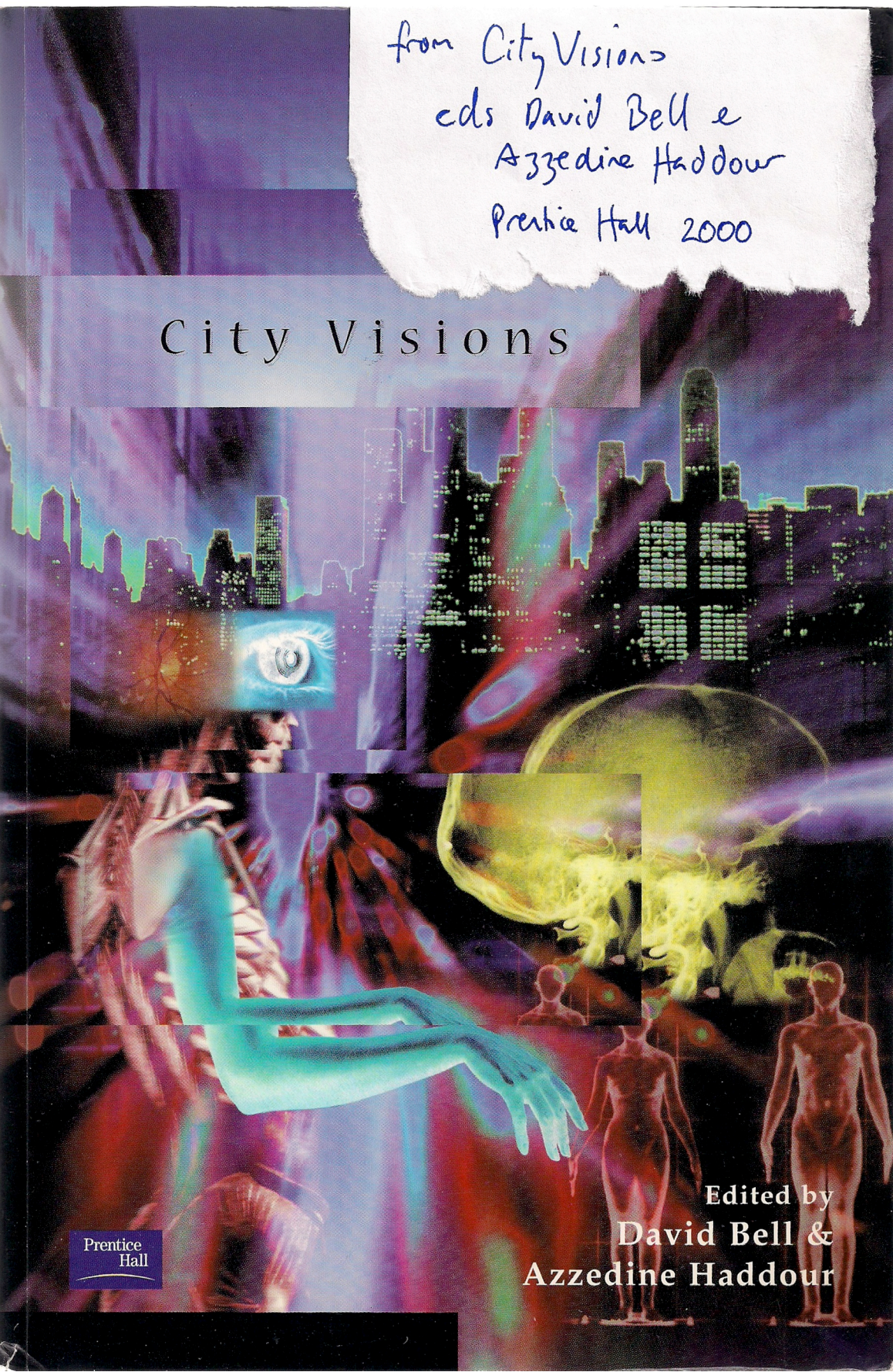


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Azzedine Haddour  
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# City Visions



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Edited by  
David Bell &  
Azzedine Haddour

## Chapter 3

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# Capital Calcutta: coins, maps, monuments, souvenirs and tourism

John Hutnyk

### The King was in his counting house ...

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Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange. (Marx, 1867/1967: 73)

This chapter begins with the charitable gift of a coin passed from the rich West to the poor East in the city of Calcutta. Specifically, with two scenes in the cinema of travel that celebrate such exchange. A traveller arrives in India. There are many arrival scenes – by train, plane and taxi. The visitor is confronted outside his hotel by begging children (the traveller in cinema is so often male). He reaches into his pocket for a trinket. Some bauble to amuse the kids. In thinking about the city in the Third World today, the arrival moments I am interested in are the first exchanges between travellers and locals. Patrick Swayze doing coin tricks outside his hotel in *City of Joy* and Bill Murray outside his in *The Razor's Edge*. Claude Lévi-Strauss could be here too, where he describes:

Every time I emerged from my hotel in Calcutta, which was besieged by cows and had vultures perched on its window-sills, I became the central figure in a ballet which would have seemed funny to me, had it not been so pathetic. The various accomplished performers made their entries in turn: a shoeblack flung himself at my feet; a small boy rushed up to me; whining 'One anna, Papa, one anna!' [an anna is a small coin] a cripple displayed his stumps. (Lévi-Strauss, 1955/1973: 134)<sup>1</sup>

What I want to illustrate are the ways the city scene in the Third World is caught up in a counterfeit exchange. Derrida says of the counterfeit coin, that it must pass itself off as real. Swayze's sleight of hand trick on the kids tells us much about the deceit here, Murray's version of the same is refused – neither gift is adequate.

