



THE CITY AS SPECTACLE AND PERFORMANCE

How can we think about urban experience through the world of spectacle and performance? The distribution of venues of entertainment and spectacle are intimately bound up with the modern spectatorial practices which compose city life. The way entertainments are placed in relation to social segregation and audience formation provides a crucial dimension of the city as a differentiated space. And this process relates to the way finance, urban policies of licensing, crowd management and policing are organised. Indeed, it impinges on the way in which the chaotic life of cities is subject to the discipline of time – programmes, schedules, the ordering of beginnings and endings – though often in a way which is flexible and alert to the variety of audiences which compose urban life.

The cadences of city life are captured through the poetic meditations and formal innovations of urban musical forms, consciously dedicated to capturing senses of space, of how we inhabit a locality, give it imaginative body and self-awareness as we move through the changing landscape of a complex history such as Calcutta's. Or we can move into the imaginary dimension relayed through the cinema. How is the city presented to us through this protean form? As a media form with a rich and distinctive history, it provides an archival resource which is crucial to the forms of modern memory, and for ways of encountering social and cultural transformation. It is also a body of techniques, rendering our engagement with the city through its assembly of views, movements and cuts, of flow and dis-jointment, paralleling the sense of shock and disequilibrium integral to urban being within its own processes of fabrication.

The cinema has also been a crucial resource to think the future of cities, and often in ways which envisage virulent projections of contemporary experience. New technologies fabricate the future, but also erase the trauma of the present, as Hollywood's global destiny turns on the trauma at its heart, digital erasure blanking out the twin towers whose destruction lifted global audiences into an unexpected destination for the experience of ruin. Away from this traumatised grand narrative, media flows continue to trace complex paths, as groups made marginal within the hierarchies of national and urban order devise ways of becoming visible through micro-strategies, low-cost technologies and guerrilla manoeuvres to gather audiences.

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