darkened as she stands looking outwards to the rear in one corner of the stage. Slowly, white spots of lighting come on to the stage. The tusker is in the "wild."

As sound of "breeze" is heard, she sits on the ground, swaying to the breeze, smelling the breeze. With the absence of a visible trunk, with the whole body swaying, she takes in, and gives in to the smell. She gives a full stretch with hands extended upwards, as if one (human) is stretching after waking up in the morning. She stands up and holding her back stooped, hand held parallel and facing down, fists rolled, and starts to move slowly swaying her whole body. She has what can be called the "charm" of the elephant (derived from the common Malayalam word, *aanachandam*: lit. "elephant charm" to suggest a leisurely swaying gait). In an abrupt instant, her hand becomes the "trunk," plucking out a branch or a fruit, and tasting the flowers with the trunk. Something bites her in the neck, and her neck and face is contorted. But quickly, she frees from the contortion to move again with the "charm" of the elephant described above. She plucks a coconut leaf (?) stretching her "trunk" up in the air, and hits the leaf with her trunk on to her forehead forcefully as a clear movement. With the dynamic movement of her left hand as trunk (while the rest of the body maintains a static pose) she hits the "coconut leaf" on the ground. Arms stretched out, she moves into a "free" movement, moving in a circle, and sits down. She is feeling "cold"; she tries to get a fly away from her body. With more free movement she moves in a fast pace in a circle around the stage and lifts the stool at the center over her head and forcefully places it in the middle. She climbs on the stool, and standing straight moves into a full gestural mode of acting derived from Kutiyattam. Some gestures can be identified—she is swirling things, smelling things, with one moment coming across as a clear gesture where she is

holding a “bow” and “arrow.” Once again, suddenly something bites her neck, and she tries to take it off. In the process, she takes a hand out of the *kimono*, and suddenly her right hand moves into a gesture of holding a dear one in her arms. After seeing her moving her lips with no sound, we hear a sound emanating from her mouths—a “lullaby” in Japanese—pointing things to the “dear one,” plucking things from trees and feeding the “dear one.” In an abrupt move she collapses from the stool onto the floor. The live percussion rhythm of the Kerala temple ritual (*panchari melam*) is at its loudest and crescendo. She moves on the floor in pain, scared. Her neck strained she again dynamically moves in circles around the stage and falls onto the stool. She climbs the stool, facing the audience with the back creating once again the geometric pattern. The ears are waving, and the rhythm of *panchari melam* is in full blast.

The temple elephant adorned with a glittering caparison, the elephant as an icon metonymically presented in a caparisoned geometric pattern of a *kimono*, the sense of smell as a distinct ontology of relating to the world, corporeal writings ranging from fully codified Kutiyattam gestures that seems illegible to the “un-educated,” to the familiar indexing of elephant through elephant charm, to a contorted body in pain moving in dynamic circular movements, and the elephant singing lullabies… While I will analyze these aspects individually in detail in the later sections, here I will highlight the fundamental question that the juxtaposition of these diverse strands in combination raises—what does it entail to embody an animal within the perspective of what Donna Haraway has termed as an “inter-species communication” or “companion species”? How can one embody an “ontological” other, an elephant, without the process being a “well meaning” but effectively “imperialistic” mode of claiming to represent the other (Haraway, 2008:21)? How does embodiment provide a materiality of human-animal interaction in the space of India, taking into account the specificity of the heterogeneous

cleavages[156] not simply of human-animal, but also the intertwined ones of woman-tusker, word-embodiment, Kerala-India-Japan?

<u>Encounter as "Becoming with": The "figure" of the elephant</u>

In her analysis, Una Chaudhuri posits the specific challenge embodiment and the mechanism of theater need to address when it involves in the critical process of zooësis. Drawing on the Deluzian concept of "becoming animal" to think through zooësis, she argues that "becoming" as a process resists "metaphor and mimesis." Instead she posits that the process of becoming "courts fleeting synecdoches, momentary metonymies, shifting interstices" (Chaudhuri, 2006:5). In the sequence I described in detail, one can see distinct kinds of body movement. One, indexing the tusker through certain recognizable traits such as movement of body parts (a hand becoming a trunk plucking things in the air, tasting flowers and fruits, driving away irritating flies), and a specific gait. Here the tusker in the "wild" is demarcated from the tusker in the *pooram* space through body movements signifying a more "freer" sense of movement, what I have isolated as the "elephant charm." Even in the case of sequences where the "wild" is not simply a nostalgic space of total comfort and pleasure, like something biting on the neck, or insects flying around and irritating, the embodiment foregrounds the "charm." Second, a series of movement that I have described as "dynamic" and "freer," where the stress is not on the indexing of the elephant through recognizable traits, but full body movements that involve fast circular movements around the stage. Third, movements that signify a body in pain, the body and neck strained, and face contorted; moments of collapses that signify a break in the unity of fantasy. Fourth, a series of movements that are directly derived from Kutiyattam, where

[156] Derrida, 2002.

the gestural language is an extremely codified alternate language in itself. Fifth, a series of movements those are "anthropomorphic" like stretching after waking up or singing lullabies like a human, which are not recognizable elephant characteristics but are those that can be ascribed to and "seen" on an elephant. All these different categories are permeable ones, and *The Elephant Project* uses them in differing combinations. The embodiment of the elephant in such shifting manner allows open-endedness in the ways one can interpret the meanings within the limit of above categories. There are momentary changes, "synecdoches" and "metonymies" that bring into view a relationality between these distinct segments without following one ideal model (of animal/elephant) of which it is a mimetic practice (by a fixed position of human other).

So what is the elephant that is embodied in *The Elephant Project*? The embodiment, using Donna Haraway's concept, can be seen as enacting what she has termed as *figure*. Positing that "figures are at the same time creatures of imagined possibility and creatures of fierce and ordinary reality," she brings both "flesh" and semiotic meaning-making together. Figures, she notes, are "not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material–semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another…figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality" (Harraway, 2008:4). It is precisely the co-existence of material and semiotic, ever-changing and shifting "nodes" that characterize the embodiment of the elephant by Mikari. Let me elaborate how the relationality or nodes is critical from the specific context from which the performance explores zooësis.

The question of zooësis, as scholars have argued, assumes a particular urgency in the contemporary moment due to the unprecedented change in the intensity of human-animal interaction in the last two centuries, prompting philosophers to posit the "question of animal" as

the most central question that we are "living through" in the present.[157] The analysis of zooësis engages in twin critiques. First, to question the ontological category of "human," studying how the category of human rather than having any inherent and natural qualities/properties, is constructed in a process of positing a category of Other in animal. Here the critique is that of the theological doctrines that articulate a fundamental superiority/right of humans over animals (as in the Genesis myth), and the philosophical assumptions based on Aristotelian definition of the human as fundamentally distinct from animals as the former is uniquely endowed with language, making it move from the sphere of zoe to that of bios.[158] In his seminal theorization on the question of man and animal, Agamben moves further by pointing out that even when it is not based on theological binary or notion of language as the sole property of humans, the category of human itself is held in an inclusive-exclusive relation to the category of animal. The question of human Agamben argues is always caught in the realization of an absence at the center. The binary for him has not been conceived as one that makes the objective cut between the two where human has been recognized as a "clearly defined species" or a having a "substance"; instead, the category of human emerges in ever shifting (failed) efforts to make a clean cut with animal, continuously drawing and redrawing the boundaries. Positing the term "anthropological machine" to describe the process of "producing the recognition" of human, he notes that "*Homo* is a constitutively "anthropomorphous" animal, who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human" (Agamben, 2004:26-27).

[157] The changes that have brought in unprecedented intensity include the development of scientific knowledge and genetic experiments, emergence of species studies with racial assumptions, the establishment of modern colonial-scientific institution of study and exhibition of animals through zoos, and capitalist hyper-industrialization of meat production. (Derrida, 2002).

[158] For more on deconstruction of the category of the "human" within the theological binary of human-animal, the problem posed by that of naming, logocentrism and Law involved in the binary construct, see Derrida opct.

Second, zooësis posited as a question of "encounter" of human and animal. Here the analysis is not limited to interrogation of the production of the category of human. Instead the human-animal encounter is explored in relation to how it has changed the material life of *both* humans and animals, historically contextualizing the encounter with all its violence as well as what new possibilities of togetherness the encounter offers. In this vein, Donna Haraway starts her seminal study on human-animal encounter with the seemingly simple question, "Whom and what do we touch when we touch this dog?" (Haraway, 2008:5). The question of relationality of human-animal encounter in the form of a touch, a contact of flesh, poses a radical challenge as Haraway moves away from a simple relation based on anthropocentrism that presumes the human as the only significant partner in the encounter or touching. While arguing the need for critiquing the construction of human, she poses an even more significant question: "how does this touch make us more worldly, in alliance with all the beings who work and play for an alterglobalization that can endure more than one season? (Haraway, 2008:5). Along with the questions of registering the absolute otherness of the gaze of the animal, her question highlights other categories such as "work" and "play" that humans and animals engage in together in being worldly. In starting with the ordinariness of human-animal interaction, what she calls a "grappling" with the ordinary, Haraway moves away from treating the "western" philosophical and theological basis, derived mostly from the textual sources, as the overdetermining factor framing the encounter. The question of animal, for her, is significantly a materialistic question that needs to be looked at for the multiple axes of identification, power, and possibilities that it conjoins.

In the Indian context, Haraway's theoretical maneuver is central as it allows for two distinct differences within a generic theorization of the binary construct of human-animal. First,

as Neel Ahuja has argued, the colonial taxonomy and the modern epistemology it was based on, had at its heart what he calls a "speciated reason," the taxonomic paradigm that emerged with the rise of "animal-centered evolutionary biology" from early nineteenth century. The speciated reason that conflated race and species, he argues, also naturalized "biological difference, legitimizing the definition of racial groups as subspecies (a definition that justified colonization and extermination) and reinforcing heterosexual reproduction as the privileged site of species definition for multicellular organisms" (Ahuja, 2009:557). When Haraway critiques the racism that "flourishes, lethally, in the entrails of humanism," by mapping the "discursive tie between the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal—all reduced to type, all Others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution" (Haraway, 2008:18), she figures in the transnational aspect of modernity, marking the "animal" also within the network of relation in the modernity project. The "encounter" of the human-animal therefore foregrounds the question of both "inter" and "intra" species, and the question of new possibilities thrown open by the encounter is not simply that of "becoming," but a "becoming with." "To be one," Haraway writes, "is always to *become with* many." (Haraway, ibid.:4). In critically adapting the human-animal figuration in the poem written in 1944 in the colonial space, *The Elephant Project* foregrounds the transnational aspect of colonial modernity while also critically interrogating the transnational aspect of globalization in the present moment. Undertaking a cross-cultural adaptation, *The Elephant Project* places the question of "speciated reason" specifically within the ways in which mainstream intercultural theorization frame the display of bodies. The interrogation of performing animal in *The Elephant Project* undertakes a simultaneous critique of framing of the mainstream intercultural theorization in globalization where nativized bodies that

are framed and taxonomized through theater move across the boundaries within network of power to create meaning.