In the 1946 version of *The Razor's Edge*, the hero, Tyrone Power, visits a studio-based 'Indian' city high in the Himalayan hills, replete with Greco-Roman columns, peacocks, Chinese gongs and blacked-up mystics. Shangri-La, above the clouds, not in Tibet, or Bhutan or Nepal or India, but in Hollywood – just as with *City of Joy*, director Roland Joffe spent millions building a slum set south of Calcutta since no real slum was slum enough for his film about a charity outfit servicing the slums of Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> The Third World

city is a site of many fantasies and deceits for the Western visitor. By giving a coin in charity the attempt is to recompensate an inequality: however, this gift works by way of emphasizing that inequality.

These are more recent examples of a founding scene of city-building. The first coins in India, according to Allchin (1995), appeared between the sixth and fourth centuries BC, the earliest coins being silver, but copper currency was minted soon after. Allchin links the spread of urban settlement and coinage closely, tracing the same route north-west to the Ganga Valley then to the peninsula South (Allchin, 1995). Coins, of course, are not found only in cities, since it is along trade routes across the Himalayas and along the Ganges that they travel, but the debate over location does exercise the experts. Numismatists discuss the relative merits of coin hordes, weights, markings, the rubbing of coins, scrapings of value, wear and tear, and how those most often found in the archaeological record nearby their site of minting are the heavier of the type, since thinner ones can be assumed to have passed through many hands, and so travelled far from the mint, etc. (see the excellent Marxist historian Kosambi, 1956: 173). Here it would be protocol to insert the famous quote from Nietzsche about truths being metaphors whose meanings have rubbed off like old coins, and Derrida's discussion of this in his 'White mythology' essay (Derrida, 1972/1982). But coin rubbing is also something that preoccupied poor, cold and grumpy Marx:

The coin, which comes into contact with all sorts of hands, bags, purses, pouches, tills, chests and boxes, wears away, leaves a particle of gold here and another there, thus losing increasingly more of its intrinsic content as a result of abrasion sustained in its worldly career. While in use it is getting used up. (Marx, 1857/1987: 343)

Marx also notes the 'contradiction between gold as coin and gold as universal equivalent, which circulates not only within the boundaries of a given territory, but also on the world market' (Marx, 1857/1987: 345-6). Subsequently a whole archive of discussion of coins in philosophy has been unearthed by Caffentzis, discussing Newton, Locke, Simmel and Marx: 'a counterfeiter presupposes the existence of a civil government' (Caffentzis, 1989: 72). Whatever the case, ill-gotten gains or not, coin hordes in the record generally mark an extended productive economy with one or more urban 'centres' within a more or less integrated domain which can be read as an archive of plunder.

More recently than the old archaeologicals, but not so recent as Marx perhaps, is the coin trick perpetrated by the East India Company at the foundation of the British presence in India, where a few coins begin the process of capital formation – the capital of the Raj – the site of capitalist extraction of wealth to Europe. I want to look at the contemporary traces of this scene in the city in the experience of travellers today, as compared to those members of the East India Company, in the early days who 'converted', who went in search of riches: what are/were they up to, those heroes of the Company who became massively rich, Job Charnock, Clive, the 'robber-baron' and his suicide? So, these themes: coins and extraction, adventurism and ideology. This token hunt encompasses tricks, deceit, exploitation and appro-

priation. The framing tropes here are forms of violence encapsulated in the signs of the marketplace. The scenes in the cinema celebrate this extraction, the methods of the Company, and the capitalist 'gift' of wealth to Europe. The very coins that founded Calcutta were slave-trade booty. The main point is that the financial centre of Empire was never London, but Calcutta, and that understandings of the meaning, money, motivation and memory of Empire have travelled the wrong way for three hundred years. This is a violence consequent upon the formations of disciplines of knowledge and protocols of culture reportage insofar as history and travel guides perpetuate myths of Calcutta. Against the escape velocity of conventional alibis for the colonial record, some other moves are possible. The movement against imperialism begins in the city, as does the movement of products – tea, cotton, back and forth – and of a cultural politics which leads today back to the cinema, to the movement of the image and of meanings, and of the memory, or mimesis, of development and anti-development, and a transformatory project that can reconfigure the world. Contemporary traveller-visitors and their losses, the ways they get around, the purchase they carry today in what was the centre of Empire – 'built on silt, but gold', Kipling wrote – all this needs to be recast.

So if it is coins that travel, it is also coins that mark the foundations of even the oldest cities. Pieces of Eight. The travel of coins marks out the value, signifies trade, locates the market: from here the city is a predictable arrival. It would of course be too much like a Lewis Mumford type simplification to see this as anything more than a grand narrative convenience, but the coincidence of coins, travels, markets and cities is sure enough to serve as a point of confluence.

There are so many coin exchanges we really must be going to market: *The Razor's Edge*, *City of Joy*, Lévi-Strauss, and soon Moorhouse with blood-curdling imageries. The purchase of land for a factory (see the film *Tales from Planet Kolkata* as an antidote to *City of Joy*). Souvenirs. Monuments. Maps. Charity. It should not be thought that I am suggesting any simple equation of coins, market and urbanization, and Marx himself was careful to avoid simplifying complex relations in his discussions of the city as the centre of rural life, as the centre of warfare, of crafts and of trade (Marx, 1857/1986: 402–7).

