

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS at
THE NEW SCHOOL

Working Papers

Risk and the City: Bombay, Mumbai and Other Theoretical Departures

Vyjayanthi Rao
The New School

International Affairs Working Paper 2005-08
December 2005

Copyright 2005 by Vyjayanthi Rao

Risk and the City: Bombay, Mumbai and Other Theoretical Departures

Vyjayanthi Rao
Graduate Program in International Affairs
and
Department of Anthropology
The New School
66 West 12th Street, Room 611
New York, N. Y. 10011
raov@newschool.edu
www.gpia.info

International Affairs Working Paper 2005-08
December 2005

ABSTRACT

This article is a review of recent writings on Bombay including texts in social science, journalism and media criticism. Taking the notion of risk as a central thematic in understanding globalization, the article explores the emergence of the city and of Bombay in particular as a subject of research in the contemporary moment. The review uses the recently published book, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* by journalist Suketu Mehta, as a point of departure. The article argues that the notion of risk circulating through representations of the city in various media and through the action of residents marks a significant departure from the nation to the city as the canonical subject of representation and for a critical understanding of the project of modernity in the era of globalization.

Risk and the City: Bombay, Mumbai and Other Theoretical Departures

Vyjayanthi Rao

Writing the City

How does a city like Bombay become a subject of writing? Increasingly, the city's dystopic qualities are becoming the focus of a number of analyses informing prophecies about cities of the future and the future of cities. The quintessential modernity of 19th and early 20th century metropolises such as New York, London or Paris have ceased to define the contemporary telos of modernity in the world of urban studies and reflection. Instead, places like Mumbai, Lagos and Dubai are increasingly beginning to define the terminal conditions of modernity. This tendency is not without serious problems. More often than not, the idea of the city, of modernity and of the injustices materially embodied by the conditions of these places is tied to their colonial and neo-colonial histories and to their place within empires, old and new. In writings about such places, including Mumbai, heroic tales of survival and social movements seeking redemptive and distributive justice compete with stories about abjection and hopelessness and visions of coming anarchy and violence. This review essay examines the emergence of Bombay-Mumbai as a subject of social scientific, journalistic and cinematic texts in relation to the specific theoretical questions that constructions of the city in general, and of this city in particular, throw up for consideration in the context of globalization.ⁱ

Mumbai, Maximum City

As a literary subject, Bombay first became available to a global audience through the success and notoriety of Salman Rushdie, whose novel *Midnight's Children*

evocatively captured the rhythms and flows of the city of his birth. Subsequently, in his infamous *Satanic Verses*, Bombay's film world was immortalized. Published nearly a quarter century after *Midnight's Children*, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, by New York-based writer Suketu Mehta recaptures a global stage for Bombay in much the same, powerful way as the former work. Both works are literary events, which perform the task of locating a particular city on the world map in two historically distinct moments. If Rushdie's book is an artefact of the post-colonial moment in world cultural history, Mehta's *Maximum City*, appears in a global moment. This is a moment characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, especially regarding borders and the functions they perform in differentiating citizens and others in a world of multiple and fractured identities. Yet, as Chris Anderson, editor of the popular technology magazine *Wired* writes in his blog, although Bombay has become an obligatory stop on the itinerary of global CEOs, it is also the one place that the foreign correspondent can still experience as foreign. For Anderson, as for many others, *Maximum City* serves as an evocative gateway to understanding the foreignness of Bombay.ⁱⁱ

The book chronicles, in three parts (respectively titled "Power," "Pleasure" and "Passages"), the writer's journey back to the city in which he grew up as a child before his family migrated to the US. It identifies a whole set of 'Bombay types,' characters associated in a special way with the world of Bombay through literature, journalism and especially cinema. Mehta spent several years meeting, interviewing and befriending these characters as part of his research for the book which is an arrangement of their stories into a powerful and evocative meta-narrative of how the city got to its present condition. The film directors, actors, hit-men, cops, dancing girls, small time thugs,

slum-dwellers, diamond merchants and newly minted home owners whose stories are vividly recounted by Mehta all constitute, in some sense, the stereotypical characters that make up the city's imaginary architecture.ⁱⁱⁱ Their stories recount the contemporary history of the city, in particular its journey from "Bombay" to "Mumbai," the city's official name since 1996. The name "Mumbai" was bestowed upon the city as an act of regionalist and exclusionary assertion by a local political party, the Shiv Sena, during the period that it governed the state of Maharashtra.

