



Introducing the Spectacle of Monomania in Satyajit Ray's *Two*: A Play of the Infectious Capital

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Abstract

Contrasting between wealth and penury, the abstract and the objective, the obsolete and the subjective, motion and stasis, alienation and belonging, Satyajit Ray's short silent film, *Two: A Film Fable* (1964) promotes an understanding of the *capital* of freedom which critiques the global circulation of *capital-as-freedom*. Ray delves deep into the existential 'lack' of the material 'thingness' (*plastic capital*) of the haves by introducing the metaphor of 'silence' as noise to the eyes. This paper attempts to highlight the fallacious reasoning of factorised *capital aggression* as an identifier of global spectacle and how it recuperates modern families into machinic puppets at the mercy of the global *plastic market*.

Keywords: aggression, capital, freedom, market, plastic, thingness

Introduction

(Wars can only bring woe,
What will you gain out of warfare?)
-Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne (1969)

Satyajit Ray has tried to cultivate artistic creativity in his films in order to reflect the narrative affectivity of human cognition by throwing a cartographic lens of the human psyche in a rapidly changing world. Ray's picturesque humanitarianism, as reflected in his films, seems to be a clear critique of borrowed 'modernity' which has often neglected (and outcasted) organic solidarity of the 'non-

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moderns', simply on the basis of *capital-in-time*. The meteoric emergence of industrial societies accompanied by the simultaneous origination of 'ocular-centrism' (Levin), nationalisation, urbanisation, and disenchantment have given birth to a pathological mimesis of *illusory capital* which binds itself as the primary capital for survival. Ray has often managed to challenge the standardised definition(s) of 'modernity' and its predetermined bio-algorithms by situating a nationality of absence(s) and thereby, setting his own set of exponential graphics. According to Amartya Sen, "...the issue can be discussed only in more dialectical terms. The diagnosis of thought as 'purely Western' or 'purely Indian' can be very illusory. The origin of ideas is not the kind of thing to which 'purity' happens easily" (Sen 132). Ray's cinematographic lens seizes to capture the idea of 'progressive' ethics as a fixated cultural borrowing of the First Worlds. For Ray, the categorical notion of 'global progress' seems to justify itself on the basis of a separatist cognition where the narratives of the past form a semantic closure to the metaphysics of the present in determining global certitudes.

The Dilemma of Capital: Is it a Being or a Thing?

The black-and-white Satyajit Ray's silent film, *Two: A Film Fable* (1964), produced under the banner of *Esso World Theatre*, manages to successfully capture almost all the socio-political arenas of civilisation: capitalism, progress, war and peace in some twelve running minutes. Frequently considered to be the precursor to *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne*, *Two* is a tale of two kids: one 'rich', tyrannical and trapped in a palatial house and the other 'poor', submissive and left loose in the fields. Here 'richness' and 'penury' are transitive indicators of bank balance and nothing else which, later in the film, gets a post-truth indexing at the hands of the director. The film starts off with a piece of monochromatic music with a child wearing a 'mickey mouse' hat bidding bye to a car. Ray directly jumps into his depiction of modernity as bearing a fleeting construct where the unit of the family gets substituted by the unit of a car, thereby reversing the trope of domesticity as having material organs without a cerebral cortex. The opening scene is quite symbolic of modernity's tryst with plastic materiality that believes much in the image of copies rather than a copy itself. The opening scene sets the film in motion by

exposing the complex symbiotic cultural embeddedness between economic materiality and social corporeality, between *having* and *being*, between black and white (which suits the tonality of the frame), and between bodies and machines. In this case, the modern subject (the 'rich' kid) has already been *twice* displaced from his eros and Ray provides plenty of images to go along with his critique of progressive modernity. The 'rich' kid is shown to be drinking cola which then becomes a sign of the child's interpellation into the global consumption process: cola is the *artificial capital* that gets embedded as 'class capital'. Ray introduces several material gimmicks in the film that surround the ecology of the 'housed' child as characteristic of a 'machinic' engineering of bodies: mickey mouse cap, electronic toys, air guns, toy weapons, toy robots, tower-like blocked structures, plastic trumpets and carbonated soft drinks. Here, the 'machinic' selfhood is shown to be providing a kind of 'over-assemblage', or negative assemblage, which is not quite similar to the prospective of a de-territorialised 'becoming' (Deleuze). The un-housed kid remains not just a subaltern prototype in the postcolonial space. His nomadic spirit is suggestive of a social prism, an ethical singular opening which mobilises a unique possibility of multiple free drives. In other words, the shabby kid reflects a multiconnected (porous) body that derives and distributes sense and affect from multiple social plateaus. The director probes into the modern's insatiable appetite for material consumption masquerading as materialist security which then becomes the socio-cultural superscript of the *material-as-rational*. Erich Fromm in *To have or to Be?* investigates the modern's Hamletian desire for materialist seduction which becomes a speaking subject in itself thereby replacing the body as the mind with objects as the futural diktat. In other words, Ray sets out to expose the modern's mystification of *capital-as-having* coupled with *thing-as-being* in no apologetic terms.

