Article

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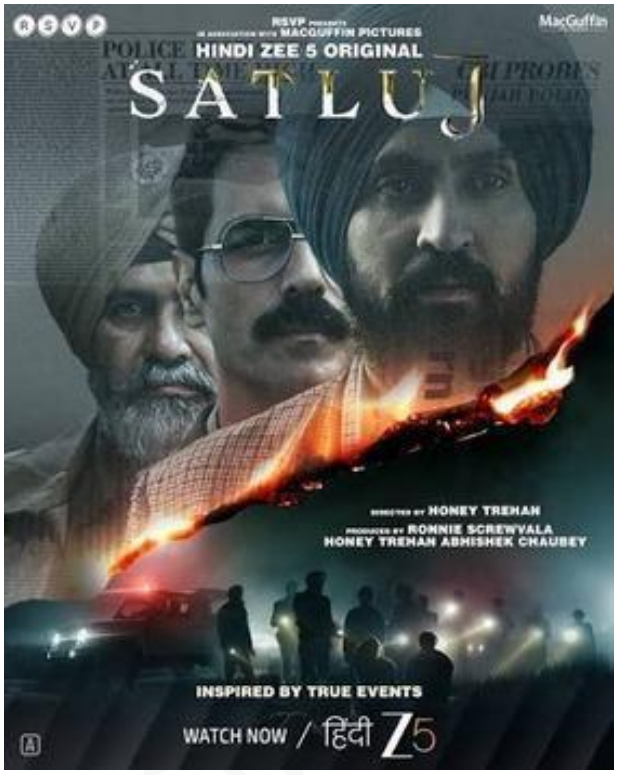
OTT Platforms, New Censorship, and Visual Politics



Let me begin with a recent event. In 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple in Amritsar; subsequently, she was assassinated by Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. What followed was the anti-Sikh pogrom. Human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra was vocal about the extrajudicial killings, abductions, and enforced disappearances carried out by the police in Punjab up until 1990. Khalra's grandfather, Harnam Singh, had been a revolutionary in the Ghadar Movement and was arrested by the British police during the Lahore Conspiracy Case. In 1975, the Government of India sought to honor Harnam Singh as a freedom fighter, an honor Jaswant Singh Khalra refused to accept. Khalra continued his legal and civil rights movement seeking justice for state-sponsored atrocities. On September 6, 1995, he was abducted and subsequently murdered by the police. Today, his wife, Paramjit Kaur Khalra—herself a dedicated human rights activist—continues this crusade.

In 2020, director Honey Trehan began working on a biographical film based on Khalra's life titled *Sutlej* (originally named *Ghallughara*, and later *Punjab '95*), starring singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh. In 2023, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) refused to clear the film for theatrical release. Eventually, the film premiered on the OTT platform ZEE5 on July 3, 2026, only to be pulled down by ZEE5 within forty-eight hours. A week post-release, the CBFC demanded 127 cuts. Upon the director's refusal to comply, the CBFC banned the film

for three years, leading to ongoing litigation in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Nevertheless, audiences have already accessed and viewed the film via alternative platforms such as YouTube.

There was a time when capturing reality required looking through glass to expose film stock. Directors could not immediately see what was recorded; the exposed celluloid was first seen by laboratory technicians in darkrooms after development and printing. Only then was the narrative pieced together frame by frame. It required a darkened auditorium and a projector to be seen. A filmmaker reached the audience through a long chain: the nation-state, the censorship board, distribution companies, and theater owners.