This nomenclatural transformation happens during a particularly anxious period of the nation's and the city's history, during a phase of economic and cultural liberalization. The renaming of Bombay has become an almost conventional trope for thinking through particular issues such as violence, decosmopolitanization, new formations of the public and new civic arrangements. This is, for example, a prominent theme in anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen's book, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Post-colonial Bombay*.^{iv} The journey from "Bombay" to "Mumbai" is a central theme in recent writings on Bombay and should be read as a shorthand for a search to find an appropriate set of conceptual categories to describe the city. In a sense, Bombay emerges as a real subject of research only after the particularly bloody period in its recent history in which the city was the stage for some of the worst communal riots in post-independence India. These riots form the backdrop of *Maximum City* and permeate its exploration of criminality and violence as the dominant tropes for understanding the masculine cultures of the city.

Before the global success of *Maximum City*, these questions would have been, in some sense, limited to specialists and experts. Although the book is classified as "travel

writing,” the ethnographic atmosphere it creates are important reasons to take it at least as a point of departure for raising the sorts of questions that Bombay-Mumbai prompts me to ask as an anthropologist. These questions have to do with the limits of generalization when speaking from a particular location, and with what lends a location its particularity.

When viewed from within the imaginary of the city, the reader is struck by the ways in which this work references a version of Bombay made popular by cinema.^v Several Indian bloggers who have written about the book, for example, praise Mehta for what they perceive as his “courage” in delving into a world of risk and danger that signifies the reality of Bombay in the popular imagination.^{vi} This is not surprising because the idea of Bombay is inextricably tied up with a cinematic vision of Bombay, especially for non-residents. In Bombay, cinema is everywhere, not just on the projection screen. Thus, for residents of the city, the question of ‘reality’ is inextricable from the cinematic universe. The significance of *Maximum City* lies in the fact that it is perhaps one of the first non-fiction accounts to describe and explore this cinematic dimension, although not in a self-reflexive fashion even though there is an entire chapter – titled “Distilleries of Pleasure” – devoted to the film industry and its workings through the story of Mehta’s collaboration with filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra.

Film appears in its own specificity as an arena vital to anyone seeking to understand Bombay. But the cinematic dimension of the city – the one that places cinema at the centre of all kinds of public transactions of the city and which layers the city’s unconscious – suffuses the book with a directive force, leading the author along to invest in the specific people whose stories he chooses to tell. In this sense, the world described by Suketu Mehta bears more than a passing reference to the world of stock

images and characters from Bombay cinema, it actually constitutes Bombay as an ethnographic site for Mehta. The reality sketched by Mehta's account is faithful not just to Bombay, the city as an empirical space, but also to its 'cinematic double_[MI]'.

Indeed, the Bombay described by Mehta in *Maximum City* is a narrative space constantly intercut with cinematic space, as scenes and characters that might well be part of some Bombay film screenplay – cops, thugs, dancers and urban heroes – are constantly interspersed with 'hard empirical research' into urban planning, urban politics and the living conditions of the city's poorly housed and struggling masses, that is to say, those who constitute the thickness of the city's social infrastructure. In some places in the text, the author's very presence on scenes considered 'dangerous' or dubious by the 'ordinary' citizen are legitimated by the fact that he arrives on the scene accompanying a film crew.^{vii} I pursue this connection between the city described and the cinematic city further because of the centrality of this relationship to the place of Bombay as subject of a modern urban and political imaginary both within India and beyond. Specifically, cinema's constitution of the city as an ethnographic site helps us understand the allegoric reach of Bombay in which its geographical form as island converges neatly with its imaginary territoriality as a singular urban space or, in other words, as a metonym for political and public processes that have been characteristic of global modernity. This singularity is, of course, best captured by Mehta's title – *Maximum City*.