Second, while colonialism and modernity is one axis, the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic practices[159] widely popular in India (mostly based on the polytheistic practices that for want of a better word what has been called as "Hinduism"), though enmeshed with modernity, posit a different relation between animals and humans to the world they inhabit. Both possibilities of "becoming animal" and the encounter between human and animal in these anthropomorphic and zoomorphic practices have a different set of assumptions that is gendered. The embodiment of Mikari, as a woman, in front of the two tusks that frame the embodiment, puts into motion the specificity of this gendered human-animal problematic. As I will elaborate in detail in later sections, the strategy splits the elephant from the masculinity discourse surrounding tusker in Kerala. While Una Chaudhuri in her analysis has analyzed how the strategy of returning the goat to the scapegoat in Edward Albee's *The Goat: Or Who is Sylvia?* destabilizes anthropocentric conventions of tragedy, making zooësis an interrogation of conventions of theater and performance (Chaudhuri, 2007:11-12), *The Elephant Project* in its interrogation of interculturalism and gendered discourse through performing animal explores the conventions of theater and performance from "another side." The analysis of *The Elephant Project*, therefore necessitates a simultaneously holding on to these three critical layers as a relationality—the question of animal, gender discourse and interculturalism. While I highlighted the relation itself till this point, in the rest of the chapter, I will disentangle its nodes highlighting each one of them as prominent at one point with the others providing layers of critique.

[159] Zoomorphism refers to ascribing animal characteristics to humans and deities.

The Elephant as Nativized Body

The first few stanzas of the poem *Sahyante Makan* sets up the figure of a temple elephant in the *pooram* (temple ritual-festival) space. The poem starts with the description of the tusker from the perspective of the narrator (poet) as onlooker, and a few comments from the people in the crowd. Adorning glittering golden-colored caparisons, stretching its back legs, thrusting forward its fore-head, the tusker is the tallest one standing in the center and leading the fifteen dark elephants. With its physical characteristics, it is indeed the "best" tusker on show, and rightly "entitled" to hold up the deity on its back. But the local "experts" in the crowd, sitting around chewing *pan,* discuss among themselves that the one in the center is "naughty." In the forehead that holds up the deity, also "whisper demons/devils." For, the tusker is still not fully out of its state of musth, and it is standing in the center of the festival space with musth fluid not yet fully dried from its forehead. As the festival goes on, amidst the noise of the ritual, percussion, and the crowd, the elephant moves into the space of fantasy, and re-members his time out of captivity. The smell of the fluid draining from the forehead merges with the smell of the *sahyadri* (Western Ghats), the earth, the flowers, the trees, the herd, the smell of mate–a nostalgic smell of "freedom." In this state of fantasy, he runs amok in the real space, dispersing the crowd, trampling and swirling with his trunk the fleeing people who had assembled. After the carnage, the tusker, still in its fantasy world and confused, is shot down by a bullet of a former soldier at the break of dawn.

Through this short narration of the figuration of the temple elephant, I wish to highlight the complexity that the seemingly "local" figuration of a temple elephant assumes. The figuration is infused with a regional cultural ethos with the stress on the significance of elephants in temple festivals of Kerala as well as the metaphor *sahyadri* (Western Ghats). I will

contextualize the first element of regional ethos, the temple elephant in this section. Elephant is regarded as the "State Animal" of Kerala with the emblem of the state, a derivation of the armorial of the erstwhile Princely State Travancore, showing two tuskers in profile, facing each other with their trunks raised "guarding" and deifying the crest at the bottom, with a *Sankhu* (conch) in the center, and an Asoka pillar on the top.[160] The two tusks that frame Mikari's embodiment on-stage are therefore not simply metonymically suggesting tusker; but they simultaneously index the state and its taxonomic project. Within the mythological works in Malayalam, in one of the significant "origin" tales of Kerala, *Keralolpatti*, each chapter ends with a tale of an elephant. Apart from these generic stress in the region for elephants, temple elephant as a category itself is of extreme significance. While the poem was written in 1944, after independence and modernization processes, the intensity of the metaphor has only increased because of the increasing popularity of the temple festivals, and elephants being the main attraction of the festivals. Rather than modernization and globalization wiping out "ritual" and traditional spaces, the ritual spaces parading elephants has only increased in spectacle. In the context of globalization process, the "gentle," decorated elephants holding up the deity on its back assume a central place in the tourist package of brand-Kerala—Kerala Tourism's influential coinage of Kerala as "Gods' Own Country." In the small linguistic region of Kerala, there are at present 600 captive elephants, out of which 500 are tuskers (bull elephants) (Cheeran et al, 2002:219). While elephants are used for moving timber, the majority of the domesticated

[160] Kerala, before independence, consisted of three geographical areas, two Princely States of Travancore and Kochi, and the third region Malabar directly under the rule of the British. Conch in the emblem is one of symbols of Lord Padmanabha (Vishnu) under whose name Travancore Maharajas ruled. For more on how British administrative policies thrust the notion of armorials on Princely States, creating much confusion about their symbolic investment among Princely States, and the later enthusiasm of the Princely States to get the armorials certified by the British, see Dick Kooiman, 2005.

elephants are used for the temple rituals. Adorned with golden colored caparisons, *allavattam*,[161] *venchamaram*,[162] and multi-colored umbrellas held by people atop the elephant, the elephants in the *pooram* stand for hours carrying the deity on its back. This specific part of the ritual space is gendered not just in the realm of the "human" as the music, fire-works, the mahouts and other ritual attendants of the elephants, is an all-male realm;[163] but significantly, even the realm of the animal is marked as an all-male realm. In the ritual processions, only tuskers are used, the inordinately high number of tuskers in the state resulting from this preference. While the entertainment within the ritual consists of the musical exposition, the change of colors of the umbrellas, and the elaborate fire-works, critically, the "aesthetics" or qualities (*laksana*) of the elephants, and the show of wealth with the capability of getting the "celebrity" elephants and more number of elephants for the ritual is a big highlight.[164]

While the *laksanas* (qualities of elephants) are described in the Sanskrit texts, it is also a widely disseminated "aesthetic," with the stress on color, height, rising tusks, and trunk lying on the ground as the most significant.[165] It is these "qualities," clearly positing a form of masculinity on to the elephants—the classification supposedly highlighting both "grace" and strength—

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[161] A circular shield made of peacock feather used to wave the idol of the deity. People atop the elephant hold two of them on each side of the elephant deifying the deity.

[162] Consist of a wooden plank with cotton or jute fabric attached to it, people atop the elephant "fan" the deity.

[163] The mahouts are also all male, making the recent qualification of a woman, Nibha Namboodiri, as a mahout an event of significant magnitude within the discursive domain.

[164] For instance, the most famous *pooram* in Kerala is the Thrissur pooram, known for presenting 100 elephants, and for the flashy fireworks.

[165] The *laksanas* are described in the Sanskrit texts on elephants, *Matangalila* of Nilakantha. The following, taken from the categorization given in *The Elephant Museum* Thrissur, Kerala, an institution run by scientific community, are the general traits demarcated as constituting an "ideal" elephant:

1. The color of coal. 2. The trunk that lies on the ground 3. Higher head hone 4. The *musthak* that is pushed forward. 5. The white tusks that fall and then rise, and that are separated and raised. 6. Clear eyes 7. Broad ears 8. Small neck 9. Strong legs 10. Eighteen nails of the same color 11. Lengthy body 12.the tail that is lengthy but not touching the ground, and filled with hair.

which make the elephants "superstars" in the State.[166] Since "the festival season and the musth season often coincide" (Cheeran et al, 2002:220), in this "local" space, therefore, the scene of the temple elephant running amok rather than an "exotic" experience is one of a familiar occurrence[167]—an occurrence around which "tradition" in globalization, anthropomorphizing practices, and governmentality (scientific discourse of medical treatment, tranquilization, and management of domestic elephant population) meet and contest.

By recording these regional engagements with the elephants, I am not positing any uniqueness or a singular "locality" to the practice. Many of these aspects, the mythological symbolism, anthropomorphism, and governmentality has a long (transnational) contestational history with regard to engagements with animals in general,[168] and elephants in particular. Sujith Sivasundaram, in his rich study on the transnational crossing of knowledge from the colonies to the metropole and vice-versa, takes up elephants as a site/body around which what he calls "trading of knowledges" occurred. Eschewing a narrative of "powerless" disappearance of "knowledges from colonized lands" in the "face of conquest," Sivasundaram argues that the knowledges in the space of the colony were "appropriated and reinvented" (Sivasundaram, 2005:30). Analyzing in detail the colonial and popular literature, Sivasundaram critiques the binary classification of British stress on "utilitarianism" as opposed to Indian stress on spectacle,

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[166] Even a cursory glance at the popular culture will throw up the wide popularity of anthropomorphizing elephants: the "stars"/"celebrities" are known by their names, their huge cut outs hung on the streets advertising the festivals, and "stories" widely disseminated through oral culture, and media. In the media for instance the craze is evidenced by the television program *E4Elephant*, telecasted primetime Sunday 12 pm in one of the regional television channels (Kairali TV), crossing over 300 episodes. The program tells the tale of elephant celebrities (each elephant generally "biographically documented" in 1-3 episodes), celebrating the "heroics," "naughtiness" including "running amok," "murders" of mahouts, and taking a sympathetic view towards elephants by critiquing the mistreatment of elephants in the state. For a short report on *E4Elephant* see, Manmadhan, Prema. "Trunk full of jumbo tales." *The Hindu, Metro Plus Thiruvananthapuram*, Saturday, Jul 01, 2006.

[167] During the two decades till January 2001, 418 tuskers under musth have been tranquilized and translocated (Cheeran opct:219).

[168] For more on the relationship between zoophilia and Indian nationalism, see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 2006:67-114.

"aesthetics" and "moral" qualities. By analyzing the anthropomorphic engagements by British both in India[169] and in the metropole (through display of elephant in London),[170] he argues that "[British] anthropomorphic gaze shares much with Eastern religions and Mughal practice… however, because of the new science's association with Christian natural theology, the anthropomorphism that was shared by Britons and Indians became irreconcilable with scientific claims about nature" (Sivasundaram, opct.:30). What is critical is the framing by colonial discourse of these imaginations and practices, whereby even while the British took from the knowledges of the colonies on how to capture elephants, or control musth, the discourse was built by setting up how the British method of catching elephants was "more benevolent" than the ones used by the colonized (ibid.). By highlighting the regional context, I wish to highlight the situated-ness and the intensity of the convergence of distinct discourses and practices around the body of the elephant, the tusker, much like human "others," indeed as a "nativized" body.

Tusker and Indian/Asian Performer: Corporeality and Spectacle in Interculturalism

The performance of *The Elephant Project* in various parts of the country has been received well for its "inter-culturality" or "multi-culturalism," and the reception of the performance, or precisely, the tensions in the reception of the performance, opens out issues of intercultural practice in India in the period of globalization. Some reviews continue to deploy the narrative of the Orientalist and Indian nationalist strategy of claiming that the ultimate significance of the production is the successful use of *Natyasastra* in a modern production. In

[169] Practices include anthropomorphic naming the elephants under the Company, ascribing masculinity to animals in hunt, and popular literature stressing the need to "listen" to the elephants.