If exchange and the international division of labour is the scene to be analysed we could do no worse than study Charlie Chaplin's film *The Immigrant* (1917 – perhaps significantly) and the scene where the tramp conjures with a coin to purchase – trick, con, contrive – a meal in a city restaurant. He finds a coin on the street and goes in to eat, but the coin has fallen through a hole in his pocket. Another tramp enters having found the coin, and pays the waiter for his meal. The waiter loses the coin through a hole in his pocket, Charlie tries to pick it up (vaudeville here that need not be detailed) but the waiter keeps on looking around at the wrong time. Eventually he pays, but the waiter bites the coin and finds it is a counterfeit. Then a to and fro about who will pay the bill, with Charlie eventually appropriating someone else's change so as to pay. This parable on the ingenuity of

the beggar is a useful parallel text to Baudelaire's one on the counterfeit coin as discussed by Derrida in *Given Time* (1991/1992: endpiece). There the coin need not be real to serve as charity, the confession by the giver that the coin was counterfeit may itself be false, tricks upon tricks. The marketplace is full of them and you need to be sharp to prevail.

### The Queen was in the parlour ...

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Thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system. (Marx, 1867/1967: 737)

It is necessary to explore three factors in the movement of capitalism in the last fifty, and three hundred, years. First the well established mobility of capitalist production as it crosses borders in search of profit – usually cheap labour (and sites of low labour regulation) but also super-profits, a kind of adventure speculation; secondly the distribution of products, or rather the increasing reach of commerce, of consumption, of everybody doing flips and twists to get into a pair of American blue jeans and drink Coca-Cola; and thirdly, a countervailing factor, or rather renegeing, that closes borders and expels, that rejects those workers brought to the metropolitan centres of Europe in a time when capital did not seem to move so fast. This third factor is closely linked to the first, just as in an earlier period migration was linked to the need for workers inside the 'West'. In both scenarios the extension of money-mediated exchange and consumption to all corners continued unabated, and intricately bound up with representation and repression.

It is the first factor, movement motivated by profit motives, that brings the East India Co. to Calcutta. Not today, perhaps (but witness the abundance of trade delegations visiting the newly deregulating India, including communist West Bengal), but certainly as the motive for the officials and buccaneers in search of fortune (no doubt there were some philanthropes too, but few) was no subtle tourism. Just over three hundred years ago Job Charnock and the English came and built a factory on the site of three villages. The British traders had entered India in 1612 and purchased land from local rulers with silver coin earned through the brutal slave trade markets of the West Indies. These first tainted coins begin a city by a process on the backs of people becoming commodities (Marx, 1857/1986: 419–20). This twisted social relation must be examined:

The mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of human labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves ... Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensual or social. In the same way the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye ... I call this fetishism. (Marx, 1867/1967: 164–5)

There is a whole range of images, narratives and meanings that cause us to accept this routine. The discipline required of the market interests me. I would agree with Andrew Lattas that 'an analysis of gifts has also to ground gifts in those structures of reification, self-mystification and legitimation which gifts make available. It is not a question of denying or dismissing as false the gift's ideology, but of exploring its constitutive power' (Lattas, 1993: 108). Just what is Swayze up to with those children? Offering a coin to teach kids to love capitalism – something like the role of Santa in the West? A commodified social contract? Is there no alternative to the market here? Cities become sites for the deal – just a glorified employment exchange. Marx shows that it is capital which travels (it circulates) while labour, even where it moves a little – as in vagabondage, urban migration, labour migrates to sell itself – is soon disciplined. Of course, without labour to make things move in the first place there could be no capital. Who, after all, built Calcutta? Still, the mystification of the social foundation of capital begins with a trick. In the 'Economic Notebooks' of 1857-8 (The *Grundrisse*), Marx sets out this moment in a vivid, if abstracted, 'sketch':

when the great English landowners dismissed their retainers, who had consumed with them the surplus produce of their land; when their tenant farmers drove out the small cottagers, etc., then a mass of living labour power was thrown on to the labour market, a mass which was free in a double sense [*eine Masse, die in doppeltem Sinn frei war*]: free from the old client or bondage relationships and any obligatory services, and free also from all goods and chattels, from every objective and material form of being, free of all property. It was reduced either to the sale of its labour capacity or to beggary, vagabondage or robbery as its only source of income. History records that it tried the latter first, but was driven off this road and on to the narrow path which led to the labour market, by means of gallows, pillory and whip. (Marx, 1857/1986: 431 [1857/1974: 406])

The goods that had previously been consumed by the feudal lords and their retainers, and the released produce of the land, were now thrown on to the exchange market, as were those who would be henceforth known as labourers. The basis of this trick is that the sale of labour power must be instilled by disciplinary force – the gallows, the workhouse, the prison (Michel Foucault's work on asylums, clinics, punishments etc., emerges from here) – and so becomes the only 'choice'. Even the poor-houses and their charity instil the discipline of work (only Dickens' Oliver dares ask for 'more' in literary versions; no doubt there were many 'Olivers'). That this was conceived by Marx as part and parcel of capitalist development can be confirmed from other (re)writings of almost the same paragraph.

In *Capital* Marx returns more than once<sup>3</sup> to this scene:

For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense [*frei in dem Doppelsinn*], that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power. (Marx, 1867/1967: 169 [1867/1975: 183. Notice how the rewritten version is more elegant: it is worth keep-

ing in mind, at a time when The *Grundrisse* seems more often read and quoted – even here – that *Capital* was the text actually prepared for readers.)

