

empty or hypocritical ritual, for we would then have to think of the Indian voters as enormously gullible. I have, therefore, read it as the site of the desire for an alternative modernity, a desire made possible by the contingencies of British colonial rule, now impossible of realization under the conditions of capitalism, yet circulating insistently within an everyday object of Indian public life, the (male) politician's uniform. I do not think that *khadi* convinces anybody any longer of the Gandhian convictions of the wearer, but, if my reading of it has any point to it, then its disappearance, were that to happen, would signify the demise of a deeper structure of desire and would signal India's complete integration into the circuits of global capital.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Habitations of  
Modernity." Chicago 2002

## FIVE Of Garbage, Modernity, and the Citizen's Gaze

Until Salman Rushdie and his followers arrived on the scene and made the intellectual ferment of modern India more visible to the outsider, India remained, in the dominant grids of Western perceptions, a place of "heat and dust" where the Europeans had once founded a resplendent raj. To heat and dust was often added another familiar list: crowds, dirt, and disease. Continuous with all this was a conception of an Indian nature that highlighted Indians' capacity to remain blind to the unwholesome aspects of their public places.

A recent example of this perennial theme in discussions of what Indians might do in public is the way in which V. S. Naipaul begins his *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. True, this book represents Naipaul's second thoughts on India and does capture some of the movements that India causes in the souls of its people. Nevertheless, Naipaul's travelogue begins by offering the reader a path that has been beaten into familiarity now for at least a century and a half: "Bombay is a crowd. . . . Traffic into the city moved slowly because of the crowd. . . . With me, in the taxi, were fumes and heat and din. . . . The shops, even when small, even when dingy, had big,

bright signboards. . . . Often, in front of these shops, and below those signboards, was just dirt; from time to time depressed-looking, dark people could be seen sitting down on this dirt and eating, indifferent to everything but their food."<sup>1</sup>

It would be unfair, however, to think of this perception as simply Western. What it speaks is the language of modernity, of civic consciousness and public health, even of certain ideas of beauty related to the management of public space and interests, an order of aesthetics from which the ideals of public health and hygiene cannot be separated.<sup>2</sup> It is the language of modern governments, both colonial and postcolonial, and, for that reason, it is the language, not only of imperialist officials, but of modernist nationalists as well. Lord Wellesley's street policy for Calcutta, minuted in 1803, embodies this connection between order, public health, and a particular aesthetics of the cityscape. He wrote: "In those quarters of the town occupied principally by the native inhabitants, the houses have been built without order or regularity, and the streets and lanes have been formed without attention to the health, convenience or safety of the inhabitants. . . . The appearance and beauty of the town are inseparably connected with the health, safety and convenience of the inhabitants, and every improvement . . . will tend to ameliorate the climate and to promote and secure . . . a just and salutary system of police."<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments were echoed in European writings on India throughout the nineteenth century. M. A. Sherring's 1868 description of Banaras in terms of its "foul wells and tanks" with their "deadly" water breeding cholera and fever, the "loathsome and disgusting state" of its temples where offerings decomposed rapidly from "the intense heat of the sun," the "stagnant cesspools, accumulated refuse and dead bodies of animals" crowding its "narrow streets," can now be read, not simply as realist prose, but also as evidence of a particular way of seeing.<sup>4</sup>

While this way of seeing is no longer exclusively European, its main bearers in nineteenth-century India were, no doubt, the Europeans themselves, whose modernist categories *public* and *private* were constantly challenged by the ways in which Indians used open space. In the many different uses to which it was put, the street presented, as it were, a total confusion of the private and the public. People washed, changed, slept, and even urinated and defecated in the open. As a traveler to India put it in the nineteenth century: "As to any delicacy about taking his siesta, or indeed doing anything in public, nothing is farther from the Hindoo mind, and it is a perpetual source of wonder and amusement to see the unembarrassed ease with which employments of a personal nature are carried on in the most crowded streets."<sup>5</sup>

