As Visible from the Outside Western Filmmakers and India

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Western film-makers have been visiting India since the early part of the 20th century. Recently, a growing body of literature has taken as its subject the films that resulted from these journeys. It maps not only the conditions and circumstances that facilitated the production of these films, but also examines the ethics and greater socio-political implications of their cross-cultural representations.[1]

Short films from the silent era, such as the popular 'trick' films of Georges Méliès – *Le Brahamane et le paillon* (1901), *La Rosier miraculeux* (1904) and *Palais des mille et une nuits* (1905) – made allusions to the subcontinent. The films are complete Oriental fantasies in which 'for Méliès, India and Indians were make believe entities…India was anything sufficiently distant in appearance from familiar Western life and customs – exotic and mysterious enough to establish its difference.' The characters are recognisable stereotypes, with no verisimilitude. Sets and décor reveal that the geographies and styles of South Asia are conflated with those from across South East Asia and the Middle East.[2] A distinctly ethnographic methodology can be traced back to *Divine India* (1914 and 1927–28), a tableau of footage commissioned by the French banker and philanthropist Albert Kahn as part of his ambitious The Archives of the Planet project. Kahn sent two cameramen, Stéphane Passet and Roger Dumas in 1914 and 1927-1928 respectively. The footage they returned with was assembled into 45 short films of varying duration, from 40 seconds to 40 minutes. Most of the films lack any inter-titles, and only a few have titles such as one that records the *50th Anniversary of the Coronation of Maharajah Jagjit Singh of Kapurthala*.[3]

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1 See S. Jhaveri (ed.), *Outsider Films on India: 1950–1990,* Mumbai, The Shoestring Publisher, 2009, and V. Mulay, *From Rajah's and Yogis to Gandhi and Beyond: Images of India in International Films of the Twentieth Century,* Kolkata, Seagull Books, 2010. A number of the films mentioned in this text were shown at Tate Modern in June 2010 ('Outsider Films on India', curated by Shanay Jhaveri) and at the Cultuurcentrum Brugge in March 2012 ('India: Visions from the Outside', curated by Shanay Jhaveri). There have been two more subsequent presentation of this material first at the Filmmuseum, Vienna in 2013 and then subsequently at the Cinematheque Ontario, Toronto in 2014. Both programmes were based on my publication and film series that originated at the Tate Modern.

2 Mulay, *From Rajah's and Yogis to Gandhi and Beyond*, cit., pp. 37-38.

3 These are held in the collection of the Musée Albert-Kahn, as part of Kahn's *Archives de la Planète* (Archives of the Planet). For more, see 'Les Archives de la Planète,' *Musée Albert-Kahn*, www.albert- kahn.fr/index.php/les-archives-de-la-planete.

During the 1920s and 30s foreign coproductions were rare and Western filmmakers began to work within the Indian film industry. The German filmmaker Franz Osten, and his collaboration with Indian producer Himansu Rai is a fine example. This was a working partnership that resulted in three significant silent films: *Light of Asia* (1926), *Shiraz* (1928) and *Throw of Dice* (1929).[4] Paul Zils, another German, followed a similar trajectory, leading the country's post-independence documentary movement. In fact, after Indian independence and the end of the Second World War, at a time when Western disenchantment intersected with South Asian aspiration, scores of European auteurs found their way to India, whose films all contain startling aesthetic and formal moves.

Jean Renoir escaped Hollywood and made *The River* (1951), on which Satyajit Ray, Subrata Mitra and Bansi Chandragupta worked. The film gained Renoir the reputation of a master cinematographer because of its experimentation with naturalism and colour, which was unlike the Technicolor in the 1947 British film *Black Narcissus*, where 'colour was used to enhance the near fantastical import of an Indian village on an English order of female missionaries'.[5] Similar to Renoir, Louis Malle also visited India when he was beset with personal and professional problems: 'At this moment of crisis in my life, when I was trying to re-evaluate everything I had taken for granted so far, India was the perfect *tabula rasa*: it was just like starting from scratch.'[6] Malle's two works – *Phantom India* (1969), a seven-part, 378-minute film, and *Calcutta* (1969), a 105-minute feature – are both preoccupied by the tension that exists between filming subject and filmed objects. While *Phantom India* was well received in France it engendered much outrage in India when it was shown in England, with certain Indian government officials being very vocal in announcing their displeasure as to how India was portrayed in the film.[7]

