The current ubiquity of the digital screen, which facilitates a variety of media experiences in different devices and different environments, has become an integral part of the way we experience the world around us. This assemblage of flickering screens, a veritable “screen explosion” of “surfaces made of liquid crystals, of plasma, and of LED’s, as flexible as a piece of paper, interconnected, reacting to...touch and...voice” (Casetti 162), insinuates itself as a sinuous presence alongside the flow of contemporary urban life, making screens not just a visual and aural phenomenon, but also a haptic, almost sensuous one. We carry the screen, move it around, wear it on our bodies, and it becomes an extension of us, embedded within our lives. Francesco Casetti observes that this profusion of screens, working as “nexuses of interconnected circuits,” lay out the matrix of our present screen world, effecting “a diffusion of content on many platforms (spreadability), an interconnection of reception points (networking), and a reactivation of experiences in many situations (relocation)” which has also led to a material mutation of the screen, a transformation not just in the technological sense but also in the conceptual sense (162). All this portends inevitable changes in the cinematic experience, as the cinema screen transforms from being uniquely placed in a cinema hall into one materialized location among the many other screens that intersect our lives. The cinema screen becomes a node in this screenscape of urban existence, connected to the “lightning rods” (156) of other screens.

Miriam Hansen observes “a palpable, seismic shift” in the way that the cinematic apparatus today, influenced by digital technology, articulates and organizes individual and social experience (22-23). She suggests that it is not just that the production of moving images has changed, but that this change relates to the transformation of just about everything surrounding the cinema – the amazing reorganization of everyday experience in terms of spatiotemporal coordinates, modes of sensory perception and attention, cognition, affect and memory, sociability and the circulation of knowledge. (22-23)

ABSTRACT
This article explores the incorporation of new media screens in filmic narratives of the Indian screen and their influence in crafting a new cinematic experience. In examining these digital intrusions, this paper locates the contemporary Indian cinema screen in and as part of a post-globalized hypervisual and connected world, which articulates a new imagination and links itself to the present and ubiquitous digital screenscape of urban life. A close reading of three Indian popular films—3G - A Killer Connection (2013), Table No. 21 (2013), and Love, Sex Aur Dhokha (Love, Sex and Betrayal, 2010)—, which integrate a range of new media screens in their narratives, reveals how the intrusion of the digital into the original filmic screen not only influences its aesthetics but also establishes a psychological territory that shapes and affects the sensory experience of film. This interlacing of the digital and the cinematic expands the spatiotemporal coordinates of the film experience, illuminating the cinema screen in a range of possibilities.
Hansen notes that as content and communication gain priority over the materiality of the medium, the profusion of and collusion of various audiovisual media have introduced a situation where cinema itself disappears into other media. But apart from the obvious medium-specific changes in cinema, as production shifts from photochemicals to digital coding coupled with digital technologies of delivery and circulation, she is more concerned about what these changes mean for the film experience (22). As the original filmic screen within the cinema hall is caught in the profusion and mutations of various forms of audiovisual media, all inexorably driving towards convergence, the cinematic implications of these changes foment deep alterations within the matrix through which the cinematic experience is articulated and organized (23). Casetti observes that now the movie screen no longer stands by itself… because of outside influences, its very nature is changing. We can no longer observe it as we did before, nor can we expect it to offer us the same kind of images as it used to. (156)

This article considers three contemporary popular Indian films – 3G – A Killer Connection (2012), Table No. 21 (2013), and Love, Sex Aur Dhokha (Love, Sex and Betrayal, 2010) – which integrate and skillfully thread the various avatars of the digital screen into and through their narratives. All three films are deeply reflective of the zeitgeist, mirroring the flux of a changing society as it seeks to align itself to a globalised world. Their narratives are rife with the anxieties and challenges of stepping into a ‘connected’ world, and all three films, resonating with a deep sense of disquiet and foreboding, are insistently marked by an awareness of the screen as a pervasive, unrestrained force that enfolds, intervenes, and interrupts the flow of life. The occurrence of digital screens in the cinematic narratives of these films can be explored as part of this contemporary ubiquity of the digital, where the intrusion of the digital into the very materiality of film, influences its aesthetics on one hand, and on the other also establishes a psychological territory that shapes and affects the sensory experience of film.

The three films offer themselves as good test cases to explore how the intrusion of various forms of new media are changing the dynamics of the original filmic screen, de-isolating it from the darkness of the auditorium, and placing it within the connected screenscape of contemporary life. This connected screenscape is a jumbled network of dislocated but pervasive screens that stretch out in all directions – on billboards, living rooms, car dashboards, photo frames, ATM machines, game consoles, mobile devices, and shop windows, among other things. These screens, luminous islands of space and time, are at once connected and disconnected, intersecting this traversal of urban space at various points in a pattern of intervention both predictable and unexpected by turns, inserting themselves in the flow of urban life in a dynamic collusion of moving images and sounds. It is a screenscape that links and splinters disparate spaces and times, centering and re-centering our bodies across time and space, co-opting the spectator within a space-time continuum that is multilayered and transformational.