The scene of the bazaar added yet another side to this perception of the Indian character: ever-present dirt and disorder. "Filthy drains," "disgusting" sellers ("corpulent to the last degree"), crowded and noisy lanes, people, birds, "goats, dogs and fowls," all worked together to produce the effect of a nightmare: "The whole seems at first more like some strange phantasmagoria, the imagery of a hideous magic lantern or a bewildered dream, than like a sober, waking reality." To this Indian chaos was opposed the immaculate order of the European quarters, where "pleasant squares," "white buildings with their pillared verandas," and "graceful foliage" lent, to European eyes, a "fairy-like loveliness" to "the whole scene."<sup>6</sup>

If these pictures seem tainted by Orientalism, let us remember that they are by no means outdated. We need only recall the time when Naipaul still wrote—out of his own (historic) wounds, he explains in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*—in a tone that made many see him as a brown Englishman. According to his *An Area of Darkness* (1965): "Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets; they never look for cover. Indians defecate everywhere."<sup>7</sup>

These accusations have hurt nationalists no less than the sights themselves have. Gandhi himself once commented acidly on the national character that expressed itself on Indian streets. "Everybody is selfish," he said, "but we seem to be more selfish than others": "We do not hesitate to throw refuse out of our courtyard on to the street; standing on the balcony, we throw out refuse or spit, without pausing to consider whether we are not inconveniencing the passer-by. . . . In cities, we keep the tap open, and thinking that it is not our water that flows away, we allow it to run waste. . . . Where so much selfishness exists, how can one expect self-sacrifice?"<sup>8</sup>

Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiography presents the problem, in sarcasm mixed with irony, as a cultural puzzle. In sharp contrast to the "extremely tidy" interiors of Bengali households—"the mistress or mistresses never permitted the slightest displacement of any object from its place"—remained their habit of rubbishing the outside. Oblivious to the classist and sexist biases of his statement, Chaudhuri describes this phenomenon as "the most complete [case of] non-cooperation between the domestic servants and the municipal sweepers": "The streets were regularly watered, swept and even scrubbed. But while the street-cleaning ended by about six o'clock in the morning and three in the afternoon, the kitchen-maids would begin to deposit the off-scouring exactly at quarter past six and quarter past three. Nothing seemed capable of making either party

modify its hours. So little piles of waste food, ashes, and vegetable scraps and peelings lay in individualistic autonomy near the kerb from one sweeping time to another."<sup>9</sup>

Both Gandhi's and Chaudhuri's are nationalist comments deploring the absence of a citizen culture on the part of the people. They are also at the same time attempts (employing very different rhetorical devices) to inculcate in their hypothetical Indian readers a sense of civic life and public interest. Yet, as we all know, Indian history bears a constant testimony to a gap that persists well into the present day between the modernist desires inherent in imperialist/nationalist projects of social reform—and I shall later argue the complicity of the social sciences as well in this—and popular practices. The complaint about popular blindness in India toward dirt and disease has not lost any of its force (although, as a slander on some eternally condemned Indian character, it no longer circulates much).

Nita Kumar's sensitive—and, in the present context, understandably somewhat coy—ethnosociology of the artisans of Banaras reports this blindness: "These same galis [lanes] are notorious among visitors for being dark, narrow, tortuous, filthy and even dangerous. . . . None of the Banarasis themselves ever described their galis as any of these things. . . . Queries about their rather 'unsanitary conditions' could elicit no response because these ideas seemingly fell outside Banarasis' conceptions of their city. . . . Most ignore the matter altogether, as they do most government officers. . . . Men often told me that one aspect of the overall friendliness and convenience of the city was that they could urinate wherever they liked. This, I realized after months of unwilling observation, was not an exaggeration."<sup>10</sup>

While Kumar is careful to distance her prose from that of the public-health inspector by putting quotation marks around *unsanitary conditions*, and while she reports, perceptively and with good humor, a mismatch between, say, the modernist view of the city and the urbanism of the Banarasi, her description of the *galis*, of the supposed incapacity of the Banarasi to respond to questions of sanitation and health, invests the modernist complaint (about popular blindness to these questions) with a certain degree of objectivity. This is precisely the objectivity of the outsider, which is the only position from which an aggressively modernist observer can speak on this subject. (It matters little for my argument whether the particular speaker is white skinned or brown.) As Thompson says of the passage from Naipaul quoted earlier: "Only the outsider can see that all of India is the Indian's latrine. It is all too easy as an outsider to spot the Indians' conspiracy of blindness."<sup>11</sup>

I should clarify, however, that, unlike Thompson, I do not by *outsider*

mean a non-Indian person. The outsider here is the observer who does not inhabit the conceptual or theoretical framework of the actor whom he or she observes. It is the observing position that I have tagged here as *modernist*, and I shall return later to the question of the relation between modernism and ethnosociology.

