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Conjunction and flow: the gendered temporalities of (media) disaster1

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The formal and fluid modalities of the televisual form often seem, definitionally and self-evidently, to foreclose the place of ideology. Is there a way to propel the formal properties of television back into the political arena, and reposition them as necessary abstractions of the social terrain?

In this reflection on the media representations and durations of disaster, I propose to nudge the conversation on televisual flow into a direction where flow can be seen to settle into what I call viewer configurations, and congealed flow to compose an ideological economy of discrepant and gendered temporalities. What is also at stake here are the critical potentials catalyzed by sudden or impending disasters and the media modalities of defining what can count as disaster and as permissible gendered agencies. My working definition of disaster is a massive event (whether sudden or in the making, unexpected or prepared for, short or long-term) that is perceived to be outside the control of those who suffer or want to prevent it. This definition deliberately circumvents the usual polarity of "natural" calamities versus engineered catastrophes.

Beginning with Raymond Williams

In Raymond Williams' writing there was a discernible shift from conjunction to flow. His insistence on attending to the overall "flow" of a day's programming indexed a concept of flow as not merely the sequence of unrelated items, but as the effects of bundling discrete programs, as was enunciated in an essay, "Combined Operations" (1969).2 Here, Williams underlined the startling aspects in the flow of a single evening's programming on BBC-2, which juxtaposed a report on the Transatlantic Air Race, a publicity stunt connected to the sale of British military aircraft that took in a "press conference" given by a moping chimpanzee in New York (sponsored by a tea company and wearing a jacket that read, "*Daily Mail,*" the name of a popular British newspaper), with a documentary in which a few East African peasant women on their fields and a pilot in a light plane overhead were trying to drive away a swarm of locusts to save their crops from destruction.

> *It isn't often [that] we get so complete and transparent a festival of the society so many powerful interests are trying to establish. What was most remarkable was the combined operation: between the BBC and the Daily Mail; between business firms and the Air Force and the Navy. This is all critically different from commercial breaks....[This is the next stage,] planned integration: a manufactured news event, given a spurious urgency by reports from a television operations-room, advertising not only a newspaper and assorted companies but military planes and arms exports. The combined operation is then in turn reported, outside itself, as news....*
> *They were so short of resources, fighting the locusts. They were poor people in poor countries. It is, then, not only that the Air Race was a conspicuous waste of resources; in television terms, it was a waste and a diversion of attention… It isn't often an evening's television dramatises, so visibly, the conflicts and contradictions of a politically intolerable world.*3

This "conjunction," produced by "ordinary BBC-2 planning,"4 became a modality of dramatizing global contradictions as well as the nexus of state and corporation.

A few years later, Williams extended and reworked the notion of flow, a form visible in BBC's daily programming and full-blown in American commercial television. He described his confusions in viewing, in a Miami hotel, a film that interleaved commercials and trailers from two other films without visual signals; the unmarked transitions composed for him "a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings."5 Williams is better remembered for this later definition of "planned flow" and "sequence as flow"6 (that signifies a decisive shift from the older concept of "sequence as programming" or the "serial assembly" of "discrete units"7) as the distinctive characteristic of television broadcasting as "a technology and as cultural form":8 flow as drawing on legacies of miscellaneity (Vaudeville, newspaper, magazine, sporting events), flow as a "mobile concept composed from the sequence of unrelated items that now included the imperatives of both programming and advertising,9 and as opposed to "discrete units" marked by intervals.10 The notion of "interruption" of a "programme,"11 even if registered as such by some viewers, was now "residual" and "inadequate."12 It could not seize the process that had come to define the "television experience": "the replacement of a programme series of timed sequential units by a flow series of differently related units in which the timing, though real, is undeclared, and in which the real internal organisation is something other than the declared organisation."13 Though "the items may be various," the television experience in some sense "unified" them, and it could be misleading to "break this experience back into units."14 Williams' emphases distributed between such a unity of the flow form and "planned flow" did not foreclose reading for ideological structure, coherence or continuity, rather it suggested, but did not fully elaborate, a shift in the ideological parameters of the television form.

Whereas Williams' notion of flow has been severally critiqued (even as a gullible British ethnographer's encounter with American commercial television, i.e., the "other" of public-service television) and reformulated, the flow form (intensified by cable or satellite transmission and maximized in channel-surfing) has since become axiomatic, whether as approaching (in the simultaneity of viewing screens) but surpassing collage,15 as continuous and incomplete,16 as decontextualizing,17 or as embedded in the aphoristic structure of television programming.18 The subsequent emphases on discontinuity, interruptibility, and segmentation are not antithetical to the flow form; they rework rather than relegate it, whether as a totalizing fragmentation, a duality of passage and segmentation, a dialectic of segmentation and flow or a segmentation without closure.19

If the two moments in Williams' writing are juxtaposed, the ideological valences of flow defined by surrealist effects and a congenital (un)interruptibility appear to be quite different from conjunction. The analytic of conjunction is derived from the serial assembly of discrete units and elaborated within a realist epistemic frame in older vocabularies of ideological exposure, diversionary tactic, defamiliarizing contrast, and stark contradiction between contiguous television events.20 The earlier essay relied on instructive contrasts between rich and poor, the discrete momentum of flippant first world countries driven by profit and purposive third world countries driven by desperation and survival, arms sales as callous encashment of (future) war and the threat of impending starvation, and between two polarized temporalities: the fabricated urgency of a publicity stunt and the material urgency of the immediate prospect of food scarcity. Both can lead to (potentially) disastrous consequences yet, viewed in conjunction, speak of contrary forms of agency. Williams' own elaboration of conjunction remained within the terms of an unjust allocation of priorities and a televisual "diversion of attention."

The flow form—a compound of multiple private channels and options, the diversity of genre and content, the buttons on the remote that can snip programs at will—presumes constant erasure of preceding programs, implies an ideological compact that rests in settled fashion on "deliverance" from memory and sedimentation, the permission to discard each previous newscast as superfluous, i.e., its own ready disposability, the promise not to accumulate or clutter and make only fleeting interpellations that will not fix interpretative positions: what one visual moment or program fixes can be unfixed by the next.