City of Risk

The place of the city in Indian cinema, and especially in Bombay cinema has recently come to the fore as an important site for grasping the constitution of a national

public. The particular place of Bombay as textual subject is also perhaps best explored through this broader examination of the place of the city in Bombay cinema. One might expect that given its position as the site of production for films in Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani that the city would constitute a natural setting for cinema as well. However, as film scholar Ravi Vasudevan demonstrates in his essay “Disreputable and Illegal Publics: Cinematic Allegories in Times of Crisis,” Bombay is connected especially with the genre of the crime film. Exploring the “political and formal resonances, which emerge in cinema’s recurrent engagement with the subject of crime,” Vasudevan argues that “criminality provided particular access to the city as experience and afforded experimentation with film style... the genre gives the spectator access to the sensorium of the city in novel ways.”^{viii} It is clear from his analysis that the city that constitutes the natural site of this particular form of urban experience is Bombay itself.

Vasudevan’s reading further reveals that it is not accidental that in popular cinema, the sensory experience of the city first becomes available through cinema’s engagement with criminality. This is so because the city constituted a suspect site in the nationalist and popular imaginations. In turn the cinematic experience of the city dwells on feelings of risk, danger, indignity and moral compromise. Of course, that such feelings are not merely cinematic surmises is easily supplemented by the observations of any number of writings on Bombay from the ethnography of Arjun Appadurai to the poetry of Narayan Surve. But to follow Vasudevan’s reading a bit further, we can see that this city of risk stands in for the constitution of a certain sort of public as well – a public that is disreputable, speculative, unstable and dysfunctional from the point of view of a normative understanding of democratic and modern politics. As he puts it, “this is

specifically a public imagined in situations of crisis, brokering a relationship between political and normative protocols, constrains and their corrosion, and transformative energies.”^{ix} It is a transformation that closely mirrors the historical transformations of the national public sphere in the post-independence period.

The texts that centralize Bombay’s cinematic double, including *Maximum City*, project a city of risk and a corresponding urban sociality built upon distrust, duplicity, deceit, scamming and other such features. These forms of sociality are necessarily tentative and provisional and are therefore available to numerous avenues of interpretation. However, in the moral universe charted by Bombay cinema as read by Vasudevan and by *Maximum City* they constitute (whether implicitly in the case of Mehta’s book or explicitly as in the case of the cinematic texts discussed by Vasudevan) strong indictments of the state for failing to properly provision urban life and thereby enabling the marginalization of vast numbers of people. These are important signposts in unpacking the study of the degraded and dystopic lifeworld of a particular city as it comes to stand in for important issues in social theory. For these moral positions allow us to ask questions about what such places, as sites of theorizing enable and, equally, what they foreclose.

Both *Maximum City* and the crime films discussed by Vasudevan^x rely upon a historicism peculiar to official nationalism, one that takes economic development and ethnic harmony as stable, normative categories, whose disturbance institutes a severe crisis in the realm of representations. In this sense, *Maximum City* is a rather old-fashioned book at its core, even if the scenes that it sketches are powerfully evocative and its language pleasurable. But insofar as it also evokes and plumbs the depths of entirely

new forms of sociality, *Maximum City* also stands at the cusp of a new way of thinking within which the city no longer constitutes a proxy subject for national crises. In this sense, *Maximum City's* success signals not just a global interest in a particular place due to its intersection with the trajectories of global capital (as it clearly does for someone like Chris Anderson) but also an invitation to rethink the nature of the global from the vantage of the southern mega-city and specifically from the vantage of those conditions of the present that most clearly embody a set of contradictions seemingly endemic to global modernity – that is, the conditions that characterize ‘cities of risk’.

City at Risk

How and when does a city become a worthy monographic subject? On the one hand this is usually tied to some sort of extreme condition signalled by that particular city as an observational site (Parisian flanerier, New York’s “culture of congestion,” Buenos Aires’ fiscal crises, Lagos’ extreme dysfunctionality). On the other hand it is also tied to the dominance of the nation as the implicit geography or unit of social science analyses i.e. the more or less self-conscious naturalization of the nation as the exemplary site for the study of modern phenomena – from culture to politics to development to art. As the contemporary conditions under which the project of modernity is pursued^{xi} are increasingly characterized by globalization i.e. movements of social, economic, demographic and cultural materials whose phenomenology exceeds the territorial boundedness of nations, the city has become a renewed site from which to construct the canonical object of the social science corresponding to the decreasing conceptual capacity of the nation to serve such canonical ends.