Correspondingly, scandal and controversy have wrung itself around the appraisal of Roberto Rossellini's time in India which is mostly remembered because of his liaison with the then married Indian scriptwriter Sonali Senroy DasGupta although his film *India Matri Bhumi* (1959) is astonishing for its melding of documentary and fiction. Jean Luc Godard has referred to it as the 'creation of the world'. Swedish film-maker Arne Sucksdorff's *En Djungelsaga* (1957), filmed in Agascope, also offers up a curious mix of the poetic and the documentary. Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Notes for a Film on India* (1968), a trenchant exploration of the seeds of embourgeoisement in India, further dismantles the conventional documentary

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4 See D. Singh, 'A German Insider in Bombay Cinema: Franz Osten's Situated Orientalism', in S. Jhaveri (ed.), *India: Visions from the Outside*, Bruges, Cultuur Centrum Brugge, 2012, pp. 28-33.

5 Mulay, *From Rajah's and Yogis to Gandhi and Beyond*, cit., p. 33.

6 L. Malle, in P. French (ed.), *Malle on Malle,* London, Faber and Faber, 1993, p. 69.

7 See S. Jhaveri, 'A Shifting Consideration of Louis Malle's Phantom India: Then and Now'. in *Marg Magazine*, The French Connection, September, 2017.

form. Alain Tanner and John Berger too take up Indian modernity in *Une Ville à Chandigarh* (1966), in which the ideological possibilities engendered by Le Corbusier's city of the future are examined.

Among the most audacious of the mid-century films are Fritz Lang's *The Tiger of Eschnapur* (1959) and *The Indian Tomb* (1959), later followed by Marguerite Duras's *India Song* (1975). Lang's Indian epic, often dismissed as old-fashioned and highly orientalist, has been retroactively defended as an auteur film that is delightfully camp and 'develops the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of his whole career'.[8] Similarly, Duras's film was attacked because she had never been to India, but it has been reclaimed as 'a sensually abstract, languorously cadent and hypnotically enigmatic exposition on longing, isolation, haunted memory and obsolescence'.[9] The portrayal of India as a 'land at once ancient and timeless, its spiritual elusiveness providing abundant metaphor – for personal regeneration, the dissolution of identity, the search for authenticity'[10] has been constant, but with varying success. Alain Corneau's adaptation of Antonio Tabucchi's novel *Nocturne Indien* (1989) fares better than Nicolas Klotz's *La Nuit Bengali* (1988), Benoît Jacquot's *L'Intouchable* (2006) or Kei Kumai's *Deep River* (1995).

Of all the work made on India, the films and documentaries of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, made in collaboration with the writer Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, are amongst few that are committed to communicating the emotional transition being faced and made by individuals post-decolonization. They pictured a host of scenarios, from the melancholic meanderings of an increasingly marginalized group of English Shakespeare performers in independent India in *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) to *The Autobiography of a Princess* (1975) in which a divorced Indian princess living in self-exile in London selectively ruminates on the long-vanished world of courtly India. They also made the BBC-commissioned documentary *Adventures of Brown Man in Search of a Civilization* (1972), whose primary protagonist is the Indian writer Nirad Chaudhuri, a controversial figure who dedicated his first book to the British Empire and moved to Oxford in 1970, never to return to India, but always remained deeply critical of British racism. Another film of theirs *Hullabuloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* (1978) takes up an intriguing aspect of the post-independent landscape of India - the collecting of historical Indian painting by Western collectors. The film follows a savvy private American collector competing with an older British curator over the miniature painting collection of a maharaja, and finds a parallel in the actions of connoisseurs like Robert Skelton, W.G. Archer, Stuart Cary Welch and Hodgkin who

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8 T. Gunning, 'The Indian tomb of the dinosaur of Eschnapur', in Jhaveri (ed.), op. cit., p. 79.

9 T. Zummer, 'On translation, in an older sense: notations on India, cinema and certain problematics of representation', in Jhaveri (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 229.

10 J. Quandt, 'In search of a shadow: Alain Corneau's Nocturne Indien', in Jhaveri (ed), p. 193.

amassed formidable collections of Indian miniature painting both their own and on behalf of institutions, in consultation with local dealers at that time.

Whilst photographs, personal oral statements and some paintings and drawings exists as testaments to the mid-century friendships and relationships Western artists would cultivate with Indian artists when they would visit India due to a whole host of reasons, there are few films that actually capture these transnational affiliations. A rare moment can be seen in Judy Marle's BBC commissioned 1983 film *Message from Bhupen Khakhar*, where there is an extended sequence in which Hodgkin is pictured at Bhupen Khakhar's home in Baroda, Gujarat, immersed in conversation, Incidentally, Marle would also make a short film on Hodgkin called *In Conversation* (1982) which contain footage of Hodgkin in India. The only other film that captures such bonhomie is Navina Sundaram's half hour long *Summer Guests*, that documents the visit by a group of seven artist-teachers from Braunschweig (in Germany) to the artist initiated and led art camp Kasauli in 1983. There are something charming sequences, which fully convey the intimate and personal nature of this art centre where creativity and ideas were shared, with singing and dancing till the early hours of the morning.

