Fandom on display: intimate visualities and the politics of spectacle
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INTIMACY ON DISPLAY

THE LIVES AND
LOVES OF CELEBRITY IMAGES

*Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very
close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.*

<div style="text-align:right">(Benjamin 1969b, 223)</div>

Introduction: On how viewers engage images and how images engage viewers

The photo on the previous page depicts a Rajini fan with a torn out image of Rajinikanth held close to his heart.[1] The fact that he used an image of Rajinikanth to show me and capture his fandom and the way in which he positions it close to his body already points to the ways in which images can be staged as intimate, embodied objects. This embodied proximity of the image of Rajinikanth serves as a starting point for an exploration of several kinds of images produced and staged by fans. In Chapter 1 we saw how fans can feel attracted towards their movie star. I demonstrated that images and stories play an important role in the construction of a movie star's persona. Fan collectivity and individual fandom are channeled through different kinds of movie star images. The images here range from commercial, mass-produced ones encountered in and collected from magazines, stickers or posters to vernacular images such as framed photos, billboards and paintings produced by fans themselves. These different images from various sources are often retouched, repainted or cut out to create the narrative that singles out the personal relationship between fan and star.

Fandom involves objects and images replicating and relating to the star. A star such as Rajinikanth has always had a strong presence in commercial and personally appropriated images. Things, as Csikszentmihalyi argues, can play important roles in the lives of individuals (1993, 23; see also Appadurai 1986). He points out how things or objects demonstrate a person's power and place in social hierarchy; they reveal continuity through time by providing the focus for involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts to future goals; and they give concrete evidence of a person's place in a social network as symbols of valued relationships. Following Csikszentmihalyi, I acknowledge the role of images as objects in everyday life. Both the material presence and content of an image create meaning in a fan's social world of fandom and fan club membership. Meaning is established, among other ways, through engagement with images. These images can be personal souvenirs and keepsakes of past events and future desires as well as serve as evidence of a fan's status as fan and club member. The ways in which fans show their star, position themselves next to their star or copy their star reveal the fans' desire to be close to their star. Images and their manipulation facilitate these intimate, personal links and corporeal engagements. Yet at the same time, desire and images seem to reinforce each other; just as desire generates images, images also generate desire (Mitchell 2005b). In other words, through the engagement with images of their star fans can come close to their desires but at the same time the circulation of images and the awareness of others engaging with the same kind of images generate

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[1] The photo on the title page is of the fan Shankar (he also calls himself Rajini Shankar but he should not be confused with Rajini Shankar, the Pondicherry fan club secretary).

these desires as well (see Jain 2007. I come back to this point below). I consider the power of images to be this generation of desire. Images are more than mere representation; they are embodied objects that, through their appropriation and reciprocal gaze, constitute power for the beholder.

This chapter focuses on fan images, the manner in which they are manipulated and how they facilitate the creation of identities and narratives as fans. In talking about the photos and other representations of movie stars that fans keep I consciously deploy the term images instead of photos. An image rather than a photo conveys the multiple ways in which images are appropriated and adjusted and are more than mere indexical representations.

The images discussed below belong to individual collections and creations that convey the various personal relationships fans can have with their star. Images which are displayed in everyday settings of the home in Tamil Nadu engender a feeling of familiarity and personal space as they are connected to the people living there (Morgan 1998, 57). These generic or personalized images can range from photos of deceased family members to religious images of family deities (calendar prints), memorabilia, posters depicting all kinds of common poster imagery such as landscapes or babies,[2] or of course a fan's favorite star. Many Rajinikanth fans that I have met have been collecting a whole range of paraphernalia related to the star since they were young. These comprise collected and replicated images from fanzines, film magazines and newspaper articles, to name just a few. Moreover, many of them have photos of the events they have organized and participated in with the fan club they are a member of. These images are documented and stored away, mostly in plastic bags or in a photo album kept at home (see figure 11 and 12). Posters and other images decorate walls and stickers are pasted on motorbikes, refrigerators, and doors. Images holding indexical or iconical signs of the star are carried close to the body, in a person's pocket or wallet, as rings or a necklace.

Movie stars live their lives predominantly as images for fans. To paraphrase Tapati Guha-Thakurta who has written on historical monuments but whose argument is relevant here as well, most fans will never meet the star but through images he survives and resonates in people's minds "as a body of readily available, reproducible imagery" (Guha-Thakurta 2003, 110). In this way, the images come to stand in for the "original." "If the aura…lies in its remoteness, its inaccessibility… the power of the image lies in its "presentness" (*ibid*.). The availability of images constitutes their power as stand-in for the "original" star while at the same time confirming their remoteness. In other words, images collected and appropriated by fans are representations of the star. This star is engaged with through representations which are imbued with power and imbue power on the original. But the image does not stand between what it represents and the beholder; the representation is a thing in its own right (Keane 1997, 8).

The images brought into play are mobile and hence appropriated in new and unintended ways. Even though these images are taken from a collection of generic images from magazines and the like, they are individually appropriated and as such "entangle widely shared visions with affectively charged personal narratives and memories" (Strassler 2010, 23). The individual appropriation of these images creates a unique, personal bond with the star. At the same time, the uniqueness of the relationship seems paradoxical, as the images that are used are often highly

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2 See Uberoi 2006 for a discussion on the common presence of babies on posters, buses and other spaces of popular culture.

11. Page from a photo album containing commercial stills (left) and photos of a fan meeting Rajinikanth (right). Chennai, date unknown.

12. Display case in Jothi Kumar's home. Besides various statues and framed images of deities and family photos, one can see several enlarged and framed photos of Rajinikanth. Pondicherry 2007.

standardized. Most fans collect the same kind of images and display them in similar ways. The omnipresence and standardization has produced uniformity in aesthetic value, taste, and judgment of fan imagery and its wider fan club culture (see also Poole 1997).[3] As Pandian observes, "[p]aradoxically, it is their condition of stasis and being in a state of freeze, that makes them mobile" (2005a, 59). Pandian refers to the static or unchanging nature of what is displayed on the image, which is inherent to the photograph as a still image, as that which makes appropriation possible. In other words, a poster's still nature, in contrast to moving images for example, makes it easier to adapt in other contexts; it evokes new directions of circulation and meaning precisely

[3] Poole argues that the standardization of *cartes de visite* "served to disseminate the particular canon of aesthetic value, moral judgment, taste, and distinction that would come to constitute nineteenth-century bourgeois culture. As a mass-produced and interchangeable commodity form, the cartes' standardized poses, airs and demeanors bridged distances, languages, and national boundaries. As such, the very sameness of the cartes' images helped to shape the specific forms of self-imagining, the personal aesthetics, and the elements of style that would come to characterize bourgeoisies (or "bourgeois cultures") in different parts of the globe" (1997, 122).

because it is a still image. Iconic images are heightened examples of such still images as they are recognizable, undemanding and therefore accessible (Hariman and Lucaites 2007). It is because they are so recognizable that they can easily take new directions. I would like to add that the commercial and generic nature of images contributes to the mobility and accessibility of images as well. Their similar appearance makes images recognizable and therefore familiar (Holland 2004), as they are adapted for individual, intimate use. Fans transform and exhibit these commercial and generic images in the setting of the home and thus engender intimateness to otherwise distant public figures (Strassler 2010, 289). Here again it is the standardization – or stasis – of images that generates a certain inventiveness in the ways in which images can be used.