Yet works about particular cities or particular urban conditions (refugee-camps and camp cities, free-trade zones and mega-cities) often inhabit a contradictory zone between singularization and universalization/generalization of the conditions of the particular city in question. In the case of places like Bombay-Mumbai especially, their emergence into generalist theoretical frames often occurs under the sign of the apocalyptic and the dysfunctional in part because they do not have any clear place in the story linking capitalist modernity and city-making or metropolitanism. At the same time, these cities are characterized by the contradictions of catering to both extremes of global wealth and local poverty and are constituted by the coexistence of multiple, adjacent historicities underwritten by such contradictions. Such disjunctures make Bombay a place where there is a growing and urgent crisis in terms of governance characterized by extreme inequality, increasing violence amongst majoritarian and minoritarian groups divided along religious lines, breakdown of services and provisioning, and contradictory economic pressures. For many writers, Bombay's severe and well-documented housing crisis and the urban riots of 1992 following by the serial bombing of the city in 1993, are the two crucial sites for articulating observations about economic growth (or lack thereof), iniquitous conditions and political crisis. From being a city *of* risk, where risk not only signified danger but also opportunity, Bombay-Mumbai is today a city *at* risk.

These conditions threaten the city's pre-eminent position within the cultural imaginary and puzzle observers about how to reconcile them with the city's image as "India's most modern city." As sociologist Sujata Patel writes, "though colonial capitalism fostered dependent economic development and unevenness in urban growth, Bombay represented for many commentators what is possible *despite* these odds." She

writes that Bombay “symbolized the paradigm associated with achievements of colonial and post-colonial India both in its economic sphere and in its cultural sphere.”^{xii} Within a less regionally invested literature on urbanization, these dystopic conditions are increasingly beginning to attract attention but largely as contemporary exemplars of the “pasts” of western metropolises like Paris and London. Geographer Michael Watts, for example, recently observed that “the Parisian slum... figured centrally in Baudelaire’s poetry. And it is the slum that constitutes the defining feature of contemporary African metropolises.” Watts sees ‘hypercities’ such as Mumbai as the most “stunning morphological and sociological” expressions of global society in the 21st century. Citing urbanist Mike Davis’ rapidly circulating apocalyptic text, “The Planet of Slums,” Watts notes that the pattern of “unprecedented urban growth, with vast numbers of people inhabiting the peripheral slums, 85 per cent of whom occupy property illegally and without obviously sustainable forms of livelihood...” is a part of “a headlong return to the age of Charles Dickens.”^{xiii}

These theoretical reflections, which take the conditions of the contemporary “third world” mega-city as their point of departure, open up several key issues for theories of a global modernity. Can the extreme conditions prevailing in these cities serve as anything but markers of a tragic failure of modernization?^{xiv} Such questions necessarily point us to the different directions of interpretation. In the literature that seeks to diagnose global conditions by generalizing from particular urban dilemmas, a city like Bombay is an exemplar of a “perverse” sort of urbanism (urbanism without economic growth). Bombay is not only *at risk* but also constitutes a risk in and of itself to ideas and forms of global justice, equity and conviviality. In the interpretation of

scholars who write from within a national paradigm, however, Bombay appears as the subject of the construction of a national modern. Its cosmopolitan culture and artistic productions are seen as products and symbols of the “achievements of colonial and post-colonial India.”^{xv} The nomenclatural transformation from Bombay to Mumbai thus neatly captures a political and moral transformation of this national symbolic terrain and therefore constitutes a risk to national self-understanding, especially one that values a secular and ecumenical style of convivial relations amongst various groups.

But both these positions, which involve specific interpretations of what constitutes risk, are tied to particular moral and political projects that animate their readings of the city and an interpretation of its malaise. Within the particular moral-theoretic terrains of such generalizations, the specificity and material qualities of city life often seem to disappear. When they do appear, they do so under the sign of new political frameworks of ‘resistance’ largely having to do with a new intersection between politics and religion.^{xvi} Connecting these various literatures, however, is an underlying sense of the shift from the city *of* risk to the city *at* risk, which causes the city to appear as a different sort of a theoretical subject. This is perhaps the most general answer that can be provided for why particular, singular and excessive urban conditions have historically been the focus of modern social and cultural theory from Walter Benjamin to Mike Davis.