The screenscape thus becomes a composite geography of images mobilized through time and movement, displayed through a multiplicity of viewing positions – a giant force field of screens that one physically traverses every day and engages with at an array of narrative junctures, negotiating multiple frames, effecting the joining or disjunction of divergent visions. Bolter and Grusin observe the different kinds of “viewing” that digital visual media affords its users, to the “situated viewing” of the virtual environment where the viewer changes her field of view without changing her own situation (244-45), or the “interrelated or connected” self of the web whose “windowed style” reflects the multiplicity of the fragmented self, where the “sense of presence of oneself to others and of the self to itself comes not through visual perception…but through the feeling of being connected to others” (258).

In 3G and Table No. 21, the literal intrusion of the other screen into the characters’ lives upsets the normal balance. It disrupts their world, throwing them into a screen-induced parallel realm, where the familiar is scrambled into an unfamiliarity that is strange and frightening. In 3G, a haunted mobile phone unfolds a malevolent space filled with ghosts and apparitions. A young couple on holiday loses their phone and buys a second-hand mobile phone, which turns into a portal through which
a ghost intrudes into their lives. In *Table No. 21*, another young couple on holiday, lured by the prospect of winning big prize money, become participants in a reality game show that is live streamed on the web. Filmed by multiple closed circuit cameras as well as other digital cameras, they are both required to perform increasingly difficult ‘tasks’ to get to the next level, which inexorably puts their lives at risk, but they are trapped by their signed agreement with the show’s organizer and unable to get out. In both films, it becomes the protagonists’ challenge to unhook themselves from the screen world that they have hurtled into (willingly or unwillingly) and find a resolution to their situation.

Both *3G* and *Table No. 21* unveil secondary screen spaces within their narratives that encroach upon and interrupt the lives of their protagonists, bringing to the surface their deep-seated anxieties and fears about life in the multi-screen digital age. In both films, the secondary screen world is not just a technological feat of silicon and photo sensors for the two sets of protagonists, but a palpable, living entity within which their very survival is at stake. In fact, in both films, the other new media screens, ‘live’ and interactive, form the fulcrum of the narrative, pivoting the action that takes place in the main screen space. The inciting incidents occur within the secondary screen spaces, which are consciously demarcated territories of action within the main screen space. But they are differentiated by their size, shape and resolution of images and insistently identified and tagged with their own set of markers like the time counters and icons denoting location, battery strength, date and such on the CCTV and digital camera screens of *Table No. 21* and similar markers of the mobile phone screen of *3G*.

With a set of actions in one screen space driving traffic in the other, the narrative flow of the three films rest on the integration of the two screen spaces, and the manoeuvrability that it affords to the action in transiting from one screen space to the other. But the two films offer differing levels of integration between the screen spaces, primarily because of the different kinds of secondary screen space that each film adopts within its narrative world, and the exigencies of the storylines woven around those intruding screen territories. The nature of the secondary screen space is thus thrown into sharp relief, its behavioral pattern dictating the ‘look’ of the film, its narrative flow, and the kind of immersive environment that it can provide.

Unlike *3G* and *Table No. 21*, the pattern of alternation between the main and secondary screen spaces does not occur in *Love, Sex Aur Dhokha*. Instead, what functions as secondary screen spaces in the former, constitutes as the sole screen space in the latter. Using three different consumer level digital formats for its three interconnected stories, the events of the protagonists’ lives play out on the screens of a digital camcorder, a set of store surveillance cameras and spy cameras successively. Instead of a dynamic interaction between different screen spaces that highlight their differences, *Love Sex Aur Dhokha* completely relocates a specific digital environment and its DIY aesthetic to the organized interiors of the cinema hall, opening out and magnifying the intimate and confined spaces of camcorders and surveillance camera screens to the bigger scale of the cinematic screen.

**THE INTRUDING SCREEN OF 3G – A KILLER CONNECTION (2013)**

In the film *3G – A Killer Connection*, the agency of the intruding screen of the mobile device is overt, as it engages the protagonists seemingly without any human prompt, driven by a self-generating energy that seems relentless, all-knowing, even indestructible. It switches on and off by itself, bringing in images and messages from an indeterminate location and time, terrorizing the young couple in the film and turning their lives upside down. Sam and Sheena go to Fiji on a holiday, where Sam buys a second-hand mobile phone from a local shop after accidentally dropping his own phone in the sea. Shortly thereafter, Sam starts receiving flirtatious video calls on his new phone from an unknown woman in the middle of the night (Fig. 1). Soon, the video calls start showing graphic footage of the same woman being murdered, and Sam (Neil Nitin Mukesh) and Sheena (Sonal Chauhan) spiral into a frightening world they cannot make sense of.