The wide availability and circulation of images contribute to their own popularity and to the popularity of what is on the image, in this case a movie star. The growth of popularity through the circulation of media is what Michael Warner has called metapopularity, i.e. being popular for being popular (2002a). Warner, following Lefort and Habermas, has shown how public figures derive their power partly from being on display. He uses the example of Ronald Reagan to show how his image "blurs the boundary between the iconicities of the political public and the commodity public" (2002a, 173). It is not his qualities as a politician anymore that are popular but his popularity for the kind of public figure he stands for. Warner calls this popularity of popularity "metapopularity." In response to Warner's metapopularity Kajri Jain argues that the efficacy of images lies in a triangulation between the image, the viewer, and the viewer's sense of what others see, think and feel (2007, 292):[4]

> Similarly, the sense invoked in the arena of mass reproduction that imagined others or an Other are looking at what one is seeing has generative effects over and above what happens to the individual viewer in isolation. In other words, the sense of "imagined community" is not simply engendered through multiple individual recognitions of commonality or simultaneity with others who consume similar mass-produced cultural goods. It is also mediated and intensified by a desire for iconic figures whose "meta-popularity" is actively maintained within economies of power and efficacy. In these economies the value generated by processes occurring in a trans-subjective domain is embodied in objects and images rather than in unitary producing subjects (Jain 2007, 294).

For fans, their iconic hero lives predominantly in images and publicity, and their iconicity as well as their circulation makes them powerful and adjustable. Film stars such as Rajinikanth, as I have already demonstrated in Chapter 1, circulate in stories and images and derive their popularity from them. Their popularity articulated in these images, but also their omnipresent circulation, availability and generic outlook create a kind of meta-popularity. The interest in the personal lives of stars and at the same time the selection of what is expected and accepted from them, once more confirms that popularity is not based on the mere qualities of the star. The efficacy of the images that circulate of a star lies in the notion of an imagined community of others that all share the personal feelings towards Rajinikanth. So even though I discuss individual appropriations of representations of a fan's favorite star, according to Jain, these are empowered by the sense of a third viewer. It creates and mediates an "imagined community" of fans.

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[4] This also parallels Nancy Munn's analysis of fame in the case of Gawa in which, she argues, there is a need for a third party to actually construct one's fame (1986).

Collections

Selvam is a coconut seller in his thirties living in a modest house in Thengai Thope, one of the coconut plantations on the outskirts of Pondicherry. Selvam has been a fan of Rajinikanth since his early childhood.

> *After father and mother, he [Rajini] is my breath. I have liked him a lot since I was a child. Even then, we painted on small cloth banners and celebrated [movie releases] at the theater in a grand manner with fire crackers. Also for his birthday we celebrated and distributed milk and chocolate to children. My mother scolded me sometimes but I didn't pay attention to her.*

> *I was a fan of Rajini and my elder brother was a Kamal [Hassan] fan, so we held competitions to collect their images. At the time, when we were going to school, our parents gave us some pocket money. I purchased Rajini photos but my brother found them and he spoiled the images.[5] So we often fought with each other. And when I was in school, I was always thinking about Rajini and his movies.*

For Selvam and his brother images also played an important role in being a fan in early childhood. Selvam is known in Pondicherry as a serious fan who is not interested in personal gain but who works really hard for the fan club. And indeed, throughout the period I got to know Selvam better, he was always very serious in his work as a fan. When I returned to Tamil Nadu after a period of time, most fans I know had changed their cell phone number as many people do all the time. Selvam hadn't. He was afraid that Rajinikanth or the head branch fan club in Chennai may want to call him on the number he once provided. Every time I left Tamil Nadu, it happened to coincide with Selvam having an invitation for Rajinikanth, first an invitation to his marriage and then to his son's first birthday celebrations. He thought that I may have a more direct connection to Rajinikanth so he asked me to send the invitations to his house. Even though he never expressed it in words, I could sense Selvam's hope that Rajinikanth would respond personally to his invitations.

Selvam spends a considerable amount of his modest earnings on collecting and producing images. For Rajinikanth's birthday and movie releases he always spends money on posters and hoardings, for family events he produces extensive invitations that contain Rajinikanth's image. If he cannot afford it himself, he borrows money from others to cover the costs. He keeps most of his images in plastic bags. From this archive Selvam selects images of Rajinikanth for the public hoardings and wall paintings he and his fan club commission for events. He has a particular interest in collecting and using rare images of Rajinikanth for his hoardings and the murals. He made several of these with his friend and artist Ranjit. Ranjit was also a Rajinikanth fan and Selvam recounts: "*Since childhood, both of us, wherever we saw a Rajini image, even if it was small, we collected it and kept it with us.*" Ranjit is dead now; he committed suicide in 2007. I will elaborate on his tragic story in Chapter 4. Selvam repeatedly mentioned, and not without satisfaction, how large his collection of images of Rajinikanth is:

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[5] This story reminds me of a scene in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle and Tandan 2008) in which the protagonist, when he is still a young boy living in a Mumbai slum, is in raptures because of the autograph he received from the celebrated movie star Amitabh Bachchan. In the next scene, to his sorrow and rage, his slightly older brother sells the signature, which leads to a fight between the two.

How many fans have you met? Did you ever see such a collection? You cannot find one. I have collected even the smallest piece of paper with his image …. Did you ever see such a variety of photos of Rajini? See, I have pasted them all over my house, even on the TV and everywhere else. I have only one photo of my mother, the rest are all of Rajini."

Selvam's mother died a couple of months before I met him for the first time in 2007. He felt somewhat guilty since he has spent large amounts of money on the fan club and his collection of Rajinikanth but he has not devoted much attention to his mother's death yet and only has one image of her in his house.

For the events that he is involved in with the fan club, Selvam keeps a photo album that contains photos of fan club activities and photos of the hoardings, cutouts, murals and posters he, Ranjit and his fan club have commissioned for Rajinikanth's birthday and movie releases. The images in the album are primarily for personal use and to show guests what kind of activities the fan club is involved in. These images are also important evidence for the head office of the fan club in Chennai as proof of genuine fandom, something I will have more to say about below. To the photos of activities Selvam has added images of Rajinikanth that he has collected throughout the years. Only the special images of Rajinikanth make it into the album.

The desire to look at and keep images of a fan's hero points towards an animated relationship with these images in which proximity and corporeality are crucial. On the one hand, movie stars remain distant charismatic personae while on the other hand their images evoke intimate relationships (Guha-Thakurta 2004). A distant symbol of a movie star becomes an intimate being through proximity. Likewise, in wedding photography in Tamil Nadu proximity is evoked by locating the wedding couple in different imagined locales and next to movie stars or politicians as if they were present at the wedding (Gerritsen 2006).

The two photos above (figures 13 and 14) depict the interior of Selvam's house. His walls are covered with posters of Rajinikanth alongside a framed portrait of his deceased mother, some other personal photos, and a calendar picturing Ganesh. Shortly after I left Tamil Nadu in 2008, Selvam was about to marry. He stressed that he was not planning to change anything about his activities regarding Rajinikanth. He emphasized that he was planning to keep on spending money on imagery and other activities related to the fan club and would not change the decoration of his house regardless of what his future wife said.

When I visited Selvam two and a half years later, he was married and had a son of more than one year old. His wife, who said she had been a Vijay fan previously, is now also a fan of Rajinikanth, just like her husband. The ways in which she expresses her interest in Rajinikanth are also based on the general characteristics that are attributed to Rajinikanth. This shows once more how personal affection can inform fandom but also how it is exchangeable and based on other selection criteria than merely personal attraction and affection. Even their son, Selvam told me proudly, reacts on hearing or seeing Rajinikanth on television, calling him *taataa*, grandfather.