[170] He analyzes the display, running amok and shooting of elephant Chuny, the consequent take over of the body of Chuny for phrenology, as well as popular sympathy for the elephant in the literature of the time, which directly points to a lot of issues that I am stressing here in the chapter.

such narratives of nationalist construction of identity, the only difference in the present performance, a positive one for the reviewers, is projected as the fusion of Indian and Japanese elements, whereby in *The Elephant Project*, the performance techniques discussed in *Natyasastra* are seemingly "incorporated" with "Japanese performance techniques."[171] Other reviews have gone to the extreme of articulating the emergence of the "third world," the performance for the reviewers being a paradigmatic case of a "third-world" supposedly finally arriving at the world-stage. In this vein, one comes across articulations such as that of eminent Malayalam playwright and activist Civic Chandran contextualizing the performance with the following lines about the young director, "here is a representative of the bold young generation of theatre personalities who, from the third world, is facing the world with confidence."[172] Both these positions, the Indian nationalist construction and the extended "third-world" facing the world narrative, rather than providing any criticality about inter-cultural practice in the contemporary moment, belie the syndrome best expressed by the Malayalam popular usage "*my granddad 'ad an elephant*."[173] Let us probe the articulation of "interculturalism" in more detail.

The group Theatre Roots and Wings, established in 2007, in fact, defines itself by highlighting its "inter-cultural" orientation. The group articulates itself as "a collective of theatre artists from various parts of the world, who come together to meet, to work, to create new, innovative, purposeful, relevant and original pieces of theatre in a context that bridges tradition and modernity, local and the global, and the individual and the wider society."[174] Though the

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[171] Majumder, Rishi. "Elephant Woman." *Culture and Society, Tehelka Magazine,* Vol 6, Issue 46, November 21, 2009.

[172] Quoted in Raveendran, Aabha. "Denouement of his zest for stage". *The Hindu*. September 29, 2010.

[173] "My granddad 'ad an Elephant" is the title of a famous story by Vaikkom Muhammed Basheer presenting a humorous and forceful critique of harking back to tradition. The expression has become an extremely popular proverbial usage.

[174] http://www.theatreraw.hyperphp.com/aboutus.htm.

group has come into existence only recently, the selection of texts for adaptation from diverse historical and cultural contexts highlight the aspect of a "traversing" of boundaries. The productions by the group include *Quick Death* (2007) a play written by the Australian playwright Richard Murphet in 1981, *The Elephant Project* (2008), an adaptation of a Malayalam poem written in 1944, *Urubhangam* (*Broken Thighs* 2009), a play by one of the early Sanskrit playwrights Bhasa [6thc BCE-6thc AD?] and the latest performance being an adaptation of *Mizu no Eki* (*Water Station*, 2010) written by the Japanese playwright Ota Shogo in 1981. Moving away from the canonical tradition of performing Greek or Shakespearean plays for establishing a (formal) identity of a peripheral space within the global, the texts that are chosen for adaptation are not ones that carry a great deal of cultural capital, or are not "universally known" in themselves.[175] About the logic of collaboration, the group highlights that rather than focusing on construction of a "consistent form or style", it stresses itself on the "unity of purposefulness."[176]

When I highlight the adaptation of texts from diverse contexts, I need to make a qualification that the group is not unique in selecting and adapting "non-Indian" texts. There is a long, vibrant, and continuing history of theatrical engagement in India of adapting "non-Indian" texts in the various regional languages whether it is in the form of direct translation, drawing on

[175] Though, in the Indian case, belonging to the Sanskrit canon, Bhasa's plays can be regarded as having a certain amount of cultural capital. Yet the discourse surrounding Bhasa's plays assumes a complexity because his plays are not regarded as the best representative of the "great" Indian Sanskrit aesthetic tradition as constructed by the early Indologists. Bhasa's plays were discovered in 1912 by Ganapathi Sastri from the repertoire of extant Sanskrit performance tradition, Kutiyattam, in Kerala. With want of clear evidence, the authorship and dating of these plays are still highly debated. Regarded as earlier or a contemporary to the time of compilation of *Natyasastra*, critics argue that Bhasa's plays (consisting of only one-act) do not follow the "aesthetics" of *rasa*. In fact, two of his plays, the one performed by the group *Broken Thighs*, and *Karnabharam* are tragic, an exception within the Sanskrit tradition, and his plays also show death on-stage, a practice counter to the prescriptions in *Natyasatra*. Plays of Bhasa have been performed post-independence by the significant theater practitioners such as K. N. Panikkar and Ratan Thiyyam. A Bhasa festival was also started in Kerala in 1989. For more on Bhasa festival, see, Richmond, 1989:68-76. For more on performance of Bhasa plays by K. N. Panikkar and Thiyyam in post-independence period, and the production of cultural capital through performance, see Dharwadker, Aparna, 2005, specially the chapter, "Myth, Ambivalence and Evil." Pp 165-185.

[176] http://www.theatreraw.hyperphp.com/aboutus.htm. Accessed 10/01/2011.

or building on the story lines of the plays, or a complete "Indianising" of the play-text.[177] What makes the reception of *The Elephant Project* specifically one that invites an intercultural frame is the form of the presentation that posits collaboration between practitioners trained in different styles and the performance bringing together styles that go beyond the national borders. Is the preoccupation with the much-maligned terms within the recent critiques of interculturalism such as "collaboration," "unity of purpose," and "moving across" boundaries, a simple re-deployment and reversal of the western/euro-centric base of interculturalism to highlight "collaboration" between "non-western" cultures? As distinct from the first world being the privileged space/site that can foster hybridity,[178] does the process simply involve a reversal by articulating a "third-world" space, and that too Kerala, a marginal space in "Indian theater," as offering the space for hybridity?

In *The Elephant Project*, the intercultural frame is crystallized in the first sequence of the performance, when different elements are introduced, and the basic non-realist frame of the performance is set up. Let me quote from a review by an eminent theater scholar, Shanta Gokhale, of the performance of *The Elephant Project* in Bombay to hone in the tensions that an intercultural narrative frame can provide within a space such as India. I am quoting the review at length as this favorable review condenses the issues of interculturalism that I will interrogate, while providing a useful first-hand description of the opening scene. She writes about the performance:

"Micari began as a shadowy bundle at one end of the stage, while an actor… sat in

[177] The most significant part of theatrical practice in India constitutes the adaptation of play-texts in the various regional languages ranging from those of Greek and Shakespearean plays, Ibsen, Chekhov, to Bertolt Brecht, Franca Rame, Dario Fo, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and Helen Cixous, to just sign-post a few significant playwrights and styles that are engaged with. The theatrical practice of drawing from these "outside" texts has been so prevalent that sometimes the critique is precisely against the Indianizing of the texts, calling for directors to perform the text directly. For more see, Bandyopadhyay 1971.

[178] Bharucha:2000; Chaudhuri:2002.

Veerasana at the other, reciting the poem. Veerasana is also the way the Japanese sit on their tatami mats, hands relaxed on knees. The recitation was very long. The actor was good-looking. He had a rich voice that was mostly quiet, yet sometimes exploded on the consonants. His diction was so sharp and clear that you got a feeling you understood some parts, at least of the poem. Of course you did not, because it was in Malayalam...Meanwhile, you were waiting in suspense for the shadowy bundle at the other end to move. When it did, it unfolded into a woman, who raised her arm slowly and moved her hand almost imperceptibly in the sleeve of her costume. Gradually, she became an elephant, using her wide kimono to suggest ears. She was in a procession. She broke the chain around her neck. She ran amok, fell and woke up in a jungle. There she tasted several kinds of fruit and smelt flowers. At some point, she became the temple elephant again. Eventually, she fell to the bullet of a guard. That is as much of the story as I gathered. There was no point straining to gather more. It was enough to sit and marvel at the face and body of this petite actor, who could conjure up myriad emotions through sheer muscle control."[179] (Shanta Gokhale. *Mumbai MirrorBytes*)

The framing narratives of mainstream interculturalism always have at its heart narratives that foreground "collaboration" through a listing of performance techniques and practices from different cultures as presented in the same performing space, a "taxonomic theater" (Chaudhuri, 2000). In the case of *The Elephant Project*, one gets the following broad highlights: kimono-clad Japanese woman and Kerala *mundu* clad, upper torso bare-bodied male, traditional Kerala percussion *chenda*, played along with Egyptian darbooka, African djembe, and Australian didgeridoo, the Japanese seiza postures resonating with Veerasana from yoga practice. In such

[179] Gokhale, Shanta. "Makan of myriad emotions." *Mumbai Mirror Bytes*.

listings of different techniques, one comes across an immediate othering of both the "Indian" part of the collaboration, which is supposedly or at least supposed to be familiar, as also the "foreign" tradition, the Japanese techniques. Much like *The Mahabharata* in Avignon or the US, in the case of *The Elephant Project*, the text itself, the Malayalam poem, is unfamiliar to the audience. The unfamiliarity is accentuated with the use of Malayalam for the recital of the poem (with supertitles in English). The Indian part of collaboration for the audience in Bombay is distantiated due to the language barrier and the non-awareness of the text and its significance in the cultural milieu, with the elephant in the space of Kerala temple festivals being an "exotic" experience that even Kerala tourism deploys to woo both Indian and foreign tourists to the state. In such a scenario, the only response to the first section of the poetry recital in Malayalam seems to be the lasting impression, yet broad categorizations such as that the actor "is good-looking," his voice is "rich," "quiet," and "exploding on consonants," and his "diction clear." And for the rest of show one simply relish in the equally "unfamiliar" but spectacular "muscle memory" acting of Mikari.

The blind-spots and the tensions that one comes across in the reception need to be contextualized in terms of what Rustom Bharucha has pointed out as the relevance of holding on to nation as a conflictual category in analysis of performance practice. While one do not need to subscribe to certain essentialization in Bharucha's conception of both "East" and West, what his critique of intercultural theorization brings to fore is the idea that neither is nation as a category as irrelevant nor is it as monolithic as framed by intercultural theorization. For him, the more challenging part of any contemporary intercultural practice involves a confrontation between the distinct and conflicting cultures within the space of nation, a confrontation that the divide and

rule policy of colonialism has not allowed.[180] In *Elephant Project*, one needs to look at the presence elements from diverse contexts as encounters, sometimes significant precisely for the mis/non-communication, and the not so easy translations they afford. By maintaining the stark distinctions of Malayalam and Japanese and the English supertitles as (super)mediation, and the distinct kinds of acting modes including gestural codes from Kutiyattam that I highlighted in the earlier section, *The Elephant Project* foregrounds the everyday acts of translation necessitated in the multilingualism characteristic of India or any urban formations of the present. Rather than avoiding the use of the language the audience might not be familiar with, or presenting one language as an "Other" from a unified position, or creating a notion of "unity in diversity" slogan of the Indian state, the strategy used by the performance requires the audience to actively engage in multiple translations, and yet still having to encounter blind-spots.