That this meeting in the market is no equal exchange is the trick of all tricks. Though it would seem that in the market-place the capitalist offers a 'fair' price – money for labour, wages – and that the entire history of reformist unions has been to ensure the 'fair trade' of this exchange, this is of course the big deception of capitalist appropriation, since the capitalist does not pay for every hour that the labourer works (nor for all the costs of reproducing labour power). Marx writes: 'An exchange of equivalents occurs, [but it] is merely the surface layer of a [system of] production which rests on the appropriation of alien labour without exchange, but under the guise of exchange' (Marx, 1857/1986: 433). Here, at the crucial point of the labour theory of value, the expansion of the trick of the market is played out in the coin of wages, and this trick is the foundation of the city as labour exchange, as Marx discusses in a passage that sets the whole movement out clearly:

The other circumstances which e.g., in the sixteenth century increased the mass of circulating commodities as well as money, created new needs and therefore raised the exchange value of native products, etc., increased prices, etc., – all these fostered the dissolution of the old relations of production, accelerated the separation of the worker from the objective conditions of his own reproduction, and thus hastened the transformation of money into capital. Nothing is therefore more foolish than to conceive of the original formation of capital as having created and accumulated the original conditions of production – means of subsistence, raw materials, instruments – and then having offered them to workers stripped of them. For it was monetary wealth which had partly helped to strip off these conditions of labour power of the individuals capable of work. In part this process of separation proceeded without the intervention of monetary wealth. Once the formation of capital had reached a certain level, monetary wealth could insinuate itself as mediator between the objective conditions of life thus become free and the freed but also uprooted and dispossessed living labour powers, and buy the one with the other. As regards the formation of monetary wealth itself, prior to its transformation into capital, this belongs to the prehistory of the bourgeois economy. Usury, trade, urbanisation and the development of government finance which these made possible, play the main role here. (Marx, 1857/1986: 432)

This moment is exported universally and urbanization plays a main role. It will be no surprise to learn that the 'veiled slavery of the wage-workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world' (Marx, 1867/1967: 759–60). Marx adds a footnote that there were 'ten slaves to one free man' in the English West Indies, 'in the French fourteen to one, in the Dutch twenty-three for one' (Marx, 1867/1967: 760n). The labourers separated from their social means of production are thus named in English legislation as the 'free labouring poor', or the 'idle poor' or the 'labouring poor', a terminology which even the 'sycophant' Edmund Burke, 'in the pay of the English oligarchy', called 'execrable political cant' (Marx, 1867/1967: 760n). Marx asks us to judge Burke's good faith here alongside his other pronouncements to the effect that the 'laws of commerce are the laws of nature

and therefore the laws of god').<sup>4</sup> The city is the site of the natural disciplining of labour, and this is achieved on the basis of a coined counterfeit. Again in another part of Volume 1 of *Capital* labourers are 'free workers in a double sense' [*Frei Arbeiter in dem Doppelsinn*, 1867/1975: 742]:

The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. (Marx, 1867/1967: 714)

Marx's story of the development of labour for sale as a world-wide system was only a 'sketch' (though the history of this expropriation is written 'in letters of blood and fire' (Marx, 1867/1967: 715)). But in a note to the editors of the paper *Otechestvennye Zapiski* in the last years of his life, Marx warned that the chapter which set this out in the most detail, Chapter 27, should not be 'transformed' from an historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe to a 'theory of the general course fatally imposed upon all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed' (Marx, 1878 in Shanin, 1983: 136). Far too often the technical abstractions necessary in setting out Marx's *Capital* which begins with commodities and expands in complexity to encompass trade, circulation of capital, rent etc., lead hasty readers to orthodox fixities and dogma. Nevertheless, the general point of the expansion of the logic of market exchange can be illustrated thus.

There is little need to go further into the hagiographic mode of repeating Marx as oracle. There are sufficient examples. In any study of the ways colonialism 'had to use force to make the indigenous populations accept the commodity form' (Cleaver, 1979: 77), the various examples would range from slavery and death to persuasion and, today, co-options of all kinds. Cleaver lists 'massacre, money taxes, or displacement to poor land' as the ways that capital dealt with resistance and refusal to be put to work. On the basis of this comes the 'civilizing' mission of the West, that would teach 'backward' peoples the values of thrift, discipline and saving.

Many heathens saved, no doubt. Mother would be proud. Patrick Swayze himself says it was a near revelation to work in Calcutta. The point is that here city building, civilizing mission, urbanization, whether through the mechanism of the sketch, or variations such as in-migration from the countryside, other strategies of 'development' (such as the weavers herded into the factories under the discipline of the coin) etc., reinforces the ramparts of the Third World city as a market with no alternative, as a glorified labour exchange, and all the Mother Teresas and coin tricks that can be marshalled should not be able to disguise such a trap.