Has the flow form (as an ideology of the medium) now entirely superceded conjunction as a point of access into the ideological effects of seriality and the proximity of disparate events or discrete programs? Or is conjunction still available in some situations such as limited choice or new proximity? Viewer choices as well as modes of entry into televisual flow may be determined by incomplete market penetration, recalcitrant governments that resist deregulation or enforce censorship, varied linguistic repertoires, disparate viewing modes and types of televisual literacy, and the selective export or import of Euro-American news and entertainment. Economic constraints (the unaffordability of television sets or cable connections) may result in practices of collective viewing that alter the charge of interpellation: the "public" location of television plucks it out of the insulation or immersion of private viewing; in collective viewing, both the situational experience of televisual flow and the contingent mode of entering it can

denaturalize the flow form.21 Not only have new regional and transnational contiguities emerged between state-owned and private channels, domestic and imported programs, but cross-regional language channels and the reception of "forbidden" channels from neighboring countries through satellite dishes can create unexpected juxtapositions.

Further, is the "world" as it stands today still amenable to the political or economic polarities that an analytic based on conjunction so readily delivered? Or, is it so irrevocably pluralized that only flow can encapsulate the diminished urgencies of channel-surfing television spectatorship? Here, the frequent mapping of the ideology of the televisual medium and the flow form as correspondence (evanescent subjectivities, consumerist imperatives), analogy (the market, the experience of the urban metropolis), or exemplum (the new ontology of the everyday in the dislocated and derealized nonspace of the freeway and the mall, the global flow of capital, images and narratives) assumes a renewed significance.22 The materiality of the social processes evoked by these analogies and correspondences is equally the permeating context and the enabling condition of television. This positions television as at once a signifier, a receptacle, and an effect, reinvests its form(alities) in an existing and emerging global political economy.

Finally, what is the relationship of the flow form and its corollary, the "restless eye"23 with disaster reportage? Is the coverage of disaster seamlessly folded back into the relentless discontinuity and erasure of seriality or does it punctuate, serrate, limit, even reinflect the flow form? Does the practice of reorganizing or suspending routine programming in moments of disaster (awaited or occurring) switch off leisure-viewing, qualitatively redetermine viewer selection or perception and induce a heightened viewing? Can "disaster" work to demarcate and fix viewing configurations?

In order to address questions of disaster representation, it may be useful to acknowledge as well as move beyond the literality of the viewing continuum. The viewing continuum does indeed range from a minimal confinement to limited choices between available channels, self-confinement to favorite programs and/or channels, to a maximal and arbitrary scrolling between a seemingly limitless number of channels, but this does not exhaust the question of viewer interpretation. Similarly, the belief that it is almost impossible to form overall narrative images from the serial experience of television24 and the multiplicity of television texts may be persuasive, but is insufficient to establish a determinate paradigm of incoherence.

Perhaps it may be productive to interpolate other analytic terms, terms that can index viewing horizons, viewing clusters and semantic chains, in sum, "viewing configurations" that compose, howsoever contingently, a "world." Choices from the limited menu of scheduled programs can produce significantly different viewing configurations that reinstate a more orderly and shaping ideological function for telecasting. Here, it is not just a day's programming but also the repetition and variation cycles in programming over longer periods of time—days or weeks—that become significant. A viewing configuration does not merely mark the ideological location of the viewing subject,25 but includes the finite ideological potentials in televisual flow that are activated in viewing options. These potentials are already circumscribed since the "brand" definition of an individual channel stands in tension with the mimicry engendered through competition with other channels, often making a choice between channels more apparent than substantive. The relative unquantifiability of individual viewing is after all subject to fairly quantifiable and concrete programming.26

I argue here that the discordances, inconsistencies or fractures within the overall narrative image elicited from a viewing configuration may be amenable, first, to readings of ideological continuity, and second, to being seen as a form of frictional temporal layering, which produces other reading consequences. Such a move makes it possible to discuss conjunction along with flow. Conjunction already has two distinct places—that of the programming grid and that of viewerly selection and interpretation—and these may not be confluent. A viewer configuration may flow with the programming grid or, as it did with Williams, transform into an active defamiliarization. Conjunction also posits a third place, that of connection, and so marks a new phase in globality (intensified in the three decades that have elapsed since Williams' formulations) which has made connections both more vivid and a more explicit analytic possibility. Williams' own move from conjunction to flow marked the former as residual; perhaps now conjunction can be rethought, in the registers of connection and temporal layering, as both a residual and an emergent form.27

If flow is no more, and no less, than a sign (and derealized space) of the single temporality of the subsumption of discrete times, specific locales, and the politics that attend on these, then the following argument may well be about the ongoing but as yet incomplete subsumption of the world into neoliberal capitalism and its modalities. It addresses the frictions that televisual imaging of full subsumption (where

that has occurred) cannot exclude, the promised insulations from the contradictions within neoliberal capitalism that it cannot deliver.

News and views: watching BBC World

Television viewing thinned for me in a university guesthouse in Budapest in 2003 to a circumscribed choice between two available English language channels: a music video and BBC World. Consequently, I watched much more BBC World (than I would in Delhi, where it competes with many channels), and more television than usual because a disaster was impending—the invasion of Iraq—and watched with the compulsive and heightened attention of a moment of crisis.

BBC World established its commercial broadcasting model in 1991, entered the European market in 1995 as a 24-hour global news and information channel, and was available by 2003 to 241 million homes and in 200 countries and territories across the world; its self-appointed task was to provide "impartial and objective journalism of the highest standard."28 As one of the largest international sources of "packaged" television news,29 BBC World is the site for the production, assembly, and export of what is deemed to qualify as international news, as well as the formation of viewer configurations outside Britain. Its target audience—"business decision-makers, frequent travellers, affluent males and females around the world"30—consists of mobile individuals and settled "regions." Reception here becomes a category responsive to a form of global outreach and is set at measurable distance from both the public-service model of BBC and the traffic jams of commercial television: programs may be designed for generalized export or regionalized to reach external markets, but must be seen from specific *locations* that reinflect their meaning.

The programs from BBC World in February and March 2003 that remain etched in my memory revolved around the news about Iraq, global finance, and commerce, and sundry renditions of the "world."

