

**POETICS OF EVER ELUDING SIMULACRUM: CRITIQUE OF THE
METONYMIC CONSTRUCTION OF NATION IN SATYAJIT RAY'S AGANTUK**

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Abstract:

This paper undertakes a philosophically inflected reading of Ray's Agantuk (1991) through the Deleuzian notion of the simulacrum as a mobile, anti-hierarchical, and transgressive form of becoming. The paper dismantles the metonymic logic by which the modern nation naturalises its imagined totality—through language, heritage, territory, currency, and citizenship—and opposes these static symbols with the film's counter-metaphor of Wanderlust. Through the figure of the vagrant anthropologist Manmohan Mitra, Ray fashions an allegory of nomadic subjectivity that resists the epistemic fixity of nationalist identity. Here, Deleuze's "reversal of Platonism" serves as a philosophical key: the simulacrum no longer copies an original, but proliferates difference, thereby exposing the nation as a copy without an origin, a fiction sustained by repetition and repression.

The article thus reconceives Agantuk as an anthropology of becoming, where Mitra's cosmopolitan irony and perpetual displacement instantiate a critique of the "State's symbolic apparatuses"—its surveillance, homogenisation, and juridical control over the body politic. Reading Ray's aesthetics against both colonial and postcolonial orthodoxies, the paper situates his cinema within a Deleuzian topology of movement, fluidity, and deterritorialisation. The simulacrum of Manmohan Mitra dissolves the binaries of home/away, civilized/savage, self/other, re-inscribing the political as an aesthetic of wandering. By positioning Wanderlust with metaphor and migration—with the endless serial play of difference—the study contends that Ray's film transforms the poetics of nationhood into a metaphysics of mobility, where identity is always already elsewhere, perpetually becoming, and forever eluding the fixities of origin, authenticity, and belonging.

Keywords: Agantuk, Satyajit Ray, Deleuze, Simulacrum, Nation, Nationalism, Migration

1.1 Introduction: Deleuze's Simulacrum – the Anthropology of Becoming and Satyajit's Migrant Anthropologist

My primary objective in this paper is to read Satyajit Ray's 1991 cinema, *Agantuk* (The Stranger) as a syncretist text which rejects a series of metonymies for the nation—language, currency, passports, an inheritance (or "heritage"), and putatively local habits. The film privileges the notion of "migration" not only in its cancellation of metonymic nationalism, but by its overt privileging of the idea of "Wanderlust", repeatedly used in the film as a

trope. "Wanderlust", I argue, is a subversive impulse, and is aided by various transposed forms in the film.

The "State" has its multiple symbolic apparatuses to define national space: sovereignty, the body politic, unity, international borders and many other structures which exert their reciprocal pressures of surveillance, homogenization, fixity, and various other regulatory, juridical procedures on mind and body of its citizens. What are the figurative correlatives for this contest? How do apparently nugatory instances of aesthetic forms resist the conformity frequently demanded by the state? How are the legacies of colonialism, and of colonial aesthetics refuted by the mobility of forms displayed in postcolonial texts? How do these refutations manufacture a series of revisions? Such questions have been frequently addressed as mere adjuncts to other "larger" historical dynamics constituting postcolonial narratives. Of course, the hybridity and "fragmentation" of postcolonial form, in a broad sense, have received theorization in refined and remarkably wide-ranging insights from a host of theorists, perhaps most notably in the work of Homi Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee.

Seeking a theorized metaphor for the mobile, transmuting, and eccentric form of migration I try to study in this paper on Ray's *Agantuk*, I selected to adapt the discussion of the simulacrum by Gilles Deleuze, rather than the more famous (and consistently morbid) commentaries on simulation by Jean Baudrillard, for my purpose. The crux prompting this choice was Deleuze's emphasis on the serial movements of the simulacrum. At the beginning of "Plato and the Simulacrum," Deleuze indicates a Nietzschean goal within a question: "What does it mean to reverse Platonism?" For Plato, Deleuze argues, the simulacrum is a copy that deviates from its model, a representation that veers from true *mimesis*, and therefore a disobedient form (*The Logic of Sense* 253-266). Discussing the simulation of multiple subjectivity in the modern work of art, Deleuze says:

It is not at all a question of different points of view on one story supposedly the same; for points of view would still be submitted to a rule of convergence. It is rather a question of different and divergent stories, as if an absolutely different landscape corresponded to each point of view. There is indeed a unity of divergent series insofar as they are divergent, but it is always a chaos perpetually thrown off center which becomes one only in the Great Work (*The Logic of Sense* 260).

