How to Read a Bomb: Scenes from Bombay’s Black Friday

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Bombing Bombay

On March 12, 1993, ten bombs exploded across the city of Bombay within a period of about two hours. The timed explosions were caused by large quantities of an explosive known as RDX, a black soap—like substance, which was loaded onto several four- and two-wheeler buses. Planted strategically in and around important city buildings, crowded marketplaces, and hotels, each vehicle exploded within fifteen or thirty minutes of the previous one. Their itinerary not only was timed sequentially but also, perhaps accidentally, followed a north-south geographic trajectory, beginning with a dramatic explosion in the basement of the Bombay Stock Exchange in the city’s historic, colonial Fort area and ending with a series of unexploded grenades hurled onto the runways of the airport in the northwest suburb of Santacruz.

These explosions followed nearly three months of tension and murderous riots in Bombay between Hindus and Muslims after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque in northern India by a mob of Hindu nationalist youths. While the riots took place immediately after the mosque’s destruction on December 6, 1992, followed by a second round a month later, in January

I thank Faisal Devji, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Claudio Lomnitz for their careful reading of an earlier, longer version of this piece. Their support and comments were invaluable in bringing this essay to its present state. Arjun Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, and AbdouMaliq Simone also read earlier versions and provided encouragement to the overall project. Satya Pemmaraju remained steadfast in his belief in the value of the work and the argument from its very inception when we saw the film Black Friday together. In Bombay, Rachel Dwyer arranged a preview showing of the film for which I am grateful. Last, but not least, I thank Jesse Willard for his valuable assistance in research and editing and his thoughtful comments.
1993, the blasts came after two months of uneasy calm, on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. More than two hundred people died in the blasts on that single day and hundreds were injured.

The event, simply referred to as the “bomb blasts” in Bombay (until the recent serial bombing of commuter trains), is treated as a singular event—*the* serial blasts—invoking a vast conspiracy. Its singularity was self-evident even on the day of the blasts, when the city’s police commissioner suggested that the bombings had turned the entire city into a battlefield. Each bomb was evidently connected to the next as if in a chain reaction. And every link of the chain remained visible as people speculated on the significance of each target. As S. Hussain Zaidi, an investigative journalist and author of a recent book titled *Black Friday: The True Story of the Bombay Bomb Blasts*, writes, “It was the first time any city in the world was subject to serial blasts” (2002: 15).

The serial explosions were, at that time, a unique form of attack, blurring the line between multiple and singular events because of the close temporal proximity of the bombs. This temporal proximity condensed and fused space into a unified field—that of the city. Yet despite the enormity and scale of this event, it quickly disappeared from the everyday life of the city into psychic registers rarely available on the surface except under carefully controlled judicial and journalistic conditions.

More than a decade after these bomb blasts, in July 2006, another series of explosions shook the city, which had been renamed Mumbai in 1996. At around six o’clock on a Tuesday evening, during the peak commuting hour, seven explosions ripped through the first-class compartments of commuter trains on the Western Railway lines, going off within minutes of each other. In the space of eleven minutes, seven train compartments had been destroyed and over a hundred commuters were dead, many of them waiting on platforms at the stations that the trains had just passed or were about to pull out from. Incessant, 24-7 news coverage showed gory scenes of dead passengers and injured commuters being carried away by police and local residents who rushed to the scene. Shocked spectators mutely witnessed the carnage with a sense of mounting outrage.

1. Following Zaidi’s lead, I use the term “Black Friday” throughout this essay as a shorthand reference for the 1993 blasts. “Black Friday” is also the title of the film based on the book (dir., Anurag Kashyap, India, 2007), but the context of the usage herein makes clear when it is the event, the book, or the film that is being referred to.
The 1993 blasts were recollected as an ancestor by a city still awaiting delivery of a final judgment against the perpetrators of those explosions. But this time, there was less skepticism and little doubt about the history in which this episode belonged. News media dutifully made the obvious connections to similar events in London and Madrid. Exactly one week after the blasts, at the precise moment of the first blast in the series, all traffic in Mumbai voluntarily stopped to observe “two minutes of silence” in memory of the victims of the blasts, on the appeal of a popular news channel. A chilling and eerie silence descended as the traffic ceased, a reenactment of the very scene of blockage that the bombs had achieved. Most media reports suggested that the chief victim of the blasts was the city itself, but that because peace had prevailed in the aftermath the “spirit of Mumbai” had triumphed after all.

The dispersed presence of the 1993 blasts, the lack of memorials to the victims or public remembrance, and the carefully controlled media coverage of the blasts contrasted sharply with the intense, mediatic coverage of the 2006 blasts. In 1993 the city, then already wounded severely by the riots of the preceding months and the seriously damaged relations between majority and minority communities, had chosen silence as a means of recuperating from the blasts. Yet the close kinship between the two events of serial attack, their focalization of a particular city within a particular region, subject to particular local causes for acts of terror, also haunted the coverage of what some newspapers began calling “7/11.” This essay is an ethnographic attempt to grasp the spectral presence and significance of Black Friday both in the landscape of Bombay-Mumbai and in the contemporary, global history of terrorism. It is not, however, a conventional history of the distance—conceptual or otherwise—between 7/11 and Black Friday but rather an attempt to grasp some of the mystery peculiar to the perceptions of Black Friday, how the denotation affects the contemporary and future life of the city, beyond the intentions of its perpetrators. It is therefore an attempt to read the City through the Bomb.

2. Here, ethnography is used in a special sense, because this work is largely an ethnography without witnesses or a testimonial dimension, one based on publicly available and circulating texts rather than on direct contact with subjects.
How to Read a Bomb

The bomb produces a non-sequential understanding of time and a fragmentation of space.
—Walid Raad / The Atlas Group

Since Black Friday, many similar events of coordinated serial attack—New York 2001, Madrid 2003, London 2005, and Mumbai 2006, to name only the more obvious ones—have taken place. These events target the physical, organizational structure of the city in a contained and highly symbolic fashion. Yet, despite being the site in which the technique of serial attack was pioneered, the Bombay blasts have remained a buried and underground episode not only in the history of the city but also in the contemporary, global history of terror. Despite the enormity of the destruction unleashed by those serial bomb blasts of 1993, the comprehensive geographic reach of the bombs across the city, and the number of people killed, injured, and missing, the blasts of Black Friday continue to have a shadowy, mysterious presence in the life of the city. While there have been periodic efforts at grasping the significance of the attacks, the Black Friday blasts remained, until the recent serial bombings on Mumbai’s commuter trains, in the shadow of the riots that shook Bombay for two months in December 1992 and January 1993. The life of the event in public memory, its affective significance, and its social effects remain highly complex even though, or perhaps because, the perpetrators have been discovered and a conspiracy case against them has been ongoing for the past twelve years in a court set up especially for this case.