Sam starts being stalked by the ghostly presence of the woman in the video, with the phone even acquiring the agency to independently change its location; it seems to be
indestructible, turning up intact even after the couple’s numerous attempts to destroy the phone. Unable to trace the unknown number from which the calls are being made, the couple decides to find out about the woman in the video clip by tracking down the original owner of the phone. The rest of the film details their search, even as Sam slowly descends into schizophrenia, often switching between his normal persona and a ‘trance’ state. After a string of murders, all committed by Sam in his ‘trance’ state, the mystery is finally unveiled when it is revealed that the woman in the video clip was murdered by her fiancé after he discovered her explicit videos online and found out about her double life as a call girl. The fiancé filmed himself murdering her on his phone and then hung himself, but not before mailing the phone off to one of her clients, setting off a chain of murderous events that culminates in Sam’s buying the phone and consequently being possessed by the dead man’s vengeful spirit. The film’s ending suggests the possibility of the murders continuing, as Sam remains possessed by the spirit of Mong Andrews, the dead man.

In effecting this illusion of spectral duplication, the film initially uses the conceptual difference between digital and cinematic spaces to effect a narrative strategy by which the digital space of the mobile screen doubles as metaphorical space through which the past can be accessed and ‘ghosts’ laid to rest. Images in digital space are not assumed to continue beyond the frame, unlike in cinematic space where the viewer assumes that things in image space possess a continuity outside the frame into off-screen space. The digital space of the mobile phone is plugged into infinite virtual space, a space that is more abstract than off-screen cinematic space. Therefore, it is apt that it becomes the portal through which the specters of the astral world intrude into reality. As the narrative progresses, however, the film eschews this stark demarcation and effects a fluid integration between the two screen spaces, with the ghosts of the past gliding seamlessly into cinematic screen space.

This literal transference occurs in two ways. One is in the way objects ‘pop up’ from digital space into diegetic film space. For instance, when travelling by car and watching a football game on his phone, Sam is suddenly hit by a random football that comes hurtling from nowhere through a window of the running car (Figs. 2-5). This recurs in the sequence where Sam and Sheena, again travelling in a car, are involved in an identical car crash to the simulated car crash of the video game that Sam was playing at the same time on his mobile phone. Per Persson observes that

[j]n cinematic and ‘realist’ environments the spectator/user is drawn into the world that seems to exist on the other side of that screen/interface… In contrast, in abstract interfaces the off-screen information is seemingly coming out towards the user: windows and menus pop up…they seem to come out towards her. (159)
From a soccer ball to a car crash, random objects and events thus *pop up* into the ‘real’ space of the cinematic screen as the protagonist engages with the mobile screen. In effect, in this direct engagement with the mobile screen, the protagonists of the latter space also seem to be able to *download* the digital story world or aspects of it into their own space. With this stylistic materialization of the concept of the ‘download’ that simulates the atmosphere of an immersive digital environment, the film gives a digital spin to a cinematic experience.

The other means of creating transference from digital to cinematic space is more subtle, as when the murdered woman’s ghost just shows up next to the protagonist Sam within the cinematic space (Figs. 6-9). Her transference from digital to cinematic space is not effected through any overt indication, but remains implicit. She first appears in the sequence when he, searching for the ringing phone and locating it under the bed sheet, then pulls up the sheet only to confront her frightening apparition. In the next sequence, as Sam and Sheena engage in foreplay, Sam suddenly finds himself with the ghost of the woman and not his wife. This is interesting because, from this point onwards, the ghosts also seem to become projections of Sam’s imagination, but less directly Sam’s own than that of the dead woman’s fiancé, whose persona Sam begins to take on in his ‘trances’.

Sam’s frequent switching to the other persona becomes a device by which the ghosts start inhabiting the cinematic space more naturally and acquiring more agency. In fact, in the climactic sequence towards the end when the couple unravels the mystery of the ghostly phone, the narrative device of Sam’s possession by the spirit of the dead man allows a destructive parallelism between the murder of Mong’s fiancée, reconstructed by the couple in detail, and the re-enactment of the same sequence of events with Sam’s hapless girlfriend Sheena. Thus Sam as Mong, the fiancé, relives the memory of the murder of his girlfriend as flashback, and at the same time also attempts to re-enact the same sequence of events with his own girlfriend. Parallel editing alters between memory and the present, constructing a scene where the past is simultaneously accessed as memory as well as transmogrified into present event.
3G’s storyline about a rogue phone carrying a murderous spirit articulates an unease and an insistent anxiety with a past that still sits in the margins of contemporary technological urban life. A mobile phone, enabled for rapid transmission of high-speed data, is transformed into a carrier of a malevolent spirit from the past. The mechanical configuration of metal parts inside the phone becomes a conduit into and out of the etheric realm of the supernatural. Technology thus becomes the medium via which the paranormal intrudes into the normal, bypassing the technological gateways that regulate and track the flow of data. The couple’s attempts to destroy the phone – trying to break it into pieces, throwing it into the sea or leaving it behind in public places – are always unsuccessful. The mobile phone, seemingly invincible, always returns to Sam and Sheena, intact and insistently ringing, calls coming in from some unknown location. The ghosts thus not only evade control but insinuate themselves into the present and thereby complicate it. In the film’s narrative, the past does not seek closure, but instead aims to rupture the façade of the present and perpetuate its existence.

