One of the remarkable features about the production of India's pasts by post-independence nationalism has been the frugal investment in the urban. This is something that stands out in contrast to both the British imperial and the Mughal reference to the city, which was indexed as constituting the centre of political power and spectacle. In the first three decades after India's independence, the urban stood out almost as a functional space for the political class, while the actual drama of the historical was played out in other areas of the country.

Much of this has changed over the past two decades, the old consuming historical fever of modernity that Neitsche spoke about has ebbed, with a new mode of crisis that shows no sign of retreating. At any rate the current situation in India has thrown into confusion the old categories of the historical, while at the same time highlighting new, dynamic forms of urban cultural practice which gesture to a creative, continuously reproducing vernacular space. The urban has emerged, perhaps for the first time in post-independence India as an important focus of movement and conflict.

I would like unpack this relationship of the historical, the urban and the vernacular from the vantage point of electronic culture, in particular that associated with telecom and computer networks. The latter are part of a porous map of overlapping forms in the electronic sphere – those of film, television and music all of which have the contemporary constellation only in the last decade. More than anything else in India, this new electronic culture has emerged today as the imaginative expression of a globalised consumption regime, with cities and towns acting as production sites of new visual practices. At one level this seems fairly compatible with global trends in the 1980's and the 1990's. What is remarkable in the Indian case is the level of non-legality that constitutes the production of this culture at the level of the everyday. Consider this: India, with its inequalities is emerging as one the large software exporters in the world, a key player in the new commodity chain of electronic capitalism. Yet about eighty percent of all computers sold in the country are from non-legal sources or the grey market. Further, almost the entire large cable television network operates out of small neighbourhood nodes, nonlegal or unorganised. Elsewhere I have called this a pirate modernity, where the contact and copy dialectic that Michael Taussig refers to in his work on mimesis is transformed by a series of diruptive and innovative practices at the level of the everyday. What is intersting for our discussion is that this dispersed but growing culture of electronic nonlegality in the city has raised important questions about urban built forms, and the emergence of vernacular spaces that almost seem to recall pre-colonial urban networks of consumption. My focus on the computer and telecom networks is deliberate, for

as I will argue they have through a strategy of imaginative and non-legal poaching transformed the built areas of cities.

To make sense of this transition to the contemporary, I would like to dwell briefly on Indian nationalisms relationship to the urban in the post-independence period. After independence in 1947 ruling Congress leadership under the leadership of the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru subtly transformed the Gandhian agenda which had prioritised the village imaginary. Gandhi's ambivalence on developmentalism was sidelined in favour of a new model which was functional for the purposes of rational accumulation. The Nehruvain preference was for a developmentalist model based on an import-substitution regime. Temporal acceleration would obtain through the Plan which was a reworking of Soviet experiences. What was important about this model was its state-centredness and its organisation of national and political territory. The preindependence anti-colonial movement had sought to lend a cluster of overlapping histories to Indials territorial pasts. Nehruls developmental model sought to organise this constellation of nation-forms into a simpler, less contradictory model, which met the needs for national accumulation.

In the first place after the onset of the Plan and developmentalism, the space of the nation was bracketed and fissured from global space. The conquest of national space through development was set up as a condition for thoroughgoing incorporation into the world economy. Much of this was pretty much in line with the initiatives by Sukarno and Nasser, but in India the legitimacy of the regime was tested by periodic elections.

What was interesting about the post-independence regime was the shift of spectacular space from the city. Urban spectacle was quite central to the landscape of power in both the Moghul and British colonial regimes. Both regimes, though vastly different in content, carried out large building projects in cities. Witness the construction of the city of Shahjehanabad by the Moghul Empire, which formed the core of Moghul Delhi. Under the British colonial rule construction initially focused on the cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, the latter in fact was known as the second city of the Empire in the 19th century. The British urban building project culminated in the building of New Delhi by Lutyens and Baker – a combination of colonial historicism and a brutal marginalisation of the Mughal town. The building of New Delhi went hand in hand with the Delhi Durbar of 1911, colonialism's attempt to mimic Moghul urban spectacle, ironically at the same time British hegemony was declining in the world-system.