The physical signs of the destruction caused by the bombs were quickly wiped away as the buildings severely damaged by the blasts were reconstructed, but the event itself was dispersed into the atmosphere of the city, particularly into its cinematic productions and in the offscreen traffic among global criminal networks, movie stars, and ordinary residents, each of which I explore in detail below. These dispersals make it clear that even though there is no memorial to Black Friday, it continues to live in unexpected places and to reappear in unpredictable ways. The significance of the blasts in transforming both the landscape of urban violence and the urban landscape itself is only now beginning to be grasped, in the light of yet another series of blasts.

The temporality of the blasts, the instantaneous denotations and their equally instantaneous dispersal into the city’s atmosphere, created a peculiar situation. The apparent lack of an identifiable perpetrator, given that unmanned, immobile vehicles had served as the agents of the detonations, and the lack of discrimination
in choosing victims created a very estranged sense of “cityness” in the aftermath of the blasts. The city appeared without particularity or individuality, without boundaries, without the recognition of an inside and an outside, of an enemy or an other, but as a pure instance of victimhood. That moment of confusion led, as I argue, to a temporary lapse of memory about enemies and others, unifying the city in its sense of victimhood. It was, as well, a specifically global moment for the city as it joined what was then a very select group of cities thus targeted by acts of terrorist violence.3

But there followed a retrospective reconstitution of those specific boundaries that made for the particular character and ethos of the city. Consequently, this essay focuses on the production of the city’s locality in the aftermath of the Bomb while also tracking the specific ways in which it emerged within a global space constituted by terror. The Bomb and its aftermath served to rupture spatial history without appearing to do so on the surface of it.

By following the micronarratives surrounding the Bomb, one perceives the specter of a global struggle to reconstitute politics through acts of militancy and the deployment of space in that particular struggle. But one also finds a tendency to retell the tale in specifically local terms, to seize it and resituate it within a known universe, even while recognizing the loss of certainty in the existence of such a universe and the politics that constitute it. This essay therefore follows these micro-narratives not as a means of understanding terrorism—its philosophical or phenomenological meanings—but in order to foreground the sites at which the meanings of contemporary terror are being forged and generated. But before moving on to Black Friday, I briefly consider the genealogy of these acts of serial terror, which use the illusion of simulaneity to paralyze entire cities, abstractions of human collectives, made possible by the organizational space constituted by infrastructural networks.

**Serial Terror**

It might be accurate to describe the serial attack as a particular subset of a much more widespread form of urban terror—that of the circulation of the car bomb or the human bomb, disguised by the anonymity of everyday urban circulation to deliver deadly and explosive cargoes. But one might in fact gain something by

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3. Black Friday, as generally known, took place just a month after the first attempt to bomb the World Trade Center towers in New York. Paul Virilio, among others, has written about the significance of the Bombay blasts in relation to the first World Trade Center attack as inaugurating a new form of terror (see Virilio 2000).
keeping these sorts of attacks analytically separate. The spectacular, incendiary dimensions of coordinated serial attacks of urban destruction and warfare have been media staples since the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in 2001. The illusion of simultaneity and the multiplication of the shock effect on the spectator are a hallmark of these early twenty-first-century bombings—Casablanca and Mumbai in 2003, Madrid in 2004, London and New Delhi in 2005, and now, once again, Mumbai in 2006. These attacks have been read as acts of urban destruction. Yet, in a curious way, these attacks are also acts of urban performance, in and through which the particular cities under attack appear as reified and abstract representations of themselves, as still points in a world of incessant flows, and as territorially contained geobodies.

The highly coordinated nature of these bombings, signaled by the multiplicity of bombs and targets, both mimics and inverts the logic of the aerial attacks of cities during World War II, which were calculated to destroy entire cities by carpeting their dense and flammable centers with incendiary explosives. In the air war, the bombs dropped from above took in the city through the veil of clouds, through the bombardier’s bird’s-eye perspective. The space of the city was a calculated guess, made concrete by carpeting large regions whose urban form was suggested by the density of building. These contemporary attacks, by comparison, achieve comprehensive urban destruction by strategically choosing the points of deployment and carefully calculating the blockage of circulation. The space of the city, orchestrated by the organizational logics of infrastructure, is thus perversely and precisely revealed in its destruction. In so doing, these simultaneous attacks draw on both military strategy and urban planning to target the city in its entirety, viewing it as an abstract and reified entity. Using the very connectivity afforded by the infrastructural network itself—the underlying systemic bases that form the conditions of possibility of modern urban planning and indeed contemporary urban life—the coordinated, simultaneous attack turns connectivity into collapse.

Commonplace as this sort of bombing has become in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there is little understanding of the diversity of its effects. Much is invested in the study of the causes and meanings of terrorism but little in the phenomenology of forms that share similar effects in terms of the experience of destruction or in the afterlives of explosions of all sorts that use the blockage of circulation, that reify the city as a performative effect, and that thus become acts of politics by other means or, at the very least, become unfamiliar openings into new histories without familiar normative underpinnings. There is, of course, a broader ontology of the global that is being sketched by focusing on these acts of terrorism and their effects in calling into being a specific kind of
humanity at the global scale. But the microhistories of these events also contribute in specific ways to this ontology. Reading the city, the reorganization of its space and of the ethos of relations, even of its demography, and of the shifting microclimates and qualities of relations within dense nodes and crowds provides a glimpse into the sites at which this ontology of the global becomes evident.

In the recent literature around destruction and violence in contemporary politics, the Bomb emerges as shorthand for inexplicable explosions—events that last mere seconds, that are spectacular and incendiary and highly media friendly. Paradoxically, the Bomb produces both enigmatic silences close to its epicenter as well as visual stimulation for the remotest viewers. Not all bombs produce the same effects of course. Some produce more silence than others. The aerial bombardment of German cities during World War II and the NATO bombing of Belgrade are significant examples of such silences. These were considered acts of war and military strategy even though they rewrote the rules of war. Then, there are intimate acts of terror—perpetrated by known enemies, enemies from within. The three events of serial attacks of Bombay-Mumbai (in 1993, 2003, and 2006)—thought to be perpetrated in order to exact revenge for the violent deaths of Muslims in riots and state-sponsored pogroms—are examples of these “intimate” acts of terror. Similarly, the gas attacks in Tokyo’s underground subway system perpetrated by members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult group and the daily car bombs in Iraq targeting specific religious communities are further examples of intimate acts of terror. These are but a few examples of the globalization of the Bomb as a weapon, a statement, and perhaps a form of efficacious speech.