Despite possessing plenteous toys and 'modern' comfort items, the 'housed' (or, 'rich') kid lacks contentment and switches from one toy to the other in an attempt to fluidise his 'modern' desires into the capitalist organs of his times. He harbours violent nature and bursts balloons by lighting matchsticks and is seen to hit a plastic ball at random that resonates with the scene from *The Great Dictator* where Chaplin plays with a globe that symbolises *balloon-in-dreams*. The

repetition of the kid's actions with his plastic toys transmutes into a zombified lobotomy of masculinity which becomes suggestive of a *major* 'thingness' of modern spectacles, "The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image" (Debord 34). The 'rich' kid becomes entangled within the hyper aggression of his plastic *excess* that creates a sort of 'divide and rule' language within his *Bio*: the plastic toys acting as plastic beings start replacing his innate self (innocence) with *thingified* gratifications (plasticised seduction) and reconstitutes him within a toxic model of *capital excess*. The 'rich' kid is seen to carry a toy dagger tied around his waist and this image becomes important in linking violence to capitalism where Ray is not only critiquing the process of producing biopower (at will) but also the 'global' methodology of containing surveillance through the bodies of class tokens. The body of the child transmutes into a militarised tool of cultural conduct as an exposition of the 'greater' capital merit over the merit of flesh. In other words, the image carries hyperreal scripting of biopower onto the performative body, which is the body of the 'housed' child, so as to transfer the matter of flesh from an agentic (active) circuit to a passive despotic consumable item. In one scene, the 'housed' kid looks through a window with iron rails that becomes a reference point to the idea of *property-as-security*. The references to the 'rich' kid getting a structure-like security (house) while the 'poor' kid having a field to play upon and simultaneously managing to *be* an 'open' space points to the ontological conflict of 'having' and 'being' as polemical vectors of life. The house is cinematised as a jail compound and the items inside classify as 'global' prisoners (things). The 'housed' kid becomes symbolic of the hypostatisation of class and wealth as opposed to the 'un-housed' kid whose ecosophic fissures become his only valid armoury to outgrow the capital tentacles of his time(s). Ray points to the limits of wealth where plastic toys can be equated with the influx of plastic capital, or surplus machine labour, as a form of 'modern' aggressive infection. The 'housed' child gets infected by the super spreader of plastic capital where the capital endorses (and removes) his body as a speculative militant capsule. This cultural reification of the state is what the 'poor' kid escapes from by voluntarily situating outside the production of prosthetic capital. With plastic toys scattered all over the house and toys tripping over one another (a robot crashes the Eiffel Tower block), the 'modern'

kid is shown to carry a contagious socio-cultural virus, which is the virus of the *excess* capital. The excess latches onto a host (in this case, a tender subject) and becomes a performing agent in zombifying the 'rich' kid where 'richness' (*capital* as the ideational truth) becomes the automatic substitute for the 'lack'. The 'lack' becomes non-performing unless it gets the attributes of a performing *capital* or the performative *excess*. The 'rich' kid becomes a diseased specimen of a hypertrophic body that has been objectified by the 'modern' speculative capital. The 'housed' kid is imprisoned by the capital-driven gaze of technologised ethics. The 'rich' boy is an embodiment of hyper-consumerism like Tom in *Parks and Recreation*. Also, Ray throws in a limbo conflict of the haves: the image of the housed kid looking through the window into the open fields provides a cinepoetic metaphor for the longing for a nomad (Deleuze and Guattari introduce the idea of literary vagabondness in *Nomadology: The War Machine*) who wishes not to be further chained by the speech of *capital excess*.