The smartphone thus becomes the interface between the two realms of the material and the spirit world. As the doorway through which ghosts unspool from their location in the past and impinge onto the present, the screen becomes a two-way reflector that creates an “experiential collage” (Pallasmaa 81) of the normal and the paranormal, of presence and absence, of reflection and fusion. The protagonist Sam, in his trance state, always sees himself as the reflection of Mong Andrews (Asheesh Kapur), the murderous fiancé of the dead woman, on the screen of his mobile phone (Fig.10). Thus, his phone screen becomes not just a portal or permeable gateway, but also a mirroring surface evoking spectral illusions of estrangement and rupture. Pallasmaa observes that in “our technologised world [which] contains ever more elements of illusion, immateriality and a-causality”, glass is “the ultimate material of this modern dream world…the source of the illusory world of transparency, reflection and mirroring” (80). The glass screen of the mobile phone, in being simultaneously transparent and reflective, malleable and hard, becomes capable of expressing multiple essences
of its materiality. It becomes an illusory landscape conjuring images of desire and fear, of cruelty and horror, of enticement and estrangement.

As a location that externalizes the invisible realms of the supernatural and also gives shape to the internalized experiences of its principal protagonist, the screen becomes a force field of associative imagery capable of inciting a powerfully emotive and affective connection with it. It becomes a location of instantaneous exchange between the ethereal and the corporeal, enabling Sam’s experience of himself as the Other—the materially non-existent—, facilitating an exchange of life force of the physical world with the astral world.

In this screen-within-the-screen paradigm, the interlacing of the two screens thus creates the film’s story world. The past materializes into the present in this flow from digital space to cinematic space, creating the juxtapositions and conflict between the old and the new, between then and now. In enabling this transference of the remains of the past, the digital screen not only makes the past visible but also enables its transubstantiation into the present, as spirits step through the phone screen, possessing bodies or materially reconstructing themselves within the coordinates of present time and space. In fact, 3G uses the concept of the permeability of the digital screen to disrupt the order of its diegetic space and to reinscribe the relations and identities of its narrative world. Abstract space, existing beyond the periphery of the mobile phone screen, finds expression in a formation of images and meaning on the digital screen. It thus forms a temporal and spatial continuum with diegetic space, generating an experiential singularity between the two spaces, mediated by the agency of the digital screen.

**GAME-PLAYING: THE DIGITAL SPIRIT OF TABLE NO. 21 (2013)**

In *Table No. 21*, a young couple, Vivaan (Rajeev Khandelwal) and Siya (Tina Desai), winners of a lucky draw, win a trip to Fiji and a week’s stay in a luxury resort. Subsequently, Mr. Khan (Paresh Rawal), the mysterious owner of their holiday resort, offers them three million dollars to participate in an interactive online game show. The show named ‘Table No. 21’, requires them to perform a set number of tasks arranged in order of increasing levels of difficulty; the rules of the game also dictate that they cannot leave the show midway. Hooked to lie detectors, and tracked by cameras at every step, Vivaan and Siya start playing the game, hosted by Mr. Khan and streamed live on the web to the show’s 8 million viewers (Fig. 11). But the couple soon realize that the game demands more of them than they had bargained for, as the tasks start revolving around their deepest fears and phobias, uncovering their darkest secrets, even putting their lives at risk. Bound by the rules of the game and unable to leave, the
couple find themselves trapped in a horror they had willingly walked into. The denouement reveals that the whole concept of the game show was an elaborate ruse designed to trap them and make them relive the mental trauma that Vivaan and Siya, as seniors in college, had meted out to Mr. Khan’s son, a freshman who lost his mental balance thereafter.

In concept and design, *Table No. 21* adapts a digital game to a cinematic environment. Games in avatar-driven digital environments are similarly designed according to levels of difficulty, with each level demanding more of the user in navigating and surmounting the given obstacles. *Table No. 21* adapts this digital environment to the cinema, replacing the avatars with live characters, and investing the omniscient control of the player in a digital game into a character who owns and directs the game show to its climactic end. The participants’ free will is taken away at the beginning of the game when they sign a contract, leaving them bound, avatar-like, within the confines of the game and at the mercy of the master-inquisitor who takes them through the eight levels of the challenging game.