Another kind of literature is beginning to place these explosions at the center of meditations on the nature of memory and history, on the boundaries of self and other, on the boundaries of public and private, or on forms and concepts of temporality particular to the present time. These projects also trace the genealogy of the contemporary Bomb to the aerial bombings of World War II. The particular relationship among destruction, experience, and memory inaugurated in the aerial bombing campaigns and the explosion of the atomic bomb constitutes a radical point of departure from the point of view of the emergence of humanity as a political category that is specifically global. In each of the situations

4. See Faisal Devji’s recent work on the landscapes of jihad (2005), an important contribution to this effort.
5. For two examples, see Sebald 2003 and Murakami 2001. Murakami 2001 is based on extensive interviews with the survivors of the gas attacks in Tokyo’s underground subway system.
6. See, for example, Hannah Arendt (1955), in which she discusses the relationship between technological development, in particular atomic weapons, and the emergence of mankind, the concept that unifies the present for all people on earth for the first time in history.
of sustained bombings that I mentioned above—bombing from either above or below the ground—there are some startling similarities in the experience of the Bomb and the recollections it produces or the silences it induces. Similarly, there are particular ways in which the Bomb’s effects are dispersed in everyday life, specific to each situation. It is also clear that the Bomb is specially connected to urban sites, not only because they are targets, but also because the effects of the Bomb seem to partake specifically in the sort of life and culture peculiar to cities. Taking the Bomb as a point of departure or exploring it as a phenomenological artifact means exploring its position as a node in a thicket of contingencies that then congeals into a history.

The nature of this history is not predictable, because unlike a nationalist history, for example, the public that the Bomb brings together is not entirely predictable. It is an ephemeral public, accidentally constituted as spectators or bystanders, global in its reach and, at the same time, dispersed into the very air of the city and the experience of its dwellers. As one strand of literature and artistic work points out, bombs are also agents of regeneration or seeds of change, but their effects are achieved through a series of dispersals, which conceal the experience itself, turn it into the substance of a traumatic return or a return that works itself out indirectly by gathering in the collective body and memory of the city.7

Situating Black Friday: Crime, Cinema, and the City

In the immediate aftermath of Black Friday, no group stepped forward to take responsibility, and a strange silence prevailed around the blasts. Rumors swirled around in the silence, and newspapers kept reporting more blasts, without even checking the veracity of the reports. Despite the atmosphere of confusion and silence, however, the blasts came to be seen as the Muslims’ answer to the rage and violence of militant Hindus who orchestrated the widespread destruction of Muslim lives and properties during the deadly riots of December 1992 and January 1993.8 An early breakthrough in the investigations revealed that one of the

7. For some examples of these positions, see Kevin Hetherington (2004) on Manchester’s urban museum, Urbis, constructed after a bombing by the Irish Republican Army destroyed the city center in 1995, and the Italian sculptor Paolo Canevari’s work (2004) on the blitz attacks on Liverpool during World War II, a project called Seed that was shown at the Liverpool Biennial.

8. These riots are widely thought to have reprogrammed the city’s ethos—transforming it from one of easy coexistence of various communities into an intolerant and ethnically cleansed city. A number of scholars invoke these riots as a watershed and landmark in the social and psychic history of Mumbai. On this point about how the blasts were perceived, see especially Hansen 2001.
vehicles used for the bombings — one that had failed to detonate — was registered in the name of a relative of Mustaq Memon, a Mumbai gangster popularly known as Tiger Memon. That clue led to further revelations of the extent to which the famed Bombay underworld — a territorializing and extrajudicial force to reckon with in its own right — had been involved in the bombings. If indeed Black Friday could be seen as an action in response to the violence against Muslims during the 1992–93 riots, then the blasts signaled a serious polarization of the underworld along communal lines, which was a shock to the city. But these “facts” of the underworld’s involvement must be recognized as such against the distinctly cinematic backdrop of Bombay crime films, within which the figure of the gangster was associated with a particular, ambivalent heroism.

The relationship between cinema and the narratives around Black Friday gains significance in the light of the critical role played by cinema in the construction of the South Asian public sphere. Since the fifties, popular cinematic narratives favored the crime genre to comment on the decline of a modern, democratic public sphere and the lost promises of freedom from colonial rule. Bombay and its criminal gangs were, in particular, the subject of many of these films. More generally, the relationship between Bombay and popular cinema is a two-way street — cinema forms the genetic code of the city’s self-image, and narratives about the city are often deeply intertwined with the cinematic vision of the city and with specific characters and situations drawn from the narratives of Bombay films. This particular triangulation of crime, cinema, and the city therefore rendered the bombings and their perpetrators comprehensible within a very specific framing.

The gangster is a central figure within these narratives. As several scholars have pointed out, there is a recursive relationship between the worlds of cinema and crime, and the Bombay underworld appears as a prominent character in Bombay films and also draws inspiration for its own acts and behavior from those very films. The complicated, real-life connections between the two worlds — of financial and other transactions — on which the business of Bombay has fed and


10. For that matter, one encounters this sense of the cinematic even when reading a book like Gregory David Roberts’s Shantaram, a quasi-fictional, autobiographical account (which is being produced as a Hollywood film). For an elaboration of this argument, see Rao 2006, on recent works of popular nonfiction and social science whose subject is Bombay.

11. The literature on this subject includes the work of Ranjani Mazumdar (2002) and Ravi Vasudevan (2004), who have written extensively on the relationship between cinema and urban space and cinema and urban subjectivity.
flourished over many decades, completes the circle of relationships in which the
two are enmeshed. The powerful but culturally specific imbrication of this genre
with the “reality” of urban experience is reflected in the fact that in reading regu-
lar news reports of criminal activity in Bombay, for example, it is often not pos-
sible to tell whether cinema was duplicating the reality of the underworld or gang-
sters, as actors, were duplicating their cinematic image. The case of Sanjay Dutt,
a prominent film star and the son of an important politician who was accused of
being part of the Black Friday conspiracy, involves all of these elements in a literal
sense and has, predictably, drawn enormous public attention. Narratives around
Black Friday and especially around the identity of the perpetrators are thus cin-
ematic in the sense that cinema provided the imaginary for constructing plausible
social scenarios around the unusual personas involved in the bombings.12

Throughout the seventies and eighties, Bombay cinema popularized and
immortalized the underworld’s connections to the supply chains of international
goods and products, which in turn positioned criminals in a particular relation-
ship to the flow of the metropolis. They were integral as smugglers, pirates, risky
entrepreneurs of free-trade and unregulated transactions, and indeed as the tacti-
cal bundlers of arcane and difficult economic exchanges and market logics. In this
capacity, both gangsters and their doppelgangers—the criminal protagonists of
Bombay cinema—had a particular, heroic resonance within the everyday world
of the metropolis, conditioned by its habitus of cash, commerce, and specula-
tion.13 They were positioned firmly on the “inside” of the city, constituting the
infrastructure of its organization and facilitating its flows.