Almost by echoing Deleuze's idea of the "Great Work of art", Satyajit Ray in most of his films chooses to a divergent and disobedient subjectivity that operates through the entire film and his *Agantuk* is no exception. Ray in the film *Agantuk* portrays the nation as defined by its own repression. As he sees nation-formation through the lenses of subversion and irony - through the changes that unrelentingly revise the nation - he figuratively sabotages its borders and its stability. If the nation is an ensemble of affinities homogenized within the simulacrum of an originary space - a birthplace, a motherland, a home - then, as Deleuze's discussion of

the “simulacrum” suggests, the nation represses internalized difference. Its restless conditions are themselves functions of the internal resonance of intersecting loyalties (as expressed by shared artistic, financial, religious, sexual, and linguistic interests) and its hostilities that force amplitude (evident in the competing dissatisfactions of such loyalties). By selecting Manmohan Mitra (Utpal Dutt), a vagrant anthropologist who, after thirty-five years of travel, arrives as a guest at the home, as the protagonist of his film, Satyajit Ray problematizes the politics of migration and change as a way of life and perhaps asserts an international and even trans-national claim to the possibility of revising the local and re-imagining the nation with a cosmopolitan aesthetics.

Satyajit Ray’s last film, and one of his least appreciated, *Agantuk* (The Stranger. 1991), is an enlarged version of his short story, “Atithi” (The Guest). *The Stranger* depicts the suspicion and fear met by Manmohan Mitra (Utpal Dutt), a vagrant anthropologist who, after thirty-five years of travel, arrives as a guest at the home of Anila (Mamata Shankar), who Mitra claims is his niece, and Sudhindra Bose (Dipankar Dey), her husband. In Ray’s short story, as in the film, Mitra is first seen in synecdoche. However, this is not synecdoche in a conventional substitution of a whole with its parts—the whole (as Mitra’s identity might be understood) is deferred with agile cunning by *Agantuk*. As a narrative device synecdoche is a mode of representation that frequently makes the partiality of knowledge manifest, and it is that topological uncertainty that the synecdochic images of Mitra provide. Synecdoche in Ray’s film signals the endless, agonized negotiation of difference in the post-colony as a mode of modernity that has to be faced without repression. The negotiation is lucidly made by the figure of Manmohan Mitra in the film - it is a refusal of the apparent (and widespread) acceptance that modernity can only have a perpetually delayed arrival in postcolonial societies. Manmohan Mitra operates as a figural construct in Ray’s film: wandering, deferred/deferring, he is overtly, and - for his hosts - exasperatingly, a simulacrum. In this perplexing role, he is “unlocatable,” his mobility fuelled by his cosmopolitanism and his alert use of irony to privilege difference. As Partha Chatterjee has observed, “The most powerful as well as creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on identity but rather on a difference with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated in the modern West” (*The Nation and its Fragments* 5). While his claim is persuasive, Chatterjee himself acknowledges the oppressions accompanying Asian nationalism. Aware that the acknowledgement of difference in the nation is an acknowledgement of the nation itself as a simulacrum, *Agantuk* explodes precisely these oppressions by rejecting a series of metonymies for the nation.

In *Faces of Nationalism*, Tom Nairn outlines shifts from the ethnic definition of the national to the civic and from the “natural” to the “designed” (86-165). Nairn asserts that nationalism is inescapable, but the inflections of parochialism in any of these models (we see

the civic model being distorted daily nowadays) require reconstitution of the metonymic categories that are considered frequently to constitute a nation. Noting metonymy's limitation of the potential for reconstitution, David Lodge explains the logical lacuna produced by metonymy:

The sentence 'Keels crossed the deep'.. is a transformation of a notional sentence, *The keels of the ships crossed the deep sea*[,] by means of deletions. A rhetorical figure, rather than a *précis*, results because the items deleted are not those which seem logically the most dispensable. As the word *ship* includes the idea of keels, *keels* is logically redundant and would be the most obvious candidate for omission in a more concise statement of the event, and the same applies to *deep*. Metonymy and synecdoche, in short, are produced by deleting one or more items from a natural combination, but not the items it would be most natural to omit: this illogicality is equivalent to the coexistence of similarity and dissimilarity in metaphor (*The Modes of Modern Writing* 76).

