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THE IMAGES SHOWN IN FIGURES 1 and 2 occupy the two poles of “accumulation by dispossession,” David Harvey’s term for a set of intertwined processes of financial globalization.¹ The story unfolding between them is that of real estate speculation, the turning of land into fictitious capital. The first image articulates the future as a new home in a postindustrial utopia, while the second documents an anonymous figure on its periphery. Both reference the numerous high-tech satellite townships of twenty-first century India built or planned on agricultural/semi-agricultural sectors bordering the megacities of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, among others.

An advertisement in one of India’s most established English-language newspapers, the *Times of India*, the first image orients potential Indian consumers from a 200- to 250-million-strong middle class toward an Asian vertical urbanism.² To live in this housing enclave would be just like living in “Singapore,” the exemplar of the Asian economic miracle. The advertisement is a standard promissory note for clean, green homes within enclosed perimeters far from the heat and dust of imploding metropolises. There are three-tier security systems, replete with CCTV cameras, security personnel, and smart alarms for every flat. There is the cool of the swimming pool and of climate-controlled temperatures inside. There is the green of eco-friendly construction and the safety of well-guarded public spaces. There are several floors of parking and quick access to highways. Sometimes there are club facilities for children, for golfing, for tennis, for yoga. And most important, the company hooks up the young professional to the low-interest loans that have enabled a historic shift from the “saving mentality” to living in “affordable indulgence.”³ The second image advertises a documentary on the violence of land acquisition practices, the unsavory story behind the new urban

ABSTRACT This essay theorizes a constellation of “high-rise horror” films from contemporary Bollywood as a cinema of apprehension. I elaborate an emergent “techno-aesthetic of security” that plunges spectators into an immersive experience of horror, orienting them to the violence of acute dispossession (of lands and livelihoods) catalyzed by current speculative financial globalization. REPRESENTATIONS 126. Spring 2014 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 58–84. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/rep.2014.126.4.58.

FIGURE 1. The high-rise dream. Advertisement, *Times Property Guide* (monthly supplement to *Times of India*), June 2012.

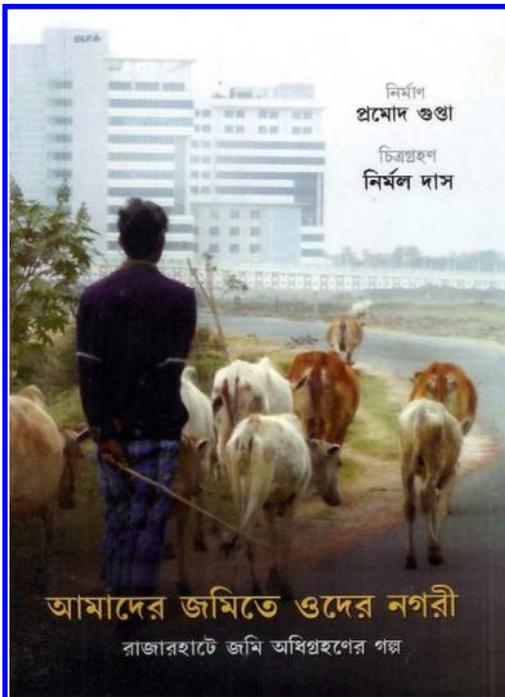


FIGURE 2. On the outside. Cover of the documentary *Amader Jomite Oder Nagori*, (Their township on our land), directed by Promod Gupta (Kolkata, 2011), DVD.

utopias. One among a smattering of journalistic investigations on the land acquisition fiascos in India, Promod Gupta's *Amader Jomite Oder Nagori* (Their township on our land, 2011) features the testimonies of small farmers, fisherman, and others who lost their land and livelihoods to an infamous land grab in the northeastern part of Kolkata. It represents a range of small-scale media that assemble local stories protesting state-corporate land acquisition practices, often through semilegal and coercive means. Predictably, the local mafia and police shut down screenings of the documentary.⁴

Between the two images we come upon the story of a "new imperialism," the geographical expansion of capital that David Harvey theorizes as a "spatio-temporal fix" for the persistent crisis of overaccumulation. Surplus capital in search of new avenues invests in large-scale housing, recreational, and infrastructural projects all over the world. These projects require land acquisition by any means, including the passage of new laws and public policies, chicanery, and even physical force. And inevitably, the social and ecological violence of land acquisition is increasingly contested, if we attend to everyday wars, infractions, and demonstrations that appear in the news. Deceptively sporadic and causally unlinked, these actions, movements, or forces that are not as yet articulated in a coherent popular front call for a closer look at what political theorist, Dilip Gaonkar has named a "phenomenology of the popular."⁵ Attending to the evolving story of accumulation by dispossession as a major vector of financial globalization, this essay takes up the challenge. However, my focus is neither on the economic context of land speculation nor on the political theories of popular mobilization. Rather, the essay is a postphenomenological account of the economic-cultural relations to the existing and emergent technological infrastructures—of the "technocultures"—constitutive of financial globalization. If financial globalization relies more heavily than ever before upon technological infrastructures and security systems, what role do technocultures play in ensuring psychic and economic investments in the new economy? Even as they habituate middle-class consumers to changing protocols of home ownership, I argue, they shore up a concrete remainder—the disappearing livelihoods and homes, waterways and species habitats—that is recalcitrant to flourishing consumer fantasies. The particular manifestation of that recalcitrance is the spectral occupancy of newly built homes. Figure 2 locates the spectral occupant, now the outsider, hovering on the edge of the vertical city even as spectral capital, dematerialized and speculative, shimmers on the recessed skyline.

In a constellation of twenty-first-century Bollywood films that I dub "high-rise horror," both valences of the spectral direct us to one technoculture that engages the problem of irrevocable unhomeliness in the luxurious flats (as condos are commonly called in South Asia) in high rises. Arguably

a cultural phenomenon across Asian cinemas, the high-rise horror films have enjoyed popularity among metropolitan and overseas audiences ever since the Bollywood virtuoso Ram Gopal Varma titillated audiences with his horror oeuvre (*Bhoot*, 2003; *Vaastu Shastra*, 2004; and *Phoonk*, 2008). Other directors, such as the financially successful Vikram Bhatt (*1920*, 2008; and *Haunted-3D*, 2011), who flaunted the first 3-D immersive experience of horror, soon followed suit. Not all of the contemporary films are set in high rises; some feature weekend or seasonal getaways in isolated farmhouses, suburban bungalows, and refurbished or abandoned mansions from the colonial era. But all of them yoke property transfers to the “problem” of spectral occupancy. And then there are occasional directorial forays into the question of the haunted flat, such as Vikram Kumar’s 2009 film *13B* (a remake of his Tamil-language film *Yavarum Nalam*, 2009), Hemant Madhukar’s *A Flat* (2011), and Jagmohan Mundhra’s *The Apartment* (2010). To this roster, one could add a growing list of sequels or second and third installments.⁶

The theme of spectral occupancy in these high-rise horror films is merely a point of departure. The films do much more in their cinematic practice of a spectral materialism. My primary focus in this essay is an emergent *techno-aesthetic of security* that is the source of both delight and horror. The techno-aesthetic habituates spectators to living in vertical zones that require psychic and economic investment in smart home security, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems. I argue that the films undertake sense training: they condition the would-be consumer to living in protected, wired, and climate-controlled vertical spaces. The consequent immersive spatial experience is integral to the success of financial globalization. The films achieve such immersion through a direct engagement with “security technologies” that exert control over the private space of the luxury flat. This involves incorporating optical, auditory, and kinesthetic security data into cinematic space, as the films motivate spectators to watch, track, sort, and classify mediatized traces of the intruder. In this regard, the techno-aesthetic points to what scholars describe as a “future cinema” attentive to a larger palette of (often competing) audiovisual technologies and flirts with other screen cultures in order to expand the cinematic experience beyond the movie theater.⁷ The high-rise horror cinema parlays small screens (cell-phones, televisions, tablets, and laptops), indexing closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras together with motion and sound detection to create a thick sensorial spatial experience of living in the new luxury flat. And beyond physical protection from intruders, there is a second mode of security that affords tactile and vertical control over the physical environment, as spectators spend most of the film’s running time inside the aspirational space of a climate-controlled, energy-stable, luxury flat far from the vertical grid of the downtown or the horizontal sprawl of the big metropolitan centers—far indeed

from the ill effects of industrialization such as pollution, temperature fluctuations, and crumbling metropolitan infrastructures. Much of this geophysical distance is achieved through the cool “feel” of the onscreen luxury flats conveyed through design elements (the decor, color schemes, lighting), the camera movement that documents the architectural layout of the flat (tracking the fluid space and providing panoramic views of the city below), and the controlled kinesthesia of vertical zooms (through stairwells and the ubiquitous elevator). Thus, the promise of security is both optical and tactile, a control and regulation of the intruder and the atomized body of the spectator/property owner.