Perhaps this is far too harsh. But then the city of Calcutta suffers from a bad press, as does development. I am resolutely not against development.<sup>5</sup> The problem is the fetishization of development and capital as a kind of juggernaut beyond control, and of course, the question of control by whom. The circulation and expansion of capital today is fetishes as speed. So:



There is nothing to regret, the world moves in every which way, men and women cross the planet every which way, through interposed images and sounds, or directly through the displacement of their own person. But let us immediately pick up the paradox. Everything circulates: the types of music, the advertising slogans, the tourists, the computer viruses, the industrial subsidiaries and, at the same time, everything seems to freeze, to be stationary, as the differences fade between things ... everything has become interchangeable, equivalent within standardised spaces. (Guattari, 1992: 123)

But what actually moves? Products to the market, images, sites? The market and the city, city images and the factory – the shopping centre? Swayze to the children (dirty dancing)? Or labour? Is revolution (the movement) more than a metaphor? Against immigration laws. Against roads as the warehouses of just-in-time delivery. Other struggles circulate here.

So what is in the traveller's suitcase? An old book. In *The Age of Revolution* Hobsbawm notes that until the industrial revolution Europe had always imported more from the East than it had sold there (Hobsbawm, 1975: 34). Balance of trade. But with the industrialization of cloth production and the rise of the Manchester mills – corresponding to the destruction of the rural and village or 'artisanal' weaving in India (sometimes by way of the amputation of weaver's thumbs by the Company, a blood curdling remembrance of *The Razor's Edge*) – weavers were forced into agriculture or into the urban centres and so into the machine shops and warehouses. This is the urban discipline of the money-wage system. The machine shops were of course first in Manchester, but soon industrialization also moved them to India and machines abstracted and multiplied the same skills that had been the – refined – preserve of the weavers' looms. Technology replaced the weaver at the very same time it brought them into the factory to work.<sup>6</sup>

By ruining handicraft production in other countries, machinery forcibly converts them into fields for the supply of its raw material. In this way East India was compelled to produce cotton, wool, hemp, jute and indigo for Great Britain. (Marx, 1867/1967: 451)

And, summarising a period of English manufacturing monopoly, Marx notes:

1830 glutted markets, great distress; 1831 to 1833 continued depression, the monopoly of the trade with India and China withdrawn from the East India Company; 1834 great increase of factories and machinery, shortness of hands. The new poor law furthers the migration of agricultural labourers into the factory districts ... 1835 great prosperity, contemporaneous starvation of the hand-loom weavers. (Marx, 1867/1967: 455)

Be it in Britain or in the 'Eastern markets' this violent conjunction of capital extraction, technological development and urbanization has transformed the world under the sign of the coin.

Thinking about weavers who now produce for the souvenir trade as technological development brings mass tourism to India adds another thread to the discussion. In this context I want to look at the ways a tourist experiences the city. The vehicles for this are the codifications that surround travel and

capital. Here I mean to play on different meanings of travelling capital: the travelling capital of Europe's expansion, the physical movement of people, power, meanings and money, the exchanges of people, power, meaning and coins, and the capital of this complex. Capital as money on the move, but also the movement of the capital – a movement concerned with what happens in that old capital of Empire, Calcutta.

### The Maid was in the garden ...

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The social character of activity, as also the social form of the product and the share of the individual in production, appears here as something alien to and existing outside the individuals; not as their relation to each other, but as their subordination to relationships existing independently of them and arising from the collision [*Anstoss* – also could be 'bump', echoes of rubbing coin] between different individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become the condition of life for every single individual, their mutual connection, appears to the individuals themselves alien, independent, as a thing. In exchange value, the social relationship of persons is transformed into a social attitude of things; personal capacity into a capacity of things. (Marx, 1857/1986: 94 [1857/1974])

Let me leave money to one side for a moment if I can, since it is the equivalence of all things (a point to come back to: see Spivak's critique of the limits of Derrida's saying 'hello' to Marx, where she shows that Marx is exhorting the worker not to fall for the trick of the money-based explanations of the capitalist, but to remember that labour power, spent in time, is productive [Spivak, 1995]).<sup>7</sup> It might be worth looking to what first of all travellers get for their currency. Today, as ever, when you arrive (after the traveller's cheque swap), the first thing you need is a guide. Among the myriad cultural productions that make up the representations of Calcutta available to visitors today – films, books, photographs – by far the most explicit representational modes are those produced for the immediate consumption of tourists. Maps of the city, guide-books and postcards of monuments present the city in handy, portable, two-dimensionally convenient ways and it is these mechanisms which govern (discipline) social relationships for the traveller. Touts are available outside the hotels offering all manner of services (this in fact is noted so often in the texts of visitors it becomes a trope of the Eastern city of iniquity – again the *City of Joy* and Lévi-Strauss hotel arrival scenes).

Get a map. Finding a way through the city is a major project for all visitors. 'New' cities are easy to get lost in and so guide-books and maps are necessary and monuments become landmarks oriented more towards the city than the histories they memorialize. Such markers offer a key to the ways a city can be made and experienced. Residents and visitors alike would often be lost without reference points; but tourists 'need' maps and guide-books which calibrate with expectations and evocations of the city formed before arrival (often as a place of immanent exotic adventure) and often throughout the stay. Maps are an adjunct to the monumental vision which orients the traveller in a foreign place when the entire world is something to be seen (as an open

market, or the phantasmagoria of the world fair as described by Marx in 1865). At the same time, however, for some a kind of 'alternative' traveller protocol requires a renunciation of the convenience of the guide in favour of a more individualistic, and 'authentic' exploration. Yet even this alternative is guided by a host of expectations and prior mappings – of Calcutta, India, of the Third World – and which as often as not has little correspondence with local residents' versions of their city. Calcutta's global image – a teeming poverty Ma T enhanced frightscape – gives it a bad press everywhere else, but not there. Another counterfeit. Alternative, disengaged or prefigured, the visitor's experience of the city fits pre-packed units like a code so that physical representational 'souvenirs' of maps, images of monuments and postcards become a mode, if often kitsch, of inscribing presence in, or of, a place.