Although Lodge's use of the word "natural" overlooks subjectivity, his location of the lacuna in the logic of metonymy is evident in chauvinist discourse. With a hysterical frequency, metonymic slogans of nationalism ("Long Live the Queen!", "Go, Stars and Stripes!", "The Indian Tiger will crush the Limey!") employ what David Lodge has termed "deletion"- a repression of the logical that is crucial to the operations of metonymy. Lodge argues that "deletion" is to combination as substitution is to selection" (76). The supposition that metonymy operates merely on "contiguity," or on contiguity, is undone here. Further, not only the substitutive, but also the combinative, powers of metaphor are on display in *Agantuk*. Accounting for its transfers, the substitutions of metaphor acknowledge selection and resemblance, whereas the mechanics of metonymy hinge on a more militant act - deletion. This aggression, and the "illogicality" that Lodge observes, establish metonymy as a main representational strategy for militant nationalism.

However, metonymy, especially nationalistic metonymy, is metaphor that does not acknowledge its own metaphorical status: militant nationalism sees its metonymy transformed as the very nation. Simon During reminds us that "Herder, who invents the word "nationalism" (in German), links a series of concepts - *Volk*, *Bildung*, language-as-consciousness-and-act, empathy, organic form, in an effort to connect with, and respect, what we must now call other cultures" ("Literature - Nationalism's Other?," 139). However, During notes, "this conceptual chain immediately penetrates imperialism [since] the notions 'culture' and 'nation' align, early nineteenth-century Europe becoming a scene of individual cultures chasing after nationhood" (139). In other words, in the nineteenth century, "culture" became - and, indeed, sought to become - a

metonym for the nation. This desperate seeking is unpacked steadily through the figure of Manmohan Mitra.

1.2 The Unknown and its Name:

The threat of this elusive character in Ray's *The Stranger* is less easily explained than the threat of the stranger, with his Nazi past, in Orson Welles's identically titled film of 1946. Ray's film offers us the "blood relative" as stranger - the most intimately familiar as the unfamiliar/uncanny. This representation hinges on Freud's definition of the Unheimlich: "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (*Writings on Art and Literature* 195). The unpredictability of the simulacrum is evident in Mitra's irruption into the life of the Bose family, and the epistemological crisis of those seeking to "expose" Mitra is manifestly the crisis in knowledge for those seeking to arrest simulacra. There is no way to verify Mitra's status as a "good" copy, no recourse to comparison with a model of the person he claims to be—the model for this simulacrum has been missing for more than three decades, since the "original" Manmohan Mitra had left home 35 years ago, and Anila has no memory or visual record of him.

The film opens at the patio of the Bose home, where Anila and Sudhindra read the letter in which Mitra claims kinship with Anila and states his plan for a week's stay with them. The letter admits that Mitra's visit is an imposition, and leaves it to Anila to accept or reject him (Anila admires the style of the letter, while Sudhindra pronounces it "too ornate" and "too decent" - he doubts that anyone living in Bengal would use language so refined). Listening to his parents' conversation, Anila and Sudhindra's son, Satyaki (Bikram Banejee), inadvertently points to the significance of the unknown in the familiar when he excitedly (even admiringly) labels Mitra "Jaal dadu"—fake/trickster granddad. The elusiveness of Mitra's "true" self is amplified by the film's complex use of names. The camera cuts away to a slow tilt that shows Mitra seated, hidden behind a newspaper, before (and during) the rolling of the film's credits - the naming of, and by, the film. We glimpse the synecdochic Mitra on the train, sitting with his legs crossed, his hands reaching for a tray of food, and, a few seconds later, the camera tilts down to his Adidas-clad feet as they walk on a railway platform. The film's title appears, but is obscured to a neon pink blur behind the credits, as if the film's mechanics themselves thwart attempts to fix the identity of the guest whom the title announces. Satyaki's name recalls a disciple of Krishna's in Hindu mythology, prefiguring the boy's loyalty and affection for Mitra, whose first name, Manmohan, includes the last of the 108 names of Krishna that Mitra sings for the boy soon after his arrival at the Bose home: Mohan. The 108 names of Krishna denote 108 identities, and the reference establishes the difficulty of reducing Mitra to a single identity early in the text. In a further irony of naming, the boy's name includes several (perhaps deliberate, but surely apt) puns: belonging to the

person most trusting of, and openly interested in, Mitra, the name gains from the Bengali language a semiotic range that includes, at least, three articulations: the inquiry “Satya, ki?” or “Is it true?” - a question conceding the possibility of certainty; the more abstract “Satyaki?” or “What is the truth?” - a questioning of certainty; and a mordant “Satya ki?” or “What truth?” - a dismissal of certainty. Facing the well-stropped arguments of Ray’s film, certainty further dwindles before alternatives with which the eclectic resists the uniform.