Activating a spectrum of perceptions (optical, tactile, kinesthetic, gravitational), this conditioning to living globally, at once wired to global information technology (IT) and business sectors and at a decided remove from the immediate environs, is particular to twenty-first-century security technologies. This is why I characterize my perusal of high-rise horror films as a *post*-phenomenological account. Such an emphasis eschews a reduction of the spectral to figuration or allegory, arising unexpected at moments of cognitive failure. Rather, I argue that the spectral is a mode of recognition, an orientation of the spectrum of human perceptions toward the concrete remainder of the global. The very technologies that remove, sequester, or immunize us against a fearsome social and ecological totality also enable a “holding,” “seizing upon,” or “possessing” of the spectator in this cinema of apprehension.⁸ Such an argument complicates a simple epiphenomenal reading of high-rise horror as the ideological containment of spectral occupancy. The question is, how might a commercial cinema that, at first glance, appears to sell luxury home ownership alert its spectators to popular unrest mobilizing against state and corporate land speculation?

Here Nigel Thrift’s “technological unconscious,” as a necessary complement to Fredric Jameson’s “political unconscious,” is a productive starting point for theorizing the technocultures of financial globalization.⁹ Thrift’s account does not call for an evacuation of the political unconscious as the driving force behind the “conspiratorial sense” of the global. The “feeling” of a social totality, apprehensible but not comprehensible, abides, creeping back in the mediatized traces of the perpetual intruder, the social other who continues to lay claim to the land, water, and air of the vertical city. As we shall see, noise, movement, or image disturbances that do not cohere within the narrative diegesis enfold us into such a phenomenology of unsettlement. Further, Thrift’s account refocuses globalization as a spatial experience. The processes of globalization, he writes, standardize space, an observation best exemplified in the streamlined vertical city where every house is just like another. Suspended in the fantasy of making a new home, the “waking and dreaming” spectator (as Anthony Vidler puts it) experiences the difficulties

of turning a house into a home.¹⁰ Packaged as a home *to come*, the luxurious onscreen flat materializes as one of the manifold “spaces of anticipation” in which one feels global. In other words, the spectral sense in the high-rise horror cinema does not unfold along a customary temporal axis—as the return of the repressed, the friction of discontinuous pasts—but arises from the embodied spatial experience of making a home in the vertical city.¹¹ That experience is inextricable from the impact of new technologies on the geographical sense of location that was once central to making a home. Thrift argues that the very spaces from which we send and receive are increasingly virtual: “Things arrive and become known” through the sensing, detecting, uploading, and transcribing of mediatised traces. In this schema, home security technologies institute a spatial encounter both with the distant unknown (the global beyond) and the all-too-proximate known other (the intrusive immediate environs). Geared to manage space—to regulate what will show up where and what will show up next—they exemplify Thrift’s “track and trace” model of one’s relationship to the social and ecological environment. If new technologies condition spectatorial senses to living globally, what is achieved through the insistent technological disturbances that create a surfeit of sensation in the high-rise horror cinema? Do these disturbances modify the easy habitation of a secure lifestyle?

This essay offers some provisional answers, mainly in elaborating the spectral mode of perception. Technological disturbances scramble the new alignments of sound, image, movement, speed, or weight necessary for living in a controlled environment, and in these films this is largely achieved through a misdirection of the senses. If a controlled partitioning of the senses one from another is inimical to feeling secure (transcribing optical impression into image, vibration into sound), then unprocessed sensation *and* synesthesia can be understood as misdirection, rerouting every sense to touch another on the human sensorium. That misdirection, and its corollary cognitive failure, instigates a phenomenological experience of horror. Even as this cinema’s flirtation with security technologies *conditions* spectators to live wired and secure, it also *opens* the human sensorium to mediatised traces of the human and nonhuman other entering the onscreen flat uninvited through “machinic” portals. In this way, the spectral directs us to the global as a deepening experiential unhomeliness; it becomes a modifying knowledge practice for living with financial globalization.

Vertical Urbanism

One must begin with the promise of the high rise. A staple in urban hauntologies (in the Derridean sense), what does the high rise signify

in the economic-cultural context of speculative real estate in twenty-first-century India? Theorists of new urbanisms have recently focused on the emergence of “high-tech” urban satellite townships on the fringes of major centers such as Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata.¹² At one level, the moniker “high-tech” refers to employment in the IT sectors that require habitats that are “clean” and wired to the worlds of business, finance, and technology. At another, these “high-tech” environments are geospatial eruptions, discordantly nested in semirural spaces (supporting mostly agricultural or small-scale industrial occupations). Such worlds nested in global financial networks are not new to critiques of urbanism: one might recall Robert Fitch’s unforgettable *The Assassination of New York* (1993), a book on the eerie Manhattan industrial grid of vacant and to-let office spaces of finance-insurance-real estate (FIR) networks. As some critics suggest, one must amend FIR to FIR-IT for the twenty-first century, since information technologies enabling ever swifter flows of finance capital are integral to greater imbrication of global networks. In the Indian context, the wired IT environments have become synonymous with green mythologies of self-enclosed, “clean,” and therefore “post”-industrial spaces where one can enjoy the creature comforts of the high rise without living in a concrete grid. All “experiential homelessness” (Esther Cheung’s description of residing in the Hong Kong high rise) of living at a remove from the immediate surroundings is ameliorated through the promise of a wired connectivity that yokes the subject ever more firmly to the global FIR-IT networks.¹³ Such is the promise of the “vertical city,” an urban landscape emerging across the world and especially in Asian cities with massive population explosions. The postindustrial drive creates housing enclaves that look out onto the modern industrial “hyper-Manhattan” skylines in Shanghai (with its Lujiazui building), Taipei (with the Taiwan 101 building), Tokyo (with the Nishi-Shinjuku skyscraper district), Seoul, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. When we conjugate the famous vertical cities of twentieth-century modernism (of the sort we encounter in Georg Simmel’s 1903 “Metropolis and Mental Life”) with the twenty-first-century eco-urbanism of clean habitats removed from pollution-ridden cities, we have the postindustrial utopias of the kind we see in the high-tech satellite townships in India today.¹⁴ These vertical urbanisms, argues Jeffrey Hou, are radically transforming the *horizontal urbanity* of metropolitan life—the everyday confluences between urban actors as they trade, commute, work, buy and sell, eat and drink, sleep, and loiter in common urban spaces.¹⁵

At least a hundred such Indian townships are projected for 2020, in an effort to keep up with the demands of the second fastest growing economy in the world. Singapore, in particular, is touted as the success story, a colonial city emerging into the neoliberal urban green; and with good reason,

for it is indeed a city-state that has effectively vanquished the heat and dust of the industrial metropolis, as Jini Kim Watson suggests in her elaboration of the darker side of living in new Asian cities.¹⁶ In the Indian case, the move to build “‘world-class’ commercial and industrial infrastructure” ensued after the Indian government put in place the legal framework for private companies to create hyperliberalized export enclaves. These are the notorious Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that aggrandize rural and semirural lands for factories and luxury real estate development.¹⁷ Acting as land broker, the Indian government has since 2005 approved 581 SEZs across the country. Agricultural lands, fisheries, and forests close to coastal or large metropolitan areas have been the prime regions targeted for “redevelopment,” and hence it is in these areas that we see the most radical geophysical, socioeconomic, and ecological upheavals. The stories circling many of these redevelopment projects unfold in characteristically unsavory ways: industrialists colluding with high-ranking government officials to clear financial and legislative ground; multinational corporations pitching their profit-making schemes to local inhabitants; a well-paid local mafia undertaking the dirty work of intimidation (beatings, murders, corporal punishment), mostly in secret but sometimes in broad daylight for symbolic deterrence. If stories of the land grab quite obviously exemplify the spatial displacement of surplus capital as it relocates to new markets and harnesses new capacities (labor and resources), there is the simultaneous temporal displacement as well, since investors are asked to finance long-term, often expensive, projects that are parceled, bundled, and sold as private futures. It is against this backdrop that the new luxury flat emerges as a speculative asset for home buyers. The new flats are more often than not temporary or seasonal residences that double as securities on the futures market. The lure of the luxury flat in India inheres in both an extreme disembedding of these residences from the immediate surroundings and a hyperlinking to FIR-IT networks. Country homes such as “Silver Springs,” “Sunrise Symphony,” and “Daffodil Park” crop up, explicitly catering to the “high-income group” and mimicking the three-car-garage American-style home close to the upcoming golf courses, tennis courts, shopping malls, department stores, and movie theaters. Exclusive consultancies and complexes are set up for nonresident Indians (NRIs), in line with the general national effort to harness NRI finances and skills.