These illegal flows were also, however, resituating the city within a global,
shadow economy of arms, drugs, and money laundering, dispersing the territory
and the substance of the city, both literally and figuratively, beyond its muni-
cipal boundaries to international locations like Dubai and Hong Kong. Prominent
gangsters like Dawood Ibrahim relocated to Dubai in the early eighties but con-
tinued to run their empires in Mumbai using technologies of remote connection.14

12. In regard to this element of surprise about the identity of the perpetrator, Black Friday is
similar to the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, where there was also public skepticism and
disbelief about the identity of the perpetrators.

13. Yash Chopra’s Deewar (1975) brings together these many aspects of the gangster figure. The
hero, Vijay (played by the superstar Amitabh Bachchan), is both a smuggler and a figure whose story
comments on the broken promises of the nation to deliver justice and equity for all citizens.

14. Dawood Ibrahim, a key figure in this transitional phase of the criminal economy, is discussed
in greater detail below. Here, it is important to note that his gang is popularly referred to as the
D-Company, a professional, transnational, corporate-like outfit.
Criminality thus not only pervaded the ethos and the imagination of the city, but it was also central to its territorial development and to its economy of connections. The redeployment of these criminal flows, along with spectacular violence, in the service of bringing about revolutionary social change in the relations between communities that had coexisted uneasily since the partition of British India, became a key feature of Black Friday. This also meant that the imagination of the figure of the gangster had to be forever altered, transformed from the ambivalently heroic figure of the seventies and eighties to a new urban type. But it also explains, to some extent, the disbelief over the news that the gangster was implicated in what was seen to be the distinct domain of the domestic politics of the nation, always brushing up against its partitioned other—Pakistan—its severed limb and the limit of its liberal and secular political claims.

The blasts, in other words, decisively separated the underworld from its secure position on the inside of this city of cash, commerce, and cosmopolitanism, hurling it into a new, as yet unfamiliar, world of international terror and long-distance death on a massive scale, as these events resituated the city within a different current of global flows. The rupture effected by the Bomb in the fabric of the public connected to these events can thus also be read as a rupture between the city and its cinematic counterpart, its characters and the habitus of everyday belonging of its residents. More precisely, perhaps, this rupture can be expressed as a rupture of secure understandings of inside and outside, of the moral boundaries of belonging expressed in these abstract categories. By configuring criminality, spectacular violence, and revolutionary social change in the same event, Black Friday was unique in the political landscape, different from previous and subsequent events of terrorist violence.15

One of the surprises thrown up by Black Friday as a sociohistorical event and process, then, is that in this seamless slide from crime to terror, a well-understood cinematic sense of urban reality was both reinforced and ruptured, because the perpetration of terror on the part of underworld figures somehow exceeded that cinematic sense of urban reality. The cinematic genealogies of the shift from the world of crime to the world of terror are also comments about the emergent worlds of the globalizing city, the region, and the ethico-political subjects whose location makes it possible to contemplate this world remade by terror. The significance of Black Friday was registered and dispersed in the public imaginary in several

15. For an interesting and unusual discussion of terrorist activity in India prior to the 1990s, commonly associated with the political and secessionary struggles of Kashmir and Punjab, see especially Nandy 1995, 2003.
recent popular films—including Black Friday, based on Zaidi’s book of the same name, which is an excellent journalistic account of the postblasts police investigation, and Company, a fictional account of gang wars in Mumbai, made in 2002.16

**Riots, Crowds, and Blasts: Imagining the Perpetrator**

The transformation of the gangster into a terrorist, the explicit politicization of this familiar subject of the public sphere, is thus a significant event in the landscape of Bombay.17 The interpenetration of the world of crime and that of terror signals a departure from the habitus of crime in the city, in which clandestine dealings constitute an accepted way of getting things done, especially in urban localities.18 Although the use of shadowy routes of economic circulation are commonplace in the execution of terrorist acts, what is new here is the explicit politicization (or communalization, particularly of the Muslim gangster) of a hitherto “business”-oriented community, bound by rules of gangster honor, or, increasingly, in the age of globalization, by the abstract rules of business firms. What is also new is the economy of violence within which this transformation occurs.

Since 1993, the blasts have appeared regularly in public discourse through accounts of the arrests and the trials of the accused. The case against the defendants is a complex amalgamation of accusations involving people arrested for various acts—including the actual blasts; the conspiracy hatched in Dubai, Bombay, and supposedly Pakistan; the landing of arms and explosives at sites along the coast, south of Bombay, which were routinely used by the underworld for smuggling contraband; and the storage of explosives in warehouses in towns sur-

16. The film Black Friday, which was directed by Anurag Kashyap and completed in 2004, was released only in early 2007. Its release had been blocked for more than two years on the ground that its circulation would prejudice the court against the accused in the ongoing blasts conspiracy case. Since the case finally entered its sentencing phase, in September 2006, the film was cleared for release. I had an opportunity to view the film at a special preview on the director’s invitation in August 2004, which allowed me to make this anticipatory argument. Since its release in February 2007, the film has played to good audiences in Bombay and elsewhere and has received considerable critical acclaim for taking on such a “difficult subject.” But the more fascinating and “cinematic” event for the public is the daily drama surrounding the film star Sanjay Dutt’s deferred sentencing, which was supposed to be pronounced at the same time as the film’s release. On July 31, 2007, after a long public drama, Sanjay Dutt finally received a sentence of six years in prison for a crime connected to the blasts but not to the conspiracy.

17. Gilbert King, in his strange journalistic account The Most Dangerous Man in the World: Dawood Ibrahim (2004), traces the career of Ibrahim, the man thought to be behind Black Friday, and claims him to be more dangerous than Osama bin Laden on account of his criminal and terrorist activities, which began with the Bombay blasts.