Within the news, interviews ("Hard Talk"), and commentary, the "hard talk" with proponents of peace, the scanty coverage of worldwide peace and antiwar demonstrations (even as visual spectacle) stood in purposive contrast to the fulsome (in both senses of the word) attention to the rationales for impending invasion. The news, news-analysis, interviews, discussion, and speculation together built up expectation of an almost certain denouement leavened with just enough doubt to maintain narrative suspense. The impending invasion of Iraq enveloped in justificatory discourses and cast in a rhetoric of will-it/will-it-not happen set up a resistance to representing war as a disaster.31 BBC World's compliant position on Iraq recast the news into a ritual of commencement (of war).32 The news broadcasts were strategically multicultural, relayed by "representative" men and, more often, women broadcasters who could be designated Asian, African, and Middle Eastern, ethnicities organized around the putative regional and/or religious origins denoted by their faces and names.

Global commerce was covered in the financial segments but also emblematized in a serial on "rescuing" unprofitable or loss-making enterprises and companies (in one "case" a British fashion house) by downsizing, by turning lean and mean, i.e., within a neoliberal framework. The affable consultant/hatchet-man seemed to be accountable to headquarters in New York; he regularly phoned in progress reports from whichever part of the world he was bringing into line.

The more direct renditions of the world came in an upmarket evocation of cultural particularity in features and travel-related documentaries mediated by the National Geographic and BBC-2's longstanding legacy of popular anthropological and historical takes on Britain's ex-colonies and other parts of the world. The USA was represented through regular coverage of Hollywood films, celebrities, gossip, as well as in a program on the British discovering "their history" in America through stories of émigré grandmothers and other ancestors or in East-Coast architecture, that is, as at once a family saga and a joint colonial history. The difference in emphases for the third world was noticeable: this came in familiar narratives of culture, violence, poverty, uplift (the activities of NGOs and northern philanthropy), the movement of money (India's annual budget), and peoples (features on travel and tourism ads). The quotidian politics of third world countries seldom qualified as "international" news.

I did, however, see a program on pension funds in a series named (with unintended irony) "Tales from the Global Economy," which incorporated the agitation against mega-dams in the Narmada valley and featured the environmentalist Vandana Shiva and Booker Prize-winning novelist Arundhati Roy.33 The Narmada valley project had envisaged thirty major dams. The Narmada Sagar Dam was to submerge 251 villages and the Sardar Sarovar Dam to submerge villages across approximately 37,000 acres of fertile

agricultural land and deciduous forest, displace at least half a million people directly, double that number indirectly, for many of whom there was no viable compensation or resettlement plan, and who were seldom given adequate information.34 The beneficiaries of the dams are mostly the rural rich, while the affected population is largely tribal, low caste, poor, and dependent on the river and forests for livelihood. Protest, resistance, and demands for substantive rehabilitation by several activist groups and the Narmada Bachao Andolan span two decades and have been punctuated by hunger strikes, arrests, state repression, direct violence, and vicious press campaigns, especially by the Gujarat government. The protests widened into a mass movement that involves local rural and urban actors and has sizeable cross-regional, cross-class, cross-tribe, NGO, and international support.35 Construction on dams continued despite the protests and continued to outpace rehabilitation.

The BBC World representation was thus an intervention in an ongoing protest movement and what was likely to be a losing battle.36 The program resisted a forthright acknowledgement of long-term environmental and economic devastation as a disaster.37 This was, instead, reintegrated into a narrative about pension funds, while the voices of protest were represented yet simultaneously managed and negated in three separate ways. First, by asking if the multinational corporations which had invested in dams were to blame and how this protest would affect old people in Britain and America, especially women, whose pension funds were invested in corporations with sizeable investments in the big dams. Interviews with old pensioned women as well as with middle-aged women who wanted to have no worries in their old age propped up this line of questioning. The edition of the program I saw was itself dedicated to an American woman who died without being able to use her pension funds. Multinationals virtually acquired the humanitarian role of protecting the old, a role that blurred their corruption (as in the unfolding Enron scandals in India and the USA) and managerial privileges (owners or beneficiaries of the assets in a pension fund do not have a say in how their savings are managed, and private fund managers are neither answerable to beneficiaries nor aware of their situation or needs).38

The second managerial strategy relied on counterpoint. By presenting local people who would be displaced by the dam and lose their homes and livelihoods but re-presenting them as if in tacit antagonism to these old pensioners, the program constructed a them-versus-us subtext in which the most visible players were Indian, British, and American women. As the camera focused on what was presumably a "traditional" rural woman (wearing a sari and bindi), the male voiceover stated that "the huddled masses of the third world do not seem to be so ineffective [ineffectual?] after all." The implication seemed to be that "they" do not, or no longer, need "our" protection, and "we" have to look after our own interests. This eased Indian women out of the frame of colonial protection and patronage as well as constricted the space for reflecting on the implications of representing the old age of one group as secured by devastating the lives of another. Finally, the same evaluative voiceover subtly questioned the authenticity of Arundhati Roy by situating her as a "global villager with a foot in both worlds."

Conjunction into configuration

This viewer configuration does not conform with televisual flow because of my inattention to the advertisements (a staple of flow), which linger only as jingles ("Malaysia, Truly Asia") and travel-centered images. This may be because BBC World was not a resolutely commercial channel, or, to put it more accurately, its articulation with neoliberal capitalism was so profound that ads became epiphenomenal.

My inattention to ads may also be related to viewing habits shaped by government-owned radio and television as well as Bombay commercial cinema. Television was an auditory and journalistic medium for "news" that functioned in tandem with the newspaper and radio to periodically bring it "home," and was, like print news, subject to decoding or critique.39 The loosening of state monopoly in television multiplied programs and diversified news but did not erode its journalistic function for me. Indeed, the contiguity of government-owned and commercial channels unfurled a host of legible confluences and contradictions between state and market as purveyors of news, and at moments of crisis, necessitated watching different channels to compare the slant and "sort" the news.