The modern disembedding from immediate lifeworlds (to recall Anthony Giddens on global modernity) reaches a new extreme in real estate endgames.¹⁸ Land speculation, as Fredric Jameson notes in “The Brick and the Balloon” (1998), is already a double abstraction. There is the first abstraction of money, further abstracted as fictitious capital in speculative finance; disarticulated from commodity transaction, money has value in the

future as revenue. Such abstraction enables the disembedding from local investments (such as manufacturing bases) for a willed immersion in global FIR-IT networks. When the disarticulated commodity in question is *land* or immovable property, then speculative finance effects a substantial deterritorialization. Land becomes fictitious capital wrenched from the geophysical region, transacted in deals amongst those who bear no responsibility for investing in the region. No wonder the reminders of what was once *there* excites the hauntological imagination. Writers, artists, photographers, and filmmakers seek out abandoned postindustrial landscapes—from vacant housing or recreational complexes to unfinished or failed state-corporate projects.¹⁹ The spectral is the recalcitrant residue accompanying dematerialized capital; as a mode, the spectral apprehends the concrete.

But what exactly is the concrete in the context of postindustrial vertical urbanism? Consider the interiorized landscapes of the high-rise horror cinema, where political dissent, economic growth, and social transformation turn into a private psychic matter. While remaining wary of the monadic subjects these films privilege, it is not a stretch to argue that the horror of disorienting possession in them arises from the progressive *loss* of the subject against the backdrop of a large-scale shift from horizontal urbanity to a postindustrial vertical urbanism. If we consider the “subject” as the singular remainder that escapes objectification, the *concrete* residue after every part of life is lived in abstraction (here, as the consumerist home owner), then horror arrives when one confronts the rapid encroachment of capitalist object-relations upon the psyche. While one may argue that horror cinema has always been such a project, the contemporary high-rise horror takes on a specific aspect of globalization, postindustrial vertical urbanism, as foundational to subjectivity. As a cultural mnemonic for the subject’s social and geophysical relations to surrounding life-worlds, the high-rise home is not only a radically disembedded psychic, social, and economic space hyperlinked to FIR-IT networks but also a geophysical (rocks, soil, plants), ecological (altering species habitats), and biophysical (climate-controlled environments) space aspiring to become a new Singapore or Tokyo.²⁰ The “concrete” in this last, physical, sense threatens the wired security of the home as the environs close in from “outside” the housing complex or from beneath the foundations of the building.²¹ The will to such disembedding—social and physical—finds expression in the mantra of “security,” a catchphrase for a controlled and regulated environment that is on par with any other place in FIR-IT networks. The challenge is to keep the concrete social and physical lifeworlds at bay. But in sensational horror, the ugliness of the concrete crashes back into the deceptive lightness of steel and glass, the nerves registering what the mind has left behind.

Enter the ghost story, fueled by the founding violence of land acquisition and the obscene spectacle of vacant homes with no permanent residents in wildly overpopulated cities. The flats lie empty, waiting, protected by state-of-the-art home security: walls, gates, fences, and alarm systems, but also CCTV cameras, motion detectors, and security personnel to ward off those whose land and commons have been repurposed. Studies on Mumbai's real estate development indicate that the excess of housing supply over demand is as high as 50 percent, while 55 percent of the city's denizens remain homeless.²² Of the flats purchased in Kolkata, 60 percent of those in its the northeastern township of New Town are owned by NRIs who make only seasonal visits.²³ Against the backdrop of accumulation by dispossession, there are roughly 1.3 million empty flats in India. Hence the proliferation of ghost towns in the Indian landscape, something we see all over the world with the popping of housing bubbles. If real estate, once the immovable property of a "home" bought with one's life savings, is in India now a speculative asset to be traded on futures markets, the fictitious character of these assets achieves new intensities in the illegal selling of still-to-be-acquired land. This is the chimerical context for emerging urban hauntologies not unlike those that erupted in Hong Kong's building boom a decade ago.²⁴ Apocryphal stories circulate in speculative media, from rumor to documentary: for example, of being the *only* denizens in a twenty-six-floor high rise; of a corporate office haunted by a female employee appearing on the deserted highway back into town; and of mysterious hit-and-run murders of those who would not make way for the coming mall.²⁵

Across media platforms one distinct strain of inquiry appears: Is there a common future that can be imagined? What of the unsettled people whose interests are radically opposed to the new property owners? The unsettled occupant becomes a public concern as local shenanigans come to light across all media sources. Of course as collective subject, "they," the local denizens whose land has been repurposed, have always been a part of the state's calculus; indeed, "they" are critical to the plan of satellite townships for middle-class consumers. If critics of the new townships argue that land acquisition would force sharecroppers into slums, state governments underscore the new employment opportunities in the service sector of the satellite township. The enticement is a cynical strategy with a hoary past, for in nineteenth-century India the colonial city was built on the principle that there would be service-sector slums within walking distance of residential neighborhoods all over the city. In round two of the same strategy, those residents who were once sharecroppers now must take on low-paying jobs as construction workers, garbage collectors, security guards, and gardeners. Yet there is ample evidence from studies of urban displacement that "they" do not follow the plan. For the building of these satellite townships is accompanied by political

ferment manifested as sporadic outrage. The occasions where state violence erupts against “them”—witnessed in the infamous Nandigram protests against the planned Nano factory, the mobilization against the SEZ of Reliance Industries Ltd. outside Mumbai, or the agitation against the POSCO steel company’s SEZ in Orissa—make the evening news.²⁶ But the legacy of subaltern studies alerts the critic to think of causally unlinked insurgency as prepolitical mobilization. Thus, critics argue, the newsworthy confrontations are just the tip of the iceberg. They are extreme instances of the constant hum of popular resistance that is expressed in everyday wars, legal disputes, and unplanned infractions across Indian cities and semi-urban areas. If a loose nexus of business elites, bureaucrats, and professionals speculate on the post-industrial utopias, then, their plans are put on hold by a recalcitrance that Solomon Benjamin (working on the peripheries of Bangalore) theorizes as an occupancy urbanism.²⁷