Moreover, Pamela Haag establishes how guns originated as an essential part of American culture. Haag says, in the United States, "It was etched strongly by the character, ambition, and will of gun capitalists rather than by diplomats, politicians, generals, and statesmen" (Haag 29). William Morris, in *How We Live and How We Might Live*, analyses how national rivalry becomes the root cause of gunpowder and bayonet wars which are waged by civilised nations. Guns as corrective instruments of society have been considered as the basic cultural icon of America: beginning from the machine gun of Al Capone to the rifle of GI Joe. Until the advent of industrial culture, toys used to be formed of materials extracted from nature like clay, rock, wood and wax. Serving as a replica of reality to the child, toys became more popular when it was infused with mythologies. Hence, the idea of movable limbs, talking robots, spring-driven motors and air-guns hit the consumer market fast as a fascinating entry into the blossoming of the prosthetic machines which then justifies an outlay of billions for the market. In *Two*, toy artillery seems to dramatically aggravate the 'rich' kid's unconscious willingness to defeat his opponent (by all means) in order to sustain its hegemonic gaze.

Kids as Capital Bodies: A Modern Grant

Interestingly, the 'rich' kid performs all masculine attributes to acquire a panopticon-like effect over the 'other' that are materially embedded and deemed superior. His elaborate display of weapons, priced possessions, false moustache, rage and belligerence are noteworthy. The 'rich' kid's operation of his battery-run toys parallels a mnemonic fever, a global catastrophe, which Ray wishes to echo as a case for the 'dangers' of modernity. The kid's 'cold' pressing of functional buttons (of his monkey-toy) not only serves as a disturbing image of the hypostatisation of plastic corporeality in the global capital but also exposes a projective tension of the World War times. The boy's actions almost seem to link up with the infamous duty of Thomas Ferebee, the bombardier of Hiroshima. This mnemonic linkage is obviously very graphic in its memorial embeddedness where the director chooses a non-adult (pre-matured cognition) type for invoking a sort of eerie time travel that exposes the politics of forgetting (forgetting as an active action). But Ray does this with a cultural logic in mind: the child, at the very outset, is factorised as a carrier of familial scripts and is thereby forcibly erased off any innocence for that matter. This shifts the idea of the child as a gift of 'god' to a tool for the usage of socio-familial utility. Likewise, Ray delivers a stark contrast to the fallacy of richness in a property (involving the 'housed' kid) from the motion of an anti-Blakean lens with that of the nudity of the 'poor' kid as bearing a transformative power over the eugenics of capital class. Rollo May in *Power and Innocence* (1972) talks about the condition of child as having a purpose to serve both in terms of its 'pre-egoic' functionality and its ordinary responsibilities while seeking a masterly address to maintain its growth. In simple terms, a child serves as a propaganda machine for the familial polity much before the condition of pre-cognition sets in. Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1845), states that every childbirth is political as sex and performance are controlled by the state wherein the state becomes a dictator of economic and socio-cultural merit. For May, as for the director, the 'housed' kid merely performs an ideological militancy where there is a complete 'lack' of maternal canny; the 'poor' kid, however, has a genderless liminality in his approach to games, playfulness and ecosophic life. Guattari reads the notion of ecosophy in *The Three Ecologies* as a non-deterministic approach to harmonise and interconnect 'all that breathes' (*All That Breathes* is a short film

that got released in 2022 on Netflix and reflects upon Guattari's ecosophic recyclable biodegradability between humans and non-humans.)

The gullible body becomes a trope over which (hyper)masculine signs are carved into and the preordained grammar of aggression is justified as phallic volatility. Pliant and prone to imbibe what it observes, a child's mind is extremely receptive. R.W Connell's gender-order theory recognises a structural verification on the topic of masculinised abilities (*ability-as-action*) that differs across culture, time and the individual. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is the execution of an empiricist practice that justifies man's superior logic and validates the subjugation of the 'lesser' male. Men possessing guns and weapons exemplify the pathological order of power and language. Even the child's mind and body (text and sub-text) fall prey to such perilous social compositions of masculinity and power. Rudyard Kipling clearly projects the intricacies of imperial masculinity in his works like *The White Man's Burden* and *The Man Who Would Be King*, connecting masculinity to chivalry, conservatism and exploitation. Kipling encourages the English for war as discursive means to acquire peaceful reforms and herein lies the topic of a degenerate class of spiritual stasis. Through rationalisation of imperial and capitalist subjugation as a Machiavellian game, Kipling emphasises the pathological necessity of imperial masculinity as an anthropological requirement to welcome a distorted utopia, or, a fashionable dystopia. Ray portrays the 'rich' kid as a protoypical positivist Weberian organ in its application of technographic plastic weaponry whereas the 'poor' kid signifies human capital (*capital-as-labour*) that supersedes all 'modern' attention on the physical capital.

