The Image After Strathern

The image after Strathern: art and persuasive relationality in India's sanguinary politics

Abstract:
Publicly enacted blood extractions (principally blood donation events and petitions or paintings in blood) in mass Indian political contexts (for instance, protest or political memorial events and election rallies) are a noteworthy present-day form of political enunciation in India, for such extractions – made to speak as and on behalf of political subject positions - are intensely communicative. Somewhat akin to the transformative fasts undertaken by Gandhi, such blood extractions seek to persuade from the moral high ground of political asceticism. This essay seeks to shed light on how and why these extractions have become such a means, with a particular focus on blood-based portraiture. What makes such portraits – chiefly of politicians and 'freedom fighter' martyrs – interesting from a Strathernian point of view is their immanent persuasive relationality. The insights of Strathern can help us to explicate these objects' dynamic relational features, while reciprocally, the portraits may help us to illuminate and clarify the very particular and interesting nature of the way Strathern treats (and creates) images.

Keywords: blood, portraiture, India, politics, Strathern

Publicly enacted blood extractions (principally blood donation events and petitions or paintings in blood) in mass Indian political contexts (for instance, protest or political memorial events and election rallies) are a noteworthy present-day form of political enunciation in India, for such extractions – made to speak as and on behalf of political subject positions - are intensely communicative.[1] Blood extraction may thus be considered a kind of political 'body language' - for if blood is frequently taken to be 'pre- or extra-discursive' (Frazer & Valentine 2006: 98), it is *not* so in the communicative contexts explored in this essay (it is the very stuff of discourse); and yet, at the same time, part of its potential as a mode of political enunciation once lay precisely in the fact that it might be so (that is, free from the ready deception of political symbols, thereby embodying a superior 'reality calibre' [van de Port 2011: 75] than conventional political discourse). Somewhat akin to the transformative fasts undertaken by Gandhi, such blood extractions seek to persuade from the moral high ground of political asceticism (Copeman 2009a: 122-130; Nandy 1970). They are a means of presentation and public positioning of self and cause. This essay seeks to shed light on how and why these extractions have become such a means, with a particular focus on blood-based portraiture. What makes such portraits – chiefly of politicians and 'freedom fighter' martyrs[2] – interesting from

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[1] See Bairy (2009: 112) for a theorisation of political enunciation.
[2] Known as *shaheed*. This essay focuses on the former. On blood portraits of *shaheed* see Copeman (2013).

a Strathernian point of view is their immanent persuasive relationality. The insights of Strathern can help us to explicate these objects' dynamic relational features, while reciprocally, the portraits may help us to illuminate and clarify the very particular and interesting nature of the way Strathern treats (and creates) images.

In his study of Polynesian tattooing – a 'species of political gesture' not dissimilar to blood extraction in making bodily political ideals and affiliations via physical subjection (marking, bleeding, enduring) - Gell (1993: 3) draws on Sperber's (1985) epidemiological model of the spread of cultural representations in order to define an epidemiology of tattooing that would describe the *uneven* and yet *predictable* pattern of occurrence of the phenomenon (Gell 1993: 20). The model is also useful for our purposes: for while various members of the public have proved *resistant* to it (due largely to widespread pronounced fears associated with blood loss), overtly mass 'political' populations in the subcontinent have proved *ultra-susceptible* to this blood-based mode of representation. Of course, like tattooing, political blood extraction 'is not one representation but a protean family of representations' (ibid): political parties compete to collect the most donated blood in West Bengal; anti-superstition campaigners and the followers of a maligned guru each organise letter-writing campaigns in their blood;[3] the Communist Party (CPM) in 1980s West Bengal lines up its activists to sell their blood to raise funds for the building of the Bakreswar power plant (hence the CPM slogan: '*Rokto diye Bakreswar gorbo*' – 'We shall build Bakreswar with our blood'); blood is donated by various political parties to mark their pledge to build a corruption-free nation; underage schoolchildren are 'forced' to donate their blood by Congress party functionaries on the birth anniversary of slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi;[4] blood is donated in protest at 'political' attacks on it by devotees of a controversial devotional movement with ambiguous ties to Sikhism.[5] Blood extractions are also *distributed* within a multitude of ostensibly non-political situations: for instance, blood is donated at colleges, corporate locations and elsewhere. But the *incidence* of the blood extraction representation is dramatically observable and prevalent in explicitly mass political contexts. Indeed, political blood extractions accord with the widespread South Asianist understanding that political potency may be achieved via an ascetic modus operandi of 'self-abnegation' and 'impulse-control' (Nandy 1970: 72). The classic example, in this respect, is the political fast. If fasting withdraws the body from the world, blood donation extends the body into it. However, like fasting, blood extractions are enacted by and/or on the political subject and involve a measure of physical subjection. In both instances powerful political images are formed that complicate the notion of simple self-subjection – for far from being passively represented by others, the protesting faster or blood extractor enforces or inflicts an image of him or herself on others. In the case of

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[3] On the former, see below. The latter is a reference to Karnataka-based guru Swami Nithyananda, whose devotees in 2010 reportedly sent 1,200 letters in blood to the Bangalore High Court in order to protest the legal charges he faced.

[4] http://www.rajasthantalkies.com/2009/08/abvp-protest-for-forced-blood-donation.html, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/58059/India/Kids+forced+to+donate+blood+on+Rajiv+b%E2%80%99day.html.

[5] See Copeman (2012).

blood extraction the image is inflicted through visceral presentation of bodily substance. These are thus interventionist images – images that (seek to) move the viewer to action.

The entire sanguinary politics, from blood donation to the blood petition, is thus imagistic - composed of 'image events' (de Luca 1999). This essay, however, is principally concerned with the very particular image of the portrait in blood. Strathern, we hope to show, provides us with indispensable analytical tools for conceptualising the intervention of the blood portrait that is now a feature of mass Indian politics. How does the Indian blood portrait 'intervene'? The answer lies in its capacity to interdigitate and present for display bodies, persons and relationships in a manner that is aesthetically compelling; in a manner, that is to say, that shares formal properties with the images analysed by Strathern in her ethnographic accounts of Papua New Guinea. Therefore, before proceeding to discuss specific examples of blood portraiture it is necessary to provide a working definition of 'the Strathernian image'. Having analysed the political blood portrait using Strathernian analytical tools, we shall turn to the larger corpus of sanguinary techniques, practices and images in which these portraits are embedded, seeking to explicate both this larger corpus and the nature of the Strathernian image in respect of theories of power.

The Strathernian Image

For our purposes 'the Strathernian image' is at the same time 'the Melanesian image', since we are concerned with Strathern's conception of images as they emerge in this particular domain of her work – which is to say we join Gell (1999: 35) in defining a system 'M', 'which you can take to stand for Melanesia or Marilyn, as you wish'. Because our ultimate aim is to elucidate portraits in blood, we pay particular attention to the treatment and status of *portrait images* in system M.

The objectification of relations in things, actions, persons and images is of pivotal importance in Strathern's work, but the relational *image* has very particular creative and temporal qualities. It should be noted that the definition of image employed by Strathern is frequently an expansive one – events or occurrences subject to interpretation are images in this schema. For instance, Strathern (1992a: 251) has written of a simple (but in the circumstances dramatic) bodily gesture, performed in Hagen in 1933 at a meeting between Australian patrol officer A. D. O. James Taylor and eight or so Hageners. At the commencement of the meeting Taylor takes off his hat. The gesture 'collapsed a relationship between distinct elements in a potent image that contained that relationship within itself'. It did so by way of reflection upon it: the relationship within the image was a function of the 'analysis', the image created by the viewer:

> What we might call analysis in Hagen takes the form of decomposition, taking apart an image to see/make visible what insides it contains; … this is a process that gives the elicitors of those insides, the decomposers, power as witnesses to their own efforts of elucidation; … the

elicitor/witness is in a crucial sense the "creator" of the image, and his/her presence thus necessary to its appearance (ibid: 245).