In his recent writing on the emergence of "Asia" as a sign within the emergence of new global capital, Bharucha argues that in India, vexed with issues of a multi-lingual nation cut by intersecting caste, gender, and class boundaries, the sign "Asia" is not a category that is well-entrenched in imagination. Or in other words, he notes that in India "Asia" as sign has not yet been realized as an object that can be, or has a potential for being branded (Bharucha, 2001;2004). So it is not coincidental that in the reception of the performance in India, even in the mainstream narratives, one does see a difference from the global narratives of interculturalism. In Indian reception, Japanese is named in its "national" status, with which a fusion is achieved, rather than deployment of a "nebulous" category of "Asia" with its own essence. Yet with the overpowering force of the narratives of interculturalism where one need to posit the work as an "Other" to "western" when the practice is happening in a site outside the "West," the national

[180] By positing the term "intra-cultural" against "intercultural" as precisely encounters and set of negotiations between cultures within the nation, the performance space for Bharucha, becomes a site where heterogeneous aspects of different cultures meet in conflictual fashion.

gets even more essentialized. It is this overpowering presence of the frame of the "West" that allows the critiques to slide over the outright critique of the constructs of "nation," "Asian-ness," and the presence of a lot of "Western," "not-so-Asian," and "not-so-Western" elements in the performance. In fact, the critique of intercultural frame is worked out strongly in the very first physical embodiment of the tusker by Mikari, the scene where, as Shanta Gokhale puts it Mikari gradually becomes an elephant. In the opening scene, rather than the *kimono* and stylized acting coming across as parading of techniques or a taxonomic theater, the distinct stylization is deployed to make a critique.

After the actor doing the recital leaves the stage, the performance goes on to construct the materiality of a contemporary *pooram* space: tall traditional lamps, emitting smoke and light are lit one-by-one by bare-bodied men, traditional percussion instruments of the region *chenda*[181] and *kombu*[182] sets up the rhythm of *tayambaka*, and fire crackers go off. Once the *pooram* is thus set up through light, smell, and noise, the bundled up figure of Mikari starts to move to embody the tusker.

The stage for embodiment of the tusker is a bare stage, almost an "empty space." The only props on stage are a *tidambu* (the idol of the deity) in the central position towards the back of the stage, and two tusks placed parallel to each other, their curves pointing inwards and oval shaped mirror with the wooden frame at the center of the tusks (indexing the emblem of the Kerala state). Mikari, her face painted white, is adorned in green, with the inner dress as well as the outer *kimono* colored green, and the material of the cloth reflecting light. While the green indexes "nature"/ecological aspect, she wears a chain around her neck, and the *kimono* is also adorned with small brass circular reflecting patterns, and wavy lines made of coir. Sitting on her

[181] A traditional Kerala percussion instrument.

[182] A traditional Kerala wind instrument.

knees on the rear side of the stage, she holds a small *tidambu* (idol of the deity) in her hand, feeling it, and waving it to both sides with her right hand that is held at the level of the chest. After this short sequence, still on her knees, she pushes forward, and pressing her both arms on the ground she thrusts her forehead to give a moment of the "best"/"perfect" elephant on the show. While there is no mask to index the elephant, and the painted white face of Mikari in fact accentuates the difference of the human face and the dark elephant, this almost "literal" rendering of body postures of the elephant in *pooram* signals to the use of abstractions in the embodiment of the elephant. The "imitation" of postures of the elephant is quickly let-off as Mikari moves on to assume a posture that is a more recognizable posture of warrior or *veera* (heroic). In this mode, she sits on one knee, with her legs separated and right leg thrusts forward to the side and with her hands placed on her knees. The further "imitation" of the elephant is performed through body movements that are slowed down, and stylized. She moves towards the *tidambu* in stylized manner, with her spine held straight and fist folded, arms held parallel to each other. With her right leg on the stool and leg stretched backwards, allowing the kimono to flow, she holds the *tidambu* with her one hand while moving her left-hand within the kimono slowly to and fro parallel to the ground—waving of ears of the elephant. She looks with "love" at the *tidambu* highlighting a form of investment in her performance before the gaze of the crowd, and internality within the matrix of power, and moves her fingers around it. She lifts the *tidambu* with her right-hand chest-high, and slowly starts moving from left to the right, showing the *tidambu* to everyone assembled. Moving away from the stretched position, she goes on to perform stylized poses with the *tidambu* without ever losing the spine position or the sense of "restraint." This indeed is a "virtuosic" act for the gaze of the crowd.

In a striking moment of such abstraction, Mikari turns around with the *tidambu*, showing her back to the audience. One realizes that she is wearing a gold-caparison on her back. She slowly moves towards the tusks on the back of the stage and places the *tidambu* between the tusks. While she performs this task what audience sees is the bent-over back adorned with caparison (definitely not an example of the "Indian"/"Asian" aesthetics). As the movement is slow she maintains this position for a while. Apart from the simple unconventionality of the "back" suddenly becoming the "front," certain disorientations of what embodying a four-footed elephant by a two footed human entails, or even an "anality" of a caparisoned buttock, this change of perspective is a critical moment in heightening the abstraction. What it does is to expose the incorporation practices that constitute the body within the spectacle, both that of the elephant in the *pooram*, and the "ideal" Indian actor—both as a particular virtuosic body that gets negated or "sublimated"—in nationalist theorizations. It highlights the categories of codification that constitute a body without a "face," a constitution of an ideal body through different ideal parts enframed by the gaze. Standing straight after this reversal of the frontality, Mikari moves on to perform a short movement in the air with her hands, almost like catching the rhythm with hands, and draws attention to the kimono as the constituting part. Slightly bending down, she gives a slight push to the kimono with her hands, allowing it to rise up and fall back on her while she moves to a straightened stance. As the *kimono* falls back, it is lifted above her head, with both sides extended with hands to suggest ears (a suggestion established earlier), so as to completely make the "human" body of the performer disappear behind the caparisoned *kimono*. The kimono is the perfect, ideal, abstracted elephant, a splendid geometric pattern. A "performance art" moment, as the body of the performer disappears, it is this non-moving *kimono*—caparisoned, and with wide ears that stay still—"hung" straight, as an object that the

audience sees for a while. The ultimate ideal and "virtuosic" body is a body without flesh, a non-corporeal object.

What does such an abstracted acting mode mean? Is it another fetishization making manifest an "Asia" or a "successful" incorporation of *Natyasatra* with Japanese techniques? Rather than standing for itself, the spectacle of non-realistic acting through abstraction indexes the "given space" of body within the space of spectacle. What I have called the "performance art" moment, where one sees only an object, a "beautiful" one, is the perfect calling into attention of abstractions one sees in the first Indian nationalist figurations almost a century before in the aesthetics of the "Bengal School." Creating a new aesthetics from the encounter with, and influence of "Japanese" aesthetics (through Okakura Tenshin), the early Indian nationalists tried to construct, in the visual realm, a political aesthetic that counters "western"/realism with an aesthetic of gesture.[183] As I have dealt with in detail the theorization of corporeality within Indian nationalist thought in the chapter *Play of Gesture*, here I am not going in detail about this construction. I will just reiterate a central argument that I make in the chapter that within the nationalist discourse on Indian art, which was built on the thematic of Orientalism, the dominant tendency was that of negation or "sublimation" of the materiality of the corporeal for making a case for the transcendental and the Absolute. Even if kinesthesis was recognized as central in such theorization, the materiality of body was articulated as one that needed to be ultimately transcended. And it is this transcendental in conceptualizing performance that allowed the nationalists thinkers to link performance to another transcendental conception, the nation.

In the scene we just analyzed, the "vanishing" of corporeality to a perfect *kimono* needs

[183] I have dealt with the nationalist rejection of corporeality by closely analyzing the theorization of Ananda Coomaraswamy elsewhere in the dissertation. For more on the early nationalist construction of a "political" aesthetic based on transcendental conception, see the chapter on "Play of Gestures."

to be read as precisely as a strategy of irony and as a critique of spectacle. Rather than the use of "Indian"/"Asian" aesthetic for construction of an "Asian" identity with an essence based on notions of "beauty," the form is invoked to make the wider critique of the negation/sublimation of the corporeal within the theorization of Indian nationalism and theorizations of "inter-Asian" derived from Orientalism. The silence with the absence of music, and the extended duration of the hung-up *kimono* while presenting the perfect abstraction simultaneously asks the audience to re-member what has vanished behind the *kimono*—the tusker and the woman's body—and to conceive what transpired before as process of achieving virtuosity, a putting on of a virtuosic and "masculine" act.

The critique of scopic regime in this manner is not restricted to theatrical practices, but is extended to that of organization of "traditional" Indian ritual space. The critique of the performance at the level of the animal highlights the specific practice of the ritual, an "Indian" practice, where as distinct from the supposed "western" practices, there is a space for other senses apart from sight. It is ironic to note that the ritual space in fact tries to provide a "total" sensory experience, stressing the aural (music, fireworks), visual (fire-works, decorated elephants, multi-colored umbrellas and the white fans) and olfactory (smell of burning oil, smoke, dung, and of course the people). *The Elephant Project* indexes this "total" sensory experience of *pooram* in its performance by having real lamps lit in the back and live percussionists dressed up as in a ritual on the sides. Yet this "total" sensory experience, sometimes lauded as the distinctness of "Indian civilization," is only for the "human." Ironically the tusker amidst the space, a creature that is hailed for a distinct olfactory sensibility, is transformed into a visual abstraction. That one can read the stillness of the "ears" of the elephant in the abstracted stationery *kimono* as a foreboding metaphor for aggression, as in popular

literature, elephant is supposed to keep its ears still when it is "not happy," adds another layer to the critique.

<u>Antinomies of being worldly: Musth and colonial modernity</u>

Sahyante Makan literally means the son of *Sahyadri* (Western Ghats),[184] and the poem was written in 1944 by Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, a significant figure in Malayalam poetry canon.[185] A schoolteacher of science and a rationalist,[186] Vailoppilli is regarded by critics as a central figure in Kerala modern poetry playing a crucial role in ushering in change from romantic poetry to realism,[187] or occupying a critical role in the transitional phase in the rise of modernism.[188] Known for constructing and foregrounding a "Kerala-ness" in poetry, his oeuvre

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[184] Western Ghats is the mountain range that runs through the Western side of India, ranging from borders of Gujarat and Maharashtra to Kanyakumari in the southern tip. For Kerala, the Arabian Sea and Western Ghats, both running for the entire stretch of Kerala on eastern and western sides respectively is regarded as providing a natural geographical boundary.

[185] Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon (1911-1988) was a prolific poet, and published during his life-time ten volumes of selected works. Rather than using the last name Menon, in the chapter, I am using the name Vailoppilli as he was popularly known and identified in Kerala. Over the years, Vailoppilli has been bestowed with the awards including Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Kalyani Krishna Menon Prize, Kendra Sahitya Academy Award, Soviet Land Nehru Award, and Odakkuzhal Award. He was the first President of Progressive Arts & Literary Organisation, Kerala. The complete collection of poems as well as two plays, and a memoir, has been published in two volumes by Current Books. For more on biography, see the complete collected works, *Vailoppilli – Sampoorna Kritikal, Volume 1, 2*. Ed. M. N. Vijayan. Current Books: Thrissur, [2001]2010.

[186] Vailoppilli taught science in secondary school, and his first publication, in fact, as Raveendran highlights, is not poetry, but a work on human physiology. (Raveendran, 2001:58; Vailoppilli, 2010 [1956]:724). Recording the significant influence of scientific knowledge to his poetic practice, Vailoppilli's writes, "The scientific truth-sensibility in me doesn't allow me to follow beliefs/fantasies uncontrollably, however splendid they might be. Take the case of nature itself. There are nature-worshipping poets who see in nature the beating of a world-heart or the face of the Absolute. I have lost that vision/philosophy (*darsanam*). In that heart and face, I see boundless affection and blind cruelty. I cannot help seeing the tiger behind the deer, and small pox bacteria in the spring breeze." (Vailoppilli, 2010 [1956]: 724. Translation mine). For more, see Raveendran, P. P. 2001, 57-58; Ramakrishnan, E. V., 2001:72.