The interior of Selvam's home had not changed much since his marriage. However, he has given his mother a respectful place on his wall with a framed, enlarged photo in between the images of Rajinikanth. In addition, he had replaced the movie posters of Rajinikanth with a poster of a newer movie, a calendar of Rajinikanth issued by a fellow fan club member and he has added a poster that he personally commissioned for Rajinikanth's sixtieth birthday. The poster says: *Makkal potrum mannane!* (The king who is praised by his people) *Un viral asaivu*

13. Selvam's living room. On the right a Rajinikanth calendar hangs next to a Ganesh calendar. Pondicherry 2007.

14. Selvam's wall. Pondicherry 2010.

15. Selvam holding his photo album. In the background, several of his Rajinikanth posters and the Neyam music channel – run by Rajinikanth fans – playing on TV. Pondicherry 2007.

16. Rajinikanth and Selvam, Pondicherry. Date and photographer unknown. (Selvam's collection).

podhum (it is enough if you just point your fingers) *nattin thalai vidhiye maarum* (the fate of this country would change) *Nee varum naal engalukku thirunaal* (the day you enter is meant to be the day of our delight). The poster refers to Rajinikanth's possible entry into politics that many of his fans have been waiting for since 1996. Up to now, Selvam had not wanted Rajinikanth to be in politics, preferring to see him act in films. What is interesting, is that Selvam is actually more concerned about the splitting up of the fan club in Pondicherry that perhaps could be prevented when Rajinikanth starts a political party than he is in Rajinikanth's entry into politics per se. I have already briefly referred to the split that happened in the Pondicherry Rajinikanth fan club after Rajini Shankar's dismissal as general secretary responsible for the Pondicherry organization. I will elaborate on the political issues within the Pondicherry fan club and the desires and disappointment of Rajinikanth's (non-)political steps at the end of this chapter and in the next two chapters. For now it suffices to say that two groups are trying to take over the fan club organization, leading to friction within the club. Selvam is not happy with these issues and just wants to show Rajinikanth the dedication his fans have for him. Problems in the fan club do not contribute to this commitment. To "read" the poster as a political statement, therefore, would not cover the significance this poster has for Selvam. For him, many more layers are present. For example, he added an image of one of the famous Pondicherry banner artists, Kumar, on the poster. It was in fact the banner artist Muthu, an apprentice of Kumar who made the poster and out of respect for the older artist added his image. For Selvam, who appreciates special and rare images, as I already indicated and who painted murals himself with his friend and artist Ranjit, banner art is an important part of fan activity. Finally, the fact that Rajinikanth is garlanded indicates the celebratory moment for which the poster was made and not the entry into politics. These "meanings" that lie in the poster for Selvam are therefore much more varied and layered than a mere political wish would suggest.

Intimate imaginaries

In figure 15, you can just make out the edge of the portrait Selvam made of Rajinikanth and himself on top of the television set. The best-preserved and most displayed images are the ones recounting fans' meetings with the star. They are often enlarged and framed and figure proudly in the homes or offices of a fan or are stored away in a fan's pocket or wallet. It is a fan's ultimate dream to meet Rajinikanth at least once in his lifetime, even though most will never achieve this. As I argued in the Introduction, tactility and *darshan*, or the reciprocal gaze of this meeting is what feeds this desire. Images, like sculptures, calendars, characters in mythological movies or on posters, are considered representations (*murti*) of the deity that can be worshipped just as images of parents or a movie hero can. By returning the gaze, however, these images do not merely depict or represent a movie star but the star is actually present in them, as if in a sense he is there (Morgan 1998, 57). In other words, images create a space for a fan to encounter and interact with his hero, not as something mediating between image and beholder but as an object in its own right (Keane 1997).

This applies to the images that Selvam has exhibited in his house, as we can see above, and more specifically, as we will see, for the images of meetings with Rajinikanth. Selvam is extremely keen on meeting Rajinikanth, seeing his movies and the images that circulate of him: "*all I want*

is to see him. We have to bring some fans to him, take a picture with him, and that is enough. That is what we are working for." Selvam did meet Rajinikanth but is frustrated that he does not have a photo of this meeting. He still hopes he can meet him again, so he works for it by producing and exhibiting his images. It shows to the outer world how big a fan he is. It shows his dedication or devotion towards Rajinikanth, something that all fans consider crucial in expressing their fandom. As we will see in Chapter four, imagery such as hoardings, posters, and other forms of publicity that individual Rajinikanth fans and fan clubs disseminate serve as a visual record of how good a fan you are, what kind of activities you have done, your personal relationship with and dedication to the star. This record is intended for a wider public of Rajinikanth fans and fan clubs of other actors but also for evidence for the headquarters to see what a dedicated fan you are. The headquarters uses this information to select new local fan club leaders. For Selvam therefore, showing his dedication to Rajinikanth is a way of proving that he is a "real" fan and active fan club member. This would enhance the chance of him joining other, higher-ranking fan club members when they go to Chennai to meet Rajinikanth.

Meeting the star is what all fan club members wish for, but this meeting is not complete without a photographic memento – preferably one that can be enlarged and framed. Selvam indicated this by stating: "*we … take a picture with him, and that is enough.*" Most fans I have worked with, when they talked about their meeting with Rajinikanth or when they expressed their hope to meet him, explained this in the desire to take a photograph with Rajinikanth. Remember my meeting with Rajinikanth in which his manager asked me to come alone and only bring my camera.

However, taking a picture does not always happen for fans. Most fans have never met him personally and if they have, the photograph is not always usable. Several fans showed me photos of their meeting that were badly framed and out of focus due to the hectic moment and the fact that the photographer was as overwhelmed as the others were by seeing Rajinikanth and therefore just pressed the button without paying attention. Nevertheless, in spite of being blurred or badly framed, at least it is evidence and a keepsake of the event. Without a photo, the meeting does not really count, as shown by disappointed fans such as Selvam who did meet Rajinikanth but do not have a photo of the occasion. Since they cannot show "evidence", they do not talk about their meeting in the same way as fans who do have such photos.

Let me now return to the photo I just pointed out on Selvam's television set. A close-up of this photo can be seen in figure 16. Selvam does not have a photo of the moment he met Rajinikanth, so he asked a photo studio to retouch a photo of another fan who did meet Rajinikanth, and replace that person's face with his own. Even though Selvam is at first somewhat reluctant to reveal this transposition, he is also happy to see himself next to his hero.

Selvam's retouching of the photo shows that images do not have to be indexical to be effective. While the photo is not indexical, it *becomes* indexical. And more importantly, it becomes effective after manipulation. At the same time, Selvam's reluctance shows that certain photographic practices are not accepted. This would suggest that a photo actually *should be* indexical and a reliable representation of what is photographed. But as we will see later for fans but also in various other photographic practices, putting the person on the photo in front of all kinds of backdrops is a suggestion of what is desired (Behrend 2003; Gerritsen 2006; MacDougall 1992; Pinney 1997). Selvam's reluctance lies at another level which once more points to the fine balance

I noticed earlier between propagating fandom and exceeding what fandom should be. As this photo is displayed in the more intimate, everyday sphere of the home in which not everyone is able to see it, there is more leeway for displaying these kinds of images that would otherwise be considered inappropriate. This would link up with Bourdieu's proposition that something cannot be photographed if it has not been solemnized (Bourdieu in Pinney 1997). However, here this is not the case. Or at least, not as it is reflected in the photograph. The manipulated image is a construction of something that did take place but does not have an indexical trace, something which would be desirable to have.