18. See Hansen (n.d.) for a discussion of what he calls “infra-power,” in which he unpacks the legitimacy and authority of gangster figures.
rounding Bombay. These separate acts, involving a large number of actors, were brought together to create a single conspiracy case in which the accused were charged with sedition and waging war against the country.19

Significantly, these charges of sedition were later dropped on the defense lawyer’s argument that the blasts should be seen as retaliation for the riots and the suffering of the minority community rather than as antinational acts (see Zaidi 2002). The effect of the argument is, of course, the reabsorption of the accused into a familiar discourse of internecine conflict between the majority and minority communities rather than the acknowledgment of either an external attack or a new combination of militant practices aimed not so much at the state as at making political statements outside the familiar language of the state. The blasts conspiracy case, still ongoing more than twelve years after the arrests, is perhaps the longest-running criminal case in the world, certainly in India. The date for delivery of the final judgment in the case has been changed several times in the past two years, and it was only in September 2006 that the case entered its sentencing phase. Coming so closely on the heels of the serial train bombings in July 2006, the sentences have drawn enormous public interest.

Even though there has been regular judicial traffic around Black Friday, the significance of the event has not been appreciated, nor has it received the sort of attention or commemoration, the mourning and grieving, that the riots of December 1992 and January 1993 did in public political discourse.20 The riots seem to provide a ready, symbolic anchor for stories about the city’s damaged and traumatized psyche, its demise and deterioration objectively caused by various political decisions, including the closure of the city’s textile mills starting in the 1980s.21 They provide, in other words, a recognizable point of reference in the reenactments of a particular kind of traumatic memory, located in the delirious zone between forgetting and remembering, between repetition and singularity.

19. Nearly two hundred people were accused in this case, and one hundred people were finally sentenced when the case concluded in July 2007.

20. Subsequent attacks like the two coordinated attacks in August 2003 have received more sensational media coverage in contrast to the sober and legalistic coverage of Black Friday. But more than media coverage, the riots also provide a significant point of departure in the scholarly literature on Bombay. Indeed, the emergence of the city as a subject of research is closely tied to the catastrophic experiences of its residents during the riots. This is also explored further in Rao 2006. More recently, the sensational media coverage of Portugal’s extradition of Abu Salem, a prominent member of the aforementioned Dawood Ibrahim’s gang, thought to be involved in the 1993 blasts, has brought the event back into public recollection, but it has done so more by its focus on the capture of a larger-than-life gangster figure, known to be centrally involved in the extortion of film-world personalities.

The blasts, however, inaugurated a new form of violence, affecting a whole population, bound only by the physical and conceptual limits of the city. In the comparable context of the attacks on the World Trade Center, a sense of outrage and injury to the abstract body of the city immediately gave rise to a memory culture and a politics of mourning, constituting and consolidating the boundaries of the community affected. By contrast, Black Friday etched itself very differently into the city’s psychic life. It seems to have become a part of a subterranean current of demolition and destruction whose logic also informs the massive efforts underway to reconstruct Mumbai and to remake it into a “world-class” city. Through its thick connection to the riots of 1992–93, Black Friday has become imbricated in more general narratives about the city’s decline, including those connected with the spatial, social, and cultural transformation of the city after liberalization and deindustrialization.

Yet there is a fundamental difference between the economies addressed and created by these two forms of violence. The sort of violence between communities seen in urban riots is more easily assimilated into the logic of partition and national citizenship. Such assimilation happens in oblique ways, through everyday practices of space making, subtle and ephemeral forms of distinctions and identifications that are subterranean rather than fully blown hatreds. Survival in this densely crowded city is in fact closely tied to the cultivation of a habitus that enables the resident to read these signs at the appropriate moments in time and to cultivate an attitude of detachment and distraction at other moments.22 Some of the writing on riots points to how the engagement with the modern city and its technologies of power is folded into the territoriality of nation-space in moments of crisis. Thus the demarcation of neighborhood territory along the Indian-Pakistani divide, with designated border zones, was not uncommon during riots in Bombay.

The urban communal riot, as a form of collective violence, has a particular genealogy in South Asia, well understood through the writings of anthropologists and historians on colonialism, secularism, and the historical formation of majorities and minorities. While riots can and do break out simultaneously in different localities, their scale is intimate, the enemy is known or suspected; they mark out specific territories and specific bodies for violation and leave, in their wake, half-destroyed neighborhoods and injured lives within them. The riot is the expression of a particular logic by which the crowd becomes an index of what Thomas Blom Hansen calls “community sovereignty.” As Hansen points out, “The use of

22. Radhika Subrahmanian (1999) makes a similar point in her essay on the Bombay riots.
the crowd and its violence as a legitimate political expression of anger and sovereignty is extensive across the political spectrum in contemporary India. As a repertoire of authority and moral argument, ‘community’ is very powerful indeed "qua" its historical connotations of delineating a measure of ‘collective intimacy,’ that is, its incorporation of issues of honour, family, bodies, and reproduction” (2005: 183).

The riot seems to work, both in the moment and in the aftermath, through certain evidentiary holes that spawn multiple narratives by imploding time, space, and memory into formations of rumor, silence, and testimony. The narrative structure imposed on the events postviolence is one familiar from countless situations, mixing hurt and anger, legalistic rhetoric about property damage, and the most intimate forms of recollecting personal violation and tragedy. “Riot memory” is often narrative and nonvisual, often extracted through inquisitorial interrogations, archived predominantly in judicial reports, and recovered in moments of “involuntary recollection” (memoire involontaire) of the sort that Walter Benjamin described in his essay on Proust (1969). It seems worth asking how and why the structures of memory were different in the case of Black Friday.

**Public Works: From Crowd to City**

Unlike a riot, where angers and grievances of the crowd are played out against the backdrop of calculated desecration, the blasts were played out against a different calculus. Departing from this logic of territorial implosion, the blasts targeted the entire city in one go. They represent an abstraction of violence from the arena of particular communities to the different conceptual plane of the city. The choice of infrastructure — the underlying organizational structure of the city — and specifically the choice of public targets rather than particular localities, is a calculated and symbolic one.