My aim in this essay is to contest and critique these modernist readings of uses of open space in India by opposing to them certain structuralist speculations based on a preliminary, and by no means exhaustive, study of some of the relevant historical and anthropological material. I am aware of the limitations of structuralist methodology and also of that which arises from the somewhat ahistorical character of my argument. This essay is in the nature of a beginning, with all the tentativeness that beginnings entail. A deeper and more convincing analysis would no doubt need to locate the argument in a more historically grounded context.

I should also clarify that a major aim of this exercise is methodophilosophical. It is to show, through a critical reading of some aspects of Kumar's otherwise excellent ethnosociology, that, when it comes to questions relating to health, that is, to life rather than death, the nonbourgeois subaltern citizen is always already condemned in our social science, however sympathetic the stance of our ethnography. As social scientists, we align ourselves with those who want to build citizen cultures. The moral consequences of wanting to do otherwise can, as some of Kumar's most honest remarks betray, be excruciatingly painful.

#### LOCATING DIRT: SOME STRUCTURALIST SPECULATIONS

Since I have allowed myself the speculative freedoms of a structuralist, I shall begin by taking a leaf out of Mary Douglas's celebrated book on dirt and start with the proposition that the problem of dirt poses, in turn, the problem of the outside.<sup>12</sup> For, whether we are talking about radioactive waste from the industrialized countries or the waste of a household or village in India, the dirt can go only to a place that is designated as *outside*. It is this problem of the outside that I want to explore in this section of the essay. Let us begin with the problem of household rubbish.

The fact that the dirt goes out of the house implies a boundary between the inside and the outside. This boundary does not simply delineate a hygienic space where cleanliness is practiced. Housekeeping is also meant to express the auspicious qualities of the mistress of the household, her Lakshmi-like nature that protects the lineage into which she has married.<sup>13</sup> As outsiders who must be received into the bosom of the

patrilineal and patriarchal family, women are particularly subject to the rituals of auspiciousness. For, in this conception, the outsider always carries “substances” that threaten one’s well-being. The “negative qualities and substances that may afflict persons, families, houses and villages,” as Gloria Goodwin Raheja has recently noted, are seldom “one’s own”: they achieve their “entry” through lapses in the performance of auspicious actions. “All forms of inauspiciousness are said to originate in entities and events that are ‘different’ and ‘distant’ from the person or other afflicted entity,” writes Raheja; “they are alien.”<sup>14</sup> Auspicious acts protect the habitat, the inside, from undue exposure to the malevolence of the outside. They are the cultural performance through which this everyday inside is both produced and enclosed. The everyday practice of classifying certain things as household rubbish marks the boundary of this enclosure.

Nirad Chaudhuri’s cultural puzzle thus contains themes that, I suggest, pervade Indian popular culture. The figure of the outsider as troublemaker was strongly conveyed by the Santal term *diku* so prominently used in the rebellion of 1855.<sup>15</sup> In the Munda country, jealousy, which is seen as corrosive of communal bonds, is attributed to mischievous outsiders.<sup>16</sup> Hatred of people conceived of as outsiders is a universal feature of so-called ethnic conflict in India and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> Correspondingly general is the practice of enclosing a place as a gesture of protection. The more-enduring boundaries—such as the wall of a fort city or a *mohalla*—of course also signify ownership and authority, but that is not a point that I will pursue here.<sup>18</sup> The general connection, however, between the *mohalla* and the insider/outsider division of identity is widely accepted in the literature.<sup>19</sup>