1.3 “Nomadology” and Frogs in the Well

When Anila asks him what he likes to eat, Mitra answers, “I’m an omnivorous, and a small, eater.” The eclecticism implicit in his answer functions as his riposte to the constraints of nationalist discourse that he faces later in the film. As he begins his meal, he samples the various dishes on the table, and keeps shuffling his preferences for what he will eat even as he obviously enjoys the food, displaying a receptivity that is also an eagerness to transmit. As he is about to start on some fish, he changes his mind, saying, “Fishbones will hamper my speech.” He selects a spinach curry first, and reminds Satyaki of Popeye the sailor’s fondness for spinach. The reference to the cartoon-strip, and Mitra’s preference for spinach over fish (itself a celebrated metonym for Bengali cuisine), provide an early clue for the debates that shape the film.

Conversing with Anila at the dining-table, Mitra recalls that he had decided to join art school before college, but was overtaken by Wanderlust. Mitra remarks that the main factor in his decision to leave home was an urge to explore the savage and the civilized, an impulse produced by Mitra’s fascination with a vibrant cave-painting of a charging bull in the Altamira region of Spain. In one of the more peculiar moments in the film, we receive this information as (apparently) the same image of a bull from the Altamira caves hovers into view, spreading over the entire screen. While Mitra himself is offscreen, Mitra’s voice continues its narrative while the screen shows this image. The displaced voice suggests his simultaneous - and therefore incomplete - presence in more than one place. His restlessness receives a similarly striking metaphor during another of his *mise en abyme* narratives in the film: an unidentified hang-glider sails over a public park in the city while, in yet another voiceover, Mitra describes Machu Picchu to a group of Satyaki’s friends, the scene a reminder of Mitra’s joint role as a vagrant traveller and storyteller. His function as a deliberately floating signifier grows when he tells the boys a different story, a re-enactment of a scene in which Apu explains the solar eclipse to his mother in *Aparajito*, the second film in Ray’s “Apu” trilogy. Strengthening the link between *The Stranger* and the trilogy, Mitra leaves home in 1955, the year of release for *Pather Panchali* (the first film in the trilogy), the sequel to which sees Apu leaving home as a young scholar. Transferring another distant locale into the film, Mitra proceeds to talk of the unexpected arrival at Machu Picchu by the

American tourist Hiram Bingham, which, he says in the same sentence, happened in the year (1911) that Mohun Bagan, the dominant team in Indian football, defeated the English football team to win the IFA shield. Play, by the significant crossover in the linked stories and in the film at large, is here a metaphor for reclamation, resistance, and restlessness. The word “magic” recurs in the film, fusing this sense of play and the unknowable—Mitrahimself calls the mysterious symmetries among the earth, the sun, and the moon during the lunar eclipse “magic.” However, later in the film, Satyaki’s explanation for knowing that Mitra is his “true granddad” is, again, “Magic!” - a frank admission of knowledge not available to explanation. Mitra endorses such moments of inexplicability when he argues that the valuable moments of clairvoyance give the lie to complacent belief in linear thought. In sharp contrast, claims to certain knowledge are punctured almost as soon as they are made in the film: Mitra tells Sudhindra that his passport, which Sudhindra wants to see as a conclusive sign of identity, can be easily forged. Hearing Anila praise Mitra’s fluency in German, Sudhindra boasts of his own stock of “50 or so German words,” as his parochial inadequacy and dilettantism are underscored. A moment later, while discussing his travels with Satyaki, Mitra advises the boy against being a *Kupamanduk* or a “frog-in-the-well,” and a *kolu* - a “stay-at-home.” Satyaki asks, “What if I move out?” and Mitra, in a flash of brilliant eclecticism, replies, “Why fear? How else would you taste armadillo meat?”