Here, I speculate that this choice might be connected to the normative underpinnings of the modern city, its promises of freedom in and through the constitution of an abstract public. As Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin argue, the “modern infrastructural ideal,” which undergirds modern urban planning, situated networked infrastructure systems as “little less than ‘the structural underpinnings of the public realm’” (2001: 43). Similarly, Paul Rabinow notes that the modernist city, with its ideology of planned infrastructure and the public realm dependent on such planning, was “one of the most complete examples of modernity,” at the nexus of practices aimed at synthesizing “historical and natural elements into an object” that was to serve as a “regulator of modern society” (1989: 12).
Infrastructure of this fixed kind, embedded in the planned, modernist city, thus literally and discursively constituted an archive of the modern public sphere in two senses—as its first principle (arche) and as the underground material trace that might be reconstituted as archaeological evidence for a rapidly transforming city and its location in relation to the project of modernity. In the modernist imaginary, infrastructure bounded the community of the city in the specific sense that it was a device for positioning “residents, territories and resources in specific ensembles where the energies of individuals can be most efficiently deployed and accounted for” (Simone 2004: 407). The modernist city, a product of urban planning, as a social form articulated by infrastructure, thus functions as a platform for the constitution of a public through “public works.”

As the underlying base or foundation for spatial organizations, the networked infrastructural systems of the city also created an abstract and synchronous temporality within which the city is enmeshed. The city, seen through the lens of the planner, as an abstract map, can be targeted in its entirety by locking onto its infrastructural networks either in the gaze of the planner or that of the military tactician. The serial attack does precisely this by creating the illusion of simultaneity in targeting multiple points as links in a chain. This manner of bombing, which is becoming increasingly prevalent, dispenses with the locality altogether by using the connectivity afforded by networked infrastructure to create a unified target. In such acts, the connection to locality and local cause, so central to the performative dimension of the riot, also necessarily becomes abstract and global, however localized the intention of the attackers might be. Thus the effects of the coordinated serial attack, itself requiring considerable “master planning,” necessarily exceed the causes that motivate such attacks. In this manner the Bomb inverts the logic of the riot, becoming, in a macabre fashion, one with the “public works” system. In these multiple senses, one might say that the engagement of everyday infrastructures by terror attacks brings the City to the fore as the object of a different sort of planning.

In the contemporary period of globalization, infrastructural conditions or “new” public works, manifested in the extreme contradictions of the actually existing city and its lived reality for the majority of residents, reveal the hollowness of the promise of the city as a site of universal and equal citizenship and entitlements, free from the burdens of origins and pasts in places like Bombay-

23. Master plans of course need not dictate the ultimate shape, direction, or health of the city—planning might provide instead a context for speculation, as is well documented in the case of New York (see Koolhaas 1994).
Mumbai. At the same time, the city as this space of promise— which exists only as a spectral trace because it is unrealized in lived experience— appears to be fulfilled in a perverse way in the moment of death through the destructive and leveling violence of terror with its indiscriminate targets, thus bringing together a city radically divided by communal hatreds. A recent newspaper article about the impending verdict to be delivered in the blasts case, for example, quotes a senior police official declaring, “We hope that Mumbai will get justice.”

In this manner, the coordinated serial attack appears to coalesce the city into a coherent body in a perverse way, aligning map with territory. The older geography of violence connected with the riot conceived of the city as a series of discrete or “sensitive” points—to use the language of police maps—while the geography produced by the Bomb, through its choice of nonparticular, public targets, aligns the city conceptually with its municipal territory.24 This has the effect of creating, albeit accidentally, a singular public, witnessing a mass attack. This is also the geography of urban redevelopment, which has been set in motion by the massive influx of real-estate capital into the city in the years after Black Friday.

The resonances between the half-destroyed city and the city constantly under construction, as new real-estate capital has been flowing in through the very criminal networks that were destroying the city, become increasingly visible through this lens. At the same time, infrastructure, at the global level, is being transformed from fixed devices for positioning “residents, territories and resources in specific ensembles” to an expression of circulating technological surplus, no longer tied to the city as a coherent spatial organizational format.

These spatial transformations and shifts are, once again, available through cinema. In the two films I mentioned earlier—Black Friday and Company—one gets a sense of these shifts by the way in which each references the Black Friday event. Company, I argue elsewhere (Rao n.d.), does so by dwelling at length on the spatial transformation of the city after economic liberalization, seen through the lens of the dispersal of criminal gangs from the city into foreign locations. The long-distance focus of the gangsters on the city, the oblique references to gang war as a consequence of an internecine conflict, and the general dissipation of an ethos of honor among gangsters frame the story in a manner of an ethnographic exploration into the psyche of the city after the blasts. By contrast, the feature film based on the journalistic account Black Friday: The True Story of the Bombay

24. See, for example, the maps of various neighborhoods under the jurisdiction of specific police stations in Mumbai for a sense of the law-and-order geography of the city. Maps are accessible at www.mumbaipolice.org/police-st_map.htm.
Bomb Blasts resorts to straightforward realism and the normative framing of the riots to tell the story of the gangsters involved in the blasts and the cops’ investigations. Black Friday—the film—while appearing to be objective and true to the events, is also, of course, framing the city in the manner that is most familiar from the narrative accounts of the riots and the nationalist reading that they engender. The spatiality of its framing similarly reflects this perceptual position.

Viewed from the perspective of the city, these coordinated, master-planned bombings bring together the contradictory dimensions of the transformations affecting the idea of the city in the contemporary moment, using this technological surplus to turn the city into a weapon—both an economic weapon of exploitation against its residents and a target for terrorizing them. An accidental public, constituted through the work of the blasts, bears witness to the cultural transformation of the crowd into a radically estranged community connected only as witness to a momentary act of mass destruction. But the prone and blasted city also bears witness, I suggest, through this accidentally constituted public and through the shared perceptual technologies like cinema and built form that shape it, to a new, collective moment in which the significance of known forms of authority, morality, and sovereignty is suspended and reconstituted. The city emerges in this moment as a temporary holding platform for shared cultural forms and as a platform for their transformation. In this manner the Bomb is as much a “public works project” as any other infrastructural project, reassembling space, time, and community in the moment of the explosion and its aftermath.