This kind of image, then, is hardly self-evident. It is created either after the fact by those who observe it or in the moment at which observed and observer encounter one another. Moreover, this kind of visual enactment comprises a picking apart (decomposition) of the image for evidence of the relations that formed it. The matter of evidence – of a person's relations and/or capacities – is particularly brought to the fore in Strathern's later discussion of portrait images, which proceeds through comparison with Euro-American practices of representation.

In her 1999 essay 'Prefigured Features', Strathern describes the problem of choosing a portrait of a Hagen dancer for a conference on portraiture. The problem is not that her photographs do not fit the aesthetic criteria for good portraiture, but that the content of the photographs, and in particular the forms of self-presentation depicted by them, bring into question the representational relationship between image and individual that underpins western conventions of portraiture. According to these conventions, the success of a portrait turns upon the physical likeness between the image and the individual's features. Correctly capturing those unique features as they appear on the surface of the body is taken to provide insight into their internal individuality: 'In the conventions of twentieth-century westerners (Euro-Americans), portraits attend to people's features in order to represent their individuality' (1999: 41).

What if, asks Strathern, we were to consider the feather plaque that the Hagen dancer carries in her photograph as a kind of portrait? How would we need to shift our notions of what portraiture is, how it is successfully accomplished and what cultural work it does? Like the western portrait, Strathern argues, the feather plaque is intended to convey the dancer's individuality to the audience. But it does not do this through the accomplishment of a physical likeness. It does not visually 'represent' the person wearing it. Instead it serves as evidence of the relationships which have enabled its construction through the gifting and loaning of feathers and other decorative artefacts, and therefore demonstrates the efficacy of the wearer in activating those relationships. The successful plaque indeed 'individuates' the dancer, but does not do so through physical resemblance but by demonstrating his internal well-being in his capacity to assemble those decorations. 'In sum, what is prefigured in the assemblages is the dancer's relationships with other persons' (1999: 39). The individuality that is made apparent in this artefact is comprised of relational capacity rather than internal biology or personality.

The contrast that Strathern draws, then, is between techniques of individuation that turn on representation, and those that serve as evidence for efficacy. The Hagen plaque is not a portrait, Strathern argues, 'if we insist on representation. Although this is an artefact that points to other events, it is not so much a representation of them as evidence of them. We witness an outcome: the results or effect of mobilising relationships' (41). As 'evidence' the Hagen plaque is a trace of the relationships that made it – it does not represent those relationships

but carries them into another material form, with the potential for generating further effects in those who view it. We particularly emphasise the latter point. The capacity to produce such evidence is demonstrative of the image-maker/image's ability to *affect*, and therefore exercise a certain power over others - a capacity that connects the portrait image with Strathern's more general account of aesthetics as the 'persuasiveness of form: the elicitation of a sense of appropriateness' (1991: 10).

Now it hardly needs saying that the theories of power predominant in the social sciences in recent years derived from the commanding work of Foucault - central to which are techniques of visualisation encapsulated in technologies of visibility such as medical imaging or the figure of the panopticon. In such a schema representation is conceptualized as a technology of governance: representational knowledge – for instance, statistics – is mobilized the better to be able to order and govern populations. Theories of affect, on the other hand, allow for the productive complication of theories of power as either domination or as disciplining through discourse for affective persuasion enacts a pre-discursive mode of power relation.[6] We thus use the term 'affect' here to refer to the non-representational ways in which images might implicitly shape a person's emotions, attitudes and motivations and compel them to act in particular ways.

Strathern's work has been centrally concerned to outline the aesthetic qualities of affective power. Aesthetic criteria, Strathern argues, delimit the forms in which persons must appear in order to be recognized by others. When people in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea, put objects on display, for example, those objects are judged in terms of their aesthetic qualities: are they shiny, fat, the right colour? This has theoretical implications because, as Hirsch (2001) has suggested, people's attempts to 'compel' or 'oblige' others to act through display draw attention to modes of power that are different to those obtaining from a Foucaultian notion of visibility. In Melanesia, the exercise of such power rests upon the capacity to make oneself visible in the correct form - often objectified in an exchange object (Strathern 1988). Which is to say, rather than power obtaining from being able to see, this is a mode of power consequent on being able *to be seen* (in the right way).

The capacity of non-representational images to influence, compel and emotionally move their viewers to action is thus a mode of affective power. A 'good' image is an image that appears in the right 'form'. The portrait images discussed by Strathern are thus not about 'squeezing meaning from the world', nor are they the kind of biographical artefacts that Thrift (2007: 7) sees as providing a 'spurious sense of oneness' regarding their subjects. Rather, such portrait images may be considered interventions made compelling via aspects of their form. Indeed, it has been argued that the antonym of representation is 'intervention' (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008: 6). If a representational methodology 'reflects' and 'illustrates' what is 'there', a non-representational methodology intervenes in the world. Insofar as the Strathernian image is non-

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[6] See also, in this respect, Blackman's (2010) important discussion. Blackman uses the term 'affective force'.

representational (or at least not conventionally representational) it shares ground with Thrift's theoretical point of view, according to which the portrait image would constitute a 'presentation' embedded in 'networks of possible connections and relations with their surroundings, "pointing toward" the (proper) roles they might actually play in our lives' (Thrift, 1997: 126). Thrift has put issues of affect at the centre of questions of space, governance and power in recent years, and we may productively inter-articulate his account of affect as a kind of non-representational, semi-conscious knowledge of the world that 'primes us for action' (2007: 221) with our own portrait of Strathern's image as relational and evidential and in consequence capable of affective interventions. We turn now to specific examples of the images we seek to illuminate by employing a Strathernian methodology.

Drawing Blood I

Blood extractions take place within a larger field of extractions with which they can form powerful analogies. In the case of blood portraits in mass Indian political milieus, an analogy is frequently set up between the blood shed by those depicted and the blood shed by the artist in depicting them. Not only are the subjects depicted, they are, so to speak, imitated – the artist enters into the sacrifice s/he commemorates. This is the case, for instance, for the blood portraits created by the Delhi-based Shaheed Smriti Chetna Samiti (Society to Awaken Remembrance of the Martyrs; henceforth 'the Samiti') which depict 'freedom fighter' martyrs (sacrificial heroes of the independence struggle) and are displayed around the country both in schools and in richly symbolic nationalist locations such as Delhi's Red Fort. Their purpose is to reawaken the spirit of sacrifice that the Samiti considers to be sadly absent in a contemporary India all too willing to forget the sacrifices that brought the nation into being; the exhibition has received national media coverage in vernacular as well as English forums (see Copeman 2013). There is a well-established tradition of explicitly patriotic art in the country, insightfully documented by Pinney (2004) and Ramaswamy (2008). Such art often depicts nationalist heroes having spilled, or in the act of spilling, their blood. The portraits produced by the Samiti likewise depicts martyrs revered for having shed their blood, but differ in also being composed *of* human blood. The analogies set up between different bloodsheds are explicitly catalytic: they seek to stimulate willingness to shed one's blood in the viewer in part through the use of blood to make that exhortation. Such bleeding is thus mimetic in two senses: in imitating (or creating an analogy with) the bleeding of one's sacrificial forbears, but also in terms of the willingness to sacrifice one's blood that it is supposed to incite in the viewer.