[187] Vijayan, M. N. Foreword to *Kannikkoythu*. [1952], republished in *Vailoppilli – Sampoorna Kritikal*, [2001]2010:567-581.

[188] Raveendran, 2001. In the article, Raveendran critiques the tendency of classifying Third-world/Indian/ Kerala poetry into neat categories derived from European movements such as the shift from romanticism to realism, and later realism to modernism, and post-modernism. On the contrary he argues that even as the ideology of colonial modernity provided the basis for the poets, their works while following the ideological framework set up by colonialism, also offers resistance through the contradictions and ambivalences they present.

deploys "Kerala's little traditions, regional myths and music,"[189] and presents an "ambivalent" perspective on the developmental logic of modernity. While some of his extremely popular poems have been received as a call for modern development and progressive reforms, presenting even a utopian dimension of change, scholars have highlighted how his works simultaneously present a deep seated suspicion about the authoritarian order and destruction ushered in by modernity.[190] Written on the cusp of Indian independence, and when debates about the need for formation of a distinct state based on Malayalam language, *Aikya Keralam* (United Kerala), had started to assume significance, *Sahyante Makan* reflects the ambivalence perfectly, as it offers a critique of modernity[191] through the "local" figuration of a temple elephant in the popular space of *pooram* (temple ritual-festival). To locate how the elephant is an exemplary problematic of "modernity" within the poem, I will turn attention to the specific phenomenon of musth in the elephant.

As distinct from any generalization in the sense of "animal" as a category distinct from "human," what gives a specific thrust to the production of knowledge and conceptualization around elephant, its "running amok," or dissidence/"naughtiness" is the specific characteristic of musth. It is precisely this "fluid," a smell that is at the heart of the problematic surrounding the figuration of the elephant. Musth is a physiological and behavioral condition that (primarily) bull elephants[192] go through once in a year. The physiological condition, which can last up to sixteen weeks, has attracted attention in various knowledge systems as it brings up the categorical

[189] Ramakrishnan, 2001:72. His poems on Kerala's festival *Onam* has been particularly significant. In *Onam* celebration, the figure from mythology Bali, who is stamped down to underworld by Vishnu's vamana avatar, is interpreted as Kerala's just emperor (called with prefix *Maha* great, Mahabali), who visits his erstwhile subjects for one day (the day of Onam) every year.

[190] Ramakrishnan, E. V, 2001; Devika, J,. 2007.

[191] Jothikumari, 2010.

[192] In the case of African elephants, both male and female elephants go through musth, a possible factor which led to the identification of phenomenon of musth itself in African elephants only recently.

distinction of an elephant. Scientific studies point out that in the case of bull elephant in musth "the temporal glands secrete a pungent fluid", and "the animal shows heightened aggression towards other bulls, and it has a better chance of successful mating" (Sukumar, 2006:3). The condition of musth, therefore, in the case of domesticated bull elephants, necessitates elephant-keepers to develop a careful method to read the symptoms and keep under control the heightened aggression and sexuality of the animal. In the poem, the tusker is described as one that has been rushed back into the space of the ritual even though it has not completely come out of its musth state, as the poem says, the musth fluid has not yet dried fully. Therefore the poem starts with offering a critique of the economic structures underlying the use of elephants. At this level, what is constructed is a clear split between the "human" and the "animal" with a specific physiology.

Yet what is critical is that the physiological characteristic also stands conceptually to think through the state of existence in "freedom"/"happiness" in relation to the structures of subjugation and norms in the mundane real world. The etymology of the term musth, in fact, gives an indication of the conception of musth as a problematic for thinking through a different state of "being worldly." The term musth is derived from the Persian word *mast* meaning intoxicated state (of a lover), and as a concept is specifically used in Islamic mystical traditions such as Sufi to refer to the state of a dervish as a lover totally intoxicated in *Allah* (Sakata, 1997). It is a state in which *aql* (reason) is held in abeyance. In *mast* while bodily or sensual experience and the "excesses" of bodily engagement such as drinking and vigorous body movements might be critical both in realization, and simultaneously as the external bodily manifestation of the state, the state is conceptualized as one where there is an indifference and therefore annihilation

of the existing order of reality and norms itself.[193] Unlike Haraway's materialism, therefore musth conceptualizes a different way of being worldly. The point is that in this conceptualization there is no binary between intoxicated state of one possessed and the real world of norms; instead *mast* is regarded as a reality or a state of being worldly, but not of *this* world, the reality itself is of a different order constituted by sense and affect. The Sanskrit word for phenomenon of musth is *mada* (or *matt*) and scholars point out that the word *mada*, as used in the significant treatise on elephants *Matangalila*, refers to "excess of joy" (Nilakantha Sastri, transl. Edgerton, 1985[1931]:32-33). *Mada* is connected to the reality of the present—it arises "out of good health, vigor, and a happy life, attended by well-balanced humors of life" but the state itself is of a different order where the ecstatic state is all that is real, and all that matters. *Matangalila* therefore notes "joy, rapture, exhilaration…so the state of musth" (ibid.:32-33).[194] Musth as rapture/intoxication highlights the singular state of the one going through musth, and since it involves only a temporality of the "present" of the sensuousness of the heightened affective state, it is indifferent to "history." The poem tries to figure in this conception of an alternate state of being worldly in love or rapture but places it simultaneously in its relation to its effect on the system and order of reality in a temple space. It is this double-vision that produces the figure of the elephant in the poem as "enslaved" rather than the figure as one who is simply in rapture or possessed and intoxicated by love.

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[193] For a useful description of *mast* as a mystical practice written from the perspective of a mystical group, see William Donkin *The wayfarersan account of the work of meher baba with the god-intoxicated and also with advanced souls, sadhus, and the poor* Ahmednagar, India:.[1988;2002] 2011.

[194] Here the Sanskrit text assumes a perfect knowledge of the state of joy and rapture of an elephant in musth. Wendy Doniger highlights the same strain of assumption of perfect knowledge about the feelings of animals in certain Sanskrit texts. The perfect access to the other presented here mirrors with the mythology Doniger analyzes where fish presents to Indian mythology an alternate state of consciousness. While in the Daoist myth from which the Sanskrit tale takes the story, the statement that the fish is happy raises the question of intellectual isolation and interrogation of from what place or position can one know that the fish is happy, the Sanskrit text assumes that the fish is happy, but the "understanding" leading to a different kind of "problem of human involvement" (Doniger, 2005:18-19).

It is significant to note that historically the practice of breeding of Asian elephants has been negligible both for the difficulty in structuring the breeding of elephants in captivity (Sukumar et al., 1997:264) as well as economic investment involved in raising an elephant that cannot involve in any productive work till it is about 15 years old. The elephants that one sees are therefore mostly elephants captured from the wild, and tamed into subjection. In this sense the domesticated elephant, with its recognized powerful memory, present a "primal" event of subjugation, a violent enslavement and control via training, with (the threat of) memory of the pre-captive days always in tension.[195] But with musth as an uncontrollable letting go, the central question that arises is where does the elephant slide to in its fantasy? Is it to the pre-captive days with an awareness of the present discipline/norm and ordinary reality, or is it an absolute fantasy, a forgetting of the "primal" moment and the "history" of disciplining itself, a state of *mast*? If one conceives the state to be an absolute other, how can language access this state?

It is precisely setting out this connection that makes the figuration of tusker in the poem a wider critique of modernity and its assumed project of liberation. *Sahyadri*, here is deployed as "nature"/"wild" to which the tusker "naturally" and "rightfully" belongs before it was domesticated. The last lines of the poem ends in pathos, with the narrator describing the soldier with the word *naran* (lit: "man," but having an incriminatory sense to the word)[196] and declaring at the death of the tusker, that even though the shriek of the dying tusker was not heard by the gods of humans within the temples, the cry struck right at the heart of the *Sahyadri* (Western

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[195] The Sanskrit text, *Manasollasa*, before laying down the ailments suffered by elephants, records: "Captivity, lashing, ailments, memories of the happiness of freedom enjoyed in the forest, staying in the captivity only physically with heart elsewhere, incompatible food, indigestion, exertion, and lack of sleep are basic causes of the diseases of the elephants. Those should be properly treated by medicines procured from forests or purchased from the shops." Verses 628-629. Transl. Nalini Sadhale and Y L Nene. 2004:116. The text presumes that elephant is an animal with tremendous intelligence and memory, and the memory of the wild is therefore a constant tension, causing along with other factors diseases to the elephants. And pertinently for discussions in this section, musth is *not* a disease of the elephant within this conception. It is simply another (joyful) state of existence.

[196] Jothikumari, Opct.

Ghats). From the enthralls of feudalism and the world of Maharajas while the humans seems to move on to the "liberation" promised by modernity, where does the elephant go—back to the "wild," which exists in fantasy? [197] Crucially, if there is violence at heart of the taming, and one learns to discipline oneself, and even assume a place and derive a pleasure within structures of power, how can one imagine liberation—will the liberation be an absolute letting go of the history of discipline itself? If the process of disciplining, is indeed as performance theory has shown, constituted through bodily practices rather than through ideas[198] (definitely more emphatically in the case of domesticated elephants), how will the body sense its surroundings in the state of musth?

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[197] I highlighted earlier the significance of elephant in the actual space of Kerala, but elephant as the figure of "enslaved" in the modernity project has an additional layer if one looks at the place of elephant as a deeply entrenched but a passive agent within the historical narrative of modernity in Kerala. Even though raising a question such as "when Malayalees accepted the nuclear family system, and stepped into modernity at the turn of the 20th century, what happened to the animal kingdom?" might be deemed off-tangent, the question seems to be interesting in case of elephants. What happened to elephants when nuclear families came up? To lay down this problematic, ironically one need to turn not to the conventional histories populated by humans, but to the popular history produced by Kerala tourism designed to present the exotic, where elephants invite you to Kerala to gaze at them as exemplary figures who have *lived through* the structural transformations in Kerala society in the 20th century. It is a story of "becoming," but becoming of the "State Animal." The Kerala tourism's official site says, "Elephants have been an integral part of cultural Kerala from time immemorial. These huge mammals have always been loved, revered, groomed and given a prestigious place in the state's culturescape. Most joint families in the past owned elephants and their increasing number was considered a symbol of the family's status. But today only a handful of families own an elephant. The rest have entrusted these treasured possessions to the Devaswoms or temple managements owing to the degeneration of the joint family system and the rising cost of maintaining elephants."[197] This short seemingly passé description connects elephants in Kerala to the destruction of joint family system, a moment that is regarded as the critical one evidencing the structural transformation of the region, and places the elephant, as a body apart from people who are affected deeply by the structural transformation brought in by modernity. From enthralls and structures of feudalism (joint family set-up and the time of Maharajas), elephants moved to a specific part of "public," not to the zoos or to the wild. Elephants and Malayalees are therefore within modern Kerala historical narratives "companion species," elephants standing side by side with human Malayalees in their transformation and as they entered modernity and nuclear families, only that the radical political thrust of Haraway's expression is absent. After providing details of the legends of the most famous elephant in Kerala, Guruvayoor Kesavan, the site goes on to say the following, "In its natural habitat (the jungles), man and tigers are the enemies of wild elephant herds, but once they are captured and tamed, they become the gentle friends of their human owners. Their attitude, life and habits change. Elephants are at first slow in grasping the commands taught to them but once they do, they remember it for decades."[197] The only blip in the history of the "gentle" friends is the glossing over the iron hook (*totti*) that is kept on the side of the tamed elephant, and the phenomenon of musth: the iron hook assuring obedience and control even when the mahout is physically absent, and musth state that is unpreventable as a state of existence with no control.