Instead of viewing the BBC World ads as delimiting or framing disaster-representation, I took them for granted or saw them as negligible precisely because they were both persistent and predictable. A televisual subject accustomed to the flow form of Bombay cinema (as opposed to the coherent narratives of Hollywood) and its disaggregated mode of production, perhaps easily accommodates, extracts from, and segments flow. The ability to turn away from predictable filmic sequences that are also techniques of

postponing a denouement (song, dance, car-chase, fight, comic interlude, or subplot) is related both to the persistence of formulaic melodrama, and the fact that some of these quasi-detachable sequences have often been produced as autonomous segments.40 The flow aspects of Bombay cinema have been compounded by its domesticated miniaturization; a film video, DVD, or film on TV can be interrupted by ads while films on video and DVD are often prefaced with ads, trailers, and songs from other films. Bombay cinema songs and dances are saturated with tourist and consumer values, and routinely travel to scenic locales in India and abroad; television ads too are not dissimilar to film songs—amenable to being read as elongation, distraction, protraction, doing more-of-the-same differently—and provide "optional" time to cut the flow. The blurring and demotion of ads foregrounded conjunction, and over the weeks, made a structural whole or overall narrative image from these segmented and discontinuous television texts on BBC World, with each program providing a silent context for the other. It was impossible not to read each intervention—in a social movement, through best-business practices or the how-to-do-it-yourself-kit of neoliberal "reform," in the rediscovered kinship of British and American subjects, the discursive preparation to invade Iraq—against the other, impossible not to read them as relays of (linked) aggression, as so many signs of a desired, partly achieved but still incomplete consensus.

In sum, *conjunction, over time, congeals flow*. This may indicate more than the surfacing of a hidden yet dominant televisual ideology or a willful viewerly overcoming of the apparent lack of connection between individual programs. Even as disaster(s) heightened the tension between familiarization and defamiliarization and so made existing or emerging contradictions more visible, the internal contexts of programming and intertextuality seemed to provide a context which interrogated or partially unraveled specific texts. Further, the conjunction of different events represented in the same televisual space interlaced with another form of conjunction that *connected* apparently discrete narratives within the intimacies and imperatives of a geopolitical economy: what pressed these disparate texts into a single template was the social relations they refracted and tried to institute.

Yet, was it only televisual intertextuality that allowed an apparently disparate set of programs to become cognates for war? And did this partake of what Frederic Jameson describes as "interfection," a mode of totalizing in which separate programs infect each other, colonize their neighbors, and even amalgamate in an archaeologically postmodern way?41 At this level, conjunction did indeed extend into a generic transposability, but it raised another formal question: does the current mobilizing of the public as spectators of war, now widely seen as a (relatively) new mode of warfare,42 in fact *entail* or *encourage* interchangeable spectatorial forms that can be transposed from one genre to another?

An earlier, and simpler, moment was the coverage of Kargil in 1999, the site of India's war with Pakistan, which quite literally competed with the World Cup cricket series and materialized war as sport and sport as war. War was sanitized; cricket, especially the India-Pakistan match, already a part of televisual nationalism, became deadly. This war, supposed to be India's first televised battle with frontline coverage, was in fact hardly covered directly, though television newscasters dressed in battle fatigues and stood in disused bunkers to add a touch of authenticity to reports from the front. It featured the first woman reporter conducting interviews on the front as shells fell all around. The army made a new policy of sending home the bodies of ordinary soldiers (instead of urns) and not those of officers alone; telecasts could thus play on stories of stitching shrouds for dead soldiers, grieving mothers and widows as victims duly compensated by the state. A communalized and corporatized media made sport of the war: donating cell phones to soldiers, even arranging a designer show43

Temporality as duration

If, at one level, the conjunction of discrete, apparently unrelated television texts within an overall narrative image can compose an ideological continuity, at another level, the nature of the temporal layering produces other interpretative consequences.

Conjunction can be refigured as a layering of different temporalities. Within this, long-term disasters are fixed into varied temporalities that are usually shorter than the duration of the disaster. (Was the war in Kargil only as long as a World Cup series?) The censorship of disaster representation thus can be about time, about controlling duration whether through temporary overamplification (a self-cancelling and amnesia-producing glut) or through abbreviation. Since anything that counts as a disaster unfolds its consequences over a longer duration, this can evict causality and amputate ongoing (con)sequentiality. An independent documentary film on the Gujarat carnage was rejected by the censor board in 2003 on the

ground that "the film depicts violence and *reminds* the people about [the] Gujarat riots last year. It shows the government and police in a bad light."44 A less obvious moment was the coverage of Gujarat in 2002. The regional and national media did not converge. The local media in Gujarat became participant through its use of incitement and rumor and actively helped to engender the carnage by abetting in cycles of fabricated rumor that could propel "revenge." However, the national print and televisual media's frontal coverage of the carnage and of the complicity of the Gujarat government turned it into a national concern. Disaster is subject to state, corporate, and media control, but it is also the point at which unprogrammed energies come into play, tell the truth, and resist whitewash. The demonization of the national media for its "partisanship" by the Hindu right (then in power both at the center and in Gujarat) produced a visible retraction; television channels limited their investigation, did not follow up on the protracted and daily effects of the carnage (the persistent threats, the homelessness and destitution, the lack of punishment for the guilty) with the same intensity; and a few weeks later were immersed in the patent artifice of the "India Shining" electoral campaign conducted by the Hindu right central government.

If disaster time is composed of the expected, anticipated, in-the-making, in-the-happening, in-the-consequence, then the media selects from this sequence and creates an abbreviated temporality which can become the dominant temporal frame. In other words, the firm control of duration becomes palpable and reveals some of the ideological mechanisms at work in planned flow. Yet televisual news genres cannot always instantly enclose a disaster; the rough edges of the event and the less programmed footage and intentionalities in the production process may appear before a disaster is scaled down to a representation, domesticated through repetition or contained through elision.