A different kind of social science literature is now beginning to emerge, exploring the connections between the city of risk – and of citizens as political risk takers – and the city at risk – as a space of compromised governance. This literature treats the city as a set of living practices of negotiation between the city as a techno-social system and as a

site of justice and enfranchisement in the context of unpredictable and elusive global flows. By way of conclusion, I want to turn to these attempts that connect and make sense of the various forms of risk – risks of self-making, risk and danger in the moral sense, risks of disenfranchisement and finally the risks arising from the severe degradation of the city as environment and life-world.

City as Subject

In his work on a movement of slum-dwellers demanding housing in Mumbai, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai focuses simultaneously on the slum-dwellers' politics of claim and rights-seeking practices and on their deployment of their life-experience surviving poverty, which they tap as knowledge in the context of seeking recognition for their claims. In so doing, he examines housing as an essential part of the phenomenology of urban life, looking at its specific place not merely as something subject to policy but as a cosmological practice of fundamental importance to social life. "Housing is the place where infrastructure meets the routines of social life..." as he puts it, "it is the place where infrastructure meets issues of dignity, style, of social standing, of all the things that make humans humans."^{xvii} This approach yields a vivid picture of the various forces at play in which the relationships between the technologies of the city, the body and community are continually remixed and renovated. Risk is apprehended in this context as both a negative and a positive element. Insofar as it demands the cultivation of practices of the imagination as a collective force in mapping the future for communities, especially those of poor and disenfranchised people, it becomes a positive element. The "production of locality," as he describes it, plays a crucial role in Appadurai's

understanding of the city as a social-theoretic subject. The “production of locality” is the process which reminds us that “for the local to have some spatialized embodiment takes an effort which transcends that very spatiality... that is to say, for mere spatiality to take its form there has to be an effort, a “production of locality,” which is much more complex.”^{xviii}

This approach allows known trajectories of urbanization – urban growth, decline, catastrophe and renovation – to be displaced by an understanding of the everyday experience of inhabiting the city, which is constantly engaged in the face of what is certainly a situation of extreme degradation and poverty. The everyday as a theoretical category has a different sort of temporality and historicity than either the temporalities of emergency under which the poor are expected to operate by society at large or the longue duree models of urban planning. In works like Appadurai’s, which foreground everyday experience, perceptions of the city at risk intersect less darkly with the city of risk bringing us back to the specific place of the city as subject, with which we began. The characters whose stories constitute the narrative thickness of *Maximum City* – extreme in their violence, in their spirits of survival and their renunciation of their own futures – are instructive models for the sorts of instability that the city fosters in subject-making. However, unlike the encounters between cinema and urban space, these characters are necessarily limited models for understanding the polyvalent nature of risk in relation to the city.

As a subject of its own construction, through the actions of its inhabitants, the city emerges as a site of risk but not in a moralistic sense that impels the formation of a fundamentally unstable public (as we saw in Vasudevan’s readings of Bombay cinema).

The formations of the public being cultivated through the sorts of movements described by Appadurai do not, in other words, fit into expected narratives about urban trajectories or the moral underpinnings of urban life within a national frame. Even in the most ‘scripted’ of texts (such as those of Bombay cinema), there are ideas about the dream-like, underlying states and realities that are opened up to the anxious self-formation of Bombay’s metropolitan subjects.

In my own current work on Bombay-Mumbai – a set of essays on Space, Violence and Speculation within the text and the body of the city – I pursue the tension and contradictions that surround the deployment of notions of risk. I do so by navigating the thick description of practices, rhetorics and texts through which Bombay’s current renovation and reinvention processes are occurring at the cost of the vast majority of its residents. My work seeks to understand how a new space of the future based on speculation about transience is called into being through the intersection of multiple sites of crisis with the sites and spaces of urban planning, urban design and contemporary art – the central forms of critical representational media in and through which the city imagines itself.