Our nonmodernist ways of handling disease are replete with these themes of the enclosed inside and the exposed outside. Only a few examples are necessary to make the point. Whitehead’s well-known study of the village gods of south India makes several connections between boundaries and their protective power. “The boundary-stone of the village lands is very commonly regarded as a habitation of a local deity, and might be called a shrine or symbol with equal propriety,” writes Whitehead. The propitiation of the cholera goddess at Iralangur (Trichinopoly district) or of Pedamma, an epidemic goddess of the Telugu country, involved, in both cases, symbolic enactments of the village boundary. In the former case, it was the duty of a washerman to place, at the end of the propitiation ceremony, the offerings to the deity “at the point where his village border[ed] on the adjoining village”: “The deity is thus propitiated and carried beyond the village limits. The villagers of the adjacent village in their turn carry the *karagam* [the offerings] to the border of

the next village, and in this way the baleful influence of the goddess is transferred to a safe distance.” The worship of Pedamma also included activities that ritually inscribed village boundaries.<sup>20</sup>

Catanach has written of Punjab villages where, during the plague scare of 1896–98, “the village site [was] surrounded with a circle of stakes, with demons’ heads roughly carved on top to serve as supernatural guardians.”<sup>21</sup> More contemporary evidence comes from Ralph Nicholas’s study of the smallpox goddess Sitala in southwestern Bengal, where worship rituals include the taking out of processions that circumambulate the village “planting flags where paths cross the village borders, or otherwise bounding the village before her [Sitala’s] *puja* is begun.”<sup>22</sup> Diane Coccari has studied similar processes in urban Banaras—the Bir *babas* who act as boundary gods of neighborhoods: “The deity is described as ‘the god’ or ‘the protector of the neighbourhood.’ . . . There are hundreds of Bir . . . shrines in the city. . . . Like the village deities, the urban Bir control the boundaries of their domains, especially with regard to the exit and entry of the intangible agents of illness, misfortune and disease.”<sup>23</sup>

If the house, thus, is only an instance of a theme general to South Asia—an inside produced by symbolic enclosure for the purpose of protection—what, then, is the symbolic meaning of the outside, which can, indeed, be rubbished?

To answer this question, I shall take the bazaar as the paradigmatic form of the outside. The bazaar, the street, and the fair (*mela*), it seems to me, have for quite some time formed a spatial complex in India. Streets, for good or bad, all too often become, effectively, bazaars, and *melas* combine the different purposes of pilgrimage, recreation, and economic exchange.<sup>24</sup> I take the bazaar as a space that serves the needs of transportation as well as those of entertainment and the buying and selling of goods and services. I am aware that there have been different kinds of bazaars in India, going by different names (*bats*, *mandis*, *ganjes*, etc.), and varying in their functional specializations.<sup>25</sup> I also ignore the interesting problem of connections between the bazaar and the structures and relationships of power in its vicinity.

The bazaar of which I speak is obviously an abstraction of certain structural characteristics that, to my mind, define the experience of the bazaar as a place. Everyday linguistic practices involve and permit such an abstraction—in the Bengali language, for instance, the word *bajar* (bazaar) is often used in a metaphoric way to represent an outside to *ghar-shangshar* (the way of the householder, i.e., domesticity); thus, prostitutes are called *bajarer meye* (women of the bazaar) to distinguish them from *gharer meye* (housewives or women of the household). In this

analysis, *bazaar* is the name that I give to that unenclosed, exposed, and interstitial outside that acts as the meeting point of several communities. It should also be clear by now that the division inside/outside involves a metaphoric use of space for the purpose of making boundaries, however transient these boundaries may be. Actual spatial arrangements may embody this division, but the cultural practices productive of boundary markers cannot be reduced to the question of how physical space is used in particular circumstances.

Structurally speaking, in my terms, then, the bazaar or the outside is a place where one comes across strangers. And, if, as I have argued, strangers, being outsiders, are always suspect and potentially dangerous, it is only logical that the themes of familiarity/unfamiliarity and trust/mistrust should play themselves out in many different aspects of the bazaar. All “economic” transactions here—bargaining, lending and borrowing, buying and selling—are marked by these themes. The cultural material uncovered in Jennifer Alexander’s study of the bazaar (*pasar*) in rural Java will not surprise those used to the marketplaces of South Asia (for the bazaar is obviously an institution belonging to a much larger culture zone than the subcontinent alone). Protestations of honesty, for example, are a recursive feature of bargaining talk. The copperware seller in Alexander’s extended recording of a particular case of haggling repeats several times:

I’m not lying.