Against accusations that Ray abandoned style in the final phase of his career (see Cooper’s reading of *Agantuk* 225), I would argue that Ray’s aesthetics grow even more self-conscious in his last works. He dismantles insularity by insistent reminders of its oppression: the Bose’s house in *Agantuk* is a metaphor for their insularity. The scenes in the house (which form the majority of the film) are dimly lit and convey a dull spatial oppression, as the house seems traversed by anxiety, with a paucity of windows, vibrance, and, for a while after the film opens, ornament. (The lack is made even starker when most of the artifacts and ornaments the house does have are locked away, on Sudhindra’s suggestion, before Mitra’s arrival).

1.4 Debating Metonymy

The actor Ranjan Rakhit (Robi Ghosh) visits the Boses to examine Mitra almost as an exhibit, but he insists that he doesn’t want to be introduced as an actor. Rakhit asks Mitra about his past and about the reasons for his return, noting that, if legal proceedings were initiated to test Mitra’s identity, “the lawyers of today would wring [Mitra] dry.” Mitra maintains a considerate restraint. Rakhit claims to see a potential newspaper headline in Mitra’s return to Bengal: “Return of the Prodigal Uncle.” Mitra sharply reminds him of two senses of the word “prodigal” and says, “I am neither,” his self-disciplined eclecticism at the dining table having already supported this claim. Rakhit tries another line of questioning and

asks Mitra what he thinks of Calcutta, warning him that he (Rakhit) is apukka Calcuttian and cannot stand “criticism” directed at the city. Mitra describes Calcutta as “very civilized,” listing the presence of skyscrapers, a happy bourgeoisie, and congested traffic, alongside the daily struggle of labourers, as prerequisites for “civilization.”

When Mrs. Rakhit nervously inquires if Mitra has “performed sangsar.” (Sangsar, as Mitra explains, translates as “home” or “family,” and Mrs. Rakhit’s question euphemistically asks, “Have you been married?”) Mitra replies courteously, saying that his choice of leaving home and family had obviated the question of marriage for him. Displaying an initially astonishing irony, he omits to mention perhaps the most common connotation of *sangsar* - “world.” However, and of course, this may be for reasons of courtesy, since he has an impressive record of travel, and has clearly “performed sangsar” more than many, in that sense. A statement of Mitra’s poetics is implied when Rakhit has difficulty remembering the name of a Greek intellectual from antiquity. He struggles with “‘Aris.. ‘Aris.. but cannot recall the complete name. Sudhindra suggests, “Aristotle?” Rakhit waves off the suggestion, hurriedly replying, “Not ‘-totle,’ not ‘-totle!” When Mitra offers “Aristophanes,” Rakhit’s eyeslight up and he offers enthusiastic confirmation. The preference for the writer of *The Achamians* and *Lvsistrata*, as well as of the anti-Socratic *The Clouds*, clarifies the text’s affiliation with subversion, comic irony, and resistance to war, rather than with Aristotelian unities and the unities of militant nations.

The film’s poetics of exchange is extended by its repeated conflation of “high” and “low” art. This poetics is prominent again, as Mitra rebuts Rakhit’s insistence that Bengalis have an exclusive claim to *adda* - the common “Bengali” practice of a small gathering where prolonged conversation, often without any ostensible purpose, is encouraged - by reminding Rakhit of Greek gymnasia. With this rebuttal, Mitra makes his first spoken refutation of supposedly local, and therefore metonymic, habits as valid claims to the authentic. Describing the gymnasia as preferable instances of *adda*, Mitra claims that these places heard “no gossip,” and were witness to conversation “at the highest level.” Ray’s early genteelism seems to seep into the text. However, as refutations of elitist notions of appropriate cultural practice, Satyaki is shown sleeping next to a Tintin comic book, and the film has already expressed its enthusiasm for Popeye. In another - but very different - reference to popular culture, Anila reads Agatha Christie’s *Peril at End House*. Given the frequent emphasis on “ends” in the detective novel, Anila guiltily says that her suspicion of Mitra was produced by crime fiction and by Sudhindra - his name has connotations of linearity and fixity: of “ends,” if you will. While she speaks, Sudhindra leafs through *India Today*, a popular magazine. The magazine’s judgmental cover paradoxically multiplies the film’s affinities: it displays a picture of Salman Rushdie

over a caption that screams “SATANIC STORY.” Clearly, the film may be commenting on itself here, as it amplifies its overt, and subtle, subversions while dismantling a screen of genteel protocols. The ironies of these protocols (frequently hyperbolic, cloying courtesy and hospitality) are evident in Sudhindra’s suspicion of even the genuineness of the coins that Mitra gifts Satyaki earlier in the story.