High-Rise Horror

Scholarship on the “new horror” mill in Bollywood underscores a generic departure from two of Bombay cinema’s existing horror traditions: the B-circuit horror immortalized by the Ramsay brothers and the beloved romantic/gothic classics such as Kamal Amrohi’s *Mahal* (1949) and Bimal Roy’s *Madhumati* (1958).²⁸ What is most relevant in these discussions is the question of the onscreen flat as the new setting for the horror experience. Scholars exploring the industrial changes and the generic mutations of the postliberalization Bombay cinema (nicknamed “Bollywood” after the studios gained “industry” status) note the *concrete materiality* of the onscreen luxury flats as hyperbolic realizations of upscale condos on Mumbai’s home buyers’ markets.²⁹ In part, the diversification of audience constituencies in Bollywood cinema has everything to do with the relation between the onscreen and the off-screen flat. Ranjani Mazumdar, Tejaswini Ganti, and Sangita Gopal have variously noted a shift in what Ganti names the “audience imaginaries” of post-1991 Bollywood cinema in general, changes that, in the case of this horror “cinema for the classes” (as opposed to “the cinema of the masses”) shapes the consumerist dreamscape in these films. Ganti elaborates the interpretive framework that targets “overseas territories” and “city film” audiences, one that explicitly links “taste” to a distaste for mass cultural aesthetics, narrative styles, and thematic concerns. Gopal links the “new horror” specifically to the housing developments and the consumer boom, both driven by the doubling of urban middle-class households in India between 1989 and 1999. Hence, in this “new horror,” Gopal remarks, there is an obsessive documenting of the onscreen flat: a restless steadicam laboriously tracks condo

space (rooms, hallways, stairs) and lingers appreciatively on the interior decor of gleaming glass and steel, minimal modular furniture. The sound design incorporates the low electronic hum of the intercom, cell phones, and washing machines; the quiet slosh of running water; and the gentle buzz of the cool track lighting. Gopal characterizes this electronic hum as part of the “social acoustics” of globalized “postindustrial” India. To the appliance heaven, I would add the persistent presence of surveillance technologies hardwired to secure the home against the intruder; in almost every film, the new home owner is initially thrilled by the easeful promise of smart security. What we see *in* the onscreen flat has an even stronger link to the off-screen home buyers’ markets, argues Ranjani Mazumdar, as she describes changes in industrial practices that affect set design. The designed space of the condo is an “aspirational space” for all who are in the home buyers’ market—whether or not they can afford it. With art directors and set designers routinely soliciting services and tie-ins from advertising firms and fashion designers, the iconic luxury flat—secure, stylish, and well appointed—becomes “real” in the sense that it is partially virtual (a place to be made) and partially actual (a place with raw materials for the home).

Thus the onscreen flats bear a “concrete and hyperbolic” relation to those that are sold on the market. Film theorists will recognize the echo “concrete and hyperbolic” from Vivian Sobchack’s insightful, indeed radical, rereading of the topoi of *film noir* (1998).³⁰ Speaking to the concrete materiality of the lounge as the paradigmatic habitus for *film noir*, Sobchack argues for its chronotropic unsettling of the idyllic home in postwar America. The lounge yokes the cocktail lounge, the nightclub, the bar, the roadside café, the wayside motel, the boardinghouse, or the diner—all common places in wartime and postwar American culture that gain a hyperbolic material presence when transported to the screen. One can reduce these places to metaphors, certainly, if one chooses to focus primarily on allegory; but to read them as material traces of the phenomenological conditions emerging at a specific historical and cultural moment is to argue for a concrete materiality that “returns things to themselves” (130). Scholars of contemporary Bollywood cinema already insist on the concrete materiality of the new luxury flat onscreen as directors, cinematographers, and art designers vigorously participate in shaping a global elite. That participation includes advertising and promoting new tastes, looks, and decor, allowing product placement and thereby entering the business of producing new consumer niche markets. But beyond the accretion of these material traces in “affordable” or “luxury” flats, there are disjointed secretions of *something else* in films about haunted flats that are *not free* for effortless habitation. That something else—the concrete remainder, so to speak—unsettles the aspiration to become part of a global elite. If we look beyond the conventional ghost to horror as sensation,

the concrete finds no representation onscreen. Repressed and buried, fragmented and displaced, it persists as mediatic traces below narrative.

The proverbial ghost-in-the-machine foregrounds yet another difference between the “new horror” and older Bombay-film romantic/gothic fare: the emphasis on technologized sensation rather than a great ghost story. In a 2012 interview on the sequel *Bhoot Returns*, Ram Gopal Varma insisted that the “horror film should never have a story” but should instead rely on nervous excitations that make audiences jump out of their skin.³¹ Once you have gone through the open door and seen what is on the other side, he explains, once you have recognized it, there is no fear. Fear happens on the way, a neurological response to a creak in the door. A man who does not believe in ghosts, he declares, can have a deep understanding of visceral horror, of the pure sensation we eventually process as fear. Not to be outdone, in his account of shooting in 3-D, Vikram Bhatt underscores the technological feat behind the film and his motivation to make the familiar anew.³² We have all seen the haunted mansion, he remarks, referring to the romantic/gothic Bombay cinema, but 3-D technologies reconstitute those spaces and spectatorial relations to them through sensorially immersive experiences. In both accounts, the stress falls on *technological* innovation: camera movement (Varma’s low-to-the-ground hurtling shots), editing (Bhatt’s long takes), and sound design (the legendary Dwarak Warriar worked on Varma’s films) that thrill and chill. Thus, critics habitually find the plotlines derivative, pointing out rehearsals, quotes, or wholesale copying of Hollywood or Japanese horror (J-horror) fare: *13B* incorporates the *Ringu* conceit of infection through watching a television show; the possessed doll in *Bhoot* resembles the ferocious Chucky of *Child’s Play* fame; and screen malfunctions of *Poltergeist* lore abound in this cinema. Jumping on the new horror bandwagon, production companies such as Pritish Nandy Communications explicitly imitate the J-horror market by launching a new film division for authentic Indian horror.³³ Importantly, several directors note the influence of *Ringu*, in particular, as the source of horror in the hardwiring of the home. The credit sequence for Vikram Kumar’s *13B*, for instance, starts from a perspective *inside* the television, the washing machine, and the fridge.³⁴ Later, almost every one of the numerous elevator sequences includes a shot of the elevator machine that acts of its own accord, even as the electrical circuits wreak havoc on the family. And in the middle of the film, a doctor self-consciously speaks of the body as an organic machine, whose circuitry interfaces with other machines in a high-tech environment. The nervous jolt, then, is connectivity gone awry.

The specific echoes of J-horror-inspired techno-sensationalism indicate that high-rise horror is a wider Asian cultural phenomenon. J-horror landmarks, such as Hideo Nakata’s *Honogurai Mizu no soko kara* (*Dark Water*, 2002),

are seminal influences: the situation of the single woman (an unmarried professional or a divorcée) living in a residential high rise; the climactic elevator sequences sucking protagonists into the concrete innards; and the return of ecological surroundings such as dirt, slime, or dark water are just some of the many resonances of this work in the Bollywood high-rise horror. The ricochet of influences should come as no surprise, however, as many Asian cinemas share a preoccupation with the experiential homelessness of vertical urbanism, industrial or postindustrial. One can think of films of the Hong Kong cinema that address urban displacement from Ann Hui's early *The Secret* (1979) to Fruit Chan's *Little Cheung* (1999), or indeed more recent Thai fare set in Bangkok, such as the award-winning *Laddaland* (directed by Sapon Sakdaphisit, 2011) and *Abia* (directed by Yongyoot Thongkongtoon et al., 2008). One might say that Asian high-rise horror is the handmaiden of the Asian miracle.

Across these cinemas, speculative real estate initially makes a thematic appearance, and the Bollywood high-rise horror is no exception. Ostensibly, the Bollywood constellation facilitates the dream of acquiring a luxury flat as one stop in an unending urban search for home. As Sangita Gopal notes, new conjugal couples, newly returned nonresidents, or migratory professionals settling in are always ecstatic about the glorious heights of the condo. The problem of land speculation surfaces in *at least* one sequence on convoluted contractual negotiations—questions over authorized certification, subleasing, property transfers, or shady real estate deals—that are only tangentially linked to the spectral occurrences within the narrative diegesis. But by and large, the films remain uncritical of land speculation, with rarely a political agenda in sight. Often the spectral presence in the flat finds banal explanation. It is reasoned away as revenge against moral lapses (such as the seduction of a hapless village belle) or an external force (a witch or traditional spirit) that takes the modern form of the humanlike ghost. Such explanations relocate the implied social problems to personal moral choices. If there is something like a collective answer, it is in the realm of the fantastic. A shaman, a medium, a Sufi mystic . . . every film restores faith in these experts in cosmic matters while doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers, and policemen fail to bring physical and mental security. The suggestion is that the solutions to modern ailments lie in the rich spiritual (and not religious) Indian traditions.³⁵

While the traditions vary across the high-rise horror films, there is one, the problem of bad *vastu* or a cosmic ill wind, that pervades almost every film about property transfer and home ownership—be they in the high-rise horror genre or not. While I do not have the space for an extended discussion of *vastu* here, I mention this preoccupation as one that complicates emerging investments in the logic of security. Bad *vastu* made a spectacular cinematic debut in Ram Gopal Varma's second horror flick, *Vastu Shastra*