The mid-1980s saw a whole host of Raj-inspired films and television series spring up following the success of Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982). *The Far Pavilions* (1984), *A Passage to India* (1984) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984) all trafficked in colonial nostalgia a trend that contuse into the present day with Channel 4's *Indian Summer* (2015-on-going). However, in the late 1980s and 1990s, some relevant and incisive documentaries emerged: Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986), David and Judith McDougall's *Photowallahs* (1992) and Werner Herzog's *Jag Mandir* (1991). Documentaries on India continue to abound, focusing on a range of issues such as women's rights in Richard Robbins's *Girl Rising* (2013) to Michael Glawogger's stark portrayal of dye workers in the slums of Mumbai in *Megacities* (1998) or the affirming and uplifting *Born into Brothels* (2004) by Zana Briski and Ross Kaufmann in which they teach the children of prostitutes in Calcutta's (known today as Kolkata) red light district the basics of photography, providing them with cameras to document their life stories.

Alongside these socially engaged documentaries, big Hollywood blockbusters like *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (2011) and *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) continue to make cursory pit stops in India, to expand the ever-growing portfolios of exotic settings with a local villain in tow, while independent American and British filmmakers with generous budgets also continue to be drawn to India. Some works, such as Chris Smith's benign *The Pool* (2007), Wes Anderson's incredibly solipsistic *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna* (2011) and John Madden's *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) and Garth Davis's weepy and sen-

timental *Lion* (2016) have been fairly better received than others, like Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) which is as Dennis Lim has rightly pointed out: 'A slippery and self-conscious concoction… It makes a show of being anchored in a real-world social context, then asks to be read as a fantasy. It ladles on brutality only to dispel it with frivolity. The film's evasiveness is especially dismaying when compared with the purpose and clarity of urban-poverty fables like Luis Bunuel's *Los Olvidados*, set among Mexico City street kids, or Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, set in inner-city Los Angeles. It's hard to fault *Slumdog* for what it is not and never tries to be. But what it is – a simulation of "the real India," which it hasn't bothered to populate with real people – is dissonant to the point of incoherence.'[11]

In the last two decades, since the Indian economy opened itself to the vagaries of global capital, a whole new set of moving image responses have been generated, mostly commissioned or supported by museums and galleries. International contemporary artists – Doug Aitken, Kader Attia, Kimsooja, Mario Pfeifer, Paweł Wojtasik to name a few – have favoured the format of the immersive multi-channel installation. Both Doug Aitken's *Into the Sun* (1999) and Kimsooja's *Mumbai: A Laundry Field* (2008) employ third person perspectives focusing on particular rhythms of labor. *Into the Sun* shot on the sound stages and films sets of Mumbai, concerns itself with the city's film industry capturing the miscellaneous behind the scenes spot boys, camera attendants, assistants at work while *Mumbai: A Laundry Field* fixates on the figure of the anonymous, migrant *dhobi* (laundryman). In 2011, as part of the Centre Pompidou's ambitious, but misguided exhibition *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* Kader Attia showed an empathetic multi-channel installation, *Collages* (2011), which juxtaposes across its three screens a meeting of transsexuals from Paris, Algiers and Mumbai. Unlike these works that have concentrated approaches, with prescribed intentions, Pfeifer's *A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue & Epilogue* (2010) is more complicated. Loosely a document of Mumbai Pfeifer's piece is over-whelmingly self-reflexive regarding the history of films made by Western filmmakers in India and he explicitly references Malle's *Phantom India* and Rossellini's *India: Matri Bhumi*. In all three works the episodic or serialiaty are crucial to the core agendas, all the filmmakers employing varying strategies that cohere in their refusal to offer definite meaning. A query then that does emerge when analyzing Pfeifer's approach is: 'do the images cave under the layered formal choices that seek to clearly forefront an awareness of the ethics of representation or do they absorb the formal choices and reveal themselves as mysterious, enigmatic, and generous, suggesting new ways of sharing ones

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[11] D. Lim, 'What, exactly is Slumdog Millionaire?', in *Slate*, January 26th, 2009, available at www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_oscars/2009/01/what_exactly_is_slumdog_millionaire.html

encounters however corrected or not? Are they able to stand simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' of a frame of historical and cultural referentiality?'[12]