[Figure 1 about here]

Consider now a further example of the blood portrait. Ayurvedic doctor and social activist Mahesh Yadav (see fig. 1), from Bhopal, frequently visits Delhi's

Jantar Mantar in order to campaign for Tibetan freedom.[7] There, in the presence of members of the press, he draws his own blood and with it paints portraits of Gandhi, the Dalai Llama and others, usually for the political purpose already mentioned but also to highlight the necessity of fighting corruption, the plight of victims of the 1984 Bhopal industrial disaster, and other causes besides. He presents his political methodology in explicitly Gandhian terms as a non-violent means of struggle – a sanguinary *satyagraha* ('truth-force' – most commonly associated with the Gandhian fast), through which, in Gandhi's words, truth is vindicated 'not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self'. Yadav states: 'I am dedicated to Tibet freedom and peace on earth...and being deeply moved by the ever increasing blood-shedding in the world...I decided to utilizingly offer my blood for the sake of peace on earth....hence I initiated a "BLOOD MOVEMENT FOR PEACE" in which I inject out my own blood and utilize it [in works of portraiture] for the sake of stopping the ever increasing shedding of the blood in the world...and since last 14 years I am incessantly and unabatedly going on with this "blood-movement" with my own blood...' Shedding his blood 'for peace', and for a very specific political purpose (Tibetan freedom), the analogy is with violent bloodshed elsewhere (in this instance, Tibet). Analogies, insists Strathern (2006: 91), both conserve and extend (see also Franklin, this issue): negative analogy is only able to have persuasive force (extend) because of the retained (conserved) positive analogy. Such a model is apt in the case of Yadav's analogy: in each case blood is shed (the analogy conserves) but if Yadav's blood is shed 'for peace', this contrasts sharply with the violent bloodshed perpetrated in Tibet (the analogy extends). If Yadav's present bloodshed refers back to prior bloodshed, in the following – similarly analogical - example, the main focus of bloodshed in the present is to *preview* future spillage.

A 2007 newspaper article headlined 'Hindu activists paint Lord Rama with blood to protest against Sethu Samundram project' states that 'the use of blood as a medium is intended to show the anguish of the Hindu community. "We have expressed the pain we have felt regarding Ram Sethu [a chain of limestone shoals which featured prominently in the famous Hindu mythological text the Ramayana and thought to be threatened by a government project to dredge a channel between India and Sri Lanka]. If one can give blood (for the cause) he can shed it as well."' In addition to being an ascetic demonstration of bodily commitment to the cause, then, there is the threat of further bloodshed. '"This is a message to those who are opposed to [the Hindu god and king] Ram and the ones concerned with the project that they should relinquish the idea of destructing the bridge or they will have to face the consequences," said a leader of [Hindu right activist organisation] the Bajrang Dal'. The blood portrait is thus a kind of premonitory bloodshed, a sanguinary forewarning. As with Yadav's portraits there is a kind of staging of analogical connection here, but in reverse: blood extraction, at least for now, is for the non-violent purpose of devotional image-construction, but it points forward toward future violent bloodshed should the image-as-warning go unheeded (remain unpersuasive). The image seems to both intimate and prefigure future violent bloodshed.

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[7] The Jantar Mantar, a 17th-century observatory, possesses an afterlife as a site popular both for tourists and for staging political campaigns, often in the forms of *dharna*s (hunger protests).

Blood portraits may thus act as both mnemonic devices (the Samiti) and templates for action (the Bajrang Dal). The present-tense bloodshed of the portrait may be made to form analogies with past bloodshed (Yadav) or future bloodshed (the Bajrang Dal). In the case of the Samiti, past, present, and future bloodsheds are evoked simultaneously: the fallen martyr, depicted in blood in the present, must inspire others to willingness to shed their blood (and that of others) in the future for the nation.[8] Analogy across time is thus a structuring element of the sanguinary politics, particularly in respect of blood portraits. In order to explore the more representationally complex features of these portraits, however - their dynamic relational features - let us turn to our principal case study of blood portraiture.

Drawing Blood II

Shihan Hussaini of Chennai, Tamil Nadu state, is a karate and archery teacher, but he also runs a fine arts academy offering instruction in sculpture, dance and painting. We sat waiting for him in his office, which displayed swords, guns, arrows, daggers and a huge Buddha head. Through a window we watched an attendant arrange 57 paintings of the then former (now current) Chief Minister (state-level head of government) of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha – all painted using the artist's blood. There were mirrors on each wall. The bloody images were multiplied (see fig. 2).

[Figure 2 about here]

Why did he engage in such an exercise? The reason, he explains, was simple: he needed land for a karate school. For this he required an appointment with the Chief Minister. 'After I had 101 cars run over my hand [Hussaini is known for such spectacular feats] I did a portrait of Jayalalitha. Had I just done a painting and no blood it would have achieved nothing'. As this suggests, he had a measure of success: 'She brought me to her residence and promised me 1 million dollars … [S]he asked why did I do it. I said I knocked on your door several times, but there was no reply. I had to run trucks over my hand and paint your portrait in my blood!' However, 'once [the promise] was announced, some bureaucrats changed the decision and the land was taken [off me]. The next year she turned 57 so I did 57 portraits. But she was subjected to 60 [legal] cases so couldn't give me the land. When she comes back I will influence her to get the land. This is to influence decision-making'.

Hussaini is explicit concerning his theory of art: 'Blood art is a tool of propaganda, communication and influencing decision-making… I go and ask for a favour and I give them a painting in my blood. I have influenced several people with my own blood portraits of them. For me, it is not aesthetic – it is to influence thought, decision making, people, an entire idea to be implanted in people.' In

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[8] Compare with the temporally composite images of Hageners (Strathern 1990).

other words this is interventionist art, created in order to compel particular outcomes.

Hussaini's portraits thus attempt, with some success, to compel or oblige via aspects of their form. First, there is the sheer number of them: '[Jayalalitha] was 57 years old so I did 57 blood portraits… I'm adding them up every year. My very first portrait was for land, and I got it, but subsequently I had an exhibition in 2001 and the Karunanidhi [Jayalalitha's successor and fierce rival] government was so offended by the blood painting they raided my place and took this painting… I said, you take – I will make 57 more. Till now I have never got it back. The original one is lost forever. So in defiance of this daylight robbery by the state machinery I did 57 more paintings [in blood of Jayalalitha]… With an election coming [Karunanidhi] thought it was only for propaganda. The paintings were taken. I fasted [to protest]. I was forced [to stop] by friends because the police were arranging and putting false [legal] cases on me. My riposte was to do 57 more paintings of Jayalalitha and another every year on February 24th – Jayalalitha's birthday. The 24th February is Jayalalitha's birthday and I have an exhibition every 24th'.[9]

With one portrait for every year of the Chief Minister's life, an acutely personal equation is set up between quantities of lifetime and offering.[10] Its numerative form seems to help make the gift compelling (in the sense of the adjective, but also the verb – force or oblige).[11] Yet each image forms only a small part of a larger concern, for another is added every year. There is, in this sense, only one (ongoing) collective portrait. The portrait is a kind of 'becoming with' (Haraway 2008) the political leader: collective, it is both one and many; tracking its object of representation, its appearance changes in concert with the visible aging of the leader.[12] But numerative form is also a site of vulnerability for Hussaini. The