In neoliberal time(s) or back to the BBC

Williams' concept of planned flow has already indexed a fashioned plurality. I want to suggest that fashioned plurality is somewhat porous and infiltrated by different temporalities that are *not of its own making*, temporalities that can unwittingly disturb viewer equilibrium or the comfort of insulation. Within a wider process of (un)settlement, each intervention on BBC World surfaced, submerged, and evaluated time in a different way:

- The mega-dams of the Narmada valley, a towering example of accumulation by dispossession, that would displace one and a half million people and quite literally submerge historic buildings and survival—the past and the present of oustees—was sketched as competing futures.
- The risk to pension funds and pensioners was displaced from corporate mechanisms to Indian protestors; uncertainty about the future found a certainty of (present) location within a geoeconomic temporality.
- The old age of British and American women was projected as a future curtailed by deprivation and death yet submerged the disquieting fact that this "future" may have a much longer life as a commodity, which multinational corporations trade on through pension funds. The specter of mortality also submerged the related questions of wealth distribution, fewer workers paying into the system, and the "private" purchase of old age security from corporations replacing state welfare.
- The time-bound turnaround for slack businesses displayed, week after week, the busy time of turning around but submerged the slack time of unemployment, the implications of downsizing a working population, and the downward mobility that public institutions no longer want to confront.45 Instead, it made a bid for permanence in the "lasting growth" of the economy.
- The (jeopardized) pension funds intended for old age security stood in ironic relation to the normalization of the stripping of working-life guarantees for the young. The present became a place where the "future" disappeared for the retired old and the working young.46 If pensions tie current contributions to future benefits—as deferred wages for present labor—then what of the downsized or unemployed whose present situation does not allow such contribution? The efficient, busy time of downsizing submerged its own connection to the reduction of a company's present and future pension liabilities.47The downsizing put individual workers, small companies, and corporations at risk while the investment in pension funds suggested a mandatory investment in the longevity or even permanence of a corporation.48
- The submergence zone in the Narmada valley would continue to "release" tribals and others dislocated from a subsistence-oriented economy into the lowest levels of an insecure labor market.

- Iraq became the site of a series of deadlines: deadlines for inspection, deadlines for invasion. The suspicion of the presence of weapons of mass destruction became a dreaded impending disaster, threatened a destruction more permanent than the invasion of Iraq, and submerged the long-term disaster of economic sanctions and the death of thousands of children from medicine shortages.
- In the news commentaries and discussion on Iraq, the explicitly controlled theatrical time of a spectacle of deliberation and decision could not quite submerge another time: time as slipping out of control for those who would be the subjects of invasion.
- Two kinds of inevitability (as time from which there is no return or retreat)—the war on Iraq and downsizing—became complementary.49 The "world," as conjured by BBC World, prefigured and enacted the fluid boundary between state and corporate power through *conjunction*. The programming conjunction was at once an act of making-familiar and a putting-into-place of the protocols of a neoliberal global formation as common sense, as that to which there could be no alternative.50
- The rediscovery of a sibling connection between Britain and the USA in the comforting generational time of the family saga, the discovery of transnational roots and branches, joined national time to the continuity of family time.
- The programming grid came to be mapped not in single days but *along* the duration of impending disaster (invasion)—in this case over a number of weeks.
- This "world" was routinely punctuated by tourist time, teetered between potential, awaited, actual disasters and the bland, "timeless" landscapes of enclaves sanitized for tourism.

The conjunction of temporalities seemed to layer but allowed no single temporality to dominate or to settle. These temporalities were connected and interdependent yet unreconciled and disconnected. Each segment is embedded as discrete in my memory, but the precise sequence has disappeared. Do the contours of layering "show up" when the televisual flow recedes?51 Does layering erode sequence because it partakes of simultaneity? Is layering no more than an effect of the presentism of the televisual medium and the production of an equilibrium?

I experienced the layering as friction, stickiness, seepage, and stasis. The discomfort of the varied temporalities that "flowed" on the screen inhibited familiarization, seemed to block any narrative resolution, and would not allow a seamless or smooth geoscape to take shape. At the same time, they had the glutinous quality of bits of soft tar from a newly laid road, and they did compose an irresistible "geological" coherence that provoked compulsive revisiting of each "layer." The different temporalities of lived time in economic and political disasters seeped into each other, but they did not amalgamate or fuse into the "same" program. Rather, they recomposed into the stasis of a ruffled tableaux, in other words, into a view of the "world."

This "arrangement" of friction, stickiness, seepage, and stasis may itself stand in for *and* characterize an ideological formation. As a formation, it seems to confirm a process that simultaneously generates the category of the "incompatible" or "incommensurate" *and* technologies of familiarization but *within* the compartmentalizing mechanisms of that powerful connective force: neoliberal capitalism.

Making worlds, gendering agency

As I discovered later, I was not alone in seeing a "world." Mark Byford, then director of the BBC World Service and Global News, is reputed to have said: "BBC doesn't just have a British view. It has a world view *for* the world."52 Here, a view of the world is patently interchangeable with a world-view. There are other locutions and mediations of this "world," too: as the window-into-the-world inherited from BBC-2's quasi-historical, popular anthropological modes; as an address to "the" world but not to a national audience; as describing, prescribing, and producing a world *for* a "world"; the BBC World as itself encapsulating the world it informs and services; as presenting the "world" with reworked images of itself.

The neoliberal compact of BBC World was held together by images of consent, images of a co-opted world joined in the consumption of leisure and credit. The channel worked to shrink the distance between elites across three worlds (first, second, third), opening up similar scenarios of leisure and business travel, consumption, transnational investment, business management, and financial news.53 It also worked to familiarize them with international instruments of credit and control. (What else could the simultaneous normalizing of consumption and of a squeeze on purchasing power signify?) Yet the avid desire to

propagate and universalize a neoliberal world view suggested that it was perceived as not being fully in place.

The neoliberal compact of BBC World thus materialized as a new civilizing mission in which, as with colonialism, self-reform, and regulation of working peoples at home, became as important as missions abroad. What the representation of the war in Kargil on Indian television had in common with the Iraq question on BBC World was that "perception management" at home (for domestic legitimacy and control) and abroad (for images and investments) was crucial for both.54 Even though BBC World disclaimed having "just a British view," the representation of war and other disasters was crucial to Britain's image abroad and its own (future) place in the global economy; the ostensible address was to the world, but the interests served were also national. The construction of the national can scarcely be split off from a construction of the international. And if constructions of the national can be insular, there can also be a parochialism in the media construction and contraction of the "world." Perhaps disasters appear to be sudden and become more amenable to management in this "world" precisely because they are subject to a powerful and parochial internationalization that can dilute contexts, and rephrase (though it cannot obliterate) the economic relations of dependence and appropriation.