Figure 17 shows a meeting with the late Ranjit, who, as I mentioned above, was a friend of Selvam. He met Rajinikanth once, but not alone. Being a painter Ranjit replaced the other person in the photo by continuing the background and added Rajinikanth's arm which was previously around the shoulders of the person he erased. So where Selvam replaced someone else with his image, Ranjit erased someone to make the image entirely his own.

Another way of centering the attention on the individual, personal meeting and which resembles Ranjit's removal of a person is the blurring of other people in a photo. This is a digital retouching trick that equals Ranjit's use of paint. District fan club leader Ibrahim runs an office and telephone booth at the main Wbus stand in Villupuram. The framed and enlarged photos in his office immediately show that Ibrahim has met Rajinikanth (and his wife Latha Rajinikanth) more than once (figure 18). On the right, we see Ibrahim meeting Latha Rajinikanth and on the left, a portrait of Ibrahim and Rajinikanth. The photo in the middle was taken much earlier than the other photos in his office, as we can tell from the young appearance of both Rajinikanth and

17. Rajinikanth and Ranjit, Pondicherry. Date unknown. (Ranjit's family collection).

Ibrahim. The images of the first meeting with Rajinikanth and the one with Latha Rajinikanth depict other people as well. To push them into the background, these people have been blurred which brings the meeting into the foreground and makes it more personal as such.

Figures 19 and 20 display two other examples of retouched photographs of actual and constructed meetings with the star. In figure 19 the people, who haven't met Rajinikanth on this occasion, have added Rajinikanth at either side. The importance of the group photos lies in the fact that former AIRFC leader Sathyanarayanan is present. Figure 20, a photo displayed in a fan's photo album, shows a constructed photo of a fan holding Rajinikanth's hand. What is noteworthy about this photo is that it is not a "natural" still of Rajinikanth but a movie still. By using the term "natural stills" fans are referring to photos of Rajinikanth that are not from movies but are of his off-screen life. A natural still, as used in figure 19, would therefore give the photo a more "realistic" look. As a result, natural stills are mainly used for personal occasions, whereas for movie releases and other fan club events it is more often stills from movies.

These retouching and collage techniques are commonly used for images in Tamil Nadu and India at large. I have written elsewhere of the production of wedding videos and photo albums in Tamil Nadu in which retouching and the adding of backgrounds and objects play an important role in the construction of a future romantic narrative (Gerritsen 2006). Photos and scenes are blurred to put the bride and groom center stage and objects and backgrounds are added to enhance an atmosphere of festivity and romance. But from the beginning personal photographs in India have been more than indexical photographic documentation (Pinney 1997). Whereas in early European photography paint was also used to retouch photos, in Indian photography paint has always been more than simply an additional extra. Entire photos are repainted to show the desired image. In studio photography, which has become popular throughout the years, photo settings and poses are staged and manipulated to signify possible states of being that "leave substantive traces of what otherwise would be mere dreams" (Pinney 1997, 91). People pose in front of backdrops of all kinds of imaginary scenes.

18. Framed photos in Ibrahim's office. Villupuram 2008.

19. Image constructed from the photo of a meeting with the former AIRFC leader Sathyanarayanan with Ibrahim, Saktivel and Murugan. Rajinikanth appears on the left- and right-hand side. Vannur, date unknown. (Saktivel's collection).

20. Constructed image of Rajinikanth and fan in photo album. Cuddalore, date unknown. (Sundar's collection).

21. Framed photo of film star Sivaji Ganesan and a fan. Place and date unknown.

22. Photos in photo album of meeting with Rajinikanth. Chennai, date unknown.

What makes the liberal use of paint unproblematic, Pinney suggests, is the lack of desire in India to capture someone within a temporal and spatial framework. Moreover, photography does not capture the 'inner' character visible by its physiognomic traces. In this way, creating a romantic wedding narrative or positioning yourself next to Rajinikanth in a manipulated image is not problematic, as in this case a photo is merely an indexical trace of the "real." What we see is merely the person's physiognomy in a constructed dream world. The efficacy of the image however, is more than that. Proximity by physically putting objects together, as Pinney has also shown in his work, imbues the image with power (*ibid.*). The use of photos of Rajinikanth works in similar ways. Centering the focus of attention on the meeting between him and the fan in question imbues the photo, whether manipulated or not, with power. It creates a dream world in which the star is put into the desired proximity of fans. For fans, the power of these kinds of images lies, first and foremost, in the joy of seeing yourself with your star. But it also positions you within the fan club, as it shows your efforts in meeting him.

The celebration of these keepsakes in the form of framed and often enlarged and retouched photos invokes the memory. At the same time, photography's more evocative and imaginative qualities constitute and enact proximity. Photos of meetings become souvenirs in which physical presence is central (Strassler 2003). Photos offer the opportunity to come closer to realizing a fan's desire to be physically proximate to Rajinikanth, a potential that is increased by contemporary digital technology through its many cut-and-paste possibilities.

But it is not only images that enact a relationship with a star. Different kinds of traces (tactical, indexical) of the star work to establish this relationship. Indexical connections – physical tokens in the place where the star actually left his mark – can function in a similar way to images. This is exemplified by a youthful memory of Saktivel, who has been an ardent fan of Rajinikanth since childhood. Now Saktivel is the fan club block secretary in Vannur, an area in Villupuram district, in which he lives and has been elected as the Panchayat president with the aid of his fan club support. During a conversation, Saktivel recalls the intensity of his fandom for Rajinikanth when he was young by narrating the following incident. At the age of 13, Saktivel eagerly wanted to see a newly released Rajinikanth movie. He received some money from his parents for his theater ticket but instead of spending it on a ticket, he bought sweets to distribute at the theater. Afterwards, he had no money left for the actual ticket and in the meantime, his parents were out so he could not ask them for more money. He decided to earn some money by collecting and selling firewood. He climbed a tree, fell out, and was severely injured. Even though he could not walk properly, Saktivel was determined to see the film. With a broken leg he stumbled to the theater and saw the film, after which he was hospitalized for six months. His mother knew that nothing would please him more than an image of Rajinikanth, so she went to Chennai and tried to meet Rajinikanth to collect a photo of him, but in vain. Instead, she met Rajinikanth's All India fan club president Sathyanarayanan. Sathyanarayanan agreed to give her his autograph. This autograph pleased Saktivel almost as much as a photo of Rajinikanth would have done. Even now, Saktivel enjoys recalling the story and keeps emphasizing how happy he was with this autograph, even keeping it under his pillow. It was like medicine – he did not need anything else. Just as the dream of many fans is to meet Rajinikanth – to have some physical contiguity with him –the autograph here also seems to work as an index: Sathyanarayanan's autograph became a physical token of Rajinikanth. This indexical connection is almost tactical: it works as medicine here.

23. Photo of fan club member Annamalai (left) and his colleague. Annamalai has two framed photos of Rajinikanth and a Rajinikanth flag attached to the top of his vehicle. Pondicherry. Date unknown. (Annamalai's collection).

"Now equivalence itself has become a fetish"[6]

Annamalai, who works as an auto-rickshaw driver, is proud to be the only person in Pondicherry with a Rajinikanth flag fluttering on top of his vehicle (figure 23). He tries to imitate Rajinikanth in every possible way, admiring him particularly in the highly successful movie *Baadsha* (1995) in which the actor played a rickshaw driver. During a conversation with Annamalai in his rickshaw, he kept emphasizing that nothing is more important to him than waking up and seeing Rajinikanth's image first. It is not his wife or his children he wants to see; it is Rajinikanth. That, he says, is why there is such a huge poster of the actor above their bed. Indeed, in their small one-room house, this poster is visible from every corner of the room. Just in front of it, there are two fascinating images displayed on the television set (figures 24 and 25).