Increasingly persuaded that Mitra has returned to collect his inheritance rather than for “unselfish reasons,” Sudhindra makes his visit to Anila’s grandfather’s lawyer, Mukherji’s place, in order to clarify the motives for Mitra’s visit by asking the lawyer if Mitra was on the list of his client’s heirs. And to confirm his suspicions about Mitra, Sudhindra asks for help - his brusque lawyer friend, Pritish Sengupta (Dhritiman Chatterjee), who is Mitra’s next inquisitor. Sengupta asks Mitra for his views on religion, to which Mitra replies that caste and religion produce “serious problems.” Sengupta demands to know if the response hints at a lack of religious faith, but Mitra defers his answer, inviting Anila to sing for the gathering. The song “Whose Veena is it that rings out” (বাজিল কাহার বীণা মধুর স্বরে) adds to the conversation with (and even functions as a response to) Sengupta’s ostensibly suspended question. “Grace and beauty awaken,” (জেগে উঠে সব শোভা, সব মাধুরী, পলকে পলকে হিয়া পলকে পুরি). Anila sings, as Ray’s camera surveys the “released” artworks in the house with an appreciative pan, and then registers Mitra’s melancholic expression. However, it also cuts back and forth between Anila and Mitra as we hear the lines, “The river and forest tremble in sympathy (কাঁপে নদী বনরাজি বেদনাভরে).” The camera’s specification of those in the room who have the capacity for such sympathy anticipates Sengupta’s lack of pleasure in the intertextual-asympathetic.

Looping back to the question of religion after Anila’s performance, Mitra replies that “the daily papers make it difficult to believe in a benevolent god,” adding that he doesn’t “believe in anything that creates barriers between people. Religion does that, organized religion especially so.” Mitra doesn’t reject a moral system altogether (he hints at an acceptance of a secular *dharma*), but he contests moral presumption in a series of rhetorical flourishes. After his first criterion for civilization is rejected, Sengupta praises the “unbelievable progress of technology,” as exemplified by NASA, and asks for Mitra’s views on science. Mitra unpacks this definition of civilized experience through his own anthropological experience of tribal life, and asks, “Have you tasted rat meat? Snake meat? Bat flesh?” He follows up with “I hear that human flesh is delicious,” although he concedes that he has not tasted human flesh, and makes a deadpan apology to Anila for having claimed to have been an omnivore earlier. He says that he has seen impressive uses of science among supposedly “uncivilized” cultures, citing Eskimo architecture and herbal medicine

produced by tribals, but Sengupta dismisses this as “voodooism,” “mumbo-jumbo,” “totem,” and “taboo” (although he does not explicitly invoke Freud). Mitra announces that it is his “greatest regret that [he is] not a savage,” but concedes that he can’t wish away the influence of his education, affirming an eccentrically textual—rather than a patrilinear—inheritance: “Shakespeare, Marx, Freud, Michael [Madhusudhan Dutt], and Rabindranath [Tagore] are in my blood.” When Sengupta asks if Mitra considers the “extreme sexual promiscuity” of the Muria tribe to be civilized, Mitra shakes his head, responds with “Holy wedlock: that is civilized,” hums a few lines about an exchange of hearts, pauses, and then says, “Civilized is the ability to destroy the world with a single press of a button.” Of course, by collapsing both wedlock and mass-destruction under the rubric of “civilization,” Mitra’s response also produces a tacit agreement with the sexual freedom that so horrifies his questioner. Mitra’s ideas upset orthodox definitions, and hence subverts the notion of definitive binaries showing “savagery” as civil, and “civilization” as barbaric. In Ray’s film, “civilization” is seen as a function of coercion, its connotations and effects very different from those of “civility.” Sympathy and courtesy are figured into the perplexing stranger’s name—*Manmohan Mitra* translates as “charming friend” - and it is through his declarations of his courteous syncretism that he stumps Sengupta. Momentarily disoriented by Mitra’s arguments, Sengupta cannot recall Mitra’s name, mumbling, “Anyway, Mister..., Mister...” as the film draws an affinity with Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*: Mitra tells Sengupta that he had used a pseudonym for some of his writings, a name “very dear” to him in his early years: “Captain Nemo.” He informs his audience that the name is Latin for “no one,” a statement where the refusal of unity is crucial for the refusal of metonymy, and not a valorisation of nullity. The notion of identity itself functions manifestly as metonymy—as a series of associated gestures, histories, and selves that are deleted for the establishment of one stable ensemble of gestures/histories/selves presented to the world as the person identified. In selecting Nemo as a model for himself, Mitra makes as radical a choice as is made by Stephen Dedalus when he contemplates his various selves and thinks, “*Lui, c’est moi*” (it’s me) (*Ulysses* 35). Sengupta cuts him short with a harangue about the burden Mitra has placed on Anila and Sudhindra. He demands that Mitra either “come clean” or he “clear out.” The lawyer bids a curt farewell to Mitra and the Boses: “*Aami aashbo*” - “I will come.” Sengupta fails to see that the conjunction of arrival with every act of departure reflects a twin dynamic in *Wanderlust* that is implicit in his own language.