In 1989 a central government edict declared illegal any map of India which did not comply with topographical Survey of India maps. In the intersections between Calcutta's political history and the seemingly more innocuous trappings of tourism, such as the paraphernalia of maps, guide-books and souvenirs, is where I would want to use the work of Henri Lefebvre, who raises questions about the relation between mapping and travel when he suggests that if 'the maps and guides are to be believed a veritable feast of authenticity awaits the tourist' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 84). In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that it is capitalism which has produced 'space' in such a way that, with the aid of the tourist map, a 'ravenous consumption' raids the landscape. He argues that 'Capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the "world of commodities", its "logic" and its world-wide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 53). A vast network links the power of the state through a complex of financial institutions, major production centres, motorways, airports and 'information lattices' which lead to the 'disintegration' of the town as anything other than a space to be consumed (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 53). Reading this body of work in Calcutta, particular attention here should be paid to representations of monuments and bridges, maps, guides, souvenirs – the code – particularly the Victoria Memorial, and the massive expanse of Howrah Bridge, which in postcards become equivalents.

- But these maps mark out another experience more clearly. The orientation of visiting Calcutta – as metaphor of inscrutable India – is the coin trick of Patrick Swayze. This is the market moment exoticized – the urban sophisticate meets the uncomprehending (pre-market relation) others. The world-wide strategy of the commodity logic, as Lefebvre calls it, appears in the evangelical coin trick played on a few kids on the street with the same violence as the all too bloody massacres of colonial genocide.

### And down came a blackbird ...

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In order for there to be counterfeit money, the counterfeit money must not give itself with certainty to be counterfeit money; and this perhaps is also the intentional

dimension, that is, the credit, the act of faith that structures all money, all experience or all consciousness of money, be it true or false. (Derrida, 1991/1992: 95)

Next to the map in the back-pack is the image machine. When travel is a signifier in the contemporary moment, the camera is never far. Click click. The tourist has become associated with the mechanical eye, making miniature equivalences of everything it sees. Cities, people, poverty – all become photogenic. Photogenic Calcutta, cinematic cities, the videographic construction of the subcontinent. To get into this we might take up these details presented through the artifice of the camera. I have become interested in another coin trick, a scene where a traveller takes a photograph of a destitute family living on the street in a congested part of town, and gives five rupees in exchange. You can be paid for the (perceived) misery of your condition. Poverty framed. This is not an unfamiliar or atypical moment on the 'banana-pancake trail' of Western budget tourism in the Third World. For travellers at the front-line of capitalist expansion today, photographs of the 'locals' are also monumental souvenirs. The budget travel Lonely Planet Guide Book, *India: A Survival Kit*, comments on the propriety of paying for snaps. But its editor, Tony Wheeler, millionaire, also once suggested that in situations where locals demanded they be photographed you could carry your camera without film and set it so the flash goes off but nothing else – a counterfeit photo. The scene of coin for photo exchange has a long, long history. It goes back to the early days of black and white cinema, *The Razor's Edge* (version one, starring Tyrone Power, 1946, directed by Edmund Golding), back further to the introduction of the camera into India (Dadasaheb Phalke, who introduced film technology to India, learning tricks from a magician). Back to the coin exchanged for membership of an anti-colonial organization (one rupee Congress membership). Back to the exchange of coin for the cloth of the Bengali weavers, back to the coins paid by the Company to Suraj-ud-duala and the (in)famous black hole/black box, further back to the coins paid by Job Charnock to establish a British factory on the shore of the Hooghly River.

Since the story of the Black Hole must be told here as well, it can be in a critical version: Marx calls the incident a 'sham scandal' (Marx, 1947: 81). In an extensive collection of notes made on Indian history, Marx comments that on the evening of 21 June, 1756, after the Governor of Calcutta had ignored the order of Subadar Suraj-ud-duala to 'raze all British fortifications' in the city:

Suraj came down on Calcutta in force ... fort stormed, garrison taken prisoners, Suraj gave orders that all the captives should be kept in safety till the morning; but the 146 men (accidentally, it seems) were crushed into a room 20 feet square and with but one small window; next morning (as Holwell himself tells the story), only 23 were still alive; they were allowed to sail down the Hooghly. It was 'the Black Hole of Calcutta', over which *the English hypocrites have been making so much sham scandal to this day*. Suraj-ud-duala returned to Murshidabad; Bengal now completely and effectually cleared of the English intruders. (Marx 1947: 81, my italics)

Marx also reports on the subsequent retaliation against and defeat of Suraj-ud-

duala by Lord Clive ('that Great Robber', as he calls him elsewhere; Marx, 1853/1978: 86), and Clive's 1774 suicide after his 'cruel persecution' by the directors of the East India Company (Marx, 1947: 88). There seem to be very good reasons to conclude that the black hole incident is counterfeit. The single report from a 'survivor' some months after Clive's savage response to Suraj-ud-duala's occupation of Calcutta – the famous/notorious Battle of Plassey – reads very much like a justification forged to deflect criticisms of brutality on the part of the British forces.<sup>8</sup> The black hole is a kind of souvenired past of imperial history faked to stand in for the theft of a city.