(2004), a self-reflexive take on the problem of unsettling occupants. By then *vastu*, an ancient architectural doctrine on the proper alignment of human dwelling to its environment, modernized for contemporary home owners, was already a commodity on the home buyers' market. *Vastu* proposes a cosmological equilibrium between multiple experiential strata (biological, social, ecological) through site-responsive architectural designs quite apposite to the geospatial eruption of the vertical city. As a belief system, it disciplines socially or ecologically unsound building construction. If you disobey the cosmological rules that recognize the continuities between humans and their cosmos, the consequent disequilibrium manifests across all walks of human existence, and that disobedience becomes your karmic burden. Recast as sacral tradition, the ancient doctrine is now pitched as the cosmic calculus for a secure future, just as important as enshrining the ancestral family deity in one's new house. The return of *vastu* as antidote to particularly modern anxieties of home ownership is easily imagined. Since living in one's ancestral home or natal locality is fast disappearing, especially in urban India, traditions of collective homeliness—of enshrining the ancestral deity, of following the rules of *vastu*—present a bulwark against the social fragmentation that follows relocation as well as against the affective reconfigurations of the family into conjugal units or single home owners. If we add to this uncertainties about the social history of land upon which one aspires to make a home, a history that erupts in the everyday disturbances of occupancy urbanism, the conversion of the geometrical space of the house into a home, as Gaston Bachelard might put it, becomes undoubtedly precarious.³⁶

On the home buyers' market, a customizable *vastu* contains the cosmic force of the doctrine (see fig. 3). New home owners habitually rely on a streamlined version of the doctrine that *vastu* experts "tailor" for each home owner, customizing rules for private convenience and personalizing mass-produced space.³⁷ Here *vastu* becomes an integral part of a consumer fantasy: the pleasures of imprinting an atomized space, just like all the others in the residential high rise, with one's singular desires. And yet, there is mounting evidence that home buyers and architects follow *vastu* dictates even when those rules inefficiently organize modern architectural space. A lift is located in the recesses of a building and not the front foyer, the kitchen shares a wall with bedroom simply because it faces a certain direction. And then there are the stories of home buyers refusing to buy flats with bad *vastu*.³⁸ The resurgence of *vastu* as a belief system scuttles efforts to contain it as modern practice.

One can certainly propose the sociohistorical thesis that the resurgence of *vastu* is symptomatic of ongoing large-scale socioeconomic transformations of modernity. But that explanation does not quite capture its relation to the technocultures of financial globalization. Rather, when we read the

RG Residency
Sector-120, Noida

Project Highlights	Locational Advantages	Club Facilities	Vaastu & Eco	Conveniences	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential complex in 12.75 acres. Only 12 towers i.e. one tower per acre Each tower to have 3 spacious lifts 3 tier security system with CCTV provision 3 side open corner plot adjoining green belt Vehicular movement free raised landscaped podium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 acre centrally landscaped greens Dedicated childrens' play area near each tower Earmarked area for Tennis, Badminton & Basketball court Skating Rink Putting Greens Jogging trail Amphitheater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Near FNG Corridor 5 minutes drive from City Centre, Sector - 32 Metro Station 5 to 7 minutes drive from Fortis Hospital 10 minutes drive from Atta Market, Sec-18 5 minutes drive from famous Sai Temple Proposed Sector Level Commercial Centre across the road 10 minutes drive from NH-24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swimming Pool, Toddler Pool Health Club, Gymnasium & Yoga Centre Steam & Sauna Indoor Games like Billiards, Pool, Table Tennis, Card Room, Carrom Board, Chess etc. Food Court & Cafeteria Multipurpose Hall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vaastu compliant layout plan Eco-friendly construction with concept of green building Water Harvesting Solar energy utilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unisex Beauty Parlour 24x7 Chemist Shop Super Market ATM Facility Laundry Services

FIGURE 3. Advertisement for the RG Residency Group offering the *vastu* option (fifth column), Noida, <http://noida-uttarpradesh.olx.in/r-g-residency-iiid-341698027>.

obsession with *security* against the obsession with *vastu* , we have a finer understanding of the techno-aesthetics of high-rise horror. My hypothesis is that “security”—the disciplinary assemblage that conditions the subject to financial globalization— *constitutes* the embodied spatial experience of vertical urbanism. It is certainly the proverbial mantra for home owners and real estate agents in the Indian context. Rarely just another customizable option, security is a *requirement* for vertical living. Every building—in advertising and in cinema—flaunts home security technologies for adjudicating distance and proximity, blockage and entry. A feature on the latest home security systems in *Property Magazine* (May 2011), for instance, highlights the pleasures of monitoring one’s home while away: “It is now possible to integrate your home security system with your smart phone, your tablet or devices that run on iOS or Android platform,” runs the enticing article.³⁹ A techno-determinist account of this cultural obsession with security might place the growing market in surveillance technologies at the center of the story. However, if we consider postindustrial vertical urbanism to be a complex phenomenon

that is at once a social, economic, technological, and ecological practice, then security appears as a more capacious rubric for all these other dimensions of life in vertical cities. In the Indian context, to be sure, security involves the physical protection of private property from the hordes gathering in overcrowded cities (internalized as the fear of the intruder). But it also involves geophysical distance from pollution, heat, dust, and moisture (internalized as the desire for climate-controlled vertical living), and social control of all networks, intimate to professional (internalized as the desire for wired connectivity). The expanded sense of security attunes us to its disassociative logic: the segregation, sanitization, partitioning, and atomization of the subject from the world and itself. This “immunitary” logic of sequestration is precisely the obverse of the *vastu shastra* that proposes proper alignments between all walks of life. *Vastu* establishes continuities between multiple experiential strata, while security relegates each to its own domain. Hence it is not surprising that the *vastu* should return as a robust belief system at the very moment of its disavowal.

The contemporary cultural obsession with *vastu* is, then, the dangerous supplement to the technocultures of security accompanying financial globalization. In the high-rise horror *vastu*, the ill wind of unhomeliness, reintroduces the concrete into the disassociative, secure world of postindustrial vertical urbanism. Cosmic bad luck habitually enters through the only form of circulation the security apparatus will allow: the controlled movement of well-oiled machines (hinges, levers, locks), the sophisticated electrical wiring, the efficient plumbing system, and, of course, the digital hookup (cable television to internet access). *Vastu* registers as technologized sensation, the shock of the concrete leaving a substantial imprint on the spectator’s neurological system.

The Techno-Aesthetic of Security

Enter the spectral occupant, withholding space from everyday use, unsettling the domestic, and derailing the turning of geometrical space into home. Importantly, the occupants make their initial appearances as swift “blurs” of the kind we see on motion detectors or moving at the edge of a CCTV camera. This troubling motion sense disturbs the optical control over the hostile environment outside. Unlike art cinema (for example, Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, 2005) or experimental cinema (Mike Figgis’s *Time Code*, 2000), high-rise horror offers no critical reflection about the social malevolence of scopophilia or the intense desire for optical control. Rather, the optical and auditory norms of CCTV and intercom technologies are heterogeneously distributed in the films and mined for their sensational affect

without pausing on their use and abuse; hence the films provoke anxieties about sorting, classifying, and interpreting an infinite database of images and sounds.⁴⁰ And yet when we track *what* norms are cinematically repurposed, we begin to detect patterns of an emergent techno-aesthetic of security. This is why I am less interested in establishing film-historical genealogies (adjudicating allegations or rebuttals of derivativeness, for instance) or the aesthetic value of high-rise horror cinema. I hope to shift the emphasis to thinking through the generic mode of high-rise horror as a set of nonrepresentational “cues” that condition our senses, training us to adjust and reorient to the emerging aspirational spaces.