Among this recent group of works the strongest engagement with India at a formal and ethical level is Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi's feature length, stirring *Images d'Orient, tourisme vandale* (2001) which contains footage of a visit made to India by Edda Mussolini, daughter of the dictator, in 1928-1929. The filmmakers at the time of the release of the film were careful to avoid mentioning Edda Mussolini in notes and interviews to not draw attention away from what is films primary concern - how non western cultures are apprehended by the Western gaze and how early elite tourism paved the way for mass tourism later in the century. By slowing down the footage and focusing on micro gestures and motions the filmmakers have created a powerful and confrontational film in which 'beauty and horror, beauty and degradation are never separated out.'[13]

The Otolith Group in their film *Communists Like Us*[14] focus on a mid-century historical moment of leftist political solidarity. *Communists Like Us* is composed of a series of captivating archival photographs, recording a trip made by Indian stateswomen in 1953 to the USSR and Mao's China. Delegations of Indian, Soviet and Chinese feminists are beheld intermingling, arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, visiting museums, factories, schools, nurseries and laboratories, participating in conferences, meetings, plenary sessions and discussions. *Communists Like Us* is unique in its exposition of India's gone energetic commitments to the Non Aligned Movement, socialist collectivism, and postcolonial and feminist agendas. Its triumphs lie in bringing back to mind the lives of overlooked and forgotten leftist political figures like M.N. Roy whose life is further explored in Vladimir Leon's film, *La Brahamane du Komintern* (2006).

The moving image works by Lucy Raven and Amie Siegel perceptively explore India's ongoing involvement in a set of international exchanges, reflecting its place within the 21st century's neoliberal global economy. Raven in two works *Curtains* (2014) and *The Deccan Trap* (2015) concerns herself with the trajectories of outsourced labour and India's place within such a market of service based exchange. Clocking in at 50 minutes, and meant to be experienced as a site-specific installation, *Curtains* is built up of 3D still photographs documenting post production facilities in Beijing, Bombay (known today as Mumbai), London, Vancouver and Toronto

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[12] S. Jhaveri, 'Inside and Outside a Frame of Historical and Cultural Referentiality?' in M. Pfeifer, *A Formal Film in Nine Episodes, Prologue and Epilogue – A Critical Reader*, Leipzig, Specter Books, 2013.

[13] R. Lumley, 'Images d'Orient, tourisme vandale and the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi' in *India: Visions from the Outside*, Bruges, Cultuur Centrum Brugge, 2012.

[14] See S. Jhaveri, *Shared Senses of Inquietude: Communists Like Us*, in 'The Otolith Group', Roma, MAXXI, 2011.

where material that needs to be transferred from 2D to 3D is outsourced from Hollywood. To be viewed with anaglyph 3D glasses, the red and blue plates of the still photographs start off a separate scrolling from right to left and left to right coming together for a few seconds, and generating a complete stereoscopic image. *Curtains* challenges our sense of perception by literally and figuratively pulling the curtain back on the production and experience of 3D and effectively situates India's place within a neoliberal global economy of outsourced labour.

Her other effort *The Deccan Trap* is a bit more speculative, its opening frames are of present-day, chaotic Chennai, the capital of the Tamil Nadu region of southeast India. Raven's camera moves through its busy streets and soaring skyscrapers into the darkened offices of International Tech Park, where once again she trains her camera on technicians converting outsourced Hollywood films from 2D to 3D. Then all of a sudden, The Deccan Trap arrives at Ellora. And equally suddenly, the 'trap' of title explains itself; 'trap' has been used by geologists to describe rock formations, and Ellora, found in the Western Deccan region, is home to one of the largest rock-cut monastery complexes in the world, dating from 600-1000 A.D. With this swift edit, Raven shifts what could simply have been a documentation of outsourced labour – the global network that Hollywood now relies on for its post-production – into a more intriguing cultural consideration of the sustained attempts on the subcontinent to continually look beyond and behind the flat image. Raven points us towards the formal relationship between bas-relief sculptures and 3-D images, both of which achieve an illusion of depth through a form of manual labour. So it is not only labour or only relief but also their twinned, conjoined realities that linger at the core of The Deccan Trap.

Siegel, in her film *Provenance*, (2013) is preoccupied with another kind of labour and how it is perceived, the artisanal production of mid twentieth design furniture and the way it has been inducted into a global commodity market. *Provenance* traces the movement of furniture designed by Pierre Jeanneret for the government offices and homes of the Le Corbusier designed city of Chandigarh in North West India, from its original context through the international auctions into the homes of wealthy western private collectors home. Built up of a series of very well composed tracking shots, with no voice over, Siegel takes viewers in reverse from the luxury homes and yachts in the West where these wooden pieces of mid-century design have arrived after extensive restoration and being acquired at staggeringly high prices in auction back to India, where they remain in use at certain offices or seen in an uncared for jumble.