At another level, BBC World could not ensure a firm distinction between domestic and foreign because its self-definition seemed to soften the home/world boundary and posit the whole world as home. This post cold-war imaginaire was entangled in the desire for a fully permeable world "opened up" to televisual omnipresence, unrestricted access, and interconnection (not unlike the neoliberal market's dream of ubiquity); yet it was also anchored in a movement of enclosure that set out to restructure the world as a transnational public sphere—one which would still allow all the classic inclusions and exclusions, the suppression of counterpublics and their discourses, the arrogation of the right to (mis)represent and evaluate modernity.55 The image of a coeval world that global television, as a stand-in for a transnational public sphere, can foster was fractured by BBC World's representation and gendering of agency that assumed pockets of cultural and temporal difference.

This world was, of course, already gendered and often in banal and clichéd ways:

- The discussion of war largely had a male cast; women were mainly newscasters relaying already-made news: signifiers of consent to the so-called objectivity of the news. They were situated within a multiculturalism that worked to generate ethnicized consent and attest the "neutrality" of the news by incorporating "other" presences and voices within a predefined mainstream.
- The impending invasion of Iraq signified the rescue of a feminized populace.
- When Mr. Fix-It salvaged enterprises, women were often among those retrenched. This lean and mean capitalism came in the rescue and profit mode—a fairy tale of neoliberalism but with no Cinderella in the cast.
- The travels and travails of pension funds enclosed stories about women. The Indian women involved in protests against big dams were no longer subjects awaiting rescue because they had become agents on their own behalf, and thus less deserving of sympathy. The old-and-white image of the victim, the fears of future victimhood, at once conjoined *and* separated women.
- The sibling construction of British and American women regarding pensions reverberated in the discovery of British family histories in America while the pension-fund narrative tacitly set women against women: Indian versus British, old versus not-so-old/young women, Indian versus Indian, and Arundhati Roy against herself.

Victimhood, now an imperious credentialing discourse and a conditionality for sympathy, aid or rescue in some parts of the world, also has a temporal dimension. In the classic frame of the regulation of the agencies of women from the third world, it is a settled convention to polarize the modern and the traditional: if women are "modern" *and* "not-so-modern," as in the Narmada valley protests, it seems to cause grave representational unease. The program posed the inauthenticity of Roy not against the authenticity of the (largely female) huddled masses but against their ambiguous agency, i.e., as two forms of ambiguous, if not dubious, agency. The authenticity of "traditional" rural women was eroded by their assessment of the role of mega-dams and multinational corporations in the local economy and that of Roy by her access to a "modern" international arena. Why did the agency of women engaged in long-term struggle against an anticipated disaster become suspect? Do ongoing disasters produce resistant agencies, and foreshortened disasters produce victims? Does the media temporality of a disaster determine whether women will be positioned as victims or agents? At any rate, the illusion of a coeval world was punctured in

this program's agential and temporal codes: the women invested in pension funds were framed as modern consumer-citizens while women protesting in the Narmada valley seemed to occupy a discomfiting range of temporal positions. The temporality of the modern was present for some, not-yet for others, not in this way for some, or too much for others: this gestural transnational public sphere had an allocative and distributive dimension.

The recasting of agency also suggests that the images and narratives of political resistance that cannot be erased from international news programs are a point of tension that televisual flow seeks to dissolve. The inability of BBC World to foresee or predetermine the range of political effects it might generate stemmed in part from its self-nomination as a channel that could represent the world. For viewers, this very position of global television as a window into the world can turn around and become a potentially configural standpoint. The vaunted omniscience of a global channel might bring levels of privilege, incorporation or complicity with the market economy and the state into sharper focus. Some viewers may see their own invisibility in this "world," assess their conditional entry on the televisual stage, and articulate their exclusion from political representation or the consumer market of advertised goods. Perhaps, the mediatic duration and routinization of a disaster become so significant because televisual disaster-reporting can both foreclose agency (it is happening elsewhere or beyond our control) and activate agencies (it is happening to "us" or people like "us") in the form of relief-work or antiwar protest. Disaster-reporting can induce helplessness and urgency; and viewer configurations may coalesce when disaster news, a sense of impotence, simmering social contradictions, and a viewer's "own experience" work to pluck, memorize, and connect disparate sequences from televisual flow.

In conclusion

This account of a viewer configuration, bracketed as it is by televisual forms, texts, markets, individual constraints, political locations, histories of spectatorship, and retrospective memory work is a personal one. The contouring of other viewer configurations would obviously vary on similar lines. Here I want to conclude with some reflections on the instability in the flow form as a medium, and on what may rupture its unity or allow flow to congeal, so that conjunction and flow can be rethought together.

The temporalities that float through the prestructured time of television programming carry adhesive potentials within the flow form and can renew the force of conjunction—imagined now in a different time and a different ideological register from Raymond Williams' suggestive notations. The resignification and realignment of narrative from flow in a viewer configuration need not be arbitrary. Televisual flow separates social domains and deflects or decomposes so-called totalizing master narratives but is itself constituted within the force-field of a global political economy. Even as it seizes, refashions or segregates the political, the flow-form can become the slippery space of discordant inscriptions and unforeseen conjunctions, and is thus not beyond the reach of significant connection.

Global television cannot be isolated from the quotidian world it seeks to inform, pleasure, manage. BBC World can serve as an example. In the very imperatives of expansion to include the "world," unify it on neoliberal lines, encompass and process multiple economic and social developments, in the mechanisms of transnational inclusion and exclusion, the terms or modalities of grudging or fulsome representation, global television does not only preempt or bury contradictions, it also inhabits, absorbs, and replays them. Thus imagined publics, as prefigured in the form and content of news programs, can shape the address and offered viewing positions, but the *sum* of uneven relationships and their effects can neither be imagined nor subdued. And it is these relationships and effects that allow frictional temporalities to layer into viewer configurations: the class, gender, and regional unevenness intensified in the transition to a neoliberal economy can collide with desired homogeneities or produce contradictions, which corporatized television constantly traverses but cannot always contain. The three tasks of television—pacificatory, regulatory, and informational—to which the flow form is so conducive, may not be congruent or may not merge seamlessly.