If you can discover a repair there’s no need to pay!

How could I lie to you and your daughter!

I’m not lying to you!

Yes, [the seller’s mother says,] she’s not lying to you. I swear it!

If I am lying to you, don’t buy another one.

I’d be extremely ashamed if I was lying to you, truly!<sup>26</sup>

In these transactions, often conducted in terms of weights and measures that are only approximate, the economic cannot be separated from the social, for prices reflect the concern with trust and familiarity. As Ostor observes in his study of a Bengali bazaar: “Regular customers do not need to haggle, but those who are mainly strangers or out-of-towners.”<sup>27</sup> In other matters, too, the social remains a prominent part of the economic. In a group of rural markets in Gujarat studied in the late 1950s, the owners of *hat* (market) lands, it was reported, “generally levied fixed charges” once “the traders . . . [became] accustomed to the place and the people.” Even the bonds of credit forged in these (predominantly tribal) markets followed the lines of familiarity and acquaintance: “[The cloth merchants] . . . maintained close and intimate ties with the

influential sections of tribal society [their customers and debtors]. . . . They made it a point to attend social occasions like marriage, death, illness, etc. in these tribal households. Interestingly, when these households purchased cloth for wedding occasions from their shops, these traders invariably gave them [a tribal wedding party] one meter of cloth and a cash amount of Rs 1.25. They said that this gift is from their side. . . . This is a time-honoured practice among cloth merchants in the hats.”<sup>28</sup>

That familiarity reduces risk in economic transactions is obvious. What I want to highlight is the way in which kinship categories are used in the bazaar in this making familiar of the strange, in this process of taming, as it were, the potentially malevolent outsider. “Most commonly men of the bazaar, are *dada* [older brother] and *bhai* [brother] to each other,” writes Ostor. “In the bazaar *bhai* expresses a continuing relationship and enjoins a code of conduct.”<sup>29</sup> Alexander reports a similar practice from her *pasar* in Java: “Kinship terms are the most common mode of address and usage is governed by age. *Bakul* [the seller] addresses most male adults as *pak* (lit. father) and females as *bu* (lit. mother), young women as *mbak* or *yu* (lit. older sister) and young men as *mas* or *kang* (lit. older brother).”<sup>30</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, unlike the modern marketplace, the bazaar (i.e., the outside) is geared to the production of social life.<sup>31</sup> Unlike its modern counterpart, it privileges speech. The physical organization of shops in the bazaar encourages, as Anthony King has observed, “visual” and “verbal” inquiry and helps convert the former into the latter.<sup>32</sup> The centrality of speech and linguistic competence to the economic transactions of the bazaar is also underlined in S. P. Punalekar’s study of the Gujarat market. “The cloth merchants,” reports Punalekar, “knew and spoke fluently in tribal dialects,” for they feared that, without this skill, they “[would] be in the dark about what they [the tribals] [were] commenting among themselves: about price, quality or about myself [the merchant].”<sup>33</sup>

The street or the bazaar, thus, serves the “multiple purposes” of “recreation, social interaction, transport and economic activity.”<sup>34</sup> Many observers have noted this. Ostor, for example, writes: “Drinking tea, chewing *pan* [betel leaf] and smoking, the men discuss everything from business, to theatre and rituals. . . . Newspapers are read and exchanged, radio news broadcasts are heard and interpreted.”<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to the ritually enclosed inside, then, the outside, for which I have used the bazaar as a paradigm, has a deeply ambiguous character. It is exposed and, therefore, malevolent. It is not subject to a single set of (enclosing) rules and rituals defining a community. It is where misce-

generation occurs. All that do not belong to the inside (family/kinship/community) lie there, cheek by jowl, in an unsorted collection, violating rules of mixing: from feces to prostitutes. It is, in other words, a place against which one needs protection.