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[9] The birthdays of Indian political leaders have become notably extractive occasions, with Hussaini's blood portraits a particular spin on an existing genre. In this economy of birthday expenditure focused on political leaders the loss must be as great as possible in order to both certify a claim to ultimate loyalty and instantiate a coercive grip via imposed debt (Chidester 2005: 4; Appadurai 1990). According to the popular press, this is usually in order to gain ascendency in the form of a 'ticket'; that is, a seat from which to contest an election. This is an arena of almost comical excess – gargantuan Guinness world record birthday cakes offered to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi; garlands made up of thousand rupee notes; a silver chair offered to the Haryana Chief Minister - but also of suffering and political scandal: children 'forced to donate their blood' in 2009 on former Prime Minister's Rajiv Gandhi's birth anniversary; an engineer killed after refusing to contribute still more to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's birthday funds.
[10] This recalls a slightly different equation whereby offerings may be made to a politician's election campaign equivalent to the politician's body weight. Such offerings may be made in cash or in donated blood (Copeman 2011: 1082).
[11] Cf. Strathern (1992b). See also Gell (1998: 84) on the distracting effects of 'sheer multiplicity': 'I am told that even recently in Italy, peasants would hang a little bag of grain next to the bedstead, so that the Devil, approaching the sleeper in the bed, would be obliged to count the grains in the bag and would be thus diverted from inflicting harm'.
[12] British artist Marc Quinn attempts something similar in his self-portraits made of his own blood (poured into a cast of his head and then frozen). His first, called 'Self' (1991), was the beginning of a long-term project to create five-yearly versions of his 'Self' using blood collected from his own veins over a period of several months. From 1991-2006 four blood heads were produced, the aim being to document his aging. Like Hussaini's works, then, the portrait is

critical mass of '60 legal cases' against Jayalalitha meant she couldn't make good her promise to him, while the very need to create more portraits/make the portrait multiple was a result of their initial theft by Jayalalitha's political opponents (see fig. 3) – an action seeming to demonstrate the superior efficacy of his competitors over his own artistic efforts at political influence.[13]

[Figure 3 about here]

It is not surprising that media reportage found in Hussaini's literally bloody art an excess that reconfirmed the state of Tamil Nadu as perverse as regards its modes of political expression. For instance, the paintings were bracketed by both the BBC and local newspapers with a case from 2003 in which a man from Vellore was reported to have cut off his tongue as a birthday offering to the Chief Minister.[14] Initiating a user-led discussion on the theme of 'Why Do Tamils Burn Themselves?' an Indian news website enlists Hussaini's paintings as further compelling evidence of Tamil Nadu's status as politically pathological. It is worth pointing out that it was also in Chennai that Cohen (1999) conducted an interview with a female slum dweller who, already having sold one kidney to settle a debt, invoked Jayalalitha's predecessor as leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, the former Chief Minister MGR, and his need for a kidney transplant, making the following startling admission: 'He was dying, and received one from his niece; they did the operation in America. At that time, I did not know about kidneys. If I had, I would have given him both of mine'. Elsewhere Cohen (2004: 167) has analysed such ideational-corporeal political relations in terms of a citizen's *operative form* where one's body is always potentially a countergift to the state, 'in some cases as a sacrifice resurrecting a failing or absent sovereign'. Hussaini's portraits point toward the variety of media employed in enacting this corporeal exchange relationship.

We use the term enact advisedly. He enacted his devotion in compelling fashion. He attained an audience with the Chief Minister – no small feat. He provided media-friendly quotes: "'There were times when I passed out [when having blood drawn]. But I persisted'… Mr Hussaini says that he worships the Chief Minister as "Ma Shakti", or the goddess of power… "It shows my admiration for Ms Jayalalitha, who is a woman of great courage'. Moreover, the BBC article on Hussaini treats his portraits as a quintessential example of the way in which in south India 'the dividing line between politics and cinema is blurred [with] fans often going to extreme lengths to display their affection'. And yet, in conversation with us Hussaini was explicit about the performative nature of his 'fandom': 'The reports were wrong. I am not a fan! [i.e. he did it not out of

cumulative and sensitive to physical changes in the person whose likeness it conveys. Also like Hussaini's portraits, 'Self' conforms on one level to the conventions of representational portrait art: the notion that an individual's internal character or essence can be conveyed by the technical capture of their external physical appearance, while at the same time suggesting the possibility of an alternative non-representational relationship between person and image. The blood doesn't need to 'look' like him for the portrait to be successful – it conveys his individuality by providing the physical evidence of his life force in a frozen form.

[13] Cf. Brass (1997) Chidester (2005) on theft of religious forms.

[14] On south Indian fan culture, see Pandian (1992), Srinivas (1999); also Spencer (2007: 20) on the offering of toes to MGR.

devotion but because he wanted land]. All poets play praise for rulers. Unless you eulogise and iconise your kings and CMs you're not going to get your commission. I did not draw her portrait because I am a fan – but because it is a tool'. While such a utilitarian analysis surely accounts for the ends the artist sought to accomplish, it hardly does justice to the means.

Portraits of what?

The material presence of the artist in Hussaini's portraits is necessary for achieving something very particular: a relation to the subject of representation in the 'space' of - which is to say enframed within - the portrait. In a consideration of Berger's (2007) writings on drawing, Taussig (2009) highlights the intimacy between drawer and thing drawn: 'Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen, but the edge of what you have become… a drawing is an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event, seen, remembered, or imagined' (Berger cited in Taussig 2009: 269). In drawing, one thus gets close to an object. The drawing forms an intimate material relation. In the case of Hussaini's portraits, the act of representation no doubt brings the artist closer to the represented in the manner suggested by Berger. But there is an intensification of the relation achieved by way of the artist's indexical physical presence within the portrait - substance delineating subject. The aniconic element – the sanguinary medium as literal index of the artist – is present as substantive delineation of the icon it comprises, the relation both formed and displayed in the space of the portrait itself. The image objectifies a relation and *is* that relation – as Strathern (2005: 63) puts it, one can 'not only perceive relations between things but also perceive things as relations'.

[Figure 4 about here]

Of course, there is no simple 'fit' between Hussaini's portraits and the images characteristic of system M. The relation displayed and enacted in the portrait is not a function of analytic decomposition so much as an outcome of strategic encoding in its very composition. But this relation – made and displayed in the image itself – is integral to its ability to affectively persuade. Hussaini ultimately might not have obtained the land he sought, but the mere granting of an audience with the Chief Minister attests to the success of what might be called the propaganda of the image. As Carrithers (2010: 255) points out, direct access to Indian political leaders – ordinarily extremely difficult to secure - may be 'vital for life chances, in politics, in business, or in education'. The fusing of subject and object in the medium of the portrait forces a relation upon the anticipated viewing subject/recipient. One thinks again of Hageners seeking to compel others into a relationship through presentation of artefacts that stand as parts of other people. Hussaini's portraits compel not by invoking the wider relationships out of which the presenter/giver is made up but by materialising (and inflicting) a relationship between the corporeal self and the recipient *onto the recipient. A priori* encoding of the form of the relation in the image was thus, in Hussaini's

own words, a tool. Strathern, too, explicitly defines the relation as the anthropologist's tool, for anthropologists 'use relations to explore relations' (2005: 7). Specifically, anthropologists 'operate two kinds of relations at the same time' (ibid) – the conceptual and the interpersonal. The relational portrait, tool-like, caused an invisible (conceptual) relation between ruler and unknown subject to become a visible (interpersonal) relation between ruler and known subject – the portrait a kind of relational intervention. Just how did it do this?

We have stated that the portraits objectify a relation - let us consider more carefully the properties of the 'blood tie' created in the images. First of all, Hussaini's portraits form a part not only of the wider sanguinary politics but also of a tradition of political praise offering in south India that is characterised by relations of 'hierarchical intimacy' (Bate 2002). Poems and images printed in local newspapers by local political functionaries or low-level community leaders in honour of visiting political leaders (in particular, Jayalalitha) 'aestheticise power as an intimate being, such as a family deity or mother, who will grant us the benefits of her presence and respond to our appeals' (ibid: 309). Locating its roots in the medieval *bhakti* tradition of devotional love, Bate describes how images of Jayalalitha are framed in ways that underscore her royal cum divine identity. Yet such 'hierarchical distancing' of the leader is fused with tropes of intimacy: the example is offered of a central print of Jayalalitha surrounded by sixty smaller images of exactly the same image, with their warm gazes seemingly directed downwards towards the advertiser himself – the head of the Tamil Nadu Sales Board - whose image is located at the bottom right of the advertisement (ibid: 318). If, once again, quantity is a key quality of an image that is both many and one at the same time, in tying the advertiser's name to that of great political leaders, what such images and their attendant poetry achieve is, of course, a relation. In other words, these 'portraits' are not simply of the leader; neither are they simply self-portraits. They are portraits of the advertiser in relation to the political leader that also create this relation.