Nehruvian nationalism sought the spectacular not in the city but in the architecture of energy. Energy now became a significant component of the historical nation in the making. The spatial form this

took was the large dam and steel mill. The dam imaginary was less Promethean than a reference to a form of developmental modernism: where built space, electrical energy and acceleration were combined in one unified system. Nehru's dam speeches were filled with references to Soviet building experiences as also the TVA, they conjured a world of order and harmony where the ambivalence associated with the village would be purged from our midst.

In spatio-historical terms the building projects were technological monuments, Nehru went so far as to say that the dams were "temples of modernity." While the transformative element both in energy and spatial terms was crucial for national ideology, the dam projects were also brutal in their displacement of millions from their homes. It was only in the 1970's that large social movements forced the suspension of some of the big projects.

In his *Things out of Season*, Neitsche says that the culture of the historical "is a kind of inherited greyness, and those who have borne its mark from childhood must believe instinctively in the old age of mankind." (p: 166) In effect one could argue that the dam imaginary posed a version of the spatial that re-coded the inheritance of the historical in post-colonial India. The new elements: energy, modern monumentality, and the categorical imperative of transformation were a sublation of the past references to the village. What was new was also the visibility of modern elements of construction: steel, concrete and electricity, which seemed to map the grid of developmental modernism. Until it was attacked in the 1970's developmental modernism sought to introduce an abstract figure of the national: the effort to organise identity around technological monuments was in direct contrast with the aestheticised politics of Gandhi. AT any rate, Nehru's technocratic model was able to enable an upper-caste elite of state managers to direct the accumulation model for almost 25 years after 1947.

The strategies of Nehruvian nationalism involved an acknowledgement of the virtues of a republican political democracy while at the same time expressing deep scepticism about any identity that gestured to place. Part modernist, part technocratic the idea of order was crucial here, albeit mediated through the experience of the territorial disruptions of 1947.

In the event this abstraction largely shut out the urban in the bigger scheme of national self-representation. There was however the exception of the construction of Chandigarh built by Le Corbusier. Chandigarh was in effect Nehru's effort to give shape to the idea of the modern, through the efforts of an avant-garde architect who displayed little interest in India's building traditions. The product, despite Corbusier's energetic efforts , was less an image of the urban future than a model of the *modern*, where an abstract vision of the now-defeated historical avant-garde and a technocratic nationlism

met, albeit briefly. And Chandigarh had little impact on the country as a whole. In every sense the *Chandigarh project was a sideshow to the developmentalist agenda*, whose architecture remained unaffected.

What is significant about both colonial and Nehruvian urban strategies was a common distrust of the traditional city, and its main public institution, the bazaar. Bazaars were the main public and commercial spaces in the traditional city, in the Moghul capital of Delhi for instance, there were around 150 of them many trading in single commodities. From the 18th century onwards, European travellers began writing horrified narratives on the Indian bazaar, with its density and apparent lack of regulation, its chaos and smells, and an inability to produce a healthy commercial society. This narrative reached an apogee in Max Weber's own writings on the city. Weber drawing from the travel writings of Bernier and Melucci saw the Asian city as nothing less than a Central Asian horde in permanent military encampment. As for the bazaar, Weber maintained caste restrictions doomed it to a marginal status and incapable of rational accumulation.

Given the European report-card on the traditional bazaar as the index of Asiatic decline, it was not surprising that the colonial plan for Delhi by Baker and Lutyens carefully separated the new space from the traditional Moghul city of Shajehanabad. The new spatial arrangement marginalised the old bazaars, preferring instead the wide European avenues and a central shopping circle name after the Earl of Connaught. Not that Le Corbusier saw the arrangement any different in post-colonial India. The bazaar has no place in Chandigarh: the design of commercial areas were designed to offer maximum control and access by the state, rather than by the cities inhabitants. Nehruvianism was of deeply suspicous of the urban bazaar, seeing it as the den of primitive trading practices, and a conservative social agenda. Much of this owed less to an engagement with the city and its pasts but from a preference for a Brahmanical political economy which prioritised state control, and distrusted all commerce.