The most obvious dimension of the techno-aesthetic is the high-rise horror film’s postcinematic romance with surveillance. As scholars ponder global surveillance systems, it is clear that this articulation of security assembles state and corporate actors, new technologies, and prison systems—a vast modern apparatus, in fact, as we know from the huge literature on modern security systems (national, global, cyber, or private). What is striking in the high-rise horror films is the *reversal* of subject positions in several films, where the surveyor (the home owner who mobilizes public-private surveillance for the protection of person and property) ultimately is the one who is watched, kinesthetically regulated, and finally imprisoned in the excessively secured home.⁴¹ This is not only a theme, but also a distinctive formal pattern that organizes onscreen space and the spectatorial immersion in that space. At the simplest level, the techno-aesthetic works through the multiplication of screens within the film frame, a proliferation that simulates the act of watching for the intruder on multiple CCTV monitors.⁴² Screens of all sizes—cellphones; television, laptop or desktop monitors; actual CCTV screens; angled mirrors, glass-paned room dividers; ordinary decorative wall mirrors; and shining stainless steel kitchen surfaces—abound, fragmenting the image of the spectral that we, the spectators, reconstruct in retrospect. Unlike working CCTV monitors, these screens often offer insufficient, disappearing, or, in some cases, distorted images that frighten rather than clarify. As in most CCTV narratives, there is always a blind spot—too near, too far, or around the corner—that escapes the optical field, instigating anxiety attacks. Several sequences from Madhukar’s *13B* foreground the difficulties wrought by proliferating screens that distract the watcher, disperse attention, and fragment habitable social space. In one memorable sequence at the start of the protagonist’s possession by a television show, his son wanders about the new flat documenting it on his cell phone. A mobile camera follows the boy around the flat, so that we see what he snaps over the boy’s shoulder as well as in his peripheral field of vision (fig. 4a). As we enter the living room where the father, Manohar, sits with family members facing the TV, an omniscient camera adds two other



FIGURE 4. (a. left) Boy with cell phone; (b. center) television and photo; (c. right) Manohar's photo. Frame grabs from *13B*, directed by Vikram Kumar (Mumbai, 2009), DVD.

screens: a photo frame with the idyllic family picture and the (infecting) television screen (fig. 4b). Viewers familiar with CCTV monitors begin to collate the images in the picture frame, on the television, and on the cellphone, relying on a knowledge-practice external to the narrative diegesis. The fact that the film insists on narrating events through such acts of visual assembling, and the fact that every frame mimics the informational insufficiency of pan-and-tilt CCTV (used for monitoring public spaces in India), expands the cinematic into a wider technoculture of surveillance. As the boy snaps his dad, Manohar's face is comically disfigured in the relay between the screens (fig. 4c); such a distortion of the images, as if they were warped by an unseen electromagnetic field, recurs in other films as well. Manohar feels the first stirrings of horror, feelings that spike a bit later when he encounters the distortion again in the basement of the condo where a parking lot is being built (Manohar deals with building construction in his day job as civil engineer). We recognize such image disfiguration as what happens when we try to capture a fast-moving object. But Manohar was stationary when the photo was taken. The optical-trace-as-blur suggests slow camera speed and a force recalcitrant to complete capture. The optical is articulated *with* the kinesthetic, the CCTV with motion detectors, for a synesthetic encounter with something that cannot be accessed by a single organ (be that the eye or ear, the skin or muscle). Such synesthetic movement persists across this cinema, the spectral more frightening in its insufficiency of form. Sometimes the pixilation of the captured image creates a dispersion that looks like the visualization of sound waves; at other moments, the indiscernible blur or blob is only felt to be scary in its sonic presence as flashy screech or quiet swoosh on the soundtrack.⁴³ Shaken by such flashes or brushes, we enter into an anticipatory mode, optically lying in wait for the intruder much like idle CCTV cameras. Thus the films suffuse spectators with *unrealized* optical desires that are often diverted to some other sense.

There is much more to say about the synesthetic mode of apprehending spectral occupancy in this high-rise horror. But in this limited space, I'll just indicate one direction in a greater argument. If one dimension of security is regulated connection to "secure networks," intimate to professional, efficient wiring is essential to that aspiration. But this is no easy achievement on a sub-continent groaning under new energy needs and crumbling infrastructures (be those plumbing, electricity, or sewage). An assortment of technologies—digital, electrical, mechanical—hold the promise of such connectivity, harnessing the senses at the body-machine interface: the air conditioning regulates body temperature; the television, audio and vision; the plumbing, the touch of water. Security as network control relies on partitioning the senses, a regulation disturbed by the messy synesthetic traffic between the senses at moments of technologized shock in high-rise horror. Vision becomes a feeling of pressure or movement becomes weight. By and large, the technological shocks—the screech, the fast camera speeds—remain unprocessed sensations, as just so *many* shocks superfluous to the story. Critics complain about this excess as gratuitous, even as the directors shrug off the criticism, reveling in the new do-it-yourself technologies of filmmaking (the new line of lightweight cameras, the expanding capacities of postproduction sound) to jolt the senses. In film after film, the quiet metallic whispers, hums, and clicks of the well-appointed condo are amped up in postproduction mixing, so that one aspect—the wail of the audio alarm, the static on the phone, or the drone of the garbage disposal—takes over the sonic space, deafening and frightening us out of our skins. These excitations of the nervous system register as sensation barely bound into affect when we partially recognize that these thrills and chills are a glitch, seepage, or dysfunction hardwired into the sophisticated circuitry of the luxury flat. Importantly, sensations intensify, piling on one another when the glitch sets off snowballing malfunctions. It is not just phone and alarm that go off, but water faucets also spout dirty water, the garbage disposal grates, and the ultrachic lighting flickers. The promises of good plumbing, limitless electricity, and wired connectivity to the outside world fade as the recalcitrant spectral occupant interrupts signal and flow.

But not every occurrence finds systematic explanation, so the heightened synesthesia is disproportionate to the weak explanations of its cause. The films cursorily narrate the tepid, often derivative, stories of psychological trauma that effectively translate cosmic disturbance as primal events and subsequently fold them into the interiorized space of the psyche. Such narration leaves a large degree of unmoored, unprocessed sensation in the viewing experience; there is little time to process the cornucopia of sensory data. There has been a substantial discussion in media studies (of the spectral-technological alliance since the mid-nineteenth century) about the spectral sense disrupting patterns of cognitive association.⁴⁴ I cannot do

justice to that discussion here. But one line of thinking runs something like this: excessive, even wild *associations* of the *senses* can produce sensorial excess that is cognitively disassociative. That is, frantic synesthesia can fragment the semiotic associative chains that make things cohere. Following Judith Butler, one may argue, it is *in* the cognitive gaps that the body as dynamic matter enters the signifying process. So the optical, kinesthetic, sonic, and tactile instances of messiness tailored to chill us in the high-rise horror might be gratuitous, even random (if we are overly concerned with authorial intent), but, when considered across the cinema, they appear as patterned reversals or accelerations of the spatial experience of living in secure environments. This pattern of nonrepresentational *cues* constitutes a techno-aesthetic, binding sensation into affective epistemologies. More importantly, these affective epistemologies do not always cohere with the cognitively realized narrative resolutions. Hence the cues leave their imprint on the spectatorial body, orienting spectators to the global as abstract space *and* the concrete remainder of what lies beyond the secure perimeter of the postindustrial utopia. The spectral becomes the conspiratorial sense of an absent totality and a dematerializing biophysical/geophysical site.