Hussaini's portraits, indeed, partake of this genre – the relation both made and made visible in the space of the portrait. But use of blood heightens the intimacy of the relation discussed by Bate. The portraits adhere to – but critically exceed – the regional convention of political praise offering. This brings us back to Berger's account of drawing. As was noted earlier, the material qualities of Hussaini's portraits embody an intensification or literalisation of the process described by Berger: Hussaini 'adds substance' to the already intimate process of physical portrayal. Indeed, Hussaini repeatedly emphasised to us the provenance of his artistic materiel *in the heart*: 'This is an amazing and personal medium – when you draw people it is said it should come from your heart and this literally comes from the heart'. He has faced criticism from several quarters; in particular for 'wasting' a medically valuable substance, and for proliferating new icons – not an uncontroversial practice for a Muslim who claims direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad: 'People have said it's sacrilegious. But I say it is the most special substance because it comes literally from the heart'. And again: 'They say that you can see the artist in the art, and when I do my art it is literally true.' That the substance of his paintings derives from his heart is a key aspect of his self-

presentation in media interviews as much as in interviews with us,[15] and the connection, far from being only his own, is a recurrent motif of the Indian sanguinary politics. For instance, the provenance of artistic material in the heart featured prominently in visitor book comments at the aforementioned Samiti's recent Delhi exhibition of freedom fighter portraits in blood; e.g.: 'since the paintings are from the heart…patriotic feeling is increased in my heart also' (Copeman 2013). To paraphrase Hussaini, then, what we witness in his blood portraits is substance literally from the heart commingle with – intimately delineate – the features of its subject. Of course, even works considered by critics to dismantle longstanding aesthetic conventions are assessed according to an authenticity criterion – they must be 'from the heart': 'modern art is required, not to please, as in earlier aesthetic theories, but to provide its audience with examples of authenticity' (Handler 1986: 4). Hence the recent controversy concerning Damien Hirst's spot paintings, famously made by a team of assistants. Defending himself against accusations that he was making millions of pounds from artworks he had little to do with, he is reported to have stated: 'assistants make my spot paintings but my heart is in them all' (Singh 2012). Well, not literally.[16]

In Hussaini's case, because the medium of the portraits has literally passed through his heart, the sentiments of the works are considered to be more forcefully conveyed and faithful. Indeed, there is the suggestion that the blood medium does not merely connote the sentiment that gave rise to its extraction but that it is, quite literally, that sentiment as unmediated affect. We have discussed elsewhere understandings in South Asia that see the heart as the literal repository of genuine sentiment (Copeman 2013). From love and pride to shame and fear, feelings 'belong to the body and they flow [literally] from the heart' (Krause 1989: 568). The de-metaphorised portrait's material composition from a substance delivered, literally, from the heart, and partaking of the sentiment it embodies and produces, lend force, we suggest, to its affective efficacy. Certainly, it was central to the propaganda of the image in Hussaini's own terms. Such running together of the contiguous and the representational is, of course, not unique to Hussaini in India's wider sanguinary politics. The example offered above of the Bajrang Dal's collective portrait of the god Ram in activists' pooled blood suggests a similar underscoring of a demonstrable relation and aesthetics of commitment via the blood medium: a portrait of neither Ram nor the activists but of the activists in relation to Ram: a blood tie made literal.

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[15] E.g. the connection was evident in 2004 when Hussaini painted a blood portrait of literary hero Tagore: 'Anguished at the theft of the Nobel medal of litterateur Rabindranath Tagore, an artist in Chennai on Sunday painted a portrait of the late poet with blood donated by 30 students. "Nothing is lost in our heart – Rabindranath" - the footnote said. Hussaini said the painting was a tribute to the great poet who still rules the hearts of people. "Artists from all over the south and art lovers decided we need to express our anguish straight from our heart by drawing blood from each one of us and sketching a big portrait of Tagore. Thereby remembering Tagore again and telling to the world that though the medallions may be lost we have not lost him from our hearts," he said'
(http://www.indiatraveltimes.com/news/news2004/apr04/apr0404_news.html).
[16] See Strathern (2005: 54) on the nature of the 'kinship' between authors and their works. See also Biagioli (1998) on related controversies and his essay in this special issue.

Portraits of what, then? Strathern's approach to images is one that pays great attention to the instability of figure and ground (Strathern 1990, Wagner 1986). Hussaini actively builds in, or encodes, a figure-ground reversal – we are directed to concentrate at least as much on the substance of composition as on the 'figure'. If in the classic understanding of portraiture, 'the portrayer makes visible the inner essence of the sitter' (van Alphen 1997: 241), in Hussaini's case the portrayer makes his own 'inner essence' visible in relation to the portrayed. That the word for heart, '*dil*', is frequently used for 'I' in parts of South Asia (Krause 1989: 568) might further support a figure-ground reversed understanding of Hussaini's paintings as non-representational *self*-portraits.[17] Of course, it is not so simple. They are not self-portraits, but portraits of 'self-in-relation-to-another' (i.e. they are not simply reducible to the non-representational element). But the instability of figure and ground is an important facet of Hussaini's relational industry. The easy switches from figure to ground, and vice versa, remind the viewer of the relation the image comprises (i.e. that the portraits make evident not only the one who is represented). Matter here is a kind of relational reminder.

Of course, one might object that the tool-like nature of the relation does not square with Hussaini's insistence that the portraits are composed via 'the most personal medium' and our own insistence, with reference to Berger and local understandings of the human heart, upon the achievement of relational intimacy. But it is not simply a question of either relation as tool *or* relation issuing pristinely 'from the heart'. The relation works so well as a tool precisely because it elaborates an aesthetics of presentation and commitment – is undergirded by an artistic sensibility fully cognisant of the persuasiveness of form. Issuing 'from the heart' via 'the most personal medium' - this is precisely how the tool works.

The portraits - as emotive instanciation of a relation between icon and iconizer - thus possess affective power; the Chief Minister was emotively compelled to respond. To conclude this section, then, we briefly consider the nature of the image-maker's sway. van Alphen (1997: 240) explains how the portrait conventionally bestows power on the portrayed: 'It is because we see a portrait of somebody that we presume that the portrayed person was important and the portrayed becomes the embodiment of authority… Thus, authority is not so much the object of portrayal, but its effect' (ibid). It is possible that Hussaini's portraits did augment the Chief Minister's authority and that her prestigious invitation to the artist and promise of property were merely acts of *noblesse oblige*. Such a view, however, discounts the capacity of the affective image to

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[17] Compare with Strathern's (1999) discussion in 'Prefigured Features' of the heads collected by Asmat headhunters in Irian Jaya, which, she says, do *not* represent the persons they once belonged to. Indeed, the features themselves are obscured by the preservation methods used. Instead the collected head bestows the life force of the deceased on the collector. The individual life force of the collector is therefore made apparent, enacted, in the taking of the head. The head doesn't represent the deceased but serves as evidence of the capacities of the headhunter; which is to say, if the head *is* a portrait it is a self-portrait of the collector.

influence or compel its viewer to action. Rather than augment her authority, the portraits demonstrate her essential vulnerability when subjected to the relational industry of another. This was not a relation she chose; Hussaini acted according to the principle that 'one cannot point to a relation without bringing about its effect' (Strathern 2005: 64). The image was the occasion for a kind of relational binding; a blood-*tie*.