In retrospect Nehruvian developmentalism seemed to be driven by two almost contradictory aims. The first was the ideal of an orderly regulated state, driven by a Promethean programme of transformation, marked by punctual national borders, all of which was managed by an upper caste, westernised elite which occupied this abstract centre of the state. On the other hand, the Nehruvian agenda also invested in the republican democratic order, whose future was predicated on the success of the accumulation model. This was not to happen and by the 1970's the model collapsed under its contradictions.

What is striking about the first thirty years after independence is the relative paucity of significant urban building programmes on the part of the

nationalist state, as compared to its predecessors. As we know both the Moghuls and the British left an impressive building legacy: even smaller Indian rulers under British rule left impressive public buildings, some of whom were built by refugee architects from Nazi Germany. After 1947, the technological monument dominated the building imaginary, held out as a *symbol of nation-ness and the abolition of caste/community divisions*. The scale of the monument and the retailing of an energy/national/future imaginary was a moment that seemed to indicate a break with the past and the Gandhian heritage. This was the nationalist spectacle, the Nehruvian reply to the legacy of Lutyens and Shahjehan. At that time the magnified force fields of the historical and the electrical rendered the brutal violence of dam capitalism invisible, neither were there any intimations of the coming ecological disaster.

Popular forms filled in where official nationalism failed in its engagement with the city. The films of Bimal Roy in the 1950's expressed a deep disenachantement with the failures of the postindependence regime, through a bleak urban landscape, and narratives of doomed lives were the first in the popular cinema at that time. In the early 1970's the Calcutta films of Mrinal Sen reflected the city in ferment and the anger of the Naxalite movement, later on, the "angry young man" films of Amitabh Bacchan made the city of Bombay a centre of narrative action and crucial reference point.

By the mid 1970's the old developmentalist regime was in crisis, now grafted to a highly centralised and repressive state whose self-representation was dynastic rule by the Nehru-Gandhi family. "Development" was paralleled by state-sponsored compulsory sterilisation drives aimed at the poor. This project ended in political defeat for Indira Gandhi and the Congress party. In the 1980's the Congress was back in power – but the old nationalist architecture was in considerable crisis. A new approach was put into place in the early 1980's, actively encouraged by Rajiv Gandhi (Nehru's grandson) who later became Prime Minister in 1984. This new constellation had two main components.

The first was to ensure temporal acceleration while at the same time perform the task of emancipating the state-managers from the everyday, the interaction with *place*. In other words the annihilation of space through time would obtain *without* the messy political problems that spatiality and its associated politics produced. What was needed was a solution that would shift from old-style nationalist policies, seen by the elite as restricting initiative and growth. This was resolved by an evacuation of the "national" space ("globalisation"), a process that would accelerate by the late 1980's and the early 1990's. Under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, the old import substitution regime was gradually dismantled and controls on domestic industry

and transnational companies lifted. The end-result of all these moves was a decisive reconstruction of the old nationalist imaginary in ways that would dissolve it to the point of no recognition. 'Development' remained an issue but was reconstituted as a problem of *communication*. The way forward was computerization, networking and a new visual regime based on a national television network. The computer soon became the iconic space around which almost all representation, both state and commercial cohered – the effect on nationalist discourse was incredible. As opposed to the Nehruvian focus on 19th century *physical* instruments of accumulation (steel, energy, coal), state discourse after 1984 posed a *virtual* space where issues of development would be resolved. Through public lectures, television programmes and press campaigns, state managers simulated this new space, which though *unseen* was seen as transcending the lack inherent in Nehruvian controls.

This phantasmic neo-national space was complicated by two factors. The first was the simple brutal fact of peripheralisation – *constant* network breakdown which militates against a seamless web of communication. The second is the multiplication of networks which cancels the monopolistic legitimacy of panoptic power. This transitional form of developmentalism was however enabling of two movements: the proliferation of a media culture through a state television network, and the increasing focus on an urban consumption sphere. By the 1990's the old model of state-centred accumulation had been overtaken by the turn to globalisation.