In the film, a string of second screens stake out the main action of the story world, slicing into the cinematic screen space at regular intervals, spotlighting certain sections of the screen action. These digital spaces exist in contiguity with the cinematic space, their borders lax and permeable, allowing the action to transit between the spaces. Two sets of digital spaces can be seen in the film: the first being the digital spaces filmed by the digital cameras and uploaded ‘live’ to the screens of the worldwide web, and the second being the string of digital cameras, both movable and fixed, filming the action and visible throughout the film (Figs. 16-19). Although what is explicitly seen on screen are these two sets of spaces, conceptually the image world of the film extends into millions of screens of the worldwide web, generating an off-screen space that spirals out into the abstractness of virtual space. *Table No. 21* carries this consciousness of manifold screens in its story world, marked by the ‘hits’ scored on the space of its ‘live’ computer screen surface. Just as users of online digital games and immersive environments are inflected by the awareness of a screen-filled virtual space, this film, too, is steeped in awareness of an off-screen network of screens, interconnected in virtual space. This is integral to the cinematic experience that the film aims to foster, as the narrative revolves round an online game show played by participants in a simulated environment.

Thus the very spirit of *Table No. 21* is digital rather than cinematic, incorporating as it does the architecture of a digital environment into a film experience, with its scattering of digital spaces from the ‘live’ computer screen to the string of ‘live’ surveillance camera screens and handheld digital camera screens. In the first task that
requires Vivaan to kiss Siya in a public place, the sequence starts with the three characters in an interior space. As Vivaan, Siya, and Mr. Khan, the host of the show, are seated opposite each other and engage in a question and answer session that precedes the task, the scene edits the conversation between them by using conventional shot/reverse shots. But it frequently intercuts the scene with long shots from the surveillance cameras fixed around the place. They capture the action from five different angles, interrupting the smooth flow of cinematic space, their black and white grainy surfaces also detailing the camera number, location, and a ticking time code (Figs. 20-25).

As the scene shifts to the exterior, a range of handheld digital cameras film Vivaan and Siya as they kiss in the middle of Suva’s busiest street. These cameras frame the pair from a variety of angles and distances, their frames providing information regarding their battery and exposure level, their shooting mode, and other technical information (Figs. 20-25). This scene frenetically cuts back and forth between the cinematic space and the gamut of digital spaces, all framing the same action, with movement, gaze and match on action maintaining continuity between the different cameras. The presence of the digital cameras as operating devices are underlined and made markedly visible within the cinematic space, as the scene involves and integrates their act of filming with the main action of the two protagonists.

*Table No. 21* thus structurally integrates visually different screen spaces within one continuous space. The rapid back-and-forth from digital to cinematic space is stitched together by the conventions of film editing, which bridge the spatial break between the two kinds of spaces and generate visual flow. The film underlines the presence of both the digital screen spaces as well as the digital cameras filming them. The former appear markedly different in their visual aesthetic from the surface of the cinematic screen space, and the latter bring to the forefront the presence of their apparatus as essential to the experience of their spaces. In this stacking together of digital and cinematic spaces in its story world, the film thus brings into the cinema hall the everyday screens that populate the life of its audience, inflecting the once inviolate cinematic screen with pieces of the digital.

By entangling digital space with cinematic space and casting them into a spatiotemporal continuity, the film raises interesting lines of inquiry into the nature of the perceptual sensibility that such a visual dissonance generates and how it is fed back into a new experience of cinema. In effect, while the action in the digital space and that in the cinematic space is continuous, structurally threading both spaces, the film plays with the difference in the perceptual sensibility of these two modes by emphasizing the dissonance between the two sets of images. The highly saturated, icon-heavy digital camera images and the decidedly grainy, low resolution, text-laden images from the surveillance cameras are juxtaposed against the low contrast but ‘warm’ cinematic image. The image world of the series of digital spaces function almost as hypertexts for the action in the cinematic space, giving out information on location, camera number, time elapsed and recording mode among other details on its screens. This data-heavy digital space unwraps the artifice of the image, laying bare as it does the technical work of the recording device. Its ticking time code tracing time on its surface makes time visible, in contrast to the cinematographically synthesized time of the cinematic screen space.

This visual dissonance generates ‘interruptions’ on the surface of the cinematic screen, breaking the flow of the cinematic space. Though the action moves ahead in time, these interruptions open up windows of suspensions, simulating a sense of recall, of return. In this pattern of intersection between digital space and cinematic space, even while the narrative moves forward, these recurrent digital doorways ‘replay’ the action in a retrospection of associations, enveloping the spectator in “a mental virtuality” (Bellour 17), generating circles of extension that radiate out to the entire film.