Annamalai, in order to emphasize that he imitates Rajinikanth in every possible way, combined his own photo with Rajinikanth's in two picture frames. One of the frames shows an enlarged portrait of Rajinikanth to which he added a passport-sized photo of himself in a similar pose. In the other frame, he enlarged himself instead and added the original passport-sized photo of Rajinikanth. This mimetic play with images of a star is very unusual. Copying the star's posture, clothes or hairstyle is accepted but it is not considered appropriate if you depict yourself as large as, or larger than the star. On the one hand Annamalai is actively mimicking Rajinikanth, and in this way confirms his genuine devotion to his hero; on the other hand, the way in which he does this – by comparing himself to Rajinikanth – is considered to be inappropriate. As we

6 Horkheimer and Adorno quoted in Taussig 1993, 45.

24. Rajinikanth and Annamalai.
(Annamalai's collection). Pondicherry,
date and photographers unknown.

25. Annamalai and Rajinikanth.
(Annamalai's collection).

will see later in reference to hoardings, fans are criticized as being too egocentric if they display such an image for a wider public. Since this photo is only for "personal" display, however, it seems that Annamalai just played around with mimesis and in this way enhanced proximity, and hence intimacy, with Rajinikanth (see also Pinney 2001). In other words, devotional intimacy and mimicry is acceptable but identification can be more problematic. There is clearly a fine line between individual expressions of fandom and "misuse" of your star. This brings me back to emphasizing what I aim to argue in this chapter, i.e. the ways in which fandom is enacted is as much about fandom in relation to a star as it is performance of the self as a fan. The personal, domestic spaces and personal appropriations of a star allow more space for the self than public spaces do. In Chapter four we will see how the publicly displayed billboards can also display personal desires for proximity but at the same time, due to their public nature, they are also subject to many more restrictions. Here, the domesticity of these images brings more leeway to performance of the self.

The efficacy of these images is due in part to the physical proximity and corporeality created by means of mimesis. Drawing on Marxist notions of the commodity fetish, Horkheimer and Adorno have suggested that it is no longer the fetish that is subject to equivalence, rather equivalence itself has become a fetish (Horkheimer and Adorno in Taussig 1993, 45). They refer to the commoditization of life under capitalism in which objects become fetishized. Several scholars have written about the disappearance of reality, the real or the authentic, categories that in modern times are said to be replaced by images, spectacle, or reproductions (Adorno and Horkheimer 2007; Baudrillard 1994; Benjamin 1969b; Boorstin 1992; Debord 1994). Except for Benjamin, who also noted the positive sides of the transformations via mass productions, most of these works are imbued with a feeling of loss of the authentic, of the real. Benjamin referred to the commodity fetish as he described the arcades as places of phantasmagoria in relation

to the objects for sale (Buck-Morss 1989). Looking at the deceitfulness of commodity desires, however, would bypass the nuances of the investment that people put in things (Taussig 1993; see also Spyer 1998). What I am particularly interested in therefore is not the take on capitalism and the (deceitful) commoditization of life, but the ways in which equivalence becomes an object of value and desire.

The fetish is one of those terms with which this desire for objects has been theorized. Pietz (1985; 1987; 1988) has shown how the notion of the fetish derived from the Portuguese bartering on slave routes. The Portuguese, despite their religion and "rational principles" took oaths on fetishes to seal agreements (Pietz in Apter 1993). Later on the notion was used to describe the "primitive other" as the antithesis of Christianity's transcendental, abstract spirituality and Enlightenment itself (Jain 2007, 223). In the 19th century it was used to understand the other within a subject and capitalist society (*ibid.*), which brings us back to the ideas of, among others, Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno about the position of commodities in capitalism.

Instead of the rejection or disapproval of things coming too close and desirable as suggested by authors such as Marx or Adorno and Horkheimer, here I actually want to address the intention of getting things closer by way of their likeness. If we recall Benjamin's definition of the mimetic faculty, he described it as the capacity to copy and to become the other (1986). The mimetic faculty suggests a dual notion of mimesis, i.e. copying or imitation and a sensuous, visceral connection between viewer and viewed (Taussig 1993). Just as fans explained how they liked to dress up as Rajinikanth when they were young, mimicry is a recurrent theme in the images brought into play by fans.

Images of movie stars, as objects and as representations, are imbued with a sense of proximity and affect. Mimicry displays power because the images can perform something that is desired. At the same time they also show the limits of likeness and what can be done to perform it (Strassler 2010). Images and their manipulation facilitate these intimate, personal links to and corporeal engagements with the star. This makes the image practices of fans productive rather than reproductive encounters, which is Michael Taussig's understanding of the mimetic faculty, i.e. "the nature that culture uses to create second nature" (1993, xiii). This complicates the copied images of fans which become objects not merely deriving from an original. Instead, they are productive practices in which the "copy" has a life of its own, partly deriving from and related to the original and partly moving from it independently.

We can distinguish two ways in which the images here draw on mimicry. Firstly, and applicable to photos in general, the image has an actual relationship to the star; i.e. the depiction of Rajinikanth is an indexical sign or a copy of the real Rajinikanth. Secondly, and what makes the retouched and constructed photos of Selvam, Ranjit and in particular Annamalai especially interesting in the further discussion of mimicry, is the men's own active involvement in changing the images. Pinney has described images that perform a mirror effect, allowing viewers to actually see themselves in the same space as the deity. This enhances the power of the religious image and the mutual gaze that is established (2008, 422). In the same way, we could consider the mimicry and the positioning of images of fans and stars in the same frame as customizations that bring these images closer to fans (*ibid.*).

Annamalai is playing with mimicry by copying Rajinikanth's pose, but he is also mimicking Rajinikanth's eminence by both enlarging and reducing his own image and that of Rajinikanth.

But who actually mimics whom here? Can we speak of an original and a copy in this case? With this reversal mimesis "becomes an enactment not merely *of* and [sic] original but *by* an 'original'" (Taussig 1993, 79 author's own emphasis). Originals only exist because copies are made of them. These copies, in turn, have to be recognized as copies in order to acknowledge the existence of an original. The fact that Annamalai knows he is crossing the fine line between devotional intimacy and identification acknowledges the existence of the original; yet as it is an image, it works in both ways for Annamalai.

Literature examining the production of familiarity and intimacy, predominantly in the context of Hollywood celebrities and audiences, suggests that the relationships audiences build up with a celebrity are constituted by the knowing and not knowing unknowing of the *authentic* individual (Dyer 2004; Doss 1999; Gledhill 1991; Marshall 2001; Stacey 1994). Desire is produced through the construction of a celebrity via stories and images found in magazines, posters and the like (Marshall 2002, 234–235; see also Doss 1999). There are two points that I want to elaborate on further here. Firstly, as I have suggested earlier, familiarity and intimacy is created as much through personalized images such as those discussed above as through mass-mediated and produced images as collected and used by fans. The photographic practices shown by Annamalai, Selvam, and Ranjit show how fans actively employ images to create intimacy and invoke a personal relationship between themselves and Rajinikanth. This can be situated in an Indian context in which images are imbued with power (Jain 2007) and can enhance certain imagined or desired identities (Pinney 1997).