[198] More generically theorization developed from Foucault's conception of body, and specifically in performance theory Paul Connerton's (1989) theorization of bodily memory.

An(im)ality, Language and Gender

In his seminal study of Vailoppilli's works, the eminent Malayalam literary critic M. N. Vijayan subjects the works of the poet who is regarded as a rationalist, and the champion of "utopian" socialism in Malayalam poetry to a Freudian psychoanalytic reading. Closely analyzing the deployment of the sense of smell in his works, Vijayan makes a forceful claim that it is the overpowering sense of smell through which the poet relates to the world outside, so far as to say that "smell never sleeps/rests in Vailoppilli's poems" (Vijayan, 2010[1970]:673. Transl. mine). Keeping in mind that Freud isolates precisely the denigration/diminution of the olfactory sense as critical in the construction of the category of "human," the deployment of the sense of smell presents a particular challenge to the centrality of the scopic.[199] After establishing the centrality of smell, Vijayan further shows how other elements such as smoke and humor are critical in Vailoppilli's oeuvre. Basing his analysis on Freud's paper *Character and Anal Erotism* (1908) where Freud isolates three inter-related character traits of orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy, and the further investigations on anal erotism by Jones, Sadger, and K. Abraham,[200] Vijayan reads the metaphors of smell, smoke and the function of humor in Vailoppilli's works as related to "anal erotism." As a "sublimation" of anal erotism, the metaphors, specifically that of smell as deployed in Vailoppilli poems, for Vijayan, is what allows the olfactory sense to simultaneously become an "erotic" engagement with the world. It is precisely the anal-erotic

[199] Una Chaudhuri points out, "the "diminution of the olfactory stimuli," says Freud, makes what was once sexually stimulating—blood, feces, earth—disgusting, producing "a cultural trend towards cleanliness," one feature of which is sexual repression. Repression eventually leads, says Freud, to "the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization"" (Chaudhuri, 2004:77-78).

[200] For more, see Jones, Ernest. "Anal Erotic Character traits", "Hate and Anal Erotism in the Obsessional Neurosis" in *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, New York: William Wood and Company, 1918; Sadger, J. "A Contribution to the understanding of Sado-masochism." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 1926, volume 7:484-491; Abraham, Karl. "Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character" (1921). In *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*. NW:Karnac Books Limited, 1979.

character so isolated that gives the classic psychoanalytic structure of "ambivalence" in Vailoppilli's works, where the "most fallen" is at the same time "the most cherished."

Sahyante Makan, in this framework, is (predictably) for Vijayan, a paradigmatic work that "condenses" the anal-erotic elements in Vailoppilli's oeuvre, as the "anal hero"[201] in the poem is an (embodiment of) olfactory sense itself.[202] The trunk of the tusker, an extension of the nose, and one with which the elephant experiences the world is presented in its ambivalence even at the start of the poem. The initial presentation of the tusker through description of its physical traits, in the case of trunk, involves the narrator describing the trunk that is constantly touching and moving through the ground even as he stands still upright (an observation highlighting the "perfection" of the elephant)[203] as a foreboding metaphor of whose graves he might be digging. But what provides the fundamental ambivalence is the driving force of musth fluid in his forehead: musth as the "magical fluid that erases truth and awakens fantasy/dream" (Vijayan, opct.:687. Transl. mine). It is an "anal sublimation," according to Vijayan, as through this smell one encounters the scenario of the equal force with which both emotions of aggression and sexuality fills its head.

This characterization of "erotic" as related to the elephant, the olfactory sensibility as an erotic engagement, assumes significance when one reads it against the anthropomorphizing and

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[201] While I will analyze in detail below the distinction between the narrator and the elephant, here I will just point out the ambivalence in Vijayan's analysis as he moves from psychoanalytic critic of poetic practice, where the categories of psychoanalysis is central for the human act of "art-making," to the abrupt move where the elephant itself becomes framed by psychoanalytic problematic. While Vijayan's analysis is of Vailoppilli's use of metaphors of smell, the analysis abruptly presents the elephant itself as "anal-hero" (the term is not my translation, but is exactly "anal-hero" in the Malayalam text of Vijayan).

[202] Here I am not going into the detail elaboration of Vijayan's argument. He presents poetic verses from disparate works across Vailoppilli's oeuvre, from the most striking example of Vailoppilli giving smell to gold, to poet's metaphor of dividing good and evil into distinct smells, to the passing metaphorical use of the above said three elements: smell, smoke, and humor.

[203] The reference of trunk lying on the ground builds on the codification (*laksana*) of the ideal elephants I discussed earlier.

symbolic practices within the canonical tradition of “Hinduism.” In her study *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology*, Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, analyzing the use of animals to “symbolize men and women with various sexual dimensions” in *Kamasutra*, argues that elephant, though part of the “equal union” between stallion (male) and elephant (female), does not have a “sexual significance,” and is not “erotic” in Indian mythology (Doniger, 1980:257-258). While the white elephant derives its significance as symbol of “royalty, as a symbol of Buddha, and as an animal churned from the ocean” (ibid:258), Ganesa, the elephant god, is symbolized as “chaste” and his broken tusk, a “phallic emblem…the detachability of which denotes a certain ambivalence about Ganesha’ sexual nature” as it comes across as “virile and potent” in some contexts, but standing for “effeminate eunuch” in other contexts (Leach, 1962:82).

Vijayan takes the ascription of “erotic” forward by analyzing how “anal erotism” is also a sadomasochistic affair, where sadism involved in the carnage is offered a solace by the masochism.[204] In the initial moments of fantasy for the protagonist, in fact, there is a moment of awareness to the “real” space of the ritual, the poem thereby stressing that fantasy is not something that is totally involuntary. The fantasy is achieved through letting oneself move into the space of fantasy, a passive letting go to the fantastical.

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[204] Here again, I am not going into the details of Vijayan’s analysis. The analysis of sadomasochism is complex, and Vijayan presents examples from disparate works of Vailoppilli’s oeuvre. What makes the reading interesting is the unconventionality and play with which Vijayan reads the metaphors, even as he opens himself to the charge of “over-reading.” One instance suffices to record the unconventionality and play involved in the reading. In one of the poems, again a human-animal scene, Vailoppilli presents the narrator feeding grass to a little calf who is excited and “jumping around” while eating the grass from his hands. To describe the calf Vailoppilli uses the Malayalam word *tullichatuka*, literally “jumping around,” used for describing almost childish excited state. This seemingly passé and “romantic” imagery of a lovely relation of the narrator with the animal, for Vijayan, is an instance of sadism, as Vijayan asks why the calf is excited and “jumping around.” He concludes that the poet is taking a sadist pleasure in giving the hungry calf one blade of grass each, the pleasure coming from feeding it ever so slowly, keeping it hungry and unsatisfied, and seeing it jump around at the sight of grass.

The psycho-analytical reading through metaphors of anal-eroticism is forceful and politically destabilizing for the mainstream criticism in its charge of sadomasochism on a "utopian" poet seemingly representing and taking a clear side with the "marginalized" or "subaltern." And distinct from the early psychoanalytic conceptualizations, rather than presenting it simply as a "neurotic" phenomenon, or critiquing it as an absence of politics, Vijayan celebrates Vailoppilli for the sadomasochism. Yet this psycho-analytic maneuver is a limiting perspective as it allows an easy resolution between the distinctness of ontology of the elephant as an "other," and the deployment of the animal as standing in for the marginalized/"subaltern" in the colonial discourse. Rather than holding on to the tensions in the deployment of the metaphor of the nativized elephant breaking chains in musth, and interrogating the displacements in such a staging of a "subaltern," whose voice is taken over by a voice of reason, Vijayan visualizes the scene as the staging of the unconscious. In fact, in this move, he is close to Vailoppilli himself, who gives the logic of psychology, a visualization of externality of power in opposition to the "natural" impulse, and what can be seen as a semi-Aristotelian logic of tragic hero, to contextualize his work. Vailoppilli writes about the poem, "Living under the artificial conditions of a sophisticated life, man may, at times find himself ruled by the strong urges of a natural impulse; he may defy the civilized ways of life and try to live as the flesh dictates. Taking fright at this, sensing danger, and also in a spirit of vengeance, society may thrash him out to death. The poem gives a suggestion of this. The Sahya forests, perhaps, represent the subconscious mind which is the seat of wild passions. That man may be a source of danger of society; but his downfall deserves our pity" (Vailoppilli, Quoted in Jothikumari:98).

For Vijayan, it is the corollary characteristic of anal erotism, what Jones and Abraham have highlighted as "omnipotence of thought," which allows a move from the realm of "involuntary"/"unstable" unconscious to "creativity" and "freedom," whereby the distinct ontology of an elephant is displaced to that of the realm of "human imagination/creativity." With the basic assumption that unconscious is driven by the sense of "freedom," Vijayan notes that "freedom is the flagstaff of his (tusker's/poet's unconscious)" (Vijayan, Opct:686). And when this notion of freedom of the unconscious is linked to the belief of "omnipotence of thought" in anal eroticism, Vijayan squarely makes a divide between the body and mind, and presents a perspective where it is ultimately the poet's "omnipotence of thought" that sets up and defines the fantasy. In this manner Vijayan concludes that *Sahyan* is therefore the "nostalgia of the poet who has *become* the elephant" (ibid.:687. emphasis mine), and that the untamable tusker stands for the poet's "obstinate resistance to the world that tries to tame him" (ibid.).

In reading the tusker's peregrinations through the fantastical wilderness as the staging of the unconscious (of the creative poet), the a-historical reading process of metaphors do not address the discursive domain that configures the metaphors, giving the metaphors the specific force and natural-ness. As Butler, in her different critique of psychoanalytic manouevre shows, while the unconscious itself is here presented as an incoherent and unstable force—a destabilization of the humanistic discourse of the subject—the narrative of psychoanalysis itself gives an essentializing perspective (Butler, 1990). What Vijayan's analysis does not expand on is precisely the colonial discursive context that sets up "ambivalence" as one of the central identificatory strategies for the colonized. By not interrogating "ambivalence" as an identificatory structure, as one that is framed within a particular historical juncture, the analysis also leaves un-interrogated the specific masculinity discourse that allows the ambivalence to

sustain itself. In his study on the recurring images and metaphors of zoo and its variations in Malayalam poetry, E. V. Ramakrishnan argues that the "obsessive preoccupation with a locus of images signifying enclosure, control, isolation, subjugation, surveillance…suggests an under-world of tension relating to sexuality, power and identity" (Ramakrishnan, 2001:66). In the work, though sensitive in his depiction of the elephant, and what for some scholars is a "bio-centric" perspective, it is precisely the colonial discursive frame that provides the ambivalence and contradictions, making the "best" tusker also the standing as an exemplary case of "subjugated" masculinity of the colonized/marginalized: the masculinity that is dominated by an "external" power, but having the potential of carnage and savagery.