**REALITY CINEMA OF LOVE, SEX AND BETRAYAL**

If Table No. 21 subtly tweaks the cinematic experience with its mash-up of digital and cinematic space, *Love, Sex and Betrayal* (henceforth referred as LSD) completely subverts the notion of a ‘cinematic experience’ by bringing in consumer-level digital cameras to tell its...
story of three interconnected narratives. The conventional cinematic screen space disappears in this invasion of the digital, as a succession of three different digital media formats, each with its own images and aesthetics, unfold their narratives on the cinema screen. The three interconnected narratives, themed around love, sex, and betrayal, are shot on a digital camcorder, store security cameras, and a spy camera respectively, with the viewer warned in advance in a sort of a mock-announcement at the beginning of the film about possible occurrences of shaky camera movements, low light and out-of-focus conditions in the film. *LSD* plays around with the conventional concept of cinematic experience not just by its complete rejection of film as a medium but also by its refusal to employ the usual cinematic conventions in explicating its narrative. Its avowed intention, contained in the same mock-announcement, is to present “a new kind of cinema,” which it christens “reality cinema,” made possible by a careful selection of the most “sensational footage” from hundreds of “security cameras, phone cameras, spy cameras, home cameras, secret cameras” from all over the country.

*LSD*’s “reality cinema” favors the darkness of the cinema hall, but eschews both the traditional materiality of the cinematic medium and its aesthetic conventions. Shot entirely on consumer-level digital video, the film transposes neatly onto the cinematic screen the Do-It-Yourself video aesthetic that sits snugly on television, computer or mobile screens. Its three stories that deal with honour killings, sex tapes, and sting operations illustrate the conflicts and dichotomies of an urban India trying to find its moorings in the globalizing present. Its topology of interconnected spaces of varied digital video formats from the digital camcorders to the surveillance cameras and spy cameras unfold a screenscape that is already familiar to the urban Indian. The camera lenses watch, their record buttons blinking red, as lovers and murderers, voyeurs and swindlers, abusers and scandal-mongers

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pass before their screens and play out their stories. *LSD* completely avoids the conventional cinematic techniques of camera movement and editing that have been used to render the fictive space coherent and consistent. Instead, the camera remains fluid and free-floating, as in the first and the third narrative, functioning as extensions of the protagonists, or it remains uncompromisingly fixed in its space as in the case of the store security cameras in the second narrative.

The first narrative, “Blockbuster Love,” tells the story of two young lovers (Fig. 26) who elope and marry despite the disapproval of the girl’s family and are later brutally murdered by the girl’s family. The camera, a digital camcorder, belongs to the boy Rahul, who is a film school student with a penchant for recording his life. The camera remains turned on throughout, faithfully recording the events as he casts the girl in his graduate film, falls in love with her, and finally gets killed by the girl’s conservative family.

In the most viscerally powerful section of the first narrative, where the young lovers are brutally killed, the sequence starts off with Rahul, the young boy, switching on the camera in the car to record their meeting with the girl’s family. It is dark outside, but the overhead light in the car is switched on, and the camera is placed at an awkward angle after some deliberation. After a brief exchange, the overhead light is switched off, and the camera, though it keeps running, goes to black. A few seconds later, when the car suddenly stops, the screen, which was running black, is suddenly switched to night shot mode (by Rahul), and what unfolds next is brutality that is gruesome and shocking. As the camera keeps running, we see a group of men kill the couple and dump their bodies in the ground (Figs. 27-30).

The sequence is set up in such a way that the unexpectedness of the attack delivers maximum impact. The camera, until now, has remained an available presence, handled casually, a close accessory in the character’s life and witness to his thoughts and feelings. Its manner has been freewheeling, unpremeditated, unstructured, recording on the spur of the moment, producing a dynamic and restless flow of images on its screen in a flurry of extreme close-ups, abrupt pans and zooms. This spontaneity breaks when the camera slips out from its protagonist’s grasp and lands on the ground with its frame askew. It still continues to record, but the dynamism of the frame...
Screens on Screen

is focused on the violence of the images on screen. Its night shot mode drains the colour from the screen, capturing the murder scene in a hazy, desaturated glow, the killers appearing as specters of the night. This sudden disintegration of the image marks a moment when the kinetic energy of the camera changes to a stillness, a physical stasis that is counteracted by the ensuing frenzied movement of the images on its screen. It also marks the rupture of the close alliance between camera and subject, signaling a breakdown, a fragmentation of its earlier design of visual movement and narrative engagement. This break also signals the approaching end of the narrative, as the visible camera settings marking the edges of its screen in a reminder of battery level and time elapsed, indicate the eventual running out of its battery charge.

*LSD* plays with the contrast between the differing digital media of the three story segments, highlighting the fixedness of one with the mobility of the other, playing with point of view and the resultant nature of their screen dynamics. All the three stories are interconnected, with the principal characters of the three narratives entering into the diegesis of all narratives at some point.