Secondly, the *authentic* individual, as Marshall describes it, is what fans are really searching for but is again created through their own practices. Fans are fascinated by the on- and off-screen life of a star which they found out about through magazines, television and circulating stories. This information enables fans to generate an image of their star as well as produce him with their own manipulations and desires. The image here can be understood in a double sense again; firstly, as a mental representation of what their star is; and secondly as an object that represents this idea. In this way, images actually become more engaging than the star himself. As they are individually appropriated and manipulated, these images stand on their own, or in Baudrillard's words, the simulacrum – the copy without an original– is a thing in its own right, or the hyperreal (1994). Baudrillard's work *Simulacra and Simulation* is imbued with a sense of loss of reality and meaning replaced by signs and symbols, something that I do not want to follow here. I want to take up the idea of the copy as a thing in its own right, something that leads its own life.

A special characteristic attributed to images makes them particularly appealing to use: they can provide a much more personalized and attractive image than the original. Images such as postcards or retouched images of deceased relatives always depict a landscape or person that is more attractive than the "original" from which it is derived. I will come back to this point in Chapter four where I discuss the difference artists and viewers observe between painted and digitally designed hoardings. In addition to the possibilities that images provide to make the content personal and more attractive, the images themselves can also be used in spaces in which the original is not available. Fans have become fans because of the images they have encountered of the star and not because they have actually met the star. Fans close the distance between themselves and their star by engaging with his images. But even though the copies have their own lives beyond that of the original, the original, or at least an imaginative creation of what that should

be, is sought after. Fans want to be close to their star too. They want a physical connection and in doing so, they engage with images.

In his work *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* Benjamin puts forward his ideas on the loss of authenticity and aura of cult objects and art works by mechanical reproduction (1969b). In short, Benjamin argues that new methods of mass reproduction mean that a work of art can be easily reproduced and therefore reach a wider audience. This has put an end to the authenticity and aura of cult objects and art works:

> *The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity. … The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis à vis technical reproduction"* (1969b, 220).

In other words, the original – its presence in time and space, its unique existence in the place where it happens to be – becomes of less value through the copies that circulate in other contexts out of reach of the original (*Op. cit.* 220). In this way, the object loses its aura, "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (*Op. cit.* 222).

> *It [the decay of aura] rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakingly, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye (Op. cit. 223).*

For Benjamin, there is a difference between a reproduced image and an original seen by the "unarmed" eye. Benjamin's thesis has been questioned repeatedly, however. Kajri Jain's work on calendar or bazaar art in India is a strong argument against the idea of the original in calendar art (Jain 2007). She shows how the representations of deities on calendars cannot be seen as having an originary moment or source, as is often claimed by pointing to the influence of the painter Ravi Varma's style and depictions.[7] It should instead be seen as a negotiation between novelty and repetition. The images of deities are copied but at the same time the artists who make them put in their own aesthetic skills and preferences, and regional, temporal and other novelties. The images of movie stars are slightly different in nature, as they appear in photographic representations in magazines and the like but are personally appropriated by fans. The fact that novelty is sought after is exemplified by Selvam and Ranjit's constant search for rare and special images, but at the same time there is not too much leeway in deviating from what the star is. A star should be recognizable as a star, otherwise the efficacy of the image disappears. Just as commercial images can be employed in many ways because of their genericness, repetition reinforces their power. In addition, Annamalai's play with mimicry is deemed not entirely acceptable, yet as it is in the everyday space of the home, it is not condemned either.

Assmann and Assmann have attempted to show that "[m]ore than a similar linear movement of depravation from original to copy, there is a return loop, a cyclical movement of enrichment

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7 See Introduction for more information on Ravi Varma.

from the copy back to the original: the latter triggers the copy; the former, in return, valorizes the original" (2003, 150). Gumbrecht and Marrinan make a similar argument in criticizing Benjamin's authenticity concept as they claim that Benjamin fails to differentiate between "copies that represent themselves as authentified copies, and multiples that want to be originals" (2003, 126). They argue instead that:

> *… while it is true that high-quality fakes can make it difficult for the original to prove its privileged status (and thus become a danger for the original), it is also obvious that fakes do not put the category of the authentic into question. The opposite seems to be the case: what would be the point of authenticity if it were not for the danger of fakes – or, more precisely, there is no point to authenticity without copies that are not easily identifiable as copies (ibid.).*

Benjamin, the Assmanns and Gumbrecht and Marrinan refer specifically to works of art and their reproductions in particular artistic traditions. There are also the intricacies of when we should use the term art and the fact that the original in this case is a living person, i.e. Rajinikanth. It is not just the original that acquires more power through these images – the power of the copy extracted from the original (Taussig 1993, 59) seems to become as important as or sometimes even more important than the original itself. This also has to do with the fact that these copies are images which, in an ideology of the image in India, are embodied and imbued with power. Therefore the distinction between copy and original falls apart when it comes to images, as cheap mass produced "take offs" representing deities are as valuable as the statue of a deity in a temple. In the same way, images of Rajinikanth are imbued with power for fans, and this is only enhanced by the adaptations that they make to images to come even closer to him.

If I stick up a poster with Rajini's image, it will wash away in the rain. If I wear this ring it will not disappear and everybody can see it; my friends, relatives, and wherever I go, others can see it.

Madhan Mohan.

Spectacle

Having discussed images in the sphere of the domestic, let me now briefly discuss the use of Rajinikanth's image for a larger public to see. Madhan's ring is just such an example. He wears it as it is a more permanent sign that is visible for a larger audience. Less permanent but relevant to this discussion are invitations to fan club members' personal events, on which images of the star are often used. These

invitations also serve as a prelude to the next two chapters where I discuss the public events that fans organize and the accompanying placement of posters, hoardings and cutouts in public spaces. Invitations offer the opportunity to display a person's connection with the star as fan club member or because of affection to a wider, yet familiar, audience. For their own birthdays or weddings or those of their family members, fans include images of their star on the invitation. I have encountered the use of star imagery for marriages, birthdays, ear piercing and coming of age ceremonies and death notices of fans or their family members. This imagery is used on hoardings made for the event (see Chapter 4) and on invitations to the event. Including your favorite movie star is a way of associating yourself with this star, just as party supporters or party members often use images of their party's leader on the front of their invitations. At the same time, just as in the images discussed above and what we see later with the hoardings exhibited in the public realm, displaying your star also indicates his presence instead of

26. Saktivel and Nalini's wedding invitation. Moratandi 1995. Collection of Saktivel and Nalini.

merely representing him (Morgan 1998, 57). But what makes these images different from the ones discussed above, is that they not only show a personal connection with a star but also relate to fan club membership.

Figures 26 to 31 show some examples of what this can look like. Figure 27 is Saktivel and Nalini's wedding invitation. Saktivel is the fan club secretary and Panchayat president I mentioned earlier. I also quoted Nalini, his wife, in Chapter one, regarding her desire to see the first show. Actually, it is officially Nalini who is the Panchayat president, as the position was given to a woman. But as often happens in other positions too, it is the husband who takes over the work. Saktivel was always on the road, trying to mediate in family feuds and other issues within the area. I met Saktivel and Nalini regularly. On our way to Vannur, the area where they live, Saktivel's house was usually our first stop. Perspiring after cycling for an hour in the hot and humid climate of the Tamil Nadu coast, Nalini and Saktivel's house was always a pit stop where we could recover a bit. If Saktivel was at home, or once he had arrived after some time hanging around at their home, we usually had elaborate conversations about the ins and outs of the fan club and the political situation. When Saktivel was not at home, which was usually the case, Nalini would tell us about her position in the fan club and her Rajinikanth fandom. Nalini recounted how, before her wedding, she secretly hoped that her future husband would be a Rajinikanth fan. I asked her when she found out about it:

> I didn't know about it [when the marriage arrangements were made]. One day he came to my home to discuss the design of the [wedding] invitation. He asked permission to put Rajini's photo on it. It was only then that we found out that he was a Rajini fan. In my home we all are Rajini fans, including my father, so we agreed that he could put Rajini's photo on the invitation. Now I am happy that my long-time dream has been fulfilled!