In an apparent capitulation to Sengupta’s demands, Mitra leaves the Boses’s house later that night without informing his hosts of his departure. Sudhindra, smug in his role as *paterfamilias* as Anila and he start their search for Mitra, dictates

instructions for further investigations to Anila in an instance of the patriarchal protocols that the narrative subverts in its next sequence. The Boses find Mitra at Baner Pukur (“forest pond”), a village of the Santhal tribe, who, the executor of Anila’s grandfather’s will informs the Boses, are descendants of the Kol tribe, the first known inhabitants of India. Mitra’s choice of leaving for the Santhal village - evoking the Santhal revolt against the British 150 years ago-is not only an act of maintaining his pride (he tells the Boses that he had left because he would not “put up with anyone throwing their weight around”), but also an act of mediation. Mitra, who speaks the Santhal language, organizes a dance concert by the Santhals, where Anila, standing behind Mitra with Sudhindra, claps in time to the music. At Sudhindra’s encouragement, she joins the dance. The dance is liberating in dual time: as an event that brings into prominence a marginalized space, it offers an antidote to the dominance of the domestic and an entry into a larger, collaborative expressive practice for Anila. It also recalls the historical moment of anti-colonial resistance, linking the constrictions of patriarchal domesticity with those of colonialism.⁴⁹ Any reading of this scene in the village as a return to the natural, the innocent, or the primordial is already qualified by the film: Mitra has acknowledged the influence of Freud, Marx, Shakespeare, and Tagore beforehand. He continues to publish, maintains international contacts, travels, and returns to the urban.

At the very end of the film, Manmohan Mitra refuses to promise a return to Satyaki, he reminds the boy of the word Wanderlust, and encourages Satyaki to visit him instead (hinting, of course, at an advocacy of crossing over, rather than of circularity). Mitra hands Sudhindra an envelope and requests Sudhindra to open it after he has gone. Following his departure, Anila finds that the envelope contains a check transferring Mitra’s entire inheritance to her, and a note, saying, “To someone who has been more than a niece to me.” This moment in the narrative suggests that Manmohan is who he claims to be, but there is no conclusive proof that he might not be the impostor (or the simulacrum) whom he is earlier suspected of being. As if to underscore this possibility, a stunned Sudhindra repeats Mitra’s translation of his erstwhile pseudonym - “Mr. No One” - and the film closes.

1.5 The *Wanderlust* of Metaphor

Ray’s *Atithi* (The Guest) is narrated from the perspective of Satyaki Bose. Near the beginning of the story, he hears each of his parents say “Just imagine!” - the exclamation mark, a hint of their anxiety about Mitra’s visit. In the closing sentence of the short story, however, the boy’s mother repeats the “Just imagine!” as an almost Forsteresque request to only connect, the phrase having changed register and connotation to suggest that extending the imagination would be an antidote to the oppressions of the insular.

Welleck and Warren observe in their *Theory of Literature* that “metaphor and metonymy may be the two characterizing structures of two poetic types—poetry of association by contiguity, of movement within a single discourse, and poetry of association by comparison, joining a plurality of worlds” (195). These definitions bring the insularity of metonymy (especially of its nationalistic versions) and the Wanderlust of metaphor into sharp relief. The metaphorical and the serial undo the self-induced sterility of the metonymic, insular modes of the national and the parochial. When Mitra tells Sudhindra (after informing him of the easy means of forging passports), “I didn’t return to come home,” he confirms his own metaphoricity. The alert comparisons Mitra makes, his refusal of parochialism, and his own restlessness make him a metaphor for metaphor itself. Thus, he is what Paul de Man terms “metafigural”: he figuratively comments on figuration (*Allegories of Reading* 14).