The shooting incident of the third narrative, “The Fame Game,” also takes place within the diegesis of the second narrative, “House of Sin.” The same scene is thus presented twice, in the different story segments, from the point of view of different types of digital cameras. The second segment, “House of Sin,” is shot through a series of store security cameras placed in vantage positions within a small twenty-four hour convenience store. It tells the story of the seduction of a salesgirl by the store security supervisor who, unbeknownst to the former, secretly uses a store surveillance camera to film their tryst, selling the resultant sex tape for money.

In “House of Sin,” the shooting sequence starts off with a man suddenly shooting another man in the small café section of the convenience store, and then running away in the ensuing melee. As his female companion raises an alarm and starts crying, the salesgirl rushes to help the wounded man sprawled on the floor, and the scene ends with the ambulance carrying the injured man away (Figs. 31-34). The entire scene is stitched together from the footage of the three security cameras around the store.
The surveillance cameras capture the terrified customers and employees running for cover, but also show the salesgirl, displaying great presence of mind, helping the injured man and calling for an ambulance.

The third narrative, “The Fame Game,” filmed entirely through concealed cameras, revolves around a sting operation conducted by a local news channel. A dancer, helped by a reporter for the channel, secretly records a pop star soliciting sex in return for a starring role in his music video. The news channel presses for more sensational footage, which results in the reporter getting shot (Figs. 35-28).

The shooting incident, presented earlier from the point of view of the surveillance cameras in the second narrative (“House of Sin”), now occurs again in the third narrative “The Fame Game,” but this time the scene is captured from the concealed cameras in the woman’s handbag and the reporter’s backpack. The dancer and pop star arrive for their rendezvous at the small café of the convenience store; the dancer informs the pop star that she has filmed their earlier meeting where he is seen demanding sex for roles in his music videos and is filming this meeting as well. The man tries to snatch the handbag with the camera, and then pulls out a gun, and, in the fracas, shoots the reporter who had rushed to assist the dancer (Figs. 35-38). This same event, shown from different points of view and two different digital camera formats, illustrates the contrasting screen dynamics of the two segments. In “House of Sin,” since the surveillance cameras are static, the movement of the different characters and the rapid cutting back and forth between the different cameras creates the dynamism within the frame. In “The Fame Game,” since the action is presented from the point of view of the concealed cameras in the dancer’s handbag and the reporter’s backpack, the dynamism of this scene is totally different, derived from the movement of the camera generated by the characters’ handling of their bags.

The film, therefore, derives its visual rhythm not from conventional camera movements or editing techniques but from the vitality of its screens. It is a vitality that is almost kinesthetic, existing as it does as physical extensions of its protagonists’ selves into space. The cameras swing, shake, get propped up on tables or chairs, carried in bags, hidden between the pages of a book, or in moments of communion.
between camera and protagonist, turned to face their handlers. In the second narrative, “House of Sin,” even though the in-store surveillance cameras are fixed, the protagonists adopt the camera as a sinuous presence in their lives, allowing it to dictate their behaviour, to shape and mark them. The camera eye is thus right in the centre of things, privy to everything. This generates intensity and spontaneity, with the camera as a deliberate physical presence creating a sense of perceptual richness and involvement for the spectator (Fig. 39-44).

LSD’s narrative space, spread across this spatio-material arrangement of three different digital media formats, is a frenetic, busy place. It pulsates with the kinetic energy of its watchful cameras, fomenting a definite perceptive as well as a cognitive and physiological pattern in its reception. Digital screens, flickering in the array of devices that the acceleration of new media has spawned, produce new ways of seeing. In the interplay of the human eye and the metadata-driven digitized screen, the interface technology via which this metadata is transmitted to our motor-sensory system generates new feedback loops and traces of circulation. Ute Holl cites Wolf Singer’s research in neuropsychology to suggest that the perception of images on the web, which depend to a large extent on user engagement, is a complex procedure where there is “an ongoing and indecisive back-and-forth between visual data, frame and image, layers and layers of information before an image and a homogeneous field appear” (Holl 166). The “digitized brain,” in making sense of ‘fragmented meta-data’ has to make up its mind, taking its time, switching levels, before it decides which gestalt, background or movement can be coherently distinguished…[Its] behaviour describes the problem of an attitude within an oscillating topology in a field of vision” (167-168). Holl’s exploration is primarily concerned with the difference in the perceptual behaviour between the old mode of watching cinema in a hall, where one is physically aware of the others watching alongside, and the new mode of watching it on the web, where the audience has to stop and “realise that they are an active part of a structure. (168)
But LSD presents a slightly different scenario. In importing digital media into the specifically organized setting of the cinema hall, it changes the psychological and physiological dynamics of its reception. The digital spaces it showcases via its narratives unfold in a different space and in a different context than those of the diegesis. The cinematic experience is generally assumed to exist under a set of fixed conditions: the specific interiors in a theatre (which includes the screen), the arrangement of seating rows, the inviolate darkness, and the uninterrupted time of a screening session (Hansen 23). To this we can add the materiality of the medium, and the unfolding on the screen surface of a narrative woven together by cinematic techniques and conventions. The spectator stitches together all these separate elements into one indivisible whole by voluntarily placing her/himself within the sensory-affective matrix constructed by the screen within the theatre, and engaging with it in an interplay that summons the cognitive processes of attention, memory, imagination and emotion, thereby conjuring a film experience that is not on screen but in that sensory-affective matrix where the screen image meshes with individual and collective spectatorial life.