If only there was better documentary evidence for this tale. Where are the paparazzi when you need them? In so many different ways photographs are souvenirs of the experience of experience. They signify travel. The trick here is the incommensurability of value in the photograph that is taken on the streets of Calcutta, the coin exchanged for the privilege, the value of the image which is so difficult to calculate. The reinvestment of these images, these mimetic aids for storytelling, and the various contexts and uses for such stories should make me cautious. The images circulate again in the slower rhythms of allegedly scholarly application. At the same time that we write these histories, today, the travel guide, the cinema, the documentary film, television and the text participate in an uneven exchange between cities like Calcutta/Mumbai and those of London or Manchester. Same as it ever was?

In the midst of an excellent essay on Phalke, Ashish Rajadhyaksha quotes E. B. Havell, Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, as one of those who complained of the loss of the artisan's skills in the face of technology. Havell's analysis seems to be sound, as he noted that the handloom workers were driven into powerloom factories and that the 'most skilled weavers in the world' were being 'concentrated in the great Anglo-Indian industrial cities [i.e. Calcutta] and delivered, body and soul, into the hands of Indian and European capitalists' (Havell in Rajadhyaksha, 1993: 51).

Perhaps it is no accident that the most prominent site of Mother Teresa's death cult, which provides a short-term 'home for dying destitutes' – those spat out by the machine city – is in Kalighat. The extent to which the Teresa image has blocked any other view of the city but those of the international clichés of teeming squalor, hunger, poverty and shit has not been often enough remarked. It is no coincidence that the bad press attached to this city coincides with the emergence of anti-imperialist struggle. Another mode of discipline. Also:

It is interesting to note that the cult of the goddess Kali was practically unknown before the eighteenth century, a period when a great change was taking place in the social and political life of Bengal. The Kali cult in its present form owes its inspiration to Krishnanada Agamavagisa ... it was popularised by Maharaja Krishnachandra ... before whose eyes the establishment of the East India Company took place. Many of the local rebellions that took place after the establishment of Company rule – e.g. the Sanyasi rebellion, the Chuar rebellion and so on – were inspired in the name of Kali. (Battacharya in Rajadhyaksha 1993: 60)

It is reported, by Moorhouse, that assassins who were devotees of Kali knotted a coin in one end of a cloth – something like a large cotton scarf – to improve their grip when strangling someone. What then is exchanged today? Engels in Manchester, Marx in London, their texts on colonialism in India are often discussed, but always in terms of past histories. All this is interesting enough. The conjunction of rebellions against the Company, the role of technology and capital, the travels of money, cotton, wefts and weaves, and the violence of extraction, industrialization and urbanization under Empire – all this can form the subject of interesting discussion, but only insofar as to stress the continuities with extraction today, colonialism now. Coins and charity are violence. *For* a cinematic Kali cult. Photogenic Hinduism.

A Kali cult? The fear and trembling that this inspires sets tea-cups a-shaking. The fear of the demonic image of Kali for the British should be explored, but with a caution in light of both an inverted exoticism (of dark satanic imagery that fascinates the Western traveller) and in the context of rampant Hindutva and the rise of the BJP. Any danger, however, that the memory of resistance in a Kali politics leads too easily into religious chauvinism has been countered by the mobilization of the secular forces under a new democratic communist movement, of various stripes, in West Bengal. Just as the struggle against imperialism begins in Calcutta, so does a contemporary anti-capitalist politics. A struggle against extraction and exploitation which continues to be facilitated by the movement of products and profits – work conditions on the tea plantations and the warehouses, back and forth with privatization and trade delegations – and all this with little yet said of a cultural politics of the most prominent local Calcuttan figures, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Charu Muzumdar and Jyoti Basu, all of whom have become iconic and even cinematic, subject to the movement of the image and of meanings, and of the memory, or mimesis. So let us remember what currency plays here.

To make sense of this overdetermined scene where coin tricks are played with photographs, I would have Patrick Swayze turn towards Marx. Could it be possible that he would learn to read the 'double' structure in Marx, that of the commodity and the money form? Instead of the strange motivations which have him forgoing his usual \$7 million fee for a mere \$1 million because he 'so wanted to do this film for the people of Calcutta' (why not do *Dirty Dancing 2* and donate the spare \$6 million?), it is possible to force a reading lesson which would have him consider his position in relation to colonial travel and the othering experience of the Western visitor. Here our hero could reflect upon the motive of profit and the imposition of a commodity form on a non-commodity relation (if that), the disguise of this deception in the trick of the giving of charity, specifically of the coin passed to a beggar in the scene of tourism as advocated by the guide-books, and the ways this offers a currency for thinking the relations of profit and its fetish disguises. But maybe Patrick does not read this sort of literature. No matter, in the scene of the coin passed to a child, the coin trick as a sleight of hand that impresses/mystifies the locals, the whole of Marx, the deceit of money, the city and capital is displayed. The coin exchange initiates a complex web of industrialization and

transition, the investment of meanings and images, the accumulation and speculation, and the inexorable spiral that leads from lost thumbs to Cola wars. (Thumbs Up to Pepsi Generations). *City of Joy* is merely the narrative condensation of so many of these developments.

The coin trick underlies the scene of deception in colonial relations as well as in the economics of tourism, gifts, knowledge and meanings. It is important here to note the similarities and differences between taking a photo, buying a souvenir, giving a coin in exchange or charity and the varied experiences these imply. As I draw examples from the travel tales of Somerset Maugham, from popular cinema such as *City of Joy* and *The Razor's Edge*, it is the example discussed by Derrida, Baudelaire's passage on deceitful gifting and that counterfeit trick of this gift, and Charlie Chaplin's more subaltern rendering of such a scene, that suggests the coin as the icon of contemporary politics.