Jayalalitha is hardly alone in such vulnerability. Visual representation, as Gell (1998: 102-3) explains so well, is always a kind of binding, for 'the image of the prototype is bound to, or fixed and imprisoned within, the index'. Rather then merely 'the foible of innocent tribesmen who believe that their souls are in danger of being stolen away therein… vulnerability stems from the bare possibility of representation, which cannot be avoided'. There is thus 'no reason to invoke magical or animistic beliefs in order to substantiate that idea that persons are very vulnerable indeed to hostile representation via images, not just to cruel caricatures, but even via perfectly neutral portrayals, if these are treated with contumely or ridicule' (ibid). Indian politicians, cognisant of this, often act in heavy-handed ways in attempts to control representations of themselves (see Mazzarella & Kaur 2009).[18] A particularly hostile usage of images is practiced in volt sorcery, the sorcerer manipulating images of the intended victim in order to physically injure them. Though 'injure' would be incorrect here ('influence' would be more apposite), might we still consider Hussaini a kind of political black magician? Gell explains that image-based sorcery is frequently practiced alongside a non-representational or 'contact' mode of sorcery that achieves its effects via manipulation of the victim's bodily excuviae, such as their hair or nail-clippings or, indeed, blood (ibid: 103; Camporesi 1990). But the blood that forms Hussaini's portraits is his own, not that of his 'target'. Neither do his images unambiguously depict their target (for they are as much a portrait of the artist). The use of blood excuviae is thus not a component of political sorcery but rather accomplishes the portrait as a binding relation that moves its target to action (cf. Thrift 2007: 221). Thus, if both strategies explore the possibilities of excorporative non-representational technique for influencing others, they remain vitally different. Strathern's visual focus is on 'the role of form and of the aesthetic contours of the image as elicitory trigger' (Weiner 1999: 243). In extending the south Indian aesthetics of commitment via the use of his own excuviae in depicting the Chief Minister, Hussaini came to assume the 'right' form. We know this because his images elicited the 'right' response.

Promissory Matter

We turn now from a Strathernian elucidation of the blood portrait to the wider sanguinary politics in which such portraits are embedded; specifically, we seek to elaborate the characteristic enunciative features of the Indian sanguinary politics. Performance is central here. Recent years have seen the term 'performative' employed in a number of divergent analytical ways, some

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[18] For instance in 2012, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, imprisoned a professor at Jadavpur University after he circulated an unflattering caricature of the politician.

unilluminating,[19] so it is necessary to be clear concerning our usage: in tune with our focus on the enunciative qualities of political blood extractions, we follow Antze (2010, cf. Austin 1962) in employing the performative as a linguistic category. The performative, we suggest, acts as a critical supplement to the constative element of political appeals enacted via blood extraction. The distinction between the constative and performative dimensions of language is a distinction 'between what is said and what is performed in the saying of it' (ibid: 312). Antze (ibid) offers as an example the rhetorical persuasiveness of stories told in the first-person: 'On the one hand there is the story I tell you about myself, subject to the usual tests of plausibility, consistency, and so on [i.e. the constative]. On the other hand there is me telling the story, and thus a series of questions about the "felicity" of my whole presentations [i.e. the performative]. Do I seem to be sincere? In claiming remorse, do I actually sound remorseful? Or, when I insist on my mental or moral competence, do I perform that competence or subtly undermine it?'

Following from this we might say that enunciative bloodshed performs the 'good faith' of the message that is being conveyed. It is in this sense that we mean that the performative supplements the constative. Blood extraction becomes a kind of felicity condition that underscores the veracity of the message being transmitted – it is an intensifier. Intensifiers, in the linguistic sense, are modifiers used to give force or emphasis, for example, *very* in *the weather is very mild*. Political blood extraction, likewise, is employed to lend force or emphasis during mass political occasions. It acts as a performative felicity condition for the political appeal being made. For instance, at an event organised by the Youth Congress in 2004 on the birthday of party leader Sonia Gandhi, activists signed an anti-corruption pledge, chanted 'Sonia Gandhi *zindabad*' ('Long Live Sonia Gandhi') and donated their blood to the Red Cross.[20] At a constative level what is being stated, of course, is that the Congress is robustly anti-corruption and devoted to the party leader.[21] At a performative level, the message is verified (or intensified) through enacting the political asceticism and devotion these constatives demand: they are shown as well as stated. Such performances ritually verify the constative element of the political utterance.

The phrase 'rituals of verification' is borrowed from the subtitle of Power's (1997) book on practices of audit and accountancy, and the connection with accountancy is apt. The reason that the blood extracted on political occasions may be termed, following Thompson (2000) and Brown et al (2006), *promissory*

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[19] Mol (2002) provides a particularly telling discussion of the drawbacks of the 'performative turn'.

[20] The Youth Congress is the youth wing of India's Congress Party. Under Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay in the 1970s, it was a 'delinquent boys' club' (Khilnani 1997: 47). It now conducts social service activities and campaigns for the Party.

[21] Many such examples of blood extraction as a political intensifier could be given: The Youth Congress also stages blood donation events on the death anniversaries of Indira, Rajiv, and Sanjay Gandhi, respectively. Politicians vie to organise such events themselves, and disclose on their CVs the number of blood camps they have arranged and number of times they have personally donated (see Copeman 2009a). During a recent demonstration, members of the Hindu nationalist groups the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) used their own blood to sign a petition that announced the 'death' of Islamic terrorism, and so on.

matter, is precisely that such blood extractions held out - continue to hold out for some political actors - an elusive promise of political transparency. There is, in general in the Indian subcontinent, an extremely negative valuation of the political (Spencer 2007: 22); at once 'appalled and fascinated' by political goings on, people of diverse backgrounds frequently comment on the unsavouriness of politics ('dirty work') and on the moral failings of particular politicians (ibid). Parry (1994: 127) comments memorably on the moral pollution thought to adhere relentlessly and invariably to politics in the region, recounting Banaras funeral priests' description of the great difficulty in making a politician's body burn due to 'the enormous burden of sin accumulated with his corrupt earnings'. So far as acts of political enunciation are concerned, people's scorn is particularly severe. Consider the fast: for Mahatma Gandhi, performed as a component of *satyagraha* (truth-force), fasting was the mass political tool par excellence, whereas if a politician now fasts, so the saying goes, he only does so between breakfast and lunch. If a political fast appears to be of a notable duration, the figure concerned has likely been 'stealthily eating all night long' (Ramaswamy 1997: 230). Deception is built into all acts of signification, for 'a sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else… If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth' (Eco 1976: 10). In popular opinion the deception of all symbolism finds its consummate realisation in the debased domain of Indian political signification.

Of course, from time to time there occur irruptions of political purification. The most recent example is Anna Hazare's middle class-backed anti-corruption movement that began to dominate news reportage in 2011 – a movement that continually proclaimed its non-political nature, despite Congress accusations that it was aligned with the Hindu right BJP party. As Spencer (2008: 625) notes, 'the use of a rhetoric of antipolitics as the ground for certain political interventions has a long history in South Asia'. Extracted blood is, or has been, definable as promissory political matter, due to understandings of it as a mode of unsymbolized (which is to say, less deceitful, or purified, that is to say, *antipolitical*) political enunciation. Criticised by political opponents in 2010 for arranging a massive blood donation event on Maharashtra Day – 'taking people's blood rather than providing them with water' – Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray is reported to have responded by stating that 'Blood donation is the real social work, and Shiv Sena has believed that social work comes before electoral politics'.[22] Blood donation, it is argued, transcends the 'profane' politics of personal gain, instead opening up onto the politically 'sublime' or utopian (Hansen 2001). In this sense blood has the same status as scientific facts had at the dawn of modern science in the 17th century: understood to be direct mirrors of nature, scientific facts remained unaffected by the realms of politics or culture – they were truth itself (Shapin and Schaffer 1985).