The space of the cinema hall therefore, is considered an important factor in contributing to a cinematic experience, and LSD, in relocating the digital environment of its three narratives to the specifically arranged interiors of a cinema hall, allows it to be viewed in the “silence,
darkness, distance, projection for an audience, in the obligatory time of a session that nothing can suspend or interrupt” (Bellour 15). The film imports its digital world into the “experience of film (as a) totality of suspended time that lasts for a projection” producing “in the film an assembling of memory in a sole place, no matter how dispersive it may be or how diverse all the places it invokes” (17). In its projection for an audience in the theatre, the digital gets absorbed in the collective social experience of cinema, instead of being engaged in a web-based digital experience, which despite its pluralistic nature of being “one of many” (Holl 164), nonetheless remains a solitary experience, albeit one inflected with the awareness of the ‘mass’ viewership.

But even when we agree that LSD’s relocation is inflected by the ‘cinematographicity’ of a cinematic setting and undergoes an experiential alteration, the change it effects is actually a two-way process. On one hand, it effects a transubstantiation of the perceptual patterns of the digital experience into a cinematic one by its relocation to a cinematic setting. On the other hand, it also engineers a big shift in the cinematic experience by taking the digital to the cinema screen – both in terms of the materiality of the medium and its aesthetic conventions – for a digitally familiar contemporary audience. In eschewing the use of 35mm film and consciously constructing an image world that is in direct contrast to conventional film aesthetics and grammar, LSD moves away from the medium-specificity of film, transposing onto the cinema screen a digital aesthetic that it borrows from television formats and Do-It-Yourself videos on the Internet.

LSD’s “reality cinema” thus becomes a resonating space, at once enmeshed in the surrounding cinematic environment of its relocation, as well as engineering a shift in the film experience. It brings a certain complexity to the film experience, as LSD’s digital cinema is neither just a production category, nor an impersonation of a celluloid aesthetic in any manner. Though relocated within a cinematographic setting and hence part of a certain ‘cinematographicity,’ the filmic environment does not completely subsume the phenomenological differences of its varied digital formats. The film may have used digital video to film its narratives, but it does not display the high-definition video aesthetics of the enormous range of HD cameras that many films are shot in nowadays, with precision of details and a wide tonal range even in extremely low light conditions. LSD’s digital cinema uses consumer-level digital video, which, while “thematiz[ing] the diffusion of such filming apparatus in everyday life and in social relations” (Gopal 186), also works by re-scaling the everyday digital space into the cinematic space. It opens out the digital world from the intimate, confined spaces of its monitors and devices and projects it onto the grander scale of the cinematic space.

All three films discussed in this article carry the digital to the cinematic environment, bringing in a new sensibility and aesthetics associated with it. While 3G and Table No. 21 bring in digital spaces and assimilate or juxtapose them within the cinematic space, LSD abjures the materiality, the aesthetics and technical conventions of the cinematic medium and instead up-scales the intimacy of the digital medium into the more expansive space of the cinematic setting. Bolter and Grusin has coined the term “retrograde remediation” to describe “how a newer medium is imitated and even absorbed by an older one” (147). Though they are specifically referring to the usage of digital graphics in live action film, the integration of digital screens into the diegetic space of the cinematic screen can also be considered in the same vein, where the cinema screen in absorbing and making visible the new media screens on the film surface, remediates it in a self-conscious way. The digital is juxtaposed in varying degrees of integration in the diegetic space of the three films, their structural assimilation across the surface of the films fostering varying levels of awareness of the medium. While the digital spaces in 3G and Table No. 21 exist as a pivot of action, driving traffic and unfolding inciting incidents of the story world, in LSD the cinematic space gives way to a series of digital screens where the cinematic conventions and aesthetics is replaced by a digital style and ethos, and where the reality effect achieved is not just by the narratives on screen but also by the style of usage of the medium itself. Such interlacing of the digital and the cinematic succeeds in expanding the spatiotemporal coordinates of the film experience, illuminating the cinema screen in a range of possibilities.
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