Concrete extracts its revenge when the optical control morphs into claustrophobia. In the high-rise horror, spectators gradually feel the steel and glass as imprisonment once the flat closes in on the middle-class protagonist. As the character's optical control diminishes, so does his or her mobility within the space of the luxury flat. If security ensures that the protagonists, and often the spectator (when sutured to them), feel comfortable and relaxed within the free-flowing space of the luxury flat, the counterpoint to this freedom is a sense of suffocation—of *losing* spatial ease, controlled direction, regulated movement, and the desired distance from the environs. Creaking walls, leaking/gushing water, or rogue electric circuits are obvious signs of concrete shock, but they are one of the most effective ways in which the environs close in upon the spectator through an oppressively low-angle and close camera view. Such a perspective, most elaborately deployed in Ram Gopal Varma's *Bhoot*, initially establishes the perspective of the specter always already watching the new owner. Not only does the new owner experience numbing spatial disorientations, unable to move freely in or out of the unhomely house, but he or she is also constantly watched from a low angle of something at floor level looking up—as if toward the defunct CCTV camera. That is, if we think of CCTV cameras as always capturing activity from above, this *persistent* low angle assumes the optical perspective of that which is surveyed or caught on tape. We are used to odd, skewed angles in most of Ram Gopal Varma's films, but the low-angle take becomes a predictable spectral perspective that obtains across this cinema. We, the spectators, are sutured to the specter's perspective, and



FIGURE 5. (a. left) Luxury condo; (b. right) trapped in the high rise. Frame grabs from *A Flat*, directed by Hemant Madhukar (2010; London, 2011), DVD.

watch the residents from *below*, so that they tower above us. It is almost as if the new owners, proud of their state-of-the-art home security, now have cameras turned on *them* from the point-of-view of the surveilled as they helplessly flail around in a spacious apartment become a concrete-and-glass trap. The tight depthless space they begin to occupy as the films progress, their restlessness within that space, signals a caged helplessness. An oppressive sense of suffocation intensifies: the door jams, preventing exit; the elevator stops again and again on the *same* floor destroying managed spatial standardization of the high rise; and penthouse windows close in on trapped protagonists (figs. 5a–b). Positioned as the prisoner in the techno-aesthetic of security, the spectator is drawn into a phenomenological experience of mounting *physical pressure* as the concrete closes in.

And with the concrete, land returns as the geophysical environs that cannot be disappeared as fictitious capital. Those environs are most starkly felt as gravity, the centripetal pull into the land acting against the fantasy of *verticality*—that form of security against geophysical and ecological surroundings. The elevator in the high-rise horror becomes the metonym for the mechanical and electrical infrastructure constitutive of vertical living. The spectral sense reorients the spectator toward the geophysical address of the new home whose phenomenological presence is felt in the excitations described earlier, but most unequivocally in the spatial experiences of uncontrollable weight. In all the films, multiple disturbances of geophysical (soil, water, energy reserves) and ecological (plants, creatures, fish) strata make scattered thematic appearances. A series of signs—the all-too-visible dirt, the strand of hair clogging the drain, and waste welling up from beneath—provide a semiotic for the geophysical environs. But at the level of sensation, spectators are most aware of those environs as a vortex in a series of sequences that manipulate weight. All the high-rise films involve episodes of falling, swirling, vertigo, depthlessness, lightness, entanglement, dragging, or suction. Toward the beginnings of the films, we have wide pans of the glorious view, a zooming sense of distance from the congested city



FIGURE 6. (a. left) The elevator plunge; (b. right) into the building innards. Frame grabs from *13B*.

enhanced by the sounds of high winds on the soundtrack. But as the films progress, the key sequences depicting the main protagonists' mental distress introduce *gravity* as the nemesis of high-rise living. Postproduction shaky zooms at fast camera speeds through corridors and lobbies, and, *most* often, in plunges down the gleaming, steel-plated elevators create sensations of losing control over height. This is especially frightening when that height is countered by a weight that drags the elevator consistently down *under* the building—to the underground car park, sometimes in the foundations. The “fall” in the elevator, a staple of high-rise horror in general, counters the earlier sensations of floating but controlled remoteness from the geophysical surroundings. *Bhoot* and *13B*, for instance, incorporate at least six or seven elevator sequences hurtling down to the underground car park; four or five sequences in each film take place there, in those parking lots. In *Bhoot*, unfinished iron spikes from the foundation play a part in the revenge drama. And almost every film flashes into the innards of the building, sometimes through the elevator shaft, sometimes lingering on iron rails on an unfinished roof, sometimes in sand piles or concrete blocks surrounding the finished structure. In one sequence from *13B*, an elevator malfunction (manifested as the heavy metallic lurch) takes us zooming down to the innards of the building (fig. 6a). Cut to the kinesthetically slow Manohar plodding down several flights. Cut to a crane penetrating and plumbing the earth outside the building for a new foundation (fig. 6b) and spewing blinding dirt. These sequences instill an ecological sense—dripping water, leaking waste, fertile mud, roots, weeds, dead insects, scuttling creatures in the belly of the buildings—in the spectator, even as the sensations of falling, the loss of control over depth, establish gravity as a formidable antivertical force. Something in the environs—the outside and the beneath—exerts hostility, an existential negativity of the sort Dana Polan ascribes to film noir.⁴⁵ The

momentum of these spatial traumas—vertigo, suction, then entrapment—escalates as the film progresses, often as diegetically unexplained jolts and shocks. Insecure, spectators apprehend the intruder acting in our bodies as uncontrolled weight. In this way, these sensational films establish uncanny connectivity to lifeworlds made remote by the techno-magic of globalization. If there is evidence that the global continually fails to fully abstract and dematerialize its concrete remainder, we find it in the belly of the beast: in the technocultures of financial globalization.

Notes

- A special thanks to Bliss Lim Rich Freeman, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Rahul Mukherjee, S. V. Srinivas, Sukanya Ghosh, and Bhaskar Sarkar.
1. David Harvey, "The Right to the City: From Capital Surplus to Accumulation by Dispossession," in Swapna Banerjee-Guha, ed., *Accumulation by Dispossession: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order* (Delhi, 2010), 17–32.
 2. The size of the middle class is predictably difficult to estimate, so the figure is a rough approximation. The US middle class, for instance, ranges anywhere from 35,000 to 140,000 people: see Jan Nijman, "Mumbai's Mysterious Middle Class," *Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 4 (December 2006): 758–75. See also Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minneapolis, 2006).
 3. India's National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) reports a revolution in housing loans, most directed toward young professionals 37 years or younger. The opposition between saving and indulgence is made in an advertisement of India's ICICI Bank. The median home value in Mumbai is around 30 lakhs (3 million rupees) for those with a median income of 50 thousand rupees. But this is on the high end, for, in Mumbai, almost 62 percent of the people have a car, as opposed to 3 percent in the rest of India.
 4. See, *Sanhati*, especially the piece, "A history of the brutal Rajarhat land acquisition, Bengal's new IT hub," <http://sanhati.com/excerpted/945/>; for the screening disruption see "Screening of Rajarhat Landgrab Film Stopped," posted April 23, 2011, Manabatargaan blog, <http://manabatargaan.blogspot.com/2011/04/screening-of-rajarhat-landgrab-film.html>.
 5. Dilip Gaonkar, "On Cultures of Democracy," *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2007), <http://publicculture.org/articles/view/19/1/on-cultures-of-democracy>.
 6. Notably some of these films have had simultaneous releases in Telugu and/or numerous remakes—such as *Shock* (2004), the Tamil remake of Varma's *Bhoot* (2003) reset in Chennai—making the Bollywood preoccupation with spectral occupancy an all-India phenomenon.
 7. For a fuller discussion of an expanded cinema, see essays in Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel, eds., *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).
 8. "Apprehension" comes from the Latin *adprehendĕre* (to lay hold of or seize), and later connotes both possession and to learn or gain practical acquaintance of; *OED: Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., apprehension, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9808?redirectedFrom=apprehension#eid>.