Third World-destined movie star travellers offering charity to the poor only help, guide and serve themselves in a show of how big (hearted) they are. This is the essence of the *potlatch*, with a grand humility in charity, even as they disavow all they do as 'just a drop of water in the ocean'. What sacrifice. A transformatory project for redistributive justice does not begin with this coin. What it demands is a rethink of the front-line role of the charitable organizations, of Western NGOs, of even those progressive 'fair trade' or alternative development types who would, for example, advocate revolution in Bengal while leaving their own little backwaters – say, London – untouched by such militant fervour.

There is an alternative to the extension of the market to all corners of the planet, and it is not a universal gift service. Charity contributes nothing but the maintenance of the trick. Travellers who don't go further than the doorstep of their hotel miss the point.

There remains much more to be done to work out how to travel to Calcutta. And this has, of course, been a partial study. Let us take Derrida at his word on travel. In an essay on the gift and charity, Derrida identifies two 'risks' of travelogues in the possible meanings of the term: 'The first is that of selectivity', and he describes a *récit raisonné* as a 'narrative that, more than others, filters or sifts out the supposedly significant features – and thus begins to censor' (Derrida, 1993: 197–8); and the second, from the first; '*raisonner* also signifies, in this case, to rationalise ... active overinterpretation' (Derrida, 1993: 198). These two themes of perspective and ordering selection are the themes of this work which take up Derrida's call (his is not the only call of this sort) alongside a Marxist analysis of money, for a 'systematic reflection on the relations between tourism and political analysis' at a time when tourism has become highly 'organized'. Derrida writes that such an analysis 'would have to allow a particular place to the intellectual tourist (writer or academic) who thinks he or she can, in order to make them public, translate his or her "travel impressions" into a political diagnostic' (Derrida, 1993: 215). The politics of coin tricks remains to be unpacked.

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## Notes

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- 1 Half way through *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss describes his 1950 visit to Calcutta. He arrived at Calcutta airport, mid-century amidst a torrential downpour, and was quickly whisked away to his hotel. From there he describes the city: 'the large towns of India are slum areas ... Filth, chaos, promiscuity, congestion; ruins, huts, mud, dirt; dung, urine, pus, humours, secretions and running sores: all the things against which we expect urban life to give us organised protection, all the things we hate and guard against at such great cost, all these by-products of cohabitation do not set any limitation on it in India. They are more like a natural environment which the Indian town needs to prosper. To every individual, any street, footpath or alley affords a home, where he can sit, sleep, and even pick up his food straight from the glutinous filth ... the tragic intensity in the beggar's gaze as his eyes meet yours ... could easily be transformed into a howling mob if, by allowing your compassion to overcome your prudence, you gave the doomed creatures some hope of charity' (Lévi-Strauss, 1955/1973: 134–5).
- 2 *City of Joy* originally was a book by Dominique Lapierre about a Polish priest doing charity work in Calcutta. In 1989 Rajiv Gandhi's Central Government gave British director Roland Joffe (*The Mission, The Killing Fields*) permission to make a film of the book. Despite Joffe's arguments that the film would 'project the indomitable spirit of the slum-dwellers of Calcutta' (*The Telegraph*, 24 December 1989), the CPI-M Government of Bengal withdrew Joffe's permission later in the year on the grounds that there was 'no need to show only the slum-dwellers to show the indomitable spirit of Calcuttans' (*The Telegraph*, 24 December 1989). Debates about censorship and freedom of information raged over the following months as Joffe refused to accept the decision and conscripted prominent Calcutta personalities to his cause. Coffee house discussion turned often to the merits of not only the proposed Joffe film, but also other filmed representations of the city. The stars of *City of Joy* were Patrick Swayze, Om Puri and Shabana Azmi.
- 3 Also: 'They were turned *en masse* into beggars, robbers, vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases from stress of circumstances. Hence at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth century, throughout Western Europe a bloody legislation against vagabondage. The fathers of the present working-class

were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals, and assumed that it depended on their own good will to go on working under the old conditions that no longer existed' (Marx 1867/1967: 734). Recently it was missionaries who exported this 'necessary discipline' by chastising throughout the world; today it is the NGOs and alternative credit banks who do so.

- 4 See also the section in *Capital* where Marx analyzes the notion of laziness versus industriousness as a parable of sin – 'Adam bit the apple' (Marx, 1867/1967: 713).
- 5 'What would be the meaning of a destruction of capitalism that would be at the same time the destruction of capitalism's achievements? Obviously it would be the crudest possible denial of Marx's lucidity. The humanity that would have destroyed the work of the industrial revolution would be the poorest of all time; the memory of the recent wealth would finish the job of making that humanity unbearable' (Bataille, 1967/1988: 170). For a useful corrective to simplistic renditions of Marx's lucidity on the role of industry in India, see Ahmad, 1992, Chapter 6.
- 6 And back and forth: see Virinder Kalra's 1997 Ph.D. study of Kashmiri workers in Oldham near Manchester, and his subsequent discussion in Kalra and McLaughlin, 1999.
- 7 I have several times to a greater or lesser extent followed Spivak's arguments in my own work, on Calcutta (Hutnyk, 1996), on Derrida (Hutnyk, 1997) and on Clifford (Hutnyk, 1998).
- 8 For a comprehensive and readable discussion see MacFarlane, 1975.