The wedding was in 1995, before today's multi-color, offset design and printing possibilities

27. Wedding invitation of an AIADMK family. The bridal couple is in the middle, the AIADMK leader Jayalalitha on the right and local AIADMK functionaries in white shirts surround the couple. Collection of designer and studio owner Yuvaraaj. Pondicherry 2005.

28. Wedding invitation displaying Rajinikanth and fan club members. Collection of designer and studio owner Yuvaraaj. Pondicherry 2006.

29. Invitation to the first birthday of the daughter of a Rajinikanth fan. Moratandi 2007.

30. Cover of a wedding photo album with the bride and groom in the middle and movie star Kamal Hassan on the left, talking into a microphone. Photo studio Devi, Pondicherry 2002.

31. Hoarding made for a wedding couple, commissioned by Selvam and several other fans. Selvam's photo is next to the two images of Rajinikanth; the other fans are displayed on the right. Pondicherry 2006. Made by artist Ranjit. Selvam's collection.

were available. The prints were mostly two color posters with simple designs, in comparison to the recent invitations that contain several special effects regarding the use of colors, the inclusion of the star, etc. (see figures 28-33).

The use of images of the star is not a prerequisite and family members of fan club members do not always approve of it. Saktivel came to Nalini's house to ask her family's permission to use Rajinikanth's image. As the members of Nalini's family are also Rajinikanth fans, they did not oppose it. But this is not always the case, and using the image of a movie star is not always considered appropriate for momentous events such as a wedding. If the family itself is not using the image, often friends of the groom make a hoarding on which they wish their friend for his marriage, and will include an image of their favorite movie star. However, higher-level fan club members almost always use imagery of the star. Now that Saktivel is the leader of his area he will use Rajinikanth's images for almost all his invitations.

The higher up in the fan club the fan was, the larger the invitations seemed to be, matching his status and aspirations. For the most part these fans were also better off but it was mainly to show their position within the fan club and their ambitions in the networks they established. It was particularly fans that were also politically active that used invitations to their family events to announce their connections and celebrate in a grand manner. If fans stopped using this imagery after having used it in the past, it was seen as proof of not being a dedicated fan anymore. For example, when Jothi Kumar did not use Rajinikanth's image for the coming of age ceremony (*Manjal Neerattu Vizha,* turmeric bathing ceremony) of his daughter in 2010, all the fans that heard about it or noticed it, understood it as an indication that Jothi Kumar had left the fan club.

For members of political parties it is common to refer to the party by inviting local political representatives, using party emblems and displaying party colors and the leader on the invitation to a family function.[8] Movie star invitations are not sold as preprinted cards; they have to be designed by a design or photo studio. The stills of the star which are used are mostly what fans call "natural" stills, i.e. Rajinikanth in an off-screen photo. Natural stills give the suggestion of the star being really present whereas movie stills suggest a more imaginative impression. Besides being natural and therefore real, often images of the star are used that create the impression that he is also blessing the couple (see e.g. figures 28, 30 and 31). Figure 30 shows the wedding album of a Kamal Hassan fan where the cover has an image of the star as if he is giving a speech at the wedding. Figure 33 shows Rajinikanth getting out of a car with his wife Latha. He is being welcomed by Rajini Shankar who organized the function for which this hoarding was made. The scene shows the importance of the guests as they have arrived with several cars, one of which has a flashing light, and security personnel.

There are various reasons for the inclusion of a fan's favorite star in imagery made for familial events. For Nalini it was the showcasing of her, her family's and future husband's fandom; for Selvam it is a sign of affection; for other fans it might be a political statement, or a sign of importance within the fan club and through the actor. These issues are the subject of the next two chapters but let me end this chapter with a final illustration of how personal, familial events can be used as examples of fan club politics and power. It is here that Benjamin's second hypothesis is touched upon, i.e. the politicization of art. The rite of passage of Rajini Shankar's daughter's

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8 The term function is commonly used in India for a formal ceremony or social gathering.

coming of age ceremony was a function in which Shankar showed his fan club leadership and political power by attracting massive crowds in the name of Rajinikanth.

A few years ago, before the release of the film *Chandramukhi* (P. Vasu 2005), Shankar was dismissed from his post as Pondicherry state fan club leader. After a group of higher-level fans got the feeling that Rajini Shankar was earning money by selling the first-day-first-show tickets at a higher price than necessary and that he was using the fan club purely for his own political career, they complained to the All India Rajinikanth Fan Club leader Sathyanarayanan in Chennai. As a result Rajini Shankar was dismissed from his post. Ten members then formed a committee and took charge of the fan club organization in Pondicherry until the selection of a new leader had been made. Rajini Shankar, though, is a well-known man in Pondicherry and had been the face of the Rajinikanth fan club for years. He continued acting as the fan club leader and so two groups came into being, both acting as representatives of the fan club. For each movie release or birthday celebration, both groups made themselves known with murals throughout the city, birthday *pujas*, newspaper ads, etc. In addition, both groups asked the collector's permission to organize the fan show. The collector divided the approvals and allocated different movie theaters to the two groups. Tension between the two groups grew and ordinary fans who just wanted their tickets from Shankar got impatient, as I showed in Chapter one. I described how Shankar's house was attacked over the fight for tickets. Despite the dismissal, the local media still treats Rajini Shankar as the official leader and, even though they cover the activities of the fan club extensively, they have never written about the conflict.

Rajini Shankar, who I introduced in the previous chapter as a long-time fan of Rajinikanth and the initiator of the fan club in Pondicherry, has become a professional involved in all kinds of business, shifting his field often from real estate to scrap iron to movie making in the last few years. He and his family are well-off as a result. Shankar never said much to me about the issue at the start and just ruled the fan club as he had always done. It was only later that he became more open about his frustrations, and these were not directed towards other Pondicherry fans but towards Rajinikanth himself. In the following chapters I will explain how this frustration developed. For now it suffices to explain Rajini Shankar's involvement in fan activity and its combination with politics.

Rajini Shankar is involved in politics by being closely connected to the AIADMK party and the former Chief Minister of Pondicherry, N. Rangasamy, who was a member of Congress but recently started the AINRC (All India N.R. Congress).[9] For his daughter's coming of age, Shankar organized a considerable ceremony and function to which he invited N. Rangasamy, the political strategist M. Natarajan[10] and several local MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) who Shankar knows well. The invitation to the event impressed many, largely due to the importance of the guests and the size of the invitation itself. The front of the invitation displayed large images of Rajinikanth, his wife Latha Rajinikanth and the Chief Minister (figure 32). Shankar's daughter figures in the middle. The other side of the invite displays the CM, M. Natarajan, and

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[9] The letters N. R. in the party's abbreviation stand for *Namathu Rajiyam* (our kingdom) but coincidently, they are also Rangasamy's initials.

[10] WM. Natarajan is the husband of Sasikala, the woman that lives with AIADMK leader Jayalalitha. All kinds of rumors abound about the alleged lesbian relationship between Jayalalitha and Sasikala. Natarajan is still married to Sasikala but they live apart. Natarajan is described as a political strategist and is a well-known public figure in Tamil Nadu politics.