My reading of the works I have engaged with in this review suggests that the city as contemporary form foregrounds an inability to pin down what works and what does not work in particular arrangements and particular circumstances. It is therefore fruitful to view the city as a platform for the fugitive intersection of known categories of analysis and observation such as ethnicity, gender, and occupation. Taken by themselves in the contemporary moment, these categories seem to lose explanatory power. Familiar routes of redemptive politics can no longer be constructed through the explanatory

centralization of one or more of these categories. Indeed, reliance on the explanatory power of these categories alone can risk the exposure of a world without redemption. In such a world risk is a measure of provisionality *per se*. It cannot be a route for an engagement with the work of the imagination, which might, in turn, provide a new politics of hope as Appadurai suggests.

Works such as *Maximum City*, for all their specificity, perform the important function of exposing a complex world enmeshed within an imaginary. It is a world that stands at the cusp of two apparently contradictory movements, of singularization on the one hand and of enabling a conversation about what we might call a ‘phenomenology of the global’ on the other. The moments that are centralized as moments of crisis in the context of Bombay (and other cities like it) are thus no longer merely tied to any local story as such nor can they stand in as teleological proxies for the conditions of modernity. Rather they serve as platforms for the sorts of intersections that reveal the fundamentally elusive nature of global flows.

Texts Cited:

Arjun Appadurai, “The Illusion of Permanence: Interview with Arjun Appadurai by Perspecta 34” *Perspecta 34: The Yale Architectural Journal*, June 2003, pp. 44-52

Arjun Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” *Public Culture*, vol. 14, no. 1, January, 2002, pp. 21-47

Arjun Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing in Millennial Mumbai” *Public Culture*, vol. 12, No. 3, September, 2000, pp. 627-651

Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: cinema and urban Space*. London: Reaktion Books, 2002.

Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums” *New Left Review*, no. 26, March-April, 2004, pp. 5-34

Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Post-Colonial Bombay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" *Public Culture*, vol. 16, no. 3, Spring 2004, pp. 347-372.

Sujata Patel, 'Bombay/Mumbai: globalization, inequalities, and politics', in Gugler (ed.), *World Cities Beyond the West: Globalization, Development and Inequalities*, (Cambridge, U. K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 328-347

Gyan Prakash, 'The Urban Turn,' in *Sarai Reader 01: Cities of Everyday Life*, (New Delhi: Sarai, 2001), pp. 2-7

Ravi Vasudevan, "Disreputable and Illegal Publics: Cinematic Allegories in Times of Crisis," in *Sarai Reader 4: Crisis/Media*, (New Delhi: Sarai, 2004), pp. 71-78

Michael Watts, "Baudelaire over Berea, Simmel over Sandton?" *Public Culture*, vol. 17, no. 1, Winter 2005, pp. 181-192

ⁱ Throughout this essay I use this hyphenated form "Bombay-Mumbai" to signal the contradictory nature of the contemporary city that was formerly known as Bombay. In fact, the renaming of the city from Bombay to Mumbai forms an important part of the story told by this review. Where appropriate, the name Bombay is used, especially when referring to practices, representations and imaginaries associated specifically with the name "Bombay," including Bombay cinema.

ⁱⁱ As for the experience of the foreign, Anderson writes in his blog: "What's foreign? How about this: 2 am, driving back from a state of the art call center in the middle of Bombay, my driver is slaloming through rubble in a scene that would look like Falluja but for the Brahman (sic) cows grazing in the fast lane. On the shoulder, a half-naked five year-old girl is squatting to pee on a huge slab of broken concrete, lit by a fire of burning garbage. The billboard behind her advertises the latest Blackberry. India!" This blog is linked to Suketu Mehta's personal website which first brought it to my attention. See <http://longtail.typepad.com>.

ⁱⁱⁱ On his first visit to Bombay last year, the well-known architect Daniel Liebeskind remarked, "Mumbai is clearly a city that eludes architects who see the city as a material object. It's a city where human beings are far more important than brick and mortar, concrete, glass and steel." (quoted in Times of India, Mumbai Edition, October 2004) In the logic of such remarks, Mumbai is a city in which architecture itself disappears as a *material* fact and is substituted by sheer demographic density that constitutes a visible overlay, taking the more traditional place of "infrastructure."

^{iv} Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Post-Colonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2002).

^v This notion of the filmic or cinematic city, as distinct from other, normative visions of the city – the city of urban planning, the 'lived' city and so on is an important object in the urban studies literature. The material effects of the representations of the film city are particularly strong in the case of cities like Bombay, which form the 'real' sites for the imaginary cities of cinema. For an exploration of this concept, see Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion Books; 2002)

^{vi} For one interesting example, see "Varnam: A Blog on India Past and Present". Blogs are fast becoming an important site of audience formation and reception research and are therefore interesting from an ethnographic point of view.