Resistive Capital: Corporeality of Silence

Throughout the twelve-minute film, the classed ('rich') kid is shown to be chewing gum non-stop. Later he sticks his gum on one of his toys' heads which goes to show the *socio-plasticity* of necrophilic fever (orgasm for the 'dead' *plastic excess*) by the State and its participants. The 'rich' class is shown to be absorbed in a hypostatic loop: at one level, the haves are seen to be blindly consuming the

cannibalistic desires of the speculative capital and, at the other level, the haves are, in turn, getting subsumed by the state machinery and are thereby, getting spatialised into 'alienated everywhere-ness':

The alienation of the spectacle to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognising himself in the dominated images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. (Debord 30)

The toys are given Dracula-like qualities in a way where the *plastic bodies* (corporeal things) consume the soul of the boy (soul with flesh) that can be seen as an attempt by the director to challenge the metaphysics of 'thingness' in things. Plastic toys are given corporeal cannibal-like bodies and the haves are seen to be motorless hypnotic objects. The classed bodies do not simply consume the illusion of plasticised futurity but, at the same time, are getting lost by a prosthetic lure of the 'capital turn'; the 'modern' ideas of *capital power* eat up the 'rich' kid as some sort of Faustian bargain. In a broader sense, the machinisation of a body into a despotic tool resonates with the image of the 'rich' kid as a repository of pre-scripted text that gets ready to be superscripted by its family and masculine institutions.

Produced during the Vietnam War, the film gains a greater symbolic significance to the larger humane cries. The film plays as a satire on technological advancement and political progress (progress for progress's sake) of a 'superpower' like the USA. The American aggression implemented on the Vietnamese destroyed numerous innocent peasants more than its political appendages. The photographs of the unarmed Vietnamese in *My Lai* being executed served as anti-war icons later. Dread of chemical weapons like Agent Orange and Napalm horrified the Vietnam civilians too. It rings true to Ray's cinematic intent. *Two* becomes a cautionary tale to the insinuations of unmitigated totalitarianism through military assistance, technological aggression and capitalistic consumerism, giving birth to a world prone to war and unrest. Ray fears the worst:

he warns his audience of a cybernetic space that germinates citizens genetically orchestrated by propagandist cyberian codes so that they engage in unrestrained impulse gratification by a process of lawful liquidation. *Two*'s pacifying message seemed crucial when war was sought at all costs. Such war-breeding ideologies under the veil of patriotism freeze people's sense to zero point, banning the use of logic which the 'Big Brother' does in Orwell's *1984*. Kipling's 'savage wars of peace' is a myth (321-323). Wilfred Owen writes, "The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est /Pro patria mori*", reversing Horace's idea of glorifying war (15). Bernard Shaw too satirises soldiers' delusional pride regarding war and military heroism in *Arms and the Man*. Ray's *Two* questions the citizens' cooperation with the state that propagates the termination of lives by manufacturing arms on the basis of geopolitical conditions and international affairs.

In the film, the un-housed ('poor') kid plays a musical flute which catches the attention of the jailed kid and immediately this 'openness' of the shabby kid disturbs the 'sanitised' kid, who is actualising a parody of *toxic capital*. Revengefully, the 'rich' kid plans to 'cut off' his soulful rhythm with the aid of a plastic flute. There is a stark contrast in the quality of tune which gets highlighted in the affective environment of the cinematic set-up: the plastic replica releases a cacophonous displacement that severs any possible relation between sound and mind. The 'poor' un-housed kid is suggestive of an alternative biodegradable rhizomatic free motor who has the grasses and the greens as his ecological allies (as having limitless green wealth) whilst ably pulling off his *sublime* knowledge for naturopathy. The 'rich' classed kid is shown to be living in a symbolic jail (house) with few of his plastic disposables whereas the un-housed kid enjoys an agrarian climate with tall grasses and dense fields at his disposal as a form of limitless expanse. The de-classed kid provides for his audiences a new kind of ecosophic assemblage where his body and spirit get spiritually linked to a deeper ingestion of 'ecocratic' capital, a space where *the flesh* of the greens and *spirit* of the humans co-opt and co-relate alternative *a-humanist* ethics (Skolimowski 34). In another scene, the 'free' kid plays a drum and its musical carnival hits the housed kid who, then, comically exposes a battery-operated monkey-beating-a-drum toy to overpower his fear of the 'lack'. This is a painful sight for any civil body to grasp as the