Disconnected from the logic of “community sovereignty” as expressed by the violent, rioting crowd, the Black Friday blasts also exceeded the instrumental rationalities of violent engagement, especially because they failed as acts calculated to destabilize the country by sowing discord between communities leading to further violence. Unlike the riot, in which agency is easily ascribed to a particular group of perpetrators and, indeed, agency is publicly sought through violent acts, the blasts left behind a mysterious hole into which no perpetrator was willing to step. The mass public constituted by these acts also, similarly, lost its organic qualities qua ethnically constituted community. Substituted by an abstract public that does not refer to any particular community as target, there is no longer a stable moral economy within which a calculus of cause and agency might be elaborated. The terrorist as subject therefore had to be understood within a different narrative calculus, one that connected crime, cinema, and the city, or criminality, spectacular, violence, and revolutionary social change, as I suggested above.
Accidental Publics

The rupture effected by the Bomb in the fabric of the public connected to these events can be read by comparison as a rupture between the city and its cinematic counterpart, between cinematic characters and the habitus of everyday belonging of its residents. More precisely, perhaps, as I observed earlier, this rupture can be expressed as a rupture of secure understandings of inside and outside, of the moral boundaries of belonging. Insofar as this ethnographic speculation of a rupture is accurate, one might compare this reading of the effects of the Bomb to those of catastrophic accidents, involving the failure of large systems. Both accidents and attacks share certain phenomenological features in that they initiate similar states of quarantine, or suspension, in which violence and devastation are made available to perception. At the same time, they are also states of suspicion about cause and specifically about the externality of cause.

The public thus connected to and constituted by witnessing these events is one constituted by fear, doubt, and uncertainty about cause and origin. As Michael Warner writes, in the era of mass mediation, doubt and worry about cause are crucial ingredients of politics (Warner 1993). The contingency of accidents, together with this element of doubt, also conditions notions of external cause or outside agency. In the case of an attack on the very conditions of possibility of the organization of the city — its infrastructure — the idea of contingency and the involvement of extrinsic cause, outside the system, takes on a moral shade.

Extrinsic error has a particular genealogy in relation to the modern, systemic accident. As Paul Virilio (2003) has suggested, the denial of the fact that systemic failure might be intrinsic to modern sociotechnical systems amounts to the denial of the accident’s inevitability and the assignation of blame for such accidents to unpredictable yet identifiable external errors. This denial creates uncertainty about the origins of accidents that in turn feeds into a politics of fear. The moment of doubt produced by systemic failures consists in raising the question, was the failure an accident or did it happen by design?

Warner goes further, showing that the popular discourse of disasters — that is, a genre that revolves around the display of injured bodies — mediates the desire of citizens of a liberal public sphere to “abstract themselves into a privileged public disembodiment” (2002: 176). The public thus constituted around accidents involving catastrophic, systemic failure, through the mediation of a discourse of disaster, is racked by doubt over the origins and cause of the event of failure but at the same time kept in thrall and fear by the display of injured bodies.

In the case of events like Black Friday, a similar suspicion about cause raises
the question of how to produce an explicit contemplation of the outside or the external as well as an explicitly external positioning, that of the deliberately distanced viewer who can clearly distinguish between inside and outside by properly reading the visual signs and signatures of the city or knowing the enemy. A fear that the wandering error/externality of the sort that produces catastrophic, systemic failure might mutate into terror has increasingly become an everyday fear.\textsuperscript{25}

It is a fear born of the increasing integration of causes at an abstract, global scale, reflected in the choice of targets. In this context, both the silences and the revelations in the story of Black Friday provide a glimpse into attempts on the ground to make sense of the increasing complications in developing an explicitly external positioning of the sort that would allow a clear moral demarcation between the worlds of the city and those of its enemies.

Although there is an increasingly shrill discourse surrounding the nature of the “enemy”—a reappearance of certainty, as witnessed in the discourse surrounding the recent train bombings in Mumbai—there is also an acute sense of awareness that Black Friday has transformed the landscape of violence not only for Bombay-Mumbai but also for the nation as a whole. Instances of communal riots are becoming increasingly rare as terrorist attacks increase. A notable exception to this situation was the Gujarat riots, or rather pogroms, of 2002, when several thousand Muslims were ruthlessly killed by parastatal militant groups. The brutality and barbarism of the violence in part draws on its intimate nature, which is in sharp contrast to the “accident-like” imagery associated with serial attacks. What is also interesting is that each instance of serial attack on Bombay-Mumbai (1993, 2003, and 2006) has been positioned by the public as an act of retaliation for riots and assaults elsewhere—1993 as revenge for the riots that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque, 2003 as an answer to the Gujarat riots, and 2006 as the response to the now more generic “attacks on Muslims” in Kashmir and elsewhere in India.\textsuperscript{26} Each time, Bombay-Mumbai has become a stage for this sort

\begin{itemize}
\item[25.] See Baudrillard 2003: 98–99.
\item[26.] This list of riot–terror attack pairs likely suggests that these forms of violence have been thoroughly “communalized,” that is, violence arising from differences between religious communities. However, there are of course other political situations in which terror attacks are routinely used by militants agitating against the state for a variety of reasons, from class warfare to regional separatism. The relationship I describe here, however, is principally an ethical one, one that exceeds considerations of state sovereignty, which seems to be the explicit and stated goal of other political groups and movements that use terrorist methods like bombing—for example, Maoist guerrillas or separatist militants in Assam or the Punjab. I am grateful to Faisal Devji for pushing me to articulate this point.
\end{itemize}
of violence, not accidentally because its qualities of “cityness” can be deployed against itself.

Specifically, through its particular form of attack, the Bomb has resituated a history of local grievances and violence by moving decisively away from particular objects and particular targets to ones that make possible the constitution of a more generic public under threat. At the same time, it is also, as I have shown above, reappropriated into local narratives and local understandings. Nevertheless, in these reappropriations one also sees a struggle to navigate the new boundaries between inside and outside, between a secure world of belonging and a new one of uncertainty. These struggles signal the increasing abstraction of causes, their integration at a scale exceeding the local that becomes clear only in these inadvertent effects, which themselves exceed the intentions of the perpetrators of these actions. I speculate here that the Bomb, as agent and event, seems responsible for this reconfiguration, for these resituations, by its particular form.

**Fossils of the Future**

*The series of weapons tests had fused the sand in layers, and the pseudo-geological strata condensed the brief epochs, microseconds in duration, of thermonuclear time. Typically, the island inverted the geologist’s maxim, “the key to the past lies in the present.” Here the key to the present lay in the future. The island was a fossil of time future, its bunkers and blockhouses illustrating the principle that the fossil record of life was one of armour and exoskeleton.*

— J. G. Ballard, “The Terminal Beach”

In his book, *Buda’s Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb*, urbanist Mike Davis sketches what he refers to as a “short history of the car bomb” (2007). It is a history of what he calls the “quotidian workhorse of urban terrorism” and an attempt to understand what makes the car bomb—shorthand for explosions of a certain kind—such a “formidable and undoubtedly permanent source of urban insecurity.” For Davis, the history of the car bomb leads, in a teleological fashion, to the history of globalization and empire and the emergence of new divisions and exclusions reflected in the spread of contemporary urban forms, of which Baghdad, with its daily car bombs and its heavily fortified “green zone,” is but an extreme manifestation.