Though the South Asian subcontinent has been linked to the capitalist world economy since the 16th century, the new phase of globalisation in the 1990's has in many ways marked a clear rupture with the post-independence order. In the first place, globalisation has accelerated a number of processes in India that have had the net result of re-inscribing the urban as a key reference point in popular culture. The reasons for this are complex and a catalog would include the secular decline in the imagination of the village in the popular, rapid urban growth and the crisis of Nehruvian developmentalism. One other factor has been the whole fragility of the nationalist idea of sovereignty, which has been complicated by a series of continuing crises, which include challenges by combination of political and social movements: from a right-wing Hindu nationalist movement to secessionist movements in Punjab and Kashmir, as well as movements of oppressed castes fighting Hindu caste hegemony. The state and the political are no longer the secure kingdom of the old nationalist elite.

One of the unintended consequences of the crisis of the political has been the re-emergence of cities and towns as nodes of consumption and mobility, as well as production centres of a new techno-popular imaginary.

What has emerged in India in the past decade is a constellation of practices cohering around film, television, cable, telecom, music, computer and internet cultures. What is interesting is that this has obtained in the face of economic growth unremarkable when measured with that of China, nor is the rate of urbanisation as distinct as the Latin American models. Yet the growth in the new cultural commodities are staggering: India is already the home of the world's second largest film industry, the second largest music market, a large television industry with fifty Indian satellite channels in just a decade, rapidly growing software and computer sectors. These in many ways define the map of the urban contemporary: a discussion of this moment will also help put light on the spatial forms of urban electronic culture.

I will now sketch out very schematically the some of the features of the urban contemporary in India.

The most dramatic expression of the contemporary is that of the concentration of different techno-cultural practices at the current conjuncture, leading to a charged urban experience. From the 1980's onwards, India's cities and towns saw a technogical experience drawn clearly by Virilio's chronospehere: the emergence and acceleration of cultural forms simulateously that could be traced to different periods in the cultural history of the West. What is interesting is that this constellation obtained less through a strategy of postmodern parody of the past and mixing of styles but through the intersection of the chonopolitics of the global and the uneven local maps in Indials cities. Thus at the same moment in time we are witness to a the cohabitation of older and newer forms of technological reproduction and practice: cassette and phone cultures co-exist with those of the internet, new music, film and television. The important thing is that all these forms more or less arrived at the same time with globalisation – the effects were dramatic. The aestheticization of everyday life in urban India grew through registers of shock, spectacle, mass consumption, a new advertising. The idea of an empire of visual signs was nothing new in India, both Hinduism and Islam were strongly visual and public with attention to spectacle and colour. What was new was the relationship of acceleration to consumption, mobility, new modes of sexual desire and the experience of the city.

The second was the production of the new in the city which differed significantly from the older claims of developmental modernism. The idea of the new was now constantly redrawn with an emphasis on consumption and the constant reworking of the image world through appeals to desire. This emerging domain of consumption was clearly a gesture to the claims of a sexualized and dynamic city: it also produced a whole new regime of display where signs were constantly retailed for a mass public. This has been a deeply problematic and contradictory space, with culture wars obtaining almost at every stage of the transition to globalism. The other, and this is something I will dwell upon later, is *the tension between the expansionary needs of a visual culture and the spatial limits of the city.*

The other aspect of this new visual regime of the urban contemporary is its inter-textuality, which is in line with global developments. Film, advertising, music, television, computer and internet cultures all offer overall visual maps: it is the speed with which systems of signs move between forms that is striking and distinctive in the contemporary.

We can distinguish two layers in the contemporary landscape of urban media in India whose relationship can at best be described as porous. At one level are the new media empires: the corporate owners of satellite television channels large software companies located in the techno-cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad, the advertising companies in Bombay. The large software companies have been the most profitable in the stock market, and operate in real time with Western contractors, and employ thousands of programmers popularly known as html slaves.