Provenance clearly reflects that Siegel is attentive to perceptions of value and how they come to be attributed in differing contexts, but Erika Balsom also notices that in its presentation of Chandigarh there are correspondences with other moving image

works that take Chandigarh as its subject[15], such as another film by The Otolith Group *Otolith II* (2007) where they contrast Chandigarh with Mumbai's megaslums or Louidgi Beltrame's *Brasilia/ Chandigarh* (2008), where the artist forges an analogy between the two planned cities, or Corey McCorkle's short *Tower of Shadows* (2006) a 16 mm short that films an unfinished structure in the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh using time-lapse photography, condensing the shortest day of the year into a single roll of film. Balsom notices: 'If one were to judge the city by only its appearances in *Otolith II, Brasilia/ Chandigarh, The Tower of Shadows* and *Provenance*, one would be forgiven for assuming it was sparsely inhabited. With a population of over one million people – far more than Le Corbusier anticipated, and two million in the metropolitan area – this is hardly the case. Why, then, do the images of the city in recent artists' films avoid representations of populated spaces?… The city's allure as an exotic and striking example of the past's vision of the future tends to overtake its actual existence.'[16]

What seems to come into evidence when tracking across all these moving image works are some consistent preoccupations, the most recurrent is in filming the laboring body. A large swath of treatments and techniques are applied to the presentation of these images, which are commensurate with the expanded field of contemporary visual arts practice. At their most insightful some of these works are able to provide a broader, and somewhat nuanced understanding of India's place within today's global economy. Conversely, a recurring tendency does exist, a fixation on the faultliness of contemporary globalization and how they are playing out in parts of India. This could be another register of the exotic, borne of this contemporaneous moment and which is distinct from previous propensities to view the country as spiritual and rural and enslaved to tradition. Sukhdev Sandhu has correctly asked whether this attentiveness to the changing skylines of India, alludes to a new danger, where the 'fascination with the turbo economics of the east becomes a new kind of orientalism'.[17]

Any project that tasks itself with cross-cultural representation is fraught, and the ways in which this anxiety is telegraphed or contained in the work can prevent it from lapsing into a purely

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[15] When Ed Halter and Thomas Beard invited me, while I was preparing *Chandigarh is in India*, to curate an evening of film at Light Industry, New York, on 27 August 2015, I decided on a presentation of films on and about Chandigarh, giving it the title of 'Chandigarh is in India'. The sequence of films that evening comprised *Chandigarh* (Yash Chaudhary/Films Division, 1969, digital projection, 11 mins), *Une Ville à Chandigarh* (Alain Tanner and John Berger, 1965, digital projection, 50 mins), an excerpt from *Journeys into the Outside with Jarvis Cocker* (Martin Wallace/Channel 4, 1999, digital projection, 10 mins), *Tracing Bylanes* (Surabhi Sharma, 2011, digital projection, 15 mins) and *Utopia* (Nalini Malani, 1969–76, digital projection, 4 mins). The event at Light Industry reaffirmed for me the need to complete *Chandigarh is in India* and to think about Chandigarh as expansively as possible.

[16] E. Balsom, 'The City Beautiful, The City Filmed' in *Chandigarh is in India*, Mumbai, The Shoestring Publisher, 2016, p. 227.

[17] S. Sandhu, 'India: best exotic movie hell?', *Guardian*, 16 February 2012, available at www.theguardian.com/film/2012/feb/16/india-best-exotic-movie-hell