kid seems to be totally unaware of his psychological recuperation within the plasticity of simulacra (toy) that provides him with some virtual ecstasy of power. He himself gets commodified into a statist toy that vies for a macro-cognitive decay in return for 'total' obedience and Ray seems to be pinpointing out this point since the very first shot in the film. The 'poor' kid with the flute perhaps represents a Gandhian idealism of spiritual resistance and ahimsa against the cacophony of expensive toys. Also, it might be true that Ray's flute-child is an allegorical extension of John Lennon's musical protests against the Vietnam War. As the film ends with the tune of the child's flute, it seems to echo Lennon's 'Happy Xmas (War is Over)' and 'Give Peace a Chance'. The child's relinquishment of worldly affairs is his *Nirvanic* attainment. He provides a hermeneutic order of world peace, paying an eco-humane tribute to the martyred bodies of monks during the Vietnam War.

The symbol of masks in the film becomes very important in understanding both the characters' spatial logic; the mask performs a literary function in its context of understanding marginality and recognition. Since, very evidently, the idea of a subaltern voice has historically been identified as having the principle factor of a marginalised agency, much attention has been given to the semiotic detailing of 'marginalising by the haves' and not so much on the 're-marginalisation of the haves'. A unique feature of power-relation is that it cannot stand on its own merit; there has to be a producer and receiver of its agency. Thereby, it becomes necessary for the statecraft to find victims of the same kind, albeit in a different context altogether: the bodies that are being marginalised or are being pushed to the margins of desperation (de-classed bodies) are victims of state power while the bodies who feel are 'safe' (classed subjects) from being categorised as 'marginal' are bigger victims of instrumental polity without even having the slightest knowledge about it. This is how selective interpellation works. Also, the fact that the non-margins live in an illusion of 'having' ('having' as the promoter of *Being* in future(s)) and are thereby immune to any social parasite falls prey to a larger covert decay of *total merit*. This kind of psychosomatic breakage of both the master and slave due to a *plastic pull* of the diffusive 'spectacular capital' (Debord, ch.1) is projected cinematically through the interplay of 'two' affective bodies on

screen. The militant 'hegemo-plastic' games that the 'rich' kid 'performs' is socially, psychologically and economically futile and can never bring prosperity to the one exercising them. It is impracticable for a nation-state or a person to forcibly grab any land, wealth, trade or perseverance of others. Ray's silent film portrays the 'rich' kid's silent defeat that hits harder than his loud triumph. In the end, we hear the music of the flute entering the classed room through the window (and disturbing the housed kid). The scene points to the musicalisation of social fissures where the 'poor' kid welcomes an ecosophic multi-agentic nudity which challenges Darwin, probably, to a large extent. Subsequently, the window transforms into a liminal gateway that divides the two corporeal materials (the house and the fields) into Biblical expositions of Hell and Heaven. The soul of Ray resides in the flute-child that reverberates Denise Levertov's message: "A line of peace might appear/ if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,/ revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,/ questioned our needs, allowed/ long pauses..." (18-19).

Conclusion

Pete Seeger's "Where have all the flowers gone?" is still sung as a protest against the conscription of the Vietnam War. William Cowper interrogates the superficiality of war between the countries separated by random geographical boundaries: "Lands intersected by narrow frith/ Abhor each other. Mountains interposed/ Make enemies of nations, who had else/ Like kindred drops been mingled into one" (Cowper 58). Weapon-industry proliferates due to the internationalism of war and is a transnational consequence of the capitalist economy. Bernard Shaw addresses the ramifications of the growing power of the weapon industry in *Major Barbara*. Interestingly, these industries, as an end in themselves, do not confirm any patriotic allegiance. The manner in which the plastic robot crashes the tower depicts the hollow mankind as a socio-gendered trope that destroys its creations by war: the disintegration of the toy tower becomes symbolic of the idea of a boxed-up body in a cage of fragile *plasticised modernity*. Also, in the end, the 'rich' kid shoots down a kite as soon as the 'poor' kid starts to enjoy his time. This action is largely symbolic of a fear of flight from the Other. In other words, the haves seem to be caught up in Schelling's dilemma,

and the classed subject quickly co-opts the power value as the needed machinic intervention of survival. The housed kid is shown to be satisfied only when he manages to limit the possibility of the other, and therein lies the de-plantation of the 'modern' soul. *Two* ends with a clear textual marker: the inadequacy of the housed kid to sustain himself with the machinic noises of his plastic toys sums up a failed idea of capital progress in exchange for marketing commodities. The 'modern' *plastic spectacle* has not only failed to affect (and impress) the Other but has also exposed its metaphysical inadequacy in its continual mode of *plastic consumption*.

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