Finally, the formal, semantic, and conjunctive possibilities in the prolonged juxtapositions and simultaneity of local, regional, national, international programs and channels have been underestimated. The continuity between channels assumed in the flow form—as the ready absorption of different channels into a singular flow—may become trickier in transnational situations. The contiguity of channels with differing regional, national, or international provenances can create new dispositions, tensions, and

instabilities or propel a magnetic flow of discrete sequences toward each other within the connective force field of neoliberal globalization.

Comment on this article

About the Author

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Footnotes

1 This essay was first presented at the plenary session on Media Disasters, at the conference on Consoleing Passions: Television, Audio, Video, New Media and Feminism, Milwaukee, 2006.

2 Williams, 1989, p. 61.

3 Ibid, 1989, pp. 61-62.

4 Ibid, 61.

5 Williams, 1975, p. 92 For Williams' close analysis of American television see ibid, pp. 91-99, 111-17.

6 Ibid, 89-90.

7 Ibid, 88-89.

8 Ibid, 86.

9 Ibid, 78.

10 Ibid, 90.

11 Ibid, 93.

12 Ibid, 90.

13 Ibid, 93.

14 Ibid., 95. Negt and Kluge's notion of "hodgepodge" covers television news and programming. Their analysis of news is adjacent to Williams' notion of conjunction while the analysis of programming, though it uses the language of montage, picks up on aspects of planned flow. In the news, "attention is diverted through the very hodgepodge selection of news items" in which information is cut off from its real social roots: "this hodgepodge results in a fragmenting of attentiveness, together with a hybrid sequence of news items, which is distinct from each individual news item and wholly different from the events that are meant to be represented through the news broadcast" (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.119). This hodgepodge implies a stripping of contexts and history, absorbs the news into the general televisual structure of abstraction,

entertainment, and distraction, and induces viewer indifference or exhaustion. The second register of hodgepodge emerges in programming: the junctures or breaks between individual program segments "constitute the moments of montage within the overall program and are more important in relation to the framework, in which reality is perceived, than in relation to the content of individual programs. They steer and direct attention, and thereby organize the possibilities for experience that must precede experience itself" (Negt and Kluge, 1993, pp.119-20).

15 Jameson, 1991, p. 31.

16 Ellis, 2000, p. 83.

17 Doane, 1990, p. 225.

18 Goldblatt, 2002, pp. 77-79.

19 As for instance: Heath, 1990, p. 292; Morse, 1990, p.206; and Jane Feuer whose work is discussed along with other critiques and re-elaborations of Williams in Abhijit Roy, 2005, pp. 3-5.

20 Williams' notation of conjunction as scandalous resonates with other accounts from the late 1960s and early 1970s that saw in conjunction a potential for shocking audiences. Hans Gerd-Wiegend, superintendent of Youth Programming at WDR, described a deliberate use of conjunction to defamiliarize the routinization of the Vietnam War in television newscasts. During the war, when a German television program followed the coverage of the dead in Vietnam with a beat dance in Soho, "there was an outpouring of letters from outraged viewers. Their sense of piety had been offended, and the program editor knew that his news had 'hit' home." Quoted in Negt, Oscar and Kluge, 1993, pp. 97-98.

21 It is worth recollecting that governments across Asia (south, southeast, northeast, and west) have diverse regulatory policies about transnational media that still include severe restrictions, controlled access to transnational media, and government regulation (see: Thomas, 2005, pp. 75-76,83,89,97.) Further, home viewing is not axiomatic and collective viewing in the absence of private ownership of television in bastis, teashops or neighbors' homes is quite common.

22 For these and other examples see Abhijit Roy 2005, p.6, 16; Morse, 1990, pp. 197-199. For a complex set of analogies between market and the media see Jameson, 1991, pp. 275-78.

23 Goldblatt's phrase. Goldblatt, 2002, p. 78.

24 Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (1992), qtd in Abhijit Roy, 2005, p. 4.

25 What I have called a viewing configuration is somewhat different from the unit of analysis that Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsh term a "viewing strip" which comprises a serial set of programs *actually* viewed, and which, as Roy points out, "also accommodates, along with the heterogeneity and intertextuality of programmes, the possibility of conceiving a sort of global image that constitutes the ideological location of the viewer." Roy also notes that viewing strips can "more aptly be seen as the repository of a series of resolutions constituted by the viewing subject, who moves to another channel only after the 'narrative interest' of a fragment has come to some temporary resolution" (Abhijit Roy, 2005, pp. 5-6, 14).

26 As Heath points out, the pluralism of television programming is hedged in by the market and dominant social terms or a "consensual centre." Thus "unique individualized sequences" exist "within the constraints of what is proposed by television in the first place" (Heath, 1990, p. 284).

27 Jameson's account of postmodern perception as a "simultaneous preservation" of "incompatibles," an "incommensurability-vision that...provisionally entertains the tension of their multiple coordinates," positions it as a fundamentally "spatial phenomenon." Within this, "a postmodern (and spatial) mode of recombination of separate columns in the newspaper" or segments of television news passes for historical

understanding but "no longer opens up historiographic deep space or perspectival temporality;" it merely "lights up like a nodal circuit in a slot machine" and signals a debased historiography which excludes "older kinds of synthesis" and "estrangement effects" (Jameson, 1991, pp. 372-75). His analysis gathers its energy and insight from a theoretical and geographical point of full subsumption, whereas my account, in which conjunction can yield relational perspectives, emerges from points of unevenness and an ongoing transition towards full subsumption.

28 BBC World has 58 international news bureaus and 250 correspondents across the world (Thussu, 2003, p. 119); and is a commercial subsidiary of the otherwise public-funded BBC, dependant on advertising and sponsorship (Thomas, 2005, 27).