orientalising exercise to one that holds the possibility of self-awareness and self-criticality. Malle's *Phantom India* remains an apotheosis of such angst; while Duras's languid and minimalist *India Song* is its complete opposite and perfectly unnatural twin. It is a cognizance of such an anxiety that similarly propels Camille Henrot's *The Strife of Love in a Dream* (2011) but with very different effects. It is an eleven minute long intricately edited work which is incited both by Karl Jung's idea of India as a 'dreamlike world' and by Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar's assertion that India is 'the unconscious of the West'.[18] Formally different than Malle and Duras who both use extended duration to parse through the sensations they wish to engender, Henrot compresses time to create a pulsating exploration of fear, using the snake as an embodiment of the sensation. Filmed in India and France, Henrot gathers together images of ritual sacrifice, pharmaceutical laboratories, museums, mass pilgrimage, popular films and comic strips, (*Tintin*, *The Jungle Book* and Lang's *Tiger of Eschnapur* show up). Spiritual India buttresses up against 'modern' day India, which immediately could be a troubling prospect, but as the film carries on Henrot edits her images loosely based on the principles of *'Mnemosyne* [1924–29] by Aby Warburg, by merging them into an atlas of images of different cultural and worldly references, all according to the principle of elective affinities'. So what Henort seems to strive for and submits are a series of formal analogies that rest on terms (the images she has assembled, but provides no context for) corresponding with one another rather than *to* one another. *The Strife of Love in a Dream* is driven by a subjective logic that is fully known only to Henrot. Through its assembly of images, through its own excess and proliferation of images, Henrot is attempting to produce something emerging from her own anxiety, her own messy cultural assumptions rather than have it be merely a formal exercise in visual annotation and sophisticated intellectual referencing and listing.

Leslie Thornton in an essay titled the 'Extent of my Ignorance' confesses: 'the reason I feel qualified to make use of things Indian in my work is that I've never been to India. So, I can safely use it as a place I know nothing about, and that is the point. If I had more pedestrian knowledge it would become impossible to use it as a symbol of ignorance, my own and, by, extension others.'[19]

She goes on to review her own short film *Another Worldy* (1999) in which she edits together numerous found footage reels of 1940s song and dance films, suppressing their original soundtracks and pairing them with 1990s East German techno. The image sound relation intriguingly coheres; generating a strangely compelling rhythm, however at one point in the film the image and soundtrack

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18 C. Henrot, *Le songe de Poliphile / The Strife of Love in a Dream*, directors note for the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

19 L. Thornton, 'The Extent of My Ignorance', in Jhaveri, *Outsider Films on India*, cit., p. 247.

synchronize. This happens when Thornton cuts in footage of Helen 'queen of the nautch', an Anglo-Indian Bollywood starlet who specialized in performing a variety of dance performances. Interestingly enough, this excerpt is from *Helen, Queen of the Nautch Girls* a 1973 short documentary directed by Antony Korner and produced by James Ivory. In the clip that Thornton uses, Helen, a white woman lures dark 'savages' into a cage and locks them away, and continues a lascivious dance. Thornton disrupts the flow of *Another Worldy* and uses Helen to make her point about cultural stereotypes and Western superficial presumptions. She concludes: 'But I do know nothing about you, India. If I did I could not have imagined you in this way, reduced to a single utterance, only the slightest evidence taken as a whole. It is true that I found in you an embodiment of my ignorance, and I both thank you and apologize. Because, of course, I know this is not you; yet in bewilderment, I am grateful.'[20]

Henrot and Thornton uses distinctive formal strategies, particularly the use of energetic extra diegetic music in their films to achieve or rather induce entrancing effects to perhaps convey the personal bewilderment provoked in confronting their own understanding of India. It is quite the reverse to Duras who indulges in a slower, old style band score. Operating in a slightly divergent register, but still reliant on music to explore altered states of consciousness is Claudio Caldini who in the arrived in India after the dictatorship in Argentina assumed power. Caldini's films from the 1970s reveal a deep connection with Indian classical music and this is explicitly witnessed in *Vadi Samvadi* (1976/1981) the title referring to the notes of a raga. During the opening of the short 6 minute film, Caldini is seen sitting at a desk, setting off a miniature steam engine that leads into an extended stroboscopic, flickering montage sequences accompanied by a soundtrack in which a sitarist, *tabla* player and Caldini himself on the *tanpura* performing 'Raga Sindhi Bhairavi'. Objects like leaves, flowers and books from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where Caldini has spent much time, are shot at differing focal lengths and with the conscious coupling with the raga on the soundtrack, a captivating sensorial effect is achieved, in which the objects telegraph on screen as if they are moving. *Vadi Samvadi* is a planned film, a 'metric' film in Caldini's own words, structured, in which units of music are carefully aligned with images to succeed in arriving at a certain set of effects. Could the seemingly reverberating trance-inducing images of the film speak to Caldini's own attempts at personal and ideological reparation sought in India through the immersion in another culture, to mitigate disenchantment? Caldini certainly would not be the first, but perhaps what recommends *Vadi Samvadi* is the attempt to utilize a set of formal dictates, through rhythm, to convey a subjective questing.

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20 *Ibid*., pp. 249-250.