மகான் ராமபரதேச சுவாமிகள் துணை

ரஜினி ஷங்கர் மகள்
மஞ்சள் நீராட்டு விழா
அழைப்பிதழ்

27.1.2008

Super Designs
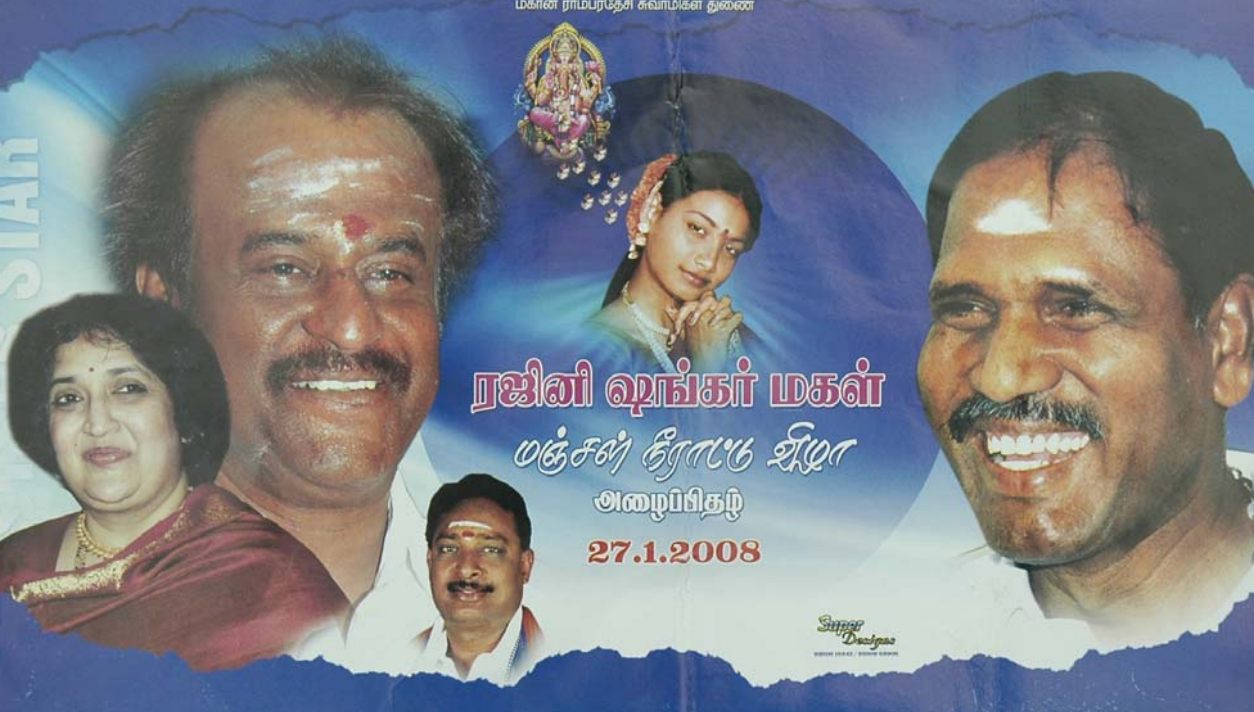
32. Front and back of the invitation to the coming of age ceremony of Rajini Shankar's daughter. The front shows Rajinikanth, Latha and the most important guest, N. Rangasamy, CM of Pondicherry. The back shows the announcement of the event, and photos and names of important guests. The invitation is 45 by 26 cm in size. Pondicherry 2008.

smaller photos of the MLAs. In addition, all the names of important guests (political and from the fan club) are listed. He invited the entire fan club network, even the opposite party that was responsible for removing him from his post. Although Shankar has never been explicit about why he organized this function, it is most likely that he used the occasion to show his power in Pondicherry.

Gandhirajan, my research assistant, and I went to the function relatively early. The location of the event, a *mandapam* (reception hall) which is often used for functions such as marriages, could be seen from afar as it had been transformed with grand decorations. Huge hoardings announced the event in front of the reception hall, an elephant greeted the guests at the entrance and the guests were served freshly made grape juice before entering the hall. The hall was divided in two, with two stages. The guests' chairs were facing each other so that the guests could watch both sides of the *mandapam*. On one side a large stage was set up for the special guests and on the other side, the religious ritual of Shankar's daughter would take place. Various cameramen covered the guests who wait patiently for Shankar's family and the political guests to arrive. A screen broadcast images of the function live so that guests could watch themselves and the event they were participating in from a distance. We waited with the other guests for a long time for Shankar to arrive. Just after Shankar, his wife and their beautifully dressed daughter arrived at the *mandapam*, the highlight of the event in terms of images to shoot for the cameramen, the honorary guest and politician M. Natarajan arrived. Everyone stood up for his arrival; the cameras were now focused on him. After Shankar had taken his daughter inside, the speeches of fan club leaders from other districts and politicians started. On the other side of the large hall, the ritual ceremony for his daughter took place. Only for the photo session after the religious ritual did Shankar go to the other side to pose with his family and the guests. We heard two older

women who sat behind us say that they were disappointed because they expected a more *filmi* function, but now Shankar had gone political. Later that evening, the Chief Minister arrived at the function and now Shankar's guests were complete. The coming of age ritual and guests' congratulations were over relatively quickly but the political part of the event continued for a while. The event bore more resemblance to a political gathering than to a familial rite of passage ceremony. Nevertheless, it had still been the fan club, Shankar's fame and the attraction of Rajinikanth that attracted the crowds. A day later, a local newspaper covered the CM's visit to the function. In the article, Rajini Shankar, despite his dismissal, is cited as the leader of the fan club. Shankar, despite the disappointment of the two women about the lack of a *filmi* character to the event, had succeeded in showing off his network of VIPs from Pondicherry to Chennai and had set his name and fame.

33. Hoarding made by fans for the coming of age ceremony. It displays a constructed image of Rajinikanth and his wife arriving at the scene of the event and Shankar greeting them with flowers. Pondicherry 2008.

Conclusion

Using the icon Rajinikanth for a personal event serves as an apt transition between the genres of images that I have discussed in the above and the cinematic and political images that are displayed by fans in the public realm. In this chapter I have attempted to show various ways in which fans engage with their star. Images as objects and representations and their manipulations facilitate these relationships in various ways. Images are keepsakes of the actual or manipulated souvenirs articulating desires. Images facilitate these personal desires and memories, whether they are based on actual occurrences or imaginary proximity.

These images invoke personal desires as well as displaying them to a wider world; as invitations or announcements and blessings on hoardings they travel outside the realm of their domestic or everyday use. The way Rajini Shankar organized his daughter's coming of age function exemplifies this public display. He used his daughter's coming of age to organize a grand event, not as an official fan club event but under the banner of Rajinikanth's image and his own position within Pondicherry. A couple of days before the function took place the busy road around Pondicherry's bus stand was the site of various hoardings displaying Rajinikanth and his wife Latha and on each hoarding there was a large photo of one of the five most important invitees to the function. Although Rajinikanth was still the main reason for inviting a larger audience, the invited guests meant that the function was more political in nature. Shankar is not the only fan who is involved in politics. The next chapter will deal with the public activities and political practices of fans. Even though these are often not the reason for joining the fan club, once older, it becomes an intrinsic part of fan activity. In the following chapter I will show the different ways in which politics start to play a role in a fan's life trajectory.