Some of the devices meant to provide such protection are bodily and personal, ranging from the mark of *kaajal* (collyrium), which little children are given to protect them from the evil eye, to *subh naam* (auspicious name), which all upper-caste Hindus use in dealing with outsiders and formal situations. Often, the community-forming rituals of enclosure are themselves replicated in the bazaar. Shopkeepers will use their own rituals for marking the area of the shop as enclosed space. Some of these strongly resemble housekeeping activities: worshiping a deity (Ganesh rather than Lakshmi since Ganesh is the lord who removes obstacles); sweeping with a broomstick the area of the street immediately adjacent to the front of the shop.<sup>36</sup> The more permanent traders in a particular bazaar sometimes even develop a sense of community and patronize a single bazaar temple.<sup>37</sup> Speech and face-to-face interaction have to do, as we have seen, with overcoming the mistrust of the outsider in a space where transactions are contingent on trust. The inside/outside dichotomy, therefore, is a matter of constant performance in the exchanges of the bazaar.

The duality of this space is inescapable. It harbors qualities that threaten one's well-being (strangers embody these qualities). Yet it provides a venue for linkage across communities (linkages with strangers). Speech and direct interaction produce such solidarity. The bazaar or the *chowk* is, as Freitag has noted, often the most public of arenas in Indian cities—*public* in the sense of “publicity”—and has, for that reason, hosted traditionally colorful religious/political spectacles involving large numbers.<sup>38</sup> The connection between the *chowk*, the bazaar, and the spectacle of public events is also drawn by Kumar in her study of Banaras.<sup>39</sup> And Guha has recently drawn our attention to the importance of rumors, that is, speech par excellence, in the political mobilization of peasants.<sup>40</sup> Spaces like the bazaar are, as Guha shows, central to the dissemination of rumors, which goes some way toward explaining why riots or rebellions often start in the bazaar.

Ambiguity and risk are, thus, inherent to the excitement of the bazaar. Punalekar's survey of tribal markets in the Surat-Valsad area gives a striking example of this. Here, people who specialize in providing entertainment at the bazaar are often those who are trusted the least. “Acrobats, rope walkers, snake charmers, singers and mimics,” as well as owners of performing monkeys and bears, gamblers, and others who performed in these bazaars, all were, Punalekar notes, often strangers to

particular markets. Belonging to the poorest sections of the bazaar populace, these entertainers “moved from one hat to another” without “a regular schedule,” not only thereby violating the codes of familiarity and trust, but also deriving from this violation itself the mysterious attractions of their presence as strangers.<sup>41</sup>

It is, therefore, easy to see why roaming the streets of the neighborhood is a pleasurable activity for most Indian men. (I say *men* advisedly, for the pleasure is gendered even when it is not class specific.) As Kumar says of her Banarasi respondents: “In their free time, they like to indulge in *ghumna-phirna*: to stroll in the *galis*, wander in the bazaars, hang around the ghats, visit temples, take in the ambience of the evening lights, crowds, bustle, and activity. But if you ask them what they like to do *best* in their free time, it is, to go *outside*.”<sup>42</sup> Or, as Raj Chandavarkar says of the textile workers of Bombay: “Street life imparted its momentum to leisure and politics as well. . . . Thus, street entertainers or the more ‘organised’ *tamasha* players constituted the working man's theatre. The street corner offered a meeting place.”<sup>43</sup> The bazaar or the street expresses through its own theater the juxtaposition of pleasure and danger that constitutes the outside or the open, unenclosed space. The street is where one has interesting, and sometimes marvelous, encounters. Even when nothing out of the ordinary happens, the place is still pregnant with possibility. And such pleasures are, by nature, transgressive because they are pleasures of the inherently risky outside.