In other films like Jorge Honik's *India-Nepal* (1971) and Ute Aurand's *India* (2005) the patterning function of editing generates a rhythm to aid in communicating how the filmmakers apprehended India. These are literally quieter films, if not silent in the case of Honik's and yet Robert Beaver's has described Aurand's film as a 'symphony'. Aurand made *India* after three visits to the city of Pune, where she shot all her footage. Calling the film India is a misnomer, because it in no way pictures all of India, but rather is confined to images captured in one city. However, by titling the film India, Aurand's asserts that this is her India, the India she met, grounding and orienting the film squarely from within and through the subjective experience of the filmmaker.

India like all of Aurand's films is built up of 16 mm footage that she herself shot and edited. The expanse of time that Aurand has spent in Pune is encapsulated through montage. Aurand films in short clusters, the images that are then related to one another through careful and precise editing. From the opening sequence of the film, in which multiple brief shots onto a street through a shade of trees from a window follow on from one another at a fairly quick succession, Aurand establishes a basic rhythm for the film. The most affecting moments in the film are when Aurand films people and especially children. These are mini portraits, in which we come up onto them, their faces, hands, bodies, from the front, at times the back, quickly and rapidly, moving away and then up close; the sensation is disarming and captivating. One particularly touching and telling moment is when Aurand films a school girl, her hair in plaits, in a blue dress smiling at the camera, and then for a few seconds we see the hem of the girl's dress, and then her bangle clad hands fidgeting with the dress. In capturing this awkward and endearing gesture by the girl, prompted probably as a reaction to being filmed, Aurand manages to telegraph something of that uncomfortable intimacy that is caused in encountering and beholding another place. *India* is undeniably an immersive kaleidoscope of personal impressions of the daily quotidian occurrences of a city filtered through the gaze of a filmmaker whose presence is of course felt through the handheld footage, but even more emphatically in the editing. Aurand also plainly introduces herself into the film in scattered shots that punctuate the film, details that intimate her physical presence, from glimpses of an earring to the flicking of her short hair to self-reflections in her room. *India* like all of Aurand's film delights in a diaristic form of filmmaking, in recording with clarity and empathy direct encounters with the living world.

Other filmmakers, who have also worked within the diaristic mode of filmmaking and have used their travels to India as raw material for rather personal films, include Jonathan Schwartz and Fern Silva. Coincidentally enough, Schwartz and Silva both credit finding their way to India through close associations with Mark Lapore, who was a professor and mentor to both filmmakers, and before his suicide in 2005 also made numerous films in South

Asia. Silva's journey to India and the resulting film *After Marks* (2008) was impelled by Lapore's tragic passing, Silva has recounted that 'I travelled to India, in search for answers I suppose, in search for him, in search for these imagined places.'[21] Silva's film is not a direct response to any of Lapore's films that he made in India, as the title *After Marks* might literally suggest. Silva films in Varanasi, and in Mumbai probably during the festival of lights, Diwali, firecrackers are ablaze, a rocket is lit and it bursts into the title of the film, an incantatory celebration of Lapore, and his spirit that guides the film. Cows recur throughout the film, eventually a series of close up of a cows face lead to the final images of the film, a beach in Goa, where a group of boys are seen herding a cow along who plunges itself into the Arabian sea. It is a concluding moment of spontaneous abandon, where maybe the perhaps the immersion in the sea offers solace and some release.

Schwartz, who has completed two films - *Den of Tigers* (2002) and *A Mystery Inside of A Fact* (2016) - with footage that he shot in India, in fact first came to India with Lapore, accompanying him to record sound for his film *Kolkata* (2005). It was during that trip that he shot the footage for *Den of Tigers.* Not intended as a portrait of the city of Calcutta, the film is a collage of observational shots accompanied by a rich and textured soundtrack of field recordings, with at times a narrated voiceover. From the glorious opening black and white shots of the people of Calcutta wading through its water clogged streets of the Bengal monsoon, it would seem that water would be a leitmotif, or a patterning concept that Schwartz would like to explore, but what follows is a loose succession of images of the street, of palm readings, outdoor haircuts, foodstalls and street performers. *Den of Tigers* wrestles with the notion of trying to generate a concept to act as a method of mediation with an unfamiliar place, and instead prioritizes the straying from that approach. Schwartz is heard introducing the film with some clarity by saying 'Calcutta, alley, woman, city' that immediately sites the film as being filmed in Calcutta, but when we hear him again as the film concludes, his thoughts are muffled and inaudible, indicative perhaps an nod to the unlearning he underwent.