^{vii} See, for example, the chapter “Distilleries of Pleasure,” begins with a scene in Madanpura, a Muslim neighbourhood in South Bombay, well known in Bombay crime lore for being the place where a number of notorious gangsters grew up.

^{viii} Ravi Vasudevan, “Disreputable and Illegal Publics: Cinematic Allegories in Times of Crisis,” *Sarai Reader 04: Crisis/Media* (New Delhi: Sarai; 2004), pp. 72-3. As Vasudevan explains, crime films or noir films in general first took film out of the studio and onto the streets of Bombay simultaneously dramatizing the plot through the use and the image of the city as well as sealing the reputation of the city as a space of criminality and moral perversion. In more recent films of course the city is also portrayed as a site of pleasure though it is significant that the visual apprehension of the city as empirical site is initially associated with narratives of moral disorder, risk and danger particularly because of the sort of national public that was being cultivated by early post-independence cinema. For a broader summary of the argument concerning the city as a problematic site in the nationalist imaginary and the historicist aspects of Indian nationalism, see Gyan Prakash, “The Urban Turn,” *Sarai Reader 01: Cities of Everyday Life* (Delhi: Sarai; 2001).

^{ix} Vasudevan, p. 72.

^x The films discussed by Vasudevan include *Deewar*, *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*, *Ankush*, *Arjun*, *Nayakan*, *Parinda*, *Baazigar*, *Ghulam* and *Satya*. By situating these films in the context of national crises contemporaneous with the films, Vasudevan shows how the space of the city, as a space of risk and “the hierarchies and prejudices of urban social order” indexed critically by criminality in the city in fact served as a comment on the crises of the nation. An inadvertent consequence is the representation of the city as a political site providing an alternative to the nation.

^{xi} Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai develops a distinction between the modern and the contemporary that is a very useful one. In his terms, the modern is “not a fact, an epoch or a stage but a vision, a conception or a project” whereas the “contemporary is a *condition*.” “Therefore,” he states, “modernity is now a *project* with a particular set of characteristics, *given globalization as a contemporary condition*.” In “Illusion of Permanence: Interview with Arjun Appadurai by Perspecta 34,” *Perspecta 34, The Yale Architectural Journal*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, June 2003.

^{xii} Sujata Patel, “Bombay/Mumbai: Globalization, Inequalities, and Politics,” Joseph Gugler ed., *World Cities Beyond the West: Globalization, Development and Inequalities* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press; 2004), p. 328.

^{xiii} Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums,” *New Left Review*, no. 26, March-April 2004, pp. 5-34. Cited in Michael Watts, “Baudelaire over Berea, Simmel over Sandton?” *Public Culture*, vol. 17, no. 1, Winter 2005, pp. 181-192.

^{xiv} This question is powerfully raised by several essays in a recent special issue of the journal *Public Culture* on Johannesburg. The volume, titled *Johannesburg: An Elusive Metropolis* has a critical-theoretical introduction by the editors Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, which lays out an argument distinguishing the “development” approach to “third world” cities from an approach that centralizes what they call the “citiness” of these cities. About “citiness” they write: “‘Citiness’ we understood as made up of excess, simultaneity, speed, appearance, rapid alternations, relentless change, and indeed ceaseless mutability and discontinuous eventfulness: transience.” Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis” *Public Culture*, vol. 16, no. 3, Spring 2004, p. 199).

^{xv} Patel, p. 328.

^{xvi} For example, Mike Davis and Michael Watts point to the political work of new religious groups like Islamists and Pentacostalists in the slums of the cities they study while several works on Bombay have looked at the rise of Hindu majoritarian chauvinist groups like the Shiv Sena – a xenophobic regional political party which sought to change Bombay’s “character and image from that of cosmopolitanism to a city of the Marathi-speaking underclass,” as Sujata Patel puts it. See Patel, p. 330.

^{xvii} Arjun Appadurai, “Illusion of Permanence: Interview with Arjun Appadurai by Perspecta 34”, p. 50

^{xviii} Appadurai, p. 46.