The second level is the large and dynamic media space of the everyday in urban India which has, for all practical purposes retailed the new cultural constellation to the mass of citizens. These include the thousands of small cable television networks, publically operated phone booths in neighbourhoods which number in their millions, street music sellers, the large grey computer market, and public internet access points. Here the computer, multimedia and phone outlets have the most visible public presence in the street, while the other forms are dominant in virtual space.

What is distinctive about the new networks of electronic culture that have emerged in the everyday is their preference for non-legal practices. This is partly a consequence of the gradual withdrawal of the state from the everyday productive space of the city, from localities and neighbourhoods. The state now exists more as a corrupt bystander, sometimes intervening as a moral policeman, often without results. Non-legality here refers to the thousands of unregistered service providers, the thriving pirate cultures of cable television, music and film. In the computer industry the grey market dominates, operating from neighbourhood shops and new nodes of commercial activity. It was these non-legal forms that have contributed to the dramatic expansion of electronic culture in the city, as also a dynamic service sector in the cities. Street and non-legal cultures are a feature of all postglobal cities, but what is significant about India is their prepondernace, as well as ability to innotvate within existing built forms.

If non-legality is the preponderant expansionary form of the post-global electronic culture in the everyday, we can also put forward an even more startling assertion. Non-legal incremental expansion

seem to have been the dynamic of post-global urban transformation in India, in the everyday at least. Expansion has not been in the form of spectacular vertical construction regimes as in east asia, but in horizontal expansion, gradually poaching on state and private land by a diverse interests which could vary from contractors, small business, slumdwellers, and private citizens slowly encroaching on public land.

This map is seems to out of sync with the global catalog of postmodern urban transformation: no large flows of finance capital pushing for spatial transformation, the absence of a large commercial downtown anywhere in India, no significant spatial class segregation as in the Brasilian experiences, in fact no building drives cohering around a consumption spectacle. One is struck by the paucity of building activity in post-global India at the pace and spatial concentration at which we have witnessed in other societies. This surely contrasts with the Mughal, British and the Nehruvian emphasis on the relationship between spectacle and built forms.

The post-global Indian urban landscape has rather been transformed by the sector classical Marxism often referred contemptuously as petty-commodity producers. The vast majority of this new sector in towns and cities are entrenched in the circulation of electronic cultures, as well as providing new media services to the citizens of the city. Through strategies of molecular non-legal expansion, this sector has transformed the space of everyday life, infusing it with a postglobal density.

In the first place, the old commercial areas built by the nationalist state have been reshaped and transformed into nodes of a new post-global commercial activity. I will take the example of *Nehru Place*, a large commercial area built by the Delhi Development Authority in 1970 to serve as the core of a business district in Delhi. When it was built, this rather limited area in the best of international style mass production was in fact held out as the pride of finance capitalism in the capital with obligatory visits by dignitaries. Today the old high-commercial district has long vanished, its place taken largely by the non-legal electronic sector. The layers of encroachment, subletting and density are in fact typical of post-global electronic culture. In *Nehru Place* a diverse combination of legal software firms, the non-legal pirate sector for computer components, scores of shops offering electronic services co-exist with a street market. The state intrudes periodically, conducting raids on pirates, but does not regulate the market on an everyday basis. What is interesting is this nonspectacular space is one of the largest computer markets in India supplying most of the resellers in city neighbourhoods and small towns. *Nehru Place* is a typical concentration of single-commodity markets for new global products that have emerged in different parts of India. This tradition of single commodity markets goes back to pre-colonial India,

but its resurrection for global products in a space dominated by individual stores is interesting. The modal form for this new development was that of cable television in early 1990's, when Delhils Lajpat Rai Market in the old city emerged as a national centre for components for cable television.