Made almost 15 years later, *A Mystery Inside of A Fact* has a more expanded geography than *Den of Tigers*, shot in three different parts of India, and a differing, elegiac tone as established in the opening minutes of the film where from a dense fog a man emerges, almost like an apparition. The film at one level operates as a reconciliation with personal memory, for Schwartz returning to a country and in confronting the loss and absence of Lapore in his life, but it also emanates more broadly onto an attempted reconciliation of unfamiliarity with another place, another culture. This is most palpa-

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[21] Correspondence with the author, June 9th, 2017.

ble as the film closes, in a staged sequence in which Schwartz frames a young pair of Westerners in Indian garb in a self-conscious embrace, slowly dancing to the Vashti Bunyan song 'I Don't Know What Love Is.' Initially viewed from a distance, to the left towards the back of the frame, in the foreground is an Indian auto rickshaw, slowly Schwartz comes up on them, and as they seem to finally give themselves over to the moment, we get a glimpse of street traffic behind them and the film ends. Coupled with Bunyan's sweet, whispery voice in which she intones 'Oh I don't know what love is, I never will, But when you're gone from me I know I'll still want to you to be with me and wonder why there was never a love for you and I' Schwartz's has fabricated a genuine image of heartbreak, acknowledging the solipsism of a foreigners connection with India, while tacitly accepting the sheer unfathomability of fully and considerately understanding a rapidly changing country.

At the apex of these 'private' films made by experimental filmmakers in India are those by Lapore himself – *A Depression in the Bay of Bengal* (1996), *The Glass System* (2000) and *Kolkata* (2005). They straddle the divergent modes of experimental film, ethnographic documentary, diarist travel film, lyrical autobiography and political polemic, and the question they seek to ask most convincingly is whether 'filmmakers are inevitably the shock troops of the centuries-old and ongoing march of global capital and exploitation in the form of picaresque culled from the world for delectation?'.[22] It is by moving between these generic interstices, and firmly refusing to follow established documentarian and ethnographic filmic procedures Lapore emboldens himself to craft films of incredible force and power. He always remains acutely aware of the cinematic apparatus itself as it is keenly reflected in the formal choices he makes especially with duration and sound. A fever pitch of intensity is reached with his film *Kolkata* that he filmed in North Kolkata, completing it just two weeks before committing suicide. The film opens with a mesmerizing extended shot of a vaporous alleyway and as figures gradually begin to emerge from it, the sonically distorted and tense soundtrack of the film announces itself. The coiled assemblage of strident sounds, an inaudible phrase repeated again and again, turns oppressive as Lapore trains his camera, fixed frame, for long moments squarely on the faces of young boys, who look straight back into the camera. The harshness of the soundtrack makes the taking in of the shifting expression on these boys' youthful and delicate faces challenging and arduous. As the minutes go by, hampered by the relentlessness of the soundtrack and as the boys keep staring back, the image has been made to turn against itself. The brutality of the lethal soundscape makes the act of looking and the exchange of glances back and forth

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[22] T. Gunning, 'Bodies, rest and motion', *Film Comment*, vol. 42, no. 6, 2006, p. 54.

fraught. There is a brief respite, when a young female tight rope walker is filmed, perhaps a knowing metaphor for this entire enterprise of filming another culture, and then the soundtrack returns, a discordant chorus of crowing crows that imbue a sense of anxiety and dread. Lapore's gaze is not observational, but confrontational, there is no seamless immersion amongst the continuous activity of the streets of Calcutta, but a ceaselessness to his approach, that is furthered in three long tracking shots. The final of these tracking shots roving from left to right is so persistent in embodying the itinerancy of a roving eye, the traveling gaze that rarely does it alight, and when it does pause its looks upon the torso of a man and a limp steel watch on his wrist, before continuing again, until that which is being looked upon -Kolkata and the teaming humanity within it- itself is no longer comprehensible and has been flattened, utterly lost in the clamour.

And so it would appear that there seems to be an irresoluble chasm between Aurand's responsive, generous handheld fluttering images and Lapore's despairing long fixed frames, and yet both approaches could be regarded as necessary and essential variations of a similar proposition. They don't so much as oppose one another but highlight the extremities of the aesthetic and ethical challenges posed by filming in India. What these 'private' personal experimental films suggest is more a spectrum of possible individual negotiations and the task it set forths in front of ones creative self when approaching another culture. At their finest and most affecting these works by the filmmakers are less an address to India, but a conscious knowing record of their own presence within India as visible to them from the outside. As Ashis Nandy has eloquently written: '…all dialogues of culture are, at their best, simultaneously monologues in self-confrontation. Whether such dialogues refashion others or not, they re-prioritise elements within one's own self. Cultural dialogues are a form of dialogues with the self, too.'[23]

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[23] A. Nandy, 'Dialogue as Self-Exploration', in *The Other Self*, 1996, p. 15.