Read specifically as weapons of urban destruction, such “quotidian” bombs are strategic, indiscriminate, ruthless, anonymous, and calculated to take by surprise. And they are indeed a globalized form of urban action, easily executed in
any part of the world. Yet it is also possible that there may be no easy way to tell a global history of the Bomb through the teleology presented by contemporary urban forms. The history of the Bomb, I venture to propose, could turn out to be the bombing of such linear narratives of history themselves, their fragmentation and dissolution in favor of thinking through emergent forms and actions as propositions in reassembling urban and regional worlds in a particularly complex moment of globalization.

Taking a particular form of bombing—that of the multiple, coordinated attack or the serial bombing, pioneered in the Black Friday attacks in Bombay in 1993—as my point of departure, I have attempted to read these acts of reassembly and the sort of history that they potentially release, one that might remain buried and dispersed through an underground network of associations with allied phenomena. My ethnographic exploration of the Black Friday attacks in Bombay reveals the affinities between such attacks and a diverse range of phenomena and fields of action. These include the functioning of criminal networks; the cinematic affinities not only to the attacks themselves but to the role of cinema in recognizing the perpetrator; the role that cinema plays in the self-image of the city and its urban types; the phenomenological affinities of attacks with accidents and natural disaster, especially in the ways in which such phenomena constitute a public that exceeds normative bounds of community; and, finally, the affinities between the organization of such attacks and the acts of planning by which cities are rendered operable platforms for living and working. Taking this ethnography as a point of departure and of connection, I have moved through these various fields of action to think through the phenomenon of the Bomb as a form of “heavy media,” of the disruptions it leaves in its wake not only in terms of physical scars and wounds of experience but also in ways that render a new field of apprehension, which has yet to be identified, thinkable.27

These possibilities are already visible in the few texts written about phenomena such as the aerial bombings of German cities (see Hewitt 1983, Sebald 2003) and the serial gas attacks in the Tokyo underground subway system (see Murakami 2001). These works argue that the Bomb’s effects can be measured in the manner in which it disrupts, shatters, and fragments the flow of history, of causality and intentionality, in wartime and in peacetime. The threat of the bomb produces new notions of time and space that linger long after the explosion.

W. G. Sebald’s lectures, collected in the book On the Natural History of

27. I owe the phrase “heavy media” to Colleen Macklin, who suggested this term as a way of capturing the Bomb’s function as media.
Destruction, make this point forcefully as he meditates on the literary silence around the aerial bombing of Germany and the lingering traces of that traumatic event in artistic pursuit. Geographer Kenneth Hewitt similarly raises the question about why war, and in particular the destruction of urban places by bombing, has received no treatment from geographers even though, he writes, “few of the phenomena we study are unaffected by the occasions and the outcomes of violent encounters. Urban places and their geography, in particular, are deeply embroiled in the preparations for and consequences of war making.” “There is even,” he writes, “a certain direct reciprocity between war and cities” (Hewitt 1983: 258; original emphasis).

The taboo surrounding the subject of aerial bombing during World War II outside the field of military history is itself remarkable. The relation between destruction and experience is touched on instead in texts that focus on the accidental effects of bombing—the role, for instance, of aerial bombing as the basis of postwar modernist planning and reconstruction. destruction and annihilation are thus transformed through their accidental effects into positive forces. The Bomb is thus brought into the same logical space as the bulldozer, into the space of capital’s “creative destruction.” Yet, the death of places, their annihilation and their reduction to iconic images or maps enabling mourning or remembrance, remains predominant in a world preoccupied with war and the constant calibration of enmity. Treating war as disaster reduces destruction to an effect akin to that produced by a natural calamity (Hewitt 1983).

In Underground, for instance, Haruki Murakami observes a similarity between the effects of the Kobe earthquake and those of the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo underground system. He writes, “Common to both was an element of overwhelming violence . . . the source and nature of the violence may have differed but the shock in both cases was equally devastating . . . in some ways, the two events may be likened to the front and back of one massive explosion. Both were nightmarish eruptions beneath our feet—from underground—that threw all the latent contradictions and weak points of our society into frighteningly high relief” (Murakami 2001: 237). The inability to pinpoint the sources of the violence is but one dimension of the ways in which the explosion disrupts the predictability of everyday life and turns it into a precarious and unstable state. The subject loses his or her mooring, the vantage point from which to achieve clarity and to forecast the

28. Paradoxically, this shift of focus from annihilation to creative regeneration, in effect, partakes of the process by which bourgeois thought has always sought to deny the creative potential of destruction and indeed the place of destruction in the movement of capital. See Berman 1983 for an elaboration of this connection.
future. Thus we find an appeal to a “natural history,” to a condition into which all human history might retreat at a foreseeable point in the future as a result of the pursuit of destruction.

This condition is best described by J. G. Ballard in his short story “The Terminal Beach,” in which the protagonist finds himself wandering through the ruins of a thermonuclear test site, where the consequences of the destructive experiment are preserved as “fossils of the future.” The ruins of the island invert the place of the fossil in the present—instead of serving as a key to the past, the fossil of the future, created by a disaster lasting mere microseconds, lives in the present and serves as a key to the present. The future, in other words, is embedded in the present in the same way that the presence of a fossil embeds the past in the present. More significantly, perhaps, this “fossil of the future” has an effect on the generation of historical consciousness similar to the more familiar trace of the past. In a fashion similar to Ballard’s terminal beach, the Bombay of Black Friday is an island that is a “fossil of time future,” its half-destroyed visage illustrating what the fossil record of life would look like. That future is now, in a city called Mumbai, whose half-built, globalizing visage is haunted by Black Friday, a moment in which several coincidences—such as the city’s increasingly dispersed spatial imagination—converged in the wake of the Bomb.

Ultimately this future is not one of return to a “natural” state—a state of no return, of complete and utter inertia and entropy—delinked from any notion of an autonomous human history. It represents an ongoing history, which connects the future of cities to further destruction and violence perpetrated as acts of politics, using the technologies of the city itself to great effect against it, scrambling local and global causes into effects that exceed either highly specific grievances or highly abstract causes, using the city as a platform. These are acts that make manifest shifting social relations within apparently destroyed landscapes, or, in other words, make manifest the continuity of the City in the wake of the Bomb.

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