But why, more specifically, was blood extraction a mode of political enunciation that seemed to promise unsymbolization and political purification? First, if a political fast contains easy avenues for sleight of hand, the visual spectacle of politicians or party activists 'bleeding for a cause' seems not to leave room for

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[22] *Outlook*, 11 May 2010.

such speculation: the evidence is before your eyes - the bag is filled. Which is to say that the felicity of the presentation successfully supplements the constative substance of the statement or appeal. Extraction as enunciation could thus appear to move beyond the critique of political signs. Second, given the widespread understanding in the subcontinent that blood loss leads to permanent volumetric deficit and consequent depletion of strength, onlookers might be more willing to acknowledge that enunciation via bloodshed is less a matter of pure deception than of deep-held commitment. To adapt Bildhauer's (2013) formulation, the extraction of blood as enunciative act promises to provide immediate access to the truth of the donor's convictions. Given the fears just mentioned, willingness to shed blood seems to demonstrate commitment 'that cannot be faked'. This argument is congruent with van de Port's (2011: 86) observation about the critical role of the body in seeming to 'precede' all opinionating and therefore in 'upgrading the reality calibre of social and cultural classificatory systems'. Much of the promise of this mode of political enunciation hinged on anxieties about depletion. We might put it thus: since enunciative bloodshed transcends my own willingness to do likewise, I am forced to construe it as compelling.[23]

Connected to this is the particular nature of blood extraction as a mode of action. Discussing photographic portraiture in south India, Pinney (1997) questions the assertion of many South Asianist scholars (e.g. Marriott 1976) that exterior bodily signs are readily readable evidence of a person's internal moral character. Pinney (ibid: 135), instead, emphasises precisely the unreadability of such signs. There is no x-ray vision; persons remain visually indecipherable: 'The striking dualism espoused [by Indians] stresses the occlusion of character and the mystery of external surfaces'. Hence, photographic portraits are unable to capture 'the internal moral character and biography of a sitter, his *charitra*'. For central Indians, then, there is a disjunction between external signs and moral interior – the latter can be known only through a person's actions (*karma*).

Mass political signification is, of course, similarly unreadable and the subject of intense suspicion. The politician's statement that s/he cares for, and will serve, his or her constituents is generally disbelieved – the disjunction between external signs and mortal interiors is reproduced. In such a context extracted blood comes into its own as promissory matter as the visibilised integration of exterior signs and moral interiority. Recall Hussaini's blood portraits 'from the heart': the particular mechanics of Hussaini's portraits *do* lay claim to display internal moral character as an exemplary externalisation of the enunciator's 'inside'. Inserted into a context in which there is little or no faith in the readability of exterior signs is a new political rhetoric formed of interior (affective) substance – the moral interior *can* now be read from the physical exterior, in a newly unsymbolised sanguinary politics.

Consider, for instance, the case of the high-profile Maharashtra Committee for the Eradication of Superstitious Practices (Maharashtra Andhashraddha

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[23] See Gell (1999), on whose formulation we draw here (which in turn draws on Simmel's theory of value).

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Nirmulan Samiti; MANS), which campaigns across the state to expose the spuriousness of what it sees as irrational and dangerous religious practices that exploit the credulous and vulnerable. The major aim of the organisation is to pass legislation in the state parliament that will make illegal precisely these forms of religious practice. In 2005 the Committee succeeded in persuading the Maharashtra State Legislature to approve the 'Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Aghori Practices Bill'. However, due to a concerted and sometimes violent campaign on the part of right-wing Hindu organisations who claim that the Bill is specifically targeted at Hindu forms of religious worship which it would effectively criminalise, the Bill has not yet – to the Committee's dismay - been signed into law.

The Committee, like Hussaini, sought an appointment with the Chief Minister to press its case. It first resorted to the somewhat passé technique of the political fast. Having no success the Committee adopted a number of less typical measures, such as a public self-slapping campaign as 'atonement' for electing the government that had now shelved the Bill. Finally, a letter writing campaign was initiated using activists' own blood. The movement's leader, Dr Dabholkar, recalled to us this campaign: 'We decided to write letters to the Chief Minister [CM], [Congress president] Sonia Gandhi, and [local 'Big Man' politician and central government minister] Sharad Pawar with our own blood, from MANS workers. We took out just 3ml of blood from the vein in a special syringe – enough for 3-4 sentences only. Then, using small brushes, we wrote letters to the CM. More than 1,000 letters were sent to the CM. Nobody objected or ridiculed the idea, but everyone was now sure of the integrity of the organisation, so ultimately the result was that the CM was compelled to discuss with us'. Which is to say that, finally, they attained the right elicitory form and secured the appointment. As with Hussaini's ever-multiplying portraits, the multiplicity of the effort was remarked upon (yet also de-emphasised by the movement's leader). To cite one report, 'Dr. Dabholkar informed that about 300 such letters would be written to the Government, where the "number" is not an issue but the issue is about the "pain"'. Physical self-subjection was also therefore key to the correct manifestation. However, number and endurance were insufficient in themselves. (After all hundreds engaged in the self-slapping campaign to little effect). Rather, it was the use of activist blood that was critical for demonstrating an 'integrity' – a 'congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (Trilling, 1971: 2) made tangible and discernible via externalisation of moral interiors ('actual feeling') as bloody text ('avowal') - that 'compelled' the Chief Minister to pay attention. In displaying activists' moral interiors externally, MANS had finally located the correct performative supplement to the constative. Recall Pinney's observation that a person's moral interior can be known only through their actions (*karma*). This helps explain the currency in India as elsewhere of expressions to the effect that 'actions speak louder than words' (e.g. the Hindi expression *kathni aur karni main antar nahi hona chahiye* – literally, 'words and actions must not differ'). Part of the power of MANS' letters in blood lay in the fact that theirs was not a case of words instead of actions, but of words as actions. As Allard (2012: 236), drawing on Fraenkel (2008), explains, the force of documents may flow not only from their 'graphic or linguistic properties' but from 'the procedures that have to be followed for their production' as well:

'"writing *acts*" are often as important as the written documents they generate' (our emphasis).

One can thus gain a sense of extracted blood as promissory political matter. From letters and petitions to donation and portraiture, blood extractions are political intensifiers that promise the removal of deceptive signification or any signification at all. Such procedures lay force or emphasis at a variety of mass political occasions. Extracted blood, exteriorised interior substance that challenges the disjunction between external signs and moral interior and whose flow or display, moreover, is the achievement of visibilised action, provided the promise of uncompromised (or less compromised) political enunciation. But in certain key respects the sanguinary politics did not live up to its promise.

Negation

We have described political blood extractions as an intensifier in the linguistic sense – a kind of supplement that lends force to a given enunciation. Over-use of such modifiers, however, has led one linguist to term them parasitical intensifiers: 'Formerly strong words are being reduced to lightweights that need to be bulked up with intensifiers to regain their punch. To *offer insight* or to *oppose a position* now sound tepid unless the insight is *valuable* and the opposition *diametrical*. The intensifier drains the vigour from its host' (Smith 2001: 98). If thus far we have shown how performative blood extraction might add vigour to the constative element of a given political occasion, we note now the ways in which political blood extractions have turned into the kind of parasitical intensifier berated by Smith - the sanguinary politics in some respects now comprising less an array of techniques of verification than of what we might be termed political ellipsis (compromised enunciation). How did the sanguinary politics degenerate into the modes of deception it was thought to transcend?