#### DIRT, CAPITALISM, AND THE LOGIC OF CITIZENSHIP

This analysis is admittedly partial and incomplete. To refine it, I would need to accommodate within my argument the subtle and critical distinctions that have been made in different regions of India between, say, the road and the bazaar. I have also ignored differences between different kinds of bazaars or between different kinds of pathways. Nor have I paid attention to the very distinctive constructions of communal space that the caste system, with its varied rules of purity and pollution, can create. Studying the roles assigned in Indian villages to castes associated with dirt would be of particular relevance in this regard. Also, the idea of the outside would have been modified by the kinds of changes in the experience of public space that British rule created. Besides, as movements such as “temple entry” or “breast cloth” agitations in south India in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth would suggest, the decline of landlords' private control over roads must have brought to many a new sense of public space. In a fascinating analysis of Muslim reactions to British rule in north India, for instance, Faisal Devji has recently

drawn our attention to a newly emergent sense of the public as expressed in a couplet by Ghalib:

Neither temple nor mosque, neither door nor threshold  
It is the public road we are sitting on,  
why should any rival dislodge us?<sup>44</sup>

I grant these changes. But the question of garbage has raised for me the question of the outside, and I have argued that, structurally speaking, the space that collects garbage is the one that is not subject to a single set of communal rules. It is the space that produces both malevolence and exchange between communities and, hence, needs to be tamed through the continual, and contextual, deployment of a certain dichotomy between the inside and the outside. This need to be tamed is what makes the outside exciting, albeit in unpredictable and dangerous ways.

Both the colonialists and the nationalists were repelled by what they saw as the two predominant aspects of open space in India: dirt and disorder. "The market-place," an Englishman said of the colonial Philippines, "is always dirty and disorderly."<sup>45</sup> This colonial perception was guided by two kinds of fear, political and medical. Politically, the bazaar was seen as a den of lies and rumors, *bazaar gup*, through which the ignorant, superstitious, and credulous Indian masses communicated their dark feelings about the doings of an alien *sarkar* (government).<sup>46</sup> The bazaar or the *mela* was the place where conspiracies and rebellions were plotted and carried out. It was where riots began and spectacles of blood and gore were played out before large numbers of interested eyes. Medically, as David Arnold, Veena Talwar Oldenberg, and other scholars have shown, places where Indians collected in great numbers were seen as threats to European health in India.<sup>47</sup> A major aim of public-health measures in colonial India was to control the spread of epidemics from fairs, bazaars, and pilgrimage centers. The theme of public order is, of course, common to both the political and the medical sides of this perception. As Foucault remarked in *The Birth of the Clinic*, "A medicine of epidemics could exist only if supplemented by a police."<sup>48</sup>

The nationalists' ideology was not the same as that of the raj. Their project was to convert the colonial state into a full-fledged modern state (ignoring, for the moment, the anarchist strain in Gandhi). Chaudhuri is acutely aware that, while British rule "conferred subjecthood on us," it "withheld citizenship."<sup>49</sup> His bourgeois sensibility is hurt at the absence of civic consciousness in Calcutta. Gandhi's, similarly, is a call for more citizen-like behavior: keeping the roads clean; turning taps off in the public interest.

Notwithstanding these important differences, both the imperialist and the nationalist reactions have one element in common. They both seek to make the bazaar, the street, the *mela*—the arenas for collective action in pre-British India—benign, regulated places, clean and healthy, incapable of producing either disease or disorder. They both present a new definition of the public, one that has often been at odds with the other forms of community that have historically come into being in these communal spaces. The British wanted to control these spaces because they were concerned about the health of the Europeans, especially of those in the British Indian army.<sup>50</sup> For the modern state, and, hence, for the nationalists—at least in terms of their ideals—good public health is a basic condition of existence, for there is no vigorously productive and efficient capitalism without a healthy workforce and increased longevity. And the latter, in turn, require disciplined, regulated public places.<sup>51</sup>

People in India, on the whole, have not heeded the nationalist call to discipline, public health, and public order. Can one read this as a refusal to become citizens of an ideal, bourgeois order? If that question is guilty of reading intentions into popular culture, let me put the problem another way. The cultural politics of transforming open spaces into public places requires a certain degree of divestment of pleasure on the part of the people. The thrills of the bazaar are traded in for the convenience of the sterile supermarket. Old pleasures are now exchanged for the new pleasures of capitalism: creature comforts, an insatiable obsession with the body and the self (the pleasures of privacy), and the mythical freedoms of citizenship.

