

# **Of Cinematic Grace and 'Miraculation' An Example from Bombay's Talkies**



**A talk by**

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## Abstract:

Cinema, notes Alain Badiou, promises the viewer that the possibility of a miracle exists. "Cinema is the miracle of the visible as an enduring miracle and as an enduring rupture." Badiou's remark echoes a strange one made by Gilles Deleuze: of a certain Catholic tendency in (good) cinema, which restores belief in this world, by re-linking man and the world. The re-connection occurs by way of a film's "irrational cuts". Cinema produces reasons for believing in the world, and this belief is nothing more than a belief in the body. My paper summons their articulations of faith, belief, and miracle to understand what most critics dismiss as the 'purple' indulgences and incongruities of Bollywood cinema, where the ordinary and the extraordinary, the plausible and the implausible, the ascetic and the excessive jostle with each other, only to be reconciled within the logic of "an inhuman theodicy" that interjects wonder into the temporality of the modern (Anustup Basu).

Examining a recent example of the crossover between mainstream and experimental, art-house cinema (a divide established from the very outset in independent India), I question critical assessments of Bollywood cinema produced after India's economic liberalization in the 1990's as multiplications of an ecology of affects yoked to the excesses of high capitalism, neoliberal commodification, unbridled consumption, and spectacular pleasures. Focusing on a film short that forms part of a quartet composed to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Indian cinema and assembled under the title *Bombay Talkies* (2013), my talk analyzes the aesthetics of existence and the politics of the body it inscribes. The short, entitled *Star*, and based on a short story by the legendary Satyajit Ray, signals the appearance of another emancipatory politics (re)claimed by the hybrid, transgressive forms of the new Bollywood. Its cinematic operations of grace and 'miraculation' (Brian Massumi, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) on the body of the ordinary man at the cinema beggar critical disbelief in Bollywood's capacity to create time-images that disrupt the forced synchrony between a body and the space-time of consumer capitalism.

I conclude with a consideration of the type of cinematic spectatorship staged by *Star*, and the pedagogy of equality that it might offer (Jacques Rancière).