Let us look at the performance as to how it destabilizes the unmarked position of the narrator. The performance space for *The Elephant Project*, which is an outdoor space in National School of Drama, consists of an empty platform in the center with a peepal tree providing the backdrop.[205] The sides of the platform are extended backwards, with tall traditional lamps occupying the short extending space in the rear. While the platform is used as the space of embodying the elephant, the rest of the space enveloping the platform set the context of the *pooram* (ritual-festival), and is occupied by the live percussionists. The organization creates a distinction between the space of the *pooram*, and a performance space within *pooram* that is centered and elevated. The "inner" space of fantasy of the elephant in this way is externalized and brought "on-stage" as another space within, well-demarcated and engaging with the *pooram* space. While in the earlier section, I looked at the description of the start of the performance, here I specifically analyze the recital of the poem that was not dealt with in detail in the review, and what it means to split word and embodiment. In *Elephant Project*, a preference for

[205] The performance on which I am basing my analysis here occurred in the Meghdoot Open Theater in National School of Drama in 2009.

physicality[206] can be seen in the stark distinction made between the recital of the poem in Malayalam at one go in the first part, and the physical rendering provided by Mikari during the rest of the performance with only intermittent Japanese.

The split (to add to the listing of formal techniques that I critiqued in earlier section) does have resonances with the performance traditions of both India and Japan. While in Japanese performance tradition one comes across a split between speaking and embodying in forms such as noh and *bunraku*, the split is also visible in Indian "classical" performance traditions such as Kathakali, Kutiyattam, or the popular ritual performance tradition of Teyyam. But more centrally, Ku Na'uka Theater Company, where Mikari has played a significant part, makes use of a distinct, signature style split between words and embodiment with the theorization of "movers" and "speakers." In the performances of Ku Na'uka such as *Medea* and *Othello*, while the "speakers" (a chorus on stage) follow a technique of *bunraku* style chanting, the "movers" (actors) "engage in *ningyo-buri*, a kabuki technique of having humans imitate bunraku puppets" (Anan, 2006:407). In an interview the director of Ku Na'uka, Miyagi Satoshi, points out that it was his aspiration to go beyond language barriers that prompted him work with the specific method and that the effort was to "to divide speech and movement and then transform speech into a type of music… [and] to create a theatre in which the audience was able to appreciate images or movements without lines or sounds, and vice versa" (Interview, Eglinton, 2011:237). As scholars have shown, this experimental use of technique in Ku Na'uka diverges from the traditional by presenting the "movers" as "self-motivated," as well as involving both male and female performers play across gender (Anan, 2006:407), and brings to view and "exposes" the

[206] This split and a stress on physicality in the act of communication can be seen as what stands out as a commonality in the seemingly arbitrary selection of texts by the group. While *Quick Death* involves 51 scenes using voice over, but having only one instance of actual use of words by an actor, *Water Station* with no actual dialogues and consisting of slowed-down movements, works with the "power of passivity... of being" (Ota Shogo, 1990:153).

“metacritical” and “metatheatrical” (Eglinton, 2011:234). Through this specific technique, where the voice and action of a character is “split between two or more actors and on occasion united again,” Eglinton argues that Ku Na’uka splits the “logos” and “pathos” regarded as “inherent in a character by the classical texts,” and that the “division, dislocation, restriction, refinement, and reunion in the relationship between words and bodies created[s] a dissimilation dynamic” (Eglinton, 2011:234).

In *The Elephant Project*, the split is much more categorical as there are no “speakers” who continuously or throughout the play narrate the words for the “movers.” More like the split in ritual traditions such as Teyyam, the poem is recited in one go (around 13 minutes), and Mikari does a full physical elaboration after the recital (about an hour). Once the physical elaboration by Mikari starts, the only words one hears as audience are those of random one-off shouts of people from outside indexing the recognition of “mad” elephant running in the real space and Mikari’s sparse singing and speaking as an elephant. The split in *Elephant Project* is therefore a contextualization and setting up of the narratorial voice in the poem, which once set, can be interrogated with the distinct possibilities of embodiment offered by performance.

As lights come in on-stage, the actor[207] comes up to the front of the platform and seats himself in the traditional Japanese seiza posture—sitting on the ground by folding legs behind the thighs, and resting the buttocks on feet and ankles, while the hands are placed on the knees—and recites the complete poem in Malayalam. The recital, being a verbatim recital of the poem, means he takes the perspective of the narrator of the poem. The entire poem is recited at length “seriously” and “emotionally” with the actor keeping eyes closed, the upright seiza posture maintained, almost every word stressed, and a non-visible group reciting along certain lines. As

[207] The part is played by director of the performance, Sankar Venkateswaran.

the tusker slides into fantasy, and starts roaming around the wild, the percussion aids him in setting the emotional heights. At the climax of the poem, one hears the noise of a gunshot and the actor stands up and recites the last verses, this time maintaining the uprightness of the spine while standing. The poem moves through varying emotions, with the description of the tusker in the *pooram*, his foray and smelling of the wild/nature/herd/mate, and the final running amok and killing, and the narrator showing the real effects of tuskers actions in the fantasy. In the poem the pathos is not created on the "fact" of the death of the people assembled nor is it reside in the moment of the death of the tusker. Instead the pathos is established in the condition of the tusker after the carnage, where it is confused in a fundamental spilt between (heightened) senses—the vision/imagination and sense of smell and touch. While the vision of the tusker shows trees, herd and mate with whom who he engages with, the powerful sense of smell confuses him as he cannot identify why his trunk smells of blood, which he is trying unsuccessfully to take off. It is precisely this pathetic confused state of figure, not one in absolute joy or simply taken over by anger and aggressiveness (*mast*) that is shot dead. The only one seeing with clarity is the narrator. The narrator, and through him the reader, are clear on the objects sensed by the tusker both in its imagination and in actuality and therefore the confusion of musth state. The shooting of the elephant in the end therefore shows the absence of reason of modernity. In the recital in the performance, yet, these different emotions get neutralized to give sense of a "restrained" and "self-conscious" masculinity. It is as if the poem is recited condensing the restrained, but visible masculinity of the enslaved elephant standing in the ritual space, stretching its back leg, and thrusting forward the forehead. The voice of reason that tries to see the whole system, but can only register pathos in the absence of reason in the system (the narrator's "consciousness") seemingly blended into that of the tusker. In the recital, with the specific use of seiza postures,

and maintaining the uprightness of the posture even while standing, the climax, rather being pathos is played out as a strong declaration.[208] The "long" almost monotonous recitation, tough to be "affected" by even the people who know Malayalam, adds to the sense of "restraint."

Along with word-embodiment binary, the other major distinction that the split highlights is the reversal of gender. Once again comparisons can be made to strategies used in Ku Nau'ka Theater company's plays where the "gender identities vary within and across plays" as "women can play men or vice versa" (Anan, 2006:407). In *The Elephant Project* yet Mikari playing the tusker makes a specific breach within the strategies of "becoming animal" within the mythological imagination in Sanskrit texts. Doniger in her analysis of zoomorphism prevalent in Sanskrit texts draws attention to the different relation between language and animal-human relation based on misogyny. Building her analysis on the myth of birth of poetic language through the first *shloka* uttered by poet Valmiki ("author" of Ramayana) in a moment of sorrow (*soka*) when he sees a hunter killing the "male of two mating cranes," and moving through multiple instances where (mis)identification of humans as animals when they are engaged in sexual act lead to their death, Doniger makes the connection between killing of the animal, sexual act, and birth of specific human language (poetry) (Doniger, 2005). Doniger convincingly shows that the texts posit a position where the "the possession of human speech is a prerogative that may deprive humans of their sexuality but may deprive animals of their lives" (Doniger, 2005:25). But there is an additional caveat within this linkage between human language and animals that makes "becoming *with*" of Haraway's theoretical maneuver even more significant in the Indian context. Analyzing the distinction between transformations into animals and talking

[208] This "restrained masculinity" can be seen as accentuated if one places it in relation to the "emotional" poetry recitals that are much popular in Kerala. While the latter poetry recitals generically tries to take one through the emotional travails, and ends up presenting the "bardic" as a nostalgia with the accompanying instruments such a *udukku,* and heightening the "existential" stature of the poet, here the recital, presents a direct challenge to the audience.

with animals, Doniger concludes that talking with animals or an access to the language of animals within Sanskrit texts was regarded as a prerogative of male domain. So while "all hypersexualized women are represented as talking animals," they do so without "talking with animals" (Doniger, 2005:25). By embodying the elephant Mikari calls into attention, accentuates, and parses open the gendered structural links, and tensions in language, animality and the process of talking with.

The embodiment does so by specific departures from the textual source, making it open-ended, and destabilizing the narrative in the process. First, the performance eschews the binary of the narrator versus the tusker, where the narrator presents to "us" the reality of the tusker lost in its fantasy. In the performance, the "reality" is presented to "us" and to the "tusker" not by a voice of reason, but often a contorted body, a body registered to be in pain. It is precisely the heightened state of sensuality, of a corporeal relation to the world that indexes possible breaches within the fantasy world. Second, the performance eschews the logic of any sense of linearity. In the poem, though the temporality is not strictly linear as the tusker slides into the fantasy and explores the wild with an extended/expanded temporality, the "break" in the real space is achieved in the moment of his move towards the herd and mate. The break in the "real" space of the *pooram* is a clear moment, from which there is no possibility of return. The performance, through visualizing the peregrinations, negates this logic of break, as, if one posits a "real" space of the *pooram* over which the fantastical is happening then there are multiple events of carnage, and multiple deaths, not just of the "people" in the ritual space, but also of the tusker. As a loop structure, closer to structures of trauma, the carnage and "awareness" of subjugation loops; returning again and again in different ways. While there are clear moments of "awareness" within the performance such as a pained and contorted body on the ground looking at the

audience in shock as the hands (while body moves on the ground in pain) gets stuck between the chain around neck, or the confused state of the elephant trying to wash off "blood" from hands,[209] the following of loop structure breaks these moments as finality. After the awareness, one sees the tusker again continuing peregrination and sensual engagement with surroundings. And amidst the peregrinations one also sees without any rupture a carry-over with a difference of the "virtuosic" body movements of the disciplined body of a tusker. This performance structure also goes against the finality of "death," as even the death by gun shot, a definite death as opposed the frequent collapses, is played out twice in the climax: once a death on-stage from an invisible gun indexed by the sound of a gun-shot hitting the tusker as it is running, and yet again, when Mikari steps out of the "role" and the stage, and is shot from behind as she stands in the midst of the audience with a visible gun-man in the center of the stage. In this manner, the performance also moves away from the defining moment of sexuality and mating as linked to death in the poem, a figuration having resonances with the "origin" myth of poetic practice in India. Awareness of subjugation, death, sexuality, disciplined body and being in wild all criss-cross, with no structural logic of Indian mythology.