29 Magder, 2003, p.32.

30 Murphy, May 6, 2005.

31 The will-it/will-it-not mode here was not very distant from television news about the impending hurricane Katrina in that both indexed inexorable forces that set in motion dislocation, homelessness, and death. However, the latter was more readily classified as a disaster than the former, perhaps because a public justificatory discourse had to be produced for waging war. In this news economy, an invasion cannot count as disaster because it has to be justified; a hurricane does because its occurrence needs no justification, only its subsequent effects do.

32 A state spokeswoman's redefinition of worldwide antiwar and peace movements as "mob rule" went unchallenged even as peace-workers were grilled in interviews. The way in which BBC World did take sides when the war began has been analyzed in Chouliaraki, 2005, pp. 143-59.

33 This program was broadcast on March 15, 2003. The series seems to have been first produced for BBC-2. The producer, Jeremy Newson, evidently well-intentioned, wanted to do a series on "we're all involved in the global economy whether we know it or not," and "reveal the strange and unexpected global connections and links between people totally unaware of each other's existence." When announced in 2001, the series consisted of "The Cappuccino Trail" (on the marketing of coffee from growers in Central America to coffee bars of Europe and America), "The Business of Christmas" (on the toy market), and "Where's Our Money?" (on the journey of pension funds and how they are invested all over the world) (news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point).

34 See Baviskar, 2004, pp. 200-02.

35 On the diverse composition of the movement and the nature of its protests, see Mehta, 2000, p.280.

36 In 2000, the Supreme Court lifted an injunction against further construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, and formally approved the project in 2004.

37 As Doane has demonstrated, because an economic crisis has a long duration, does not kill immediately, and can be linked to a notion of agency or system (that of commodity capitalism), it does not meet the criteria of the true catastrophe and must be "naturalized, contained, desystematized" on television (Doane, 1990, pp. 236-237).

38 Financialization has involved the dumping of pension promises and health entitlements while the savings of millions are committed to funds that are vulnerable to long-term business cycles (Blackburn, 2006, p.67). In 2001-02, pension funds in the USA lost between a quarter and third of their value (in the case of Enron employees, they disappeared totally), jeopardizing middle class retirement prospects. At this time, pension funds were also finding it increasingly difficult to meet their obligations (Harvey, 2003, pp. 13, 71). On the Enron scandal in India, see Arundhati Roy, 2001, pp. 53-58, and Mann, 2003, pp.66-67; on Enron and pension funds as well as the management of private funds, see Blackburn, 2006, pp.52-57.

39 Since people often only listen without watching, Morley says that television is better understood as a sound-based medium, a "radio-with-pictures" rather than a mini cinema; television programming was in fact designed to be like "radio-with-pictures," as not requiring full attention, so that housewives could follow the program and ads from the soundtrack while working (Morley, 2002, p.177).

40 Prasad has discussed this "heterogenous mode of manufacture" (pace Marx) or the production of autonomous segments with their own conditions, expertise, and economy of production as the disaggregated nature of popular commercial Indian cinema (Prasad, 1998, pp.29-52). Abhijit Roy has traced a formal correspondences between the flow form of television and Indian popular cinema (Roy, 2005, pp.15-16).

41 Jameson, 1991, p. 373.

42 See Webster, 2003, p. 64**.**

43 See Seshu, 1999, pp. 2917-20.

44 Italics added; Quoted in Sharma, 2003.

45 The increase of temporary, part-time and casual positions is visible not merely in the third world but in Europe and America. Temporary labor is the fastest growing sector of the labor force in Britain and the USA (Sennett, 2006, p.49).

46 Bourdieu shows how unemployment deprives existence of its temporal structures, the casualization of labor makes the whole future uncertain and prevents all rational anticipation, and short-term contracts sweep away "all temporal guarantees" (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 82, 98). Further, "Insecurity acts directly on those it touches and indirectly on all others, through the fear it arouses, which is methodically exploited by all the *insecurity-inducing strategies*, such as the notorious `flexibility.'" Ibid, 84.

47 The downsizing of 2002-03, the passing on of pension liabilities by American companies through bankruptcies or other means, and the forcing of employees to accept reduced pensions and benefits to save their jobs, together reduced the pensions of hundreds of thousands in the USA (Blackburn, 2006, pp.58-61).

48 Blackburn shows that downsizing has made both the corporation and its workforce disposable (Blackburn 2006, p.43). In the context of the failure of Enron and its pension funds, Patel points out that Enron employees who bought shares in the corporation necessarily invested in the idea of the infinite life of the corporation (Patel, 2006, p.19).

49 This complementarity was not arbitrary since, as Harvey demonstrates, the invasion was intended to turn Iraq into a neoliberal state (Harvey, 2005, p.7).

50 Harvey notes that the ideological influences circulated in the media played a role in generating consent for the neoliberal turn (Harvey, 2005, p.40), while Bourdieu speaks of television's role in the production of neoliberalism as "an inevitability" and "as a universalist message of liberation" (Bourdieu, 1998, p.30-31). In this context, the latent hostility to protests against big dams would be allied to what Harvey points to as the hostility of the neoliberal state to social movements that seek collective intervention (Harvey, 2005, p. 68).

51 Significantly, what remained fixed in my memory were these layered temporalities and not what I set out to watch: my direct concern was the detail of the news.
52 Italics added; quoted in Capell, April 28, 2003.

53 The neoliberal model would have had such a resonance for Hungary, then in the throws of "transition" and awaiting entry into the European Union.

54 Webster points out that in contemporary warfare, where media coverage is massive, perception management has become very important (Webster, 2003, p.64). If the play of images, and consequently the media, has increased in importance with worldwide neoliberal economic policies, the same policies seem to provide a degree of insurance against the risks of a relatively independent national media as well. In 2002, soon after national newspapers had shown an unprecedented consensus against the violence in Gujarat, the Hindu right government decided to allow 26 percent foreign direct investment in the print media.

55 Negt and Kluge indicated a similar contradiction in German television news. They noted that the notion of "comprehending the whole of the world" is a characteristic of the bourgeois public sphere, and "linked to this is the contradiction that such a state of perfection can only be reached once all of the information that disturbs the image of completeness has been excluded. Also linked to this is the necessity that whatever is brought in the way of system-endangering information must, because of the ideal of the completeness of information, again be eliminated in whatever form" (Negt and Kluge, 1993, p.115).

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