When capitalism has not delivered these cultural goods in sufficient quantities—and Indian capitalism has not—the exchange of old pleasures for new remains an understandably limited exercise. In this situation, state action (in the arena of open space), directed at the preservation of public health or interest, will often take the form of a violent, intrusive, external force in the lives of the people. It is not coincidental that the statement of Wellesley's introduced early in this essay moved easily between the ideas of urban beauty, public health, and efficient policing in defining a street policy for colonial Calcutta. *Halla*, a colonial practice—continued by the national government—of sudden, violent police action aimed at clearing streets of hawkers and vendors (whose presence is proscribed by law), has, for years, served to illustrate this phenomenon.

It is, of course, the nationalist desire for a strong nation-state that makes certain European practices the universal rituals of public life in all countries. However, for people who, for diverse historical reasons, are yet to participate in this collective desire, this universality hardly ever has the status of a self-evident fact. The battle between their sensibility and

the academic observer's is often one between the nonbourgeois peasant-citizens and those who want to inhabit a bourgeois-modern position, and, in this war, analysis is not neutral.

At the end of her book, in an impressive spirit of self-criticism that indicts the rest of the work, Nita Kumar offers a very telling story. She calls it "The Limits of Ethnosociology." I want to consider this story in bringing this essay to an end. "As my research proceeded," writes Kumar,

I found myself understanding my informants and their world with progressive sensitivity, and paradoxically, also understanding how this world should be shunned and condemned as "lower-class" and "backward." . . . The dilemma became partly clear to me on the death of one of my favourite informants, Tara Prasad. . . . [H]e passed away of mysterious ailments, regarding which, including the exact symptoms, and even the location, whether in the chest or the stomach or the legs, his family was frustratingly vague. This was of course the same "vagueness" glorified by my informants in other contexts, and by me in subsequent reporting of these contexts. It was however clear that he had fallen victim to . . . poverty and ignorance. . . . He had been killed by the filthy galis and mohallas of Banaras; the very same which are extolled by indigenous Banarasis as beyond any considerations of stench and garbage. . . . I clearly reach the limits of ethnosociology here, for death matters to him and his family in a different way than it does to me, and I have no sympathy for their way.<sup>52</sup>

This is a rare moment of honesty, one in which the ethnosociologist, committed, by her training, to understanding the "natives" on their own terms and without prejudice, confronts the political responsibility of that commitment. Should such subaltern citizens have the freedom to die in their ignorance, or should we intervene with our knowledge and the police? Let us follow Kumar to the very end of her journey: "I do not care for my informants' lifestyle in the way they do. I want them to live longer, enjoy better health, earn more, beget fewer children, and, out of place as it sounds, learn of modern science. I do not know how best their culture can be encouraged to coexist with such development, but, however it does happen, a precondition will be a knowledge of this culture in itself."<sup>53</sup>

In this battle of the bourgeois moderns versus the subaltern citizens (those who have not imbibed a bourgeois outlook on matters of public health and personal hygiene), the violence of Kumar's dilemma reveals to us the purpose of our knowledge. It is, not to adjudicate, but to write

epitaphs for the gravestones of dying and defeated concepts and practices, to help preserve them as objectified knowledge. This objectified knowledge is what Kumar calls *a knowledge of this culture in itself*. To do anything else would be untrue to our own concerns for prolonging life, the fear of death and the desire for preservation on which modernity is founded. This is why, as Rey Iletto has remarked in the context of the Philippines, "nationalist writers . . . find it impossible to interrogate the established notion that among the blessings of American colonial rule was a sanitary regime which saved countless Filipino lives."<sup>54</sup>

Can modern knowledge transcend this concern with prolonging lives? I suggest that it cannot but that we can at least recognize it as the (historical) condition within which we speak and ask of Kumar's dilemma. How is the subject of this quandary produced? Through what historical process of subject formation did long life, good health, more money, small families, and modern science come to appear so natural and God given?

Kumar's dilemma is too real to be trivialized. And I have no easy answers. In my younger and more citizenship-minded days, I once told a nine- or ten-year-old boy in Calcutta not to throw rubbish in the street. "Why not?" he asked, as he proceeded to throw the rubbish anyway. "I suppose you like to think that we live in England, don't you?" This essay is a troubled and overly delayed response to that defiant question.