To hone in on the argument, I will now closely analyze two scenes from the performance. where rather than the fragmented corporeal writings of becoming, there is a heightening of differences between the gendered human body and the animal through the strategy of anthropomorphism. While first is the twin death sequences at the end of the performance, as a counterpart to this death one sees a sequence absent in the poem, an anthropomorphic sequence of an "life" of the elephant in an alternate space of *pooram*, a *pooram* or carnival of the elephant.

[209] Here the scene plays on the possibilities ranging from simply a confused state of the tusker to even a notion of guilt from the awareness much like a scene of Lady Macbeth.

Between Animal and Human: The question of Anthropomorphism

In the first death sequence, coming right after a full-fledged anthropomorphic enactment of the elephant (which I will discuss shortly), the tusker is once again rudely awakened to the "reality" of subjugation. With contorted face signifying pain, she wears the *kimono* and climbs onto the stool. She tries to balance herself on one leg stretching her hands to one side and the feet to the other. Not able to balance, she gets down. While one hears a lot of cries from outside, as also sounds of fireworks and rhythm of the drums in a crescendo, she throws away the *kimono* and walks slowly towards the *tidambu* (deity) kept on one side of the stage. She looks intensely at the *tidambu*, moves her hand across it, and removes its top while the larger portion falls down. After a moment of pathos, she moves in quick paces to the front towards the audience, "fleeing." In this abrupt fleeing, one hears the sound of the gunshot and she collapses. She tries to get up, pulls herself through the ground towards the twin tusks at the center (reminiscent of Kerala the emblem) and crashes on to the mirror in the center of the emblem. As the mirror is a rotating one, her upper torso vanishes behind the mirror. The mirror starts revolving and she pushes it with her hands making it revolve fast with the only part of her body visible to the audience being her separated legs lifting and falling down, suggesting rather than a simple death, but more a rape. After maintaining the movement for a short duration, she vanishes, or more aptly, giving an impression of being sucked behind the emblem.

This sequence is followed by another "death" sequence, where a more clear "self," not one that is trying to frame in the state-emblem, is portrayed. Mikari comes out onto the stage, now dressed in a complete white attire, a costume that resonates with the traditional female attire of Kerala women, *mundu veshti* (an upper caste attire) much popularized by the tourism industry as the educated hospitable, but "authentic" Malayali woman. She faces the audience directly,

addressing them with questions in Japanese, looking at audience members intensely and slowly exiting through the midst of the audience. On the stage one sees two men take out the tusks of the emblem, and one sees two bare-bodied males, one with a gun and another attendant with a stick. Slowly the gunman takes aim, and fires the shot. Mikari, amidst the audience turns around hurt, and lights black out.

As a work adapting a Malayalam poet who stages ambivalence, and the performance taking the masculine space of ritual as its central materiality, and ending with bringing back the "self" of the actor in a regional code, the scene can be read as a complex but indirect gender critique within the space of Kerala. The scene assumes significance if one contextualizes the discourse surrounding gender in Kerala, and significantly what a specific gender discourse performs as a force of stabilization for Kerala identity in its relation to the "outside." Kerala, as a region, enters the global academic discourse on three counts: its (erstwhile) matrilineal system,[210] communism,[211] and development. It is the third one, development that is significant for us here. Hailed into a "model," the "Kerala Model," highlighted by the Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, foregrounds that even with low per capita income and growth levels, Kerala has very high ratios of Human Development Index that have not been achieved elsewhere in India, or in other "Third-world" nations. In this vein, Amartya Sen points out, "in respect of certain variables like average levels of literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality etc. conditions in India are enormously adverse compared with China, and yet in all these respects, Kerala does significantly better than China" (quoted in Kurien, 1995:70). It therefore becomes an "indigenous" model that can be, and needs to be emulated at the national level, "there are a great

[210] For the debates around matrilineal system and the significance and the transformation of matrilineal system through "reforms" at the turn of the century, see, Arunima, G., 2003.

[211] Kerala has one of the first elected Communist governments in the world as in the first election after the formation of the state in 1957 a communist government came to power.

many things we can learn from within the country by using the diversity of our experiences, particularly in the use of public action-involving the public itself as well as the government…The Indian government should try to emulate the Kerala experience" (Sen. Quoted in Kurien, 1995:70).[212]

The constitutive part of this model is the discourse around gender, as the narrative of well being is also regarded as a narrative of gender equality and parity. So for the proponents of the model, the narrative is framed highlighting that Kerala has a better sex ratio where there are more females per men, greater female life expectancy, infant mortality being lower for girls, and higher access for women to education, and that the figures are the result of the "greater access that women have to food, education, and health care in the state."[213] The critiques of the model on the other hand point out that rather than being any rosy haven of gender parity, there are low rates of employment, low property holding and property rights for women, rising dowry, higher levels of suicide rates, low visibility of women in public space and politics, and among the highest rates of sexual harassment cases against women in Kerala.[214] It is this critique that almost "spontaneously" transforms the metaphor of the "best" tusker in the masculine public space an

[212] The fact that it is Communist Party that has been a major force in post-independence Kerala that gives a particular thrust to the developmental model—making it a paradox and critique—as it goes against the grain of more orthodox Marxist categorizations of economic development leading welfare in other realms of life. In this vein, Marxist economist Patnaik points out, "This model provides a contrast to the traditional view which sees development as a sequel to growth, which postulates, in other words, that economies should give the highest priority to growth of per capita output; and if growth occurs then human development would follow. The Kerala model, by contrast, shows that the elimination, or at any rate the alleviation, of the miserable conditions of life which the bulk of the population in the third world faces, does not have to await that distant day when growth has taken place to a sufficient extent for its 'trickle down' to make an impact upon the people" (Patnaik 1995:37).

[213] The figures of 1991 census found that while there were about 929 women per 1,000 men in India (the infamous "fifty million women missing" in India because of female foeticide), in Kerala, the number was 1,040 women. The female life expectancy in Kerala, as in the developed world, exceeds that of the male. More figures that are significant for the model include the male-female gap in literacy rates for Kerala in 1981–82, which was 75-66 percent, as against 47-25 percent for India; life expectancy for males (in 1981–82) lower than for females (64 years for males vs. 68 for females) while the corresponding numbers for the rest of India are 57 and 56 years, a higher number of female college students compared to males (Tharamangalam, 1998:24).

[214] Sreekumar points the figures published in a regional newspaper from 1997 that Kerala leads all other states in sexual harassment, with the figures for the previous year alone showing a 30% increase (Sreekumar, Opct.:43).

embodiment of phallus, rather than an embodiment of the olfactory sense. While it is not my project to analyze the highly controversial Kerala model, what is significant is, as Sharmila Sreekumar points out, that in these forceful narratives of identity construction, where Kerala is posited as a paradox—an utopia and a dystopia simultaneously—

> "gender gets collapsed onto women…so that the term 'gender paradox' becomes a way of talking about the situation of *women*, or even the position of women in contemporary Kerala. In fact 'gender paradox' is the overwhelming context of imagining women in Kerala today, whether in everyday conversations, media reports or academic and activist articulations. Far from being the esoteric preoccupation of a few developmental theorists it has come to be the very stuff of commonsense about women in contemporary Kerala" (Sreekumar, 2007:35).

It is precisely the overarching presence of the framing of gender paradox that both proponents and critiques share that Sreekumar points out hampers the feminist activism as the paradox constructs a homogenous subject of "woman", and "sedimenting" "all social inequalities along the lines of gender" whereby it "becomes a site from which to misread, misrecognize and ignore other axes of subjection" (ibid.:53).[215] In the last scene of the performance, due to the intercultural frame, when Mikari after the rape sucked into the emblem with a revolving mirror, but also emerging out of it dressed in white resonating with the "dominant" "free" Malayalee woman, popularized by the state and tourism, the working of the paradox is evoked.

Yet the performance also performs an unsettling of the boundaries, and offers stronger

[215] Sreekumar argues that rather than serving as a site for radical critique, therefore, "discourses of paradox often become occasions for conservative re-telling. It determines that discontent and protest get articulated only by using the leverage of the prevaricating 'but'. Paradox thus becomes the very condition of possibility of regulation and control." She articulates that it is precisely this force of the paradox that makes the feminist activism not engage with emerging politics from diverse groups such as claims made by women from Dalit and fishing communities, sex-workers, or wide number of cases of lesbian deaths not becoming an issue that feminists engage with.

critique of masculinity, most palpable ironically in a sequence of full-fledged anthropomorphism, a scene or image absent in the poem. In one of the sequences, after a collapse by the tusker, three males, bare bodied, enter the stage wearing masks of boar, two of them carrying drums and another, a string instrument. Slowly starting to play the instruments, one of them gives Mikari an elephant mask, and the traditional multi-colored umbrellas (used in *pooram*). The paper mache masks, both of the boar and the elephant are not ornate, and give the feel of popular and unfinished masks as they show the curves and fissures on them. The music, rather than the *pooram* one, is that of flamenco, with more popular amateur drum rhythm played by a boar on-stage. The males start dancing, what seems to be a banal, non-virtuosic dance, with short swaying of their arms and feet to the sides. Their faces covered by the masks, draws even more attention to their non-muscular bodies swaying in such banal fashion. Mikari wears the elephant mask and takes a green umbrella, stands in the center rolling it in her hands, while two boars "fan" the elephant with *venchamaram*. The male dancers also move on to roll and play with the umbrellas, and continue the banal/base dancing. The short sequence of a "liberated" space, or an alternate "carnival" of the animals, is striking in that it breaks whatever frames for acting mode that are set up through the performance: it is the only "group" sequence; it breaks away from indexing of elephants to do full-fledged anthropomorphism; it moves away from the kind of acting mode used in other sequences with its relinquishing of measured and "virtuosic" acting. As John Berger has highlighted how anthropomorphism as a strategy offers a challenge to modernity (1980), here the anthropomorphism does something complex: it disentangles the elephant from the discourse of masculinity, resisting the over-determined and spontaneous ascription of masculinity onto the elephants. While scholars have talked about returning the goat in the scapegoat as a radical gesture, here the reverse, of removing the elephant from the

masculinity discourse becomes the most significant gesture. Centrally, while providing this imaginative space of an alternate carnival of the animals with the props of the *pooram*,[216] it does not posit a full-fledged Bakhtinian usurpation, and alternate upside-down second world. Only that against the crescendos and heights of the *pooram*, whether it be the music, the fireworks, and the over-determined masculinity, the alternate carnival is a low-key affair, time to have some "fun" with the umbrellas and dance to flamenco, but not a complete full-fledged and "self-conscious" break from the representational violence. In this sense, the materiality of bodies in this sequence, specially, the banality of the dances, works as parasitic on the entire materiality of *pooram* that the performance re-creates. It is precisely this parasitic quality of the sequence that provides the most fundamental critique of the masculinity practice at the sensory level.

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[216] Though one wonders, an additional prop of slippers for the elephant could have radically challenged the human-animal split even while the temple elephants are regarded as "decorated" elephants. With all the "decoration" and dressing up, it is one piece of clothing that elephants do not have even as they walk through the scorching tarred roads of Kerala, the white scars in their feet taking over the blackness evidencing the fact. The big black rubber slippers designed for the elephants in the Elephant Museum, Thrissur, run by the scientific community has still no takers (maybe they should have multi-colored ones). They remain there not as documentation, but still as a potentiality.

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