The analyses of nationalist revivalism in Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments* and Seamus Deane’s *Celtic Revivals* suggest that Indian and Irish nationalist discourse specified/manufactured the “abiding” qualities, myths, and symbols of their respective nations, offering these partial images of the nation as a “whole” national tradition, and the revival of these as the iconic continuation (the “good copy”) of tradition. In other words, nationalism used metonymy to refuse the status of the nation itself as a simulacrum. Mitra’s rejection of a series of metonymy for the nation - language, currency, passports, an inheritance (or “heritage”), and supposedly local habits - makes clear that he accepts no conclusive proof of his authenticity. Self-evidently, his rejection of these metonymies is a rejection of the constraining definitions of authenticity, at large, and so an announcement of his *Wanderlust*. *Wanderlust* is, of course, a literal form of an intertextual impulse. With a democratic and zestful use of intertextuality, Ray’s film weaves several intertextual references with the text’s admiration for *Wanderlust*, the latter working as a metaphor for the former, and the other way around. As *Agantuk* references Popeye, Krishna, Rushdie, Freud, Marx, Shakespeare, Tagore, and thus expresses its metatextual *Wanderlust*, Ray’s admiration for Jean Renoir is expressed in a reprise of Renoir’s frequent use of several languages in his films. The cosmopolitan influence of Renoir’s *Grand Illusion* is manifest in *Agantuk*’s use of Bengali, Hindi, the Kol language, German, English, French, Spanish, and Sanskrit. *Agantuk*’s linguistic *bricolage* performs the words and sentences from these languages in a celebration of exchange, rather than with a sense of loss for their “minor” roles in a largely Bengali film. In other words, the film reconstitutes language as a metaphor for Mitra’s *Wanderlust*, subverting readings that view these linguistic transfers as “severed” or “fragmented” from their original linguistic contexts. Linda Nochlin has argued that “the struggle to overcome the disintegrative effects - social, psychic,

political - inscribed in modern...experience” is resisted in modern art by “hypostasizing them within a higher unity. One might, from this point of view, maintain that modernity is indeed marked by the will toward totalization as much as it is metaphorized by the fragment” (53). Nochlin does not specify which version of modernity she is discussing, and so she herself exercises a form of totalization here. The final sub-clause in the excerpt from her text overlooks the incompatibility of the words “fragment” and “metaphor.” Metaphor, a play of resemblance and difference, is weakened by the idea of the fragment. The word “fragment”—implying “detachment” in its very etymology-- concedes the priority of the whole, while Deleuze might argue that the whole never existed in the first place.

1.6 Conclusion

Migration has featured prominently, but without receiving any detailed critical attention, in Ray’s films from the beginning of his career. The films of the Apu trilogy, which trace Apu’s life from his birth in rural Bengal to his family’s transfer to the northern city of Benares and his return to his village before he leaves for Calcutta (twice), started a cinematic exploration of lives negotiating the unfamiliar that was sustained in Ray’s films such as *Abhijan* (The Expedition!) *Mahanagar* (The Big City). *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha!) and *Aranyer Din Ratri* (Days and Nights in the Forest), well before Ray returned to the topic in *Agantuk*. Darius Cooper has argued that Ray’s last three films mark a shift from the “center” to the “margins”. *Agantuk*, on the other hand, explodes these divisions, bringing the serial convolutions of strains in these spatial influences to the foreground. *Agantuk* privileges eclecticism, the mode of *Wanderlust*, as the mode for modern exchange and awareness - and for modernity itself - in the post-colony. Through its debate with insularity, the film dislodges the presumption of the abiding characteristics in the familiar, thereby sabotaging the safety of metonymy (of nationalistic metonyms, in particular). Being migrant is a form of spatial revision, a transfer of the “contingent” impulses in metonymy to the vagrancy of metaphor, and, in this case - with Mitra’s receptiveness to sensation and experience - it is an expectation. Manmohan Mitra, as a disruptive simulacrum, introduces metonymy to its own status as metaphor, and presents it as the opportunities of the eclectic. Asserting its place in the world, and welcoming the world to the text, migrant form in Ray’s film does us the dangerous courtesy of an introduction to the pleasures of *Wanderlust*.

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