This changed urban map suggests the recall of a form derided by colonialism and nationalism alike - the bazaar. Like the precolonial bazaar, electronic markets gesture to the state formally, but remain outside its effective regulation. Unevenness, intimacy, and density are shared by both forms, as is the preponderance of small enterprises. The new bazaars are of course markers of a new arena of consumption, embedded in global technological time, and offer secular form of ownership when compared to that of their medieval predecessors. They are also located in a mix of spaces: sometimes traditional commercial areas which they have transformed, in localities and in neighbourhoods. It is a quitodianism of presence which has obtained: for the first time since independence the domain of technoculture has left the monument and emerged in the street. This is perhaps our own postmodern moment, but one which seems to break with the more global models of that moment.

The spatial limits to capital have concentrated the rush of global images on the new electronic cultures in two areas – the domain of the virtual and the domain of the city street. The registers of the virtual are largely those of film and television, and increasingly the sites on the internet. The intertextuality of all media in India inflects the production of images with a new acceleration as well as techniques of editing and movement. This cross-imaging i. e. television screens look like websites and websites look like Bombay film posters, produces an theatre of representation where newness seems to be an end in itself, with an emancipation from the social terrain of the past.

The absence of shopping mall culture in India has meant that the retailing of global consumption in the urban everyday has been through the street. This is particularly so in the case of the new multimedia cultures, which have a public presence largely due to the proliferation of images on the street. These images posted on lampposts, bus stops, street corners all over the country are often shorn of the phantasmic quality of Virilio's vision machine. The images are marked by their functionality, offering access to a service economy at low cost for the cities citizens. These functional signs of newness are maps of locality, implicated in everyday practices of electronic non-legality that bear comparison to those studied by de Certeau in his own research project in Paris. It also recalls the visual map of the bazaar, chaotic, uneven and non-expansionary. The contemporieness of this space is marked a fragility: the tension between consumption and economic crisis,

between nature and artifice, between constant migration patterns and the desire for stability. The contrasts with the old development authority city drawn from the best of functionalisty design are evident in the areas of new urban growth. De Certeau in his 'walking in the city' had remarked that "functionalist organisation, by privelaging progress (i. e. time) causes the condition of the city's own possibility – space itself – to be forgotten; space thus becomes the blind spot in a scientific and political technology." Pirate electronic culture, by emerging in the very ruins of functionalist buildings, has invested them with deep layers of indeterminacy, where flows have transformed the original urge for order.

Apart from the spatial limits to creating a significant mall culture, part of the problems of any program of display in India is the sharp juxtaposition of inequalities, almost side by side in the city. Slums and legal housing are often in the same neighbourhood in large parts of urban India: it is most advanced in cities like Bombay. The political space of the poor is not insignificant in urban India, mediated by sometimes by struggle and land occupation, sometimes by patronage which makes large-scale demolition drives an impossibility. This makes the retreat of the global spectacle to the virtual more pressing.

"Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction", wrote Walter Benjamin in the *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. For the vast pirate electronic sector in urban India, the desire for modernity comes through a new relationship with temporal acceleration. While in the past such desires were invested in the abstractions of development, the contemporary world of electronic space has held out the dream world of the virtual as one saturated in a new commodity space, as also the promise of mobility. The emergence of a new life-world where the preponderance of industrial products take the part of nature is a sharp break for a newly urbanised population. Benjamin speaks of a similar situation in his *Passagen Werke* where for children industrial products appear to be nature itself. In the case of the urban electronic contemporary in India this world of industrial nature holds out the dream of mobility for a new pool of urban unemployed, as artisans and pirates. Occupying the lower end of the global commodity chain this sector also mocks the laws of national and international legality, less by design than by a molecular practice.

In the event the post-global city in India has been significantly affected: with a reproduction of density in the old commercial areas and the locality in ways that make the city under nationalism look unrecognisable. What is interesting is that in this process a new everyday life saturated with the practices of new electronic culture has emerged adding its own section to the global catalog of the postmodern. A picture that includes the relative stasis of built forms and a dynamism of new electronic culture recalls the dystopian graphics of cyberpunk, but that would surely be a misreading. The pirate urban forms in contemporary India reveal a tactile energy in a situation of institutional inequality in the world system. They have energised the space of the locality with few gestures to organicism. Flow, instability and indeterminancy are basic to a pirate culture, and such seems to be the fate of our urban futures.

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