This is the irony of India's sanguinary politics - it is precisely because it has developed into such a consummate sign of transparent political asceticism and promise that it has become ripe for appropriation for purposes of obscuration. For example, in 2002 a controversy arose when Hindi film icon Amitabh Bachhan inaugurated a series of blood donation camps for the Uttar Pradesh-based political outfit the Samajwadi Party (SP). They were staged during a state assembly election campaign, a time when the Election Commission's model code comes into force, which is meant to prohibit 'vote buying' by candidates eager to hand out 'electoral freebies' (frequently saris, cooking vessels, alcohol and cash [see Roberts 2010]). The SP's rival, the Congress Party, lodged a complaint with the commission, alleging that 'Mr. Bachhan and the SP leaders were using the blood donation camps to gain political mileage. "These camps are being synchronised with the election campaign and they amount to an offer of allurement to the voters"'.[24]

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[24] *The Hindu*, 2 Feb. 2002.

The complaint was that blood donation was being deployed in order to legitimate otherwise forbidden political bribes. One implication was that since the event was associated with the SP, the blood collected might be viewed as a 'gift' to the public from whom it seeks votes. Probably more pertinent, however, is the way in which the 'token of regard' which is by law quite acceptable for blood donation event organisers to offer to blood donors on completion of their donation can be used to set up an exchange that otherwise would be obstructed. This is where blood donation as a technique of political ellipsis comes into its own. At a time when gifts to voters are expressly forbidden, and this indeed being the only time that political functionaries would want to make them, the exchange is performed obliquely in the guise of another exchange (that which legitimately inheres in the setup of blood donation events). That is, taking the donor-voter's blood allows the party in turn to offer back that which they would not be allowed to give if there wasn't a blood donation event acting as 'exchange cover' whilst also making visible an electorally useful association between the party and social service.

Further, a news article headlined 'After the bloodletting, the blood donation', reports on a blood donation camp organised by the notorious Mumbai 'don of Dagdi Chawl', Arun Gawli.[25] It speculates dryly that his own blood donation may have been an attempt to 'atone for his sins'. In fact, the blood donation camp formed part of a publicity drive for his newly constituted political party, the Akhil Bharatiya Sena, through which Gawli seems to have been trying to demonstrate his 'reformed' character. Similarly, accusations have frequently been levelled against the Dera Sacha Sauda [DSS] devotional movement that its gargantuan, world-record breaking blood donation feats are performed in order to distract the media from a number of serious criminal charges faced by its guru (Sikh organisations, threatened by both the acclaim and the followers generated by the DSS, retaliate in kind with their own world record attempts – see fig. 6 and Copeman, 2008, 2012). Just as the SP is likely to have convinced few people that it was not engaged in vote buying by other means, the tone of the news article documenting Arun Gawli's blood donation evinces scepticism about the party leader's supposed reform. Nevertheless, the very attempt to employ blood extraction as a means to attain easy political virtue brings the sanguinary politics as a mode of political enunciation into disrepute. It is precisely because blood extraction is such a readily available (and deployable) political intensifier – interior moral substance brought forth and displayed via visibilised acts of exteriorisation - that its enactment now gives rise to high levels of distrust and scepticism in respect of the mass political events it supplements. A practice that performs the commitment and transparency it enunciates, it is also used to legitimate bribes and engage in political spectacles of excess in which parties vie to collect the most blood precisely because of the virtues it enunciates; which is to say that, rather than a productive supplement, the performative extraction now drains the constative political enunciation of its vigour – a victim, so to speak, of its own success. Thus has the political blood extraction become a parasitical intensifier, as clichéd, nearly, as the political fast.

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[25] *The Indian Express*, 22 May 1997.

Conclusion

To assert that the sanguinary politics has been recast wholesale as a dissembling political form would be going too far – its continued enactment in a large variety of mass political settings suggests it continues to possess some degree of communicative efficacy. The latter sections of the essay have simply sought to show (1) how and why promise was invested in it, and (2) the considerable extent to which this promise has remained unfulfilled. The trajectory of the sanguinary politics is thus very much in tune with Spencer's (2008: 626) observation that one aspect of the opposition between 'dirty politics' and imaginary anti-politics 'is its constant productivity—new leaders constantly seek new ways to take the politics out of politics, yet each attempt ends in a different kind of failure as the amoral world of the political inexorably tarnishes the shiny new possibilities'. The fast, too, has been written off on multiple occasions as an efficacious mode of political expression. Yet it has recently made a high-profile comeback (if it ever really went away) in the hands of Gandhian social activist Anna Hazare and his anti-corruption movement. A key difference, perhaps, is that it now matters just *who* is enacting the fast or the blood extraction. For at the height of the sanguinary politics – roughly in the late-1990s/early 2000s - part of its attraction lay precisely in its not really mattering who enacted it because the action formed its own proof of veracity and moral worthiness. To employ Weston's (2013) formulation, the extracted blood that is used in portraits and petitions is *meta-material* because it forces reflection upon the material properties of the artefacts it forms. Over time, however, extracted blood seemed to become less meta-material: the character of those being bled came to matter more. Yet, as with the fast, a comeback seems possible if the correct presentational and affective configuration is achieved.

Fasting and blood extraction are interesting analogues. Both enact a kind of corporeal emptying that would, in excess, result in death. Both couple physical self-subjection with the infliction of this image on others. Political blood extraction thus conceptually connects with the political fast. But it also departs from it. If fasting instantiates a kind of active passivity that moreover is subject to accusations of sleight of hand, blood extraction is a physical action the veracity of which (in terms of its visible demonstrability) is less contestable. Moreover, it can take many forms (petitions, letter writing, medical donations etc). One such form is the affectively efficacious imaged relation. We employed Strathern's insights on the subject of the objectification of relations in images in order to explicate political blood portraits while reciprocally employing the portraits in order to illuminate Strathern's distinctive approach to the persuasive relationality of objects of display. Like anthropologists, Hussaini uses the relation as a tool. The use of his blood to image the relation he sought instanciated that relation and moved the Chief Minister to action. The commanding sway of the Foucauldian understanding of power-vision appears undiminished in the social sciences. Notwithstanding a number of important criticisms and refinements

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(e.g. Jay 1986, Thompson 2005), this understanding remains, quite rightly in our opinion, extremely influential. But as we have shown, Hussaini's portraits not only made him visible to power - reminding us that this might well be on occasion a desired state of affairs - but envisioned himself in relation to the powerful in a manner that persuaded the powerful to do his bidding. Vital, here, was the capacity of being able to be seen (in the right way) in order to elicit an appropriate response from the viewer. So, far from occluding relations of power as some scholars have alleged (Carrier 1992; Josephides 1991; Li Puma 2001; though see also Munro's important discussion [2005]), the insistence in Strathern's work on the persuasiveness of form allows us to discern more fully the underside of disciplinary power: its capacity to empower the subjects it produces at the same time as it delimits the forms of action that are possible. In other words, the different emphases on power-vision manifested in the works of Strathern and Foucault are remarkably complementary, the former a necessary balancing out of the latter.

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Jacob Copeman is a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *Veins of Devotion: Blood Donation and Religious Experience in North India* (2009). His edited and co-edited works include *Blood Donation,*

Bioeconomy, Culture (2009), *The Guru in South Asia: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2012), and *South Asian Tissue Economies* (2013).

Alice Street is a chancellor's fellow at the University of Edinburgh, UK. Her research interests include hospital ethnography, anthropology of science and technology, and relationships between representational and relational knowledges.