9. Nigel Thrift, "Remembering the Technological Unconscious by Foregrounding the Knowledges of Position," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22 (2004): 175–90, and N. J. Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (London, 2005).
10. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).
11. For example, Bliss Lim's study of Asian horror films, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and the Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC, 2009), which elaborates cinematic entanglements with the standardization of heterogeneous time.
12. A series of essays in C. Ramachandraiah, A. C. M. van Westen, and Sheela Prasad, eds., *High-tech Urban Spaces: Asian and European Perspectives* (New Delhi, 2008), analyze the effects of the emerging vertical cities across the world. Importantly, the "vertical city" is a concept that applies equally to slum relocation projects, as we have seen with the Dharavi (characterized as the largest slum in Asia) initiatives in Mumbai.
13. Esther Cheung, "On Spectral Mutations: The Ghostly City in *The Secret, Rouge and Little Cheung*," in Kam Louie, ed., *Hong Kong Culture: Word and Image* (Hong Kong, 2010), 169–92.
14. Vinayak Bharne, editor's introduction to part 3 of *The Emerging Asian City: Concomitant Urbanities and Urbanisms* (London, 2012), 179.
15. Jeffrey Hou, "Vertical Urbanism, Horizontal Urbanity: Notes from East Asian Cities," in *ibid.*, 235–43.
16. Jini Kim Watson, *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (Minneapolis, 2011).
17. For discussions of SEZs and other megacity projects, see Pranab Kanti Basu, "The Political Economy of Land Grab," *Economic and Political Weekly of India*, April 7, 2007, 1281–87; Solomon Benjamin, "Manufacturing Neoliberalism: Lifestyling Indian Urbanity," in Banerjee-Guha, *Accumulation by Dispossession*, 92–124; and Michael Goldman, "Speculative Urbanism and the Making of the Next World City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (2010): 1–26.
18. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, 1991).
19. See for instance, Tong Lam's photographic archives of abandoned projects, *Abandoned Futures*, http://tonglam.com/ABANDONED_FUTURES.html.
20. The New Town land grab, for instance, closed fisheries in the northeastern part of Kolkata, leading environmentalists to protest the destruction of 52 varieties of local fish. This is but one instance of the ecological damage these new townships wreak on species habitats.
21. In India, houses are built with brick and concrete. So here the reference is partially literal.
22. Darryl D'Monte, "'Middle Class' Palaces," *India Together*, July 20, 2005, <http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/jul/eco-palaces.htm>.
23. Mumbai, the worst hit, has as many as 88,000 unsold flats, even as 10 billion rupees' worth of housing projects are still in the pipeline; see "Real Estate Bubble Set to Burst Again," [Indianrealestatemarket.com](http://www.indianrealestatemarket.com), May 24, 2012, <http://www.indianrealestatemarket.com/real-estate-bubble-set-burst/>, and "Residential Prices Under Threat in India: Inflation Now RBI's Top Priority," *Global Property Guide*, <http://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Asia/India/Price-History>. Of course the new ghost towns are comparable with those in China, such as the much-photographed Ordos. For more on China, see "The Ghost Towns of China: Amazing Satellite Images Show Cities Meant to be Home to Millions Lying Deserted," *Mail Online, Daily Mail*, December 18, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.com>.

- co.uk/news/article-1339536/Ghost-towns-China-Satellite-images-cities-lying-completely-deserted.html.
24. Hong Kong's "Haunted-House King," Ng Goon Lau has bought more than 20 properties with spooky histories; Te-Ping Chen and Jeffrey Ng, "Hong Kong's Real-Estate Boom Conjures a Scary Development," *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324669104578208181761763650.html>.
 25. Documentarian Ranu Ghosh, for example, spent some years tracking the story of Shambhu Prasad, the factory worker who refused to vacate his quarters to make way for the South City mall in Kolkata. See the "NowhereMan" entry on Ranu Ghosh's blog, "How It All Began—Ranu Ghosh Tells a True Story," posted December 2, 2006, <http://nowhereman-shambhu.blogspot.com/2006/12/how-it-all-began-ranu-ghosh-tells-true.html>; Danish Raza, "How the Delhi Government Authorized Ghost Colonies," *Firstpost.India*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/how-the-delhi-government-authorised-ghost-colonies-258382.html>.
 26. The Nandigram sit-ins resulted in an ugly incident when the state police shot 11 farmers at a high-pitched confrontation. It became the calamity that turned many left-sympathizers who had long supported the Marxist government against the state.
 27. Solomon Benjamin, "Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses," in *Sarai Reader 7: Frontiers* (New Delhi, 2007): 538–63.
 28. For an elaboration of these differences, see See Sangita Gopal's chapter on the Ramsay brothers, "Fearful Habitations: Upward Mobility and the Horror Genre," in *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema* (Chicago, 2012), 91–123, and Kartik Nair, "Fear on Film: The Ramsay Brothers and Bombay's Horror Cinema," in *Sarai Reader 8: Fear* (Delhi, 2004), 254–61.
 29. As scholars of Bombay cinema have noted, the status as industry occurs at the same time that financing for Bombay films expands in the postliberalization era; consequently, Bollywood emerges as a reconfigured cultural-economic juggernaut by the close of the twentieth century. For fuller accounts of the economic and cultural makeover of the Bombay film industry, see Nitin Govil's "Bollywood and the Frictions of Global Mobility, in Daya Thussu, ed., *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow* (London, 2007), 76–88, and Bhaskar Sarkar's "Melodramas of Globalization," *Cultural Dynamics* 20 (2008): 31–51. The coterie of scholars whose recent works present Bombay cinema's transformation into Bollywood relevant to my discussion of the "new horror" and the luxury flat include Ranjani Mazumdar, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (Minneapolis, 2007), Tejaswani Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Durham, NC, 2012), and Gopal, *Conjugations*.
 30. Vivian Sobchack, "'Lounge Time': Post-War Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley, 1998), 129–70.
 31. Ram Gopal Varma, in an interview with Rajiv Masand at Mehboob Studios, Mumbai, September 28, 2012.
 32. Vikram Bhatt insists that there was no conversion to 3-D on computer; *Haunted 3D*, explains Bhatt, was shot in 3-D with two cameras constantly aligned; the stereographer Brent Robinson engaged long takes with minimal cut-aways, keeping two large cameras moving together (see extras for *Haunted 3D*, directed by Vikram Bhatt [Mumbai, 2011], DVD).
 33. See "PNC and HPM Joined Hands to Make Scares," *IndiaGlitz*, March 25, 2010, <http://www.indiaglitz.com/channels/telugu/article/55581.html>.

34. Ram Gopal Varma's *Bhoot* commences with the sound perspective (a wailing raspy sound) of the ghost freewheeling from the burning *ghat* back through the streets to the high-rise site of murder.
35. *Haunted 3D* (2011) features a Sufi mystic; a tantric solves the problem in *Bhoot* (2003) and an exorcist, in *Raat* (1992).
36. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1994).
37. Most real estate and property development firms employ *vastu* experts as a part of the "facilities" they offer to home buyers, but one can also find independent *vastu* planning outfits for consultation, advice, planning, and design. Many commentators point to Kushdeep Bansal's modernizing of the doctrine published as *The MahaVastu Handbook*.
38. One of the famous stories of bad *vastu* involves the Antilia building in Mumbai, the spectacular new digs for the Ambanis, with six floors of parking and a hanging garden. Despite the splendence, local lore speculated on why the Ambanis delayed their move in.
39. "Safe and Secure?," *Property Magazine* 3, no. 3 (May 2011): 56–58 (58); see also advertising in installments of the *Times of India Property Guide*. A recent article on Delhi housing colonies reports an upturn in the brisk market for home security systems; Shilpa Raina, "CCTV, Your New Colony Watchman," *Times of India*, March 22, 2012.
40. I do not have the space to develop the high-rise horror cinema's engagement with database processing. In *13B*, the terror of the infinite database that overwhelms cognitive processing is explicitly referenced in a scene toward the close of the film when Manohar bows helplessly before multiple television screens at a shop window, each capturing only one inexorable sequence of events. The "image" here is of data flow and a desiring subject who seeks to arrest it; the proliferation of data causes a frightening excess, in the same way that a surfeit of unprocessed sensations affects the sensorial register.
41. The new condos feature partly private (tailored to each flat) and partly public (CCTV camera in the lobbies and elevators and around the perimeter) surveillance technologies. For a discussion of the new combinatory surveillance technologies, see, David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Buckingham, UK, 2001).
42. See Dietmar Kammerer, "Video Surveillance in Hollywood Movies," *Surveillance and Society* 2, no. 2/3 (2004): 464–73. See also his "Surveillance Studies" online platform, <http://www.surveillance-studies.org/author/dietmar/>; and Nic Groombridge, "Crime Control or Crime Culture TV?" *Surveillance and Society* 1, no. 1 (2002): 30–46.
43. There is emerging scholarship on the changing practices of sound design and postproduction sound technologies in Bollywood that offers analysis of how the horror soundscapes are put together: see, for instance, essays in Radhika Gajjala and Ventakarama Gajjala, eds., *South Asian Technospaces* (New York, 2008), and Ian Garwood, "The Songless Bollywood Film," *South Asian Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (2006): 169–83.
44. Jeffrey Sconce, for one, argues that the spectral was a bodily adjustment to a new sense of simultaneity, an embodied disassociation of time, space, body, and matter. See his *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC, 2000).
45. Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940–1950* (New York, 1990).