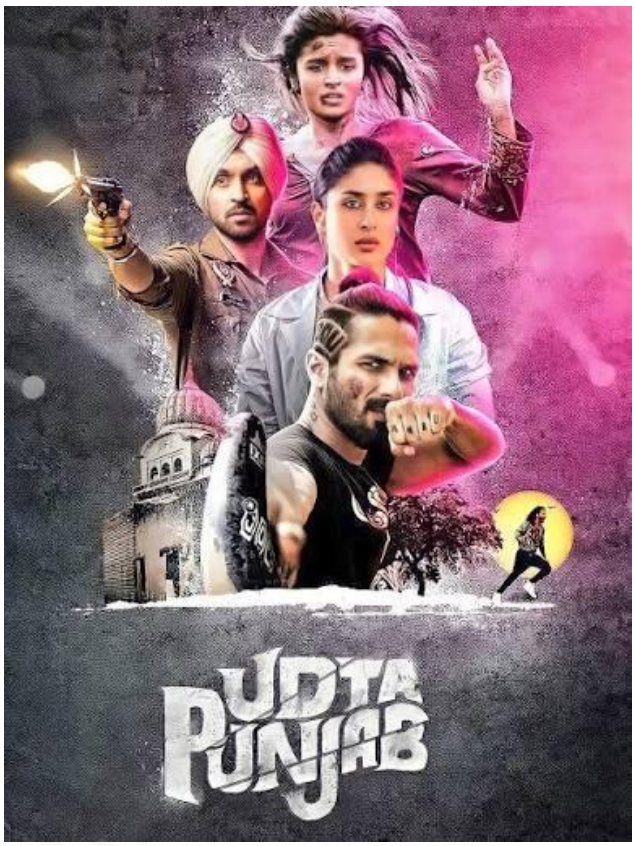
Today, one simply records a video on a mobile device and uploads it to a preferred platform at will—single-handedly. Across human history, the modes of communication and forms of entertainment have undergone continuous transformation. At the digital horizon of entertainment, Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms have emerged as a novel audio-visual medium. From drawing-room radios to black-and-white television sets, and onward through color screens and the boom of multiplexes, the third decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented revolution in visual media.

How deceptively simple this technology-driven equation appears! Yet, does censorship no longer exist? Is everyone displaying an "uncut reality"? Far from it. Distinct societies, bound by disparate social norms, impose strict codes: some truths remain taboo. Here, media platforms function much like traditional distribution conglomerates—capital-intensive structures built on employer-employee hierarchies that market audio-visual content as a commodity. And those distinct societies and localized values are now globalized—ostensibly unified and homogenized. But is that truly the case? How free are OTT platforms? What does the visual politics of censorship look like here? Before addressing these questions, it is instructive to examine the evolution of censorship in India.

From Cinema to OTT: The Mechanics of Censorship in India

Cinema is often regarded as a mirror of society, reflecting culture while simultaneously shaping public consciousness. In India, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)—formerly the Film Censor Board—serves as the regulatory authority governing content and enforcing moral standards. Censorship was first introduced under the Indian Cinematograph Act of 1918 to quell political unrest and safeguard British colonial interests. Post-independence, the Cinematograph Act of 1952 was enacted, under which the modern CBFC operates. In 1983, the nomenclature shifted from "Film Censors" to "Film Certification."

The boundary between freedom of expression and state censorship in India has consistently been a battleground for debate. In recent times, when the CBFC ordered 89 cuts for *Udta Punjab* (2016), the Bombay High Court intervened to uphold the filmmakers' constitutional right to free speech. Conversely, *Padmaavat* (2018) succumbed to socio-political pressures, undergoing title changes and extensive modifications before release.



In the digital era, government IT rules and regulatory policies governing OTT content have reframed the debate surrounding free speech versus state morality. It was in this context that reformative initiatives like the Mudgal Committee were constituted in 2013. Headed by Justice Mukul Mudgal, former Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the committee included prominent figures such as former CBFC Chairperson Sharmila Tagore, lyricist Javed Akhtar, and CBFC Chairperson Leela Samson. The committee concluded that the existing "U/A" classification created significant ambiguity for viewers. It recommended adopting internationally recognized norms by strictly categorizing films based on age and audience maturity. Emphasizing a transparent and user-friendly certification process, the committee proposed a new draft Cinematograph Bill. Although submitted in late 2013, its recommendations were not immediately implemented by the government.

Subsequently, on January 1, 2016, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting constituted the Shyam Benegal Committee to recommend a comprehensive framework for the CBFC that would not stifle artistic creativity and freedom. The committee proposed that the CBFC should not possess the power to censor or order cuts in films; its primary role should be limited to certifying and classifying films based on age and cognitive maturity, with granular sub-classifications for adult content to clearly inform the audience. The CBFC could withhold certification only if a film violated the Indian Constitution, incited violence, promoted hate speech, or constituted contempt of court. In all other instances, the board could merely suggest a change in age rating. Furthermore, films slated for television or digital platforms could be re-certified according to the medium. Content that did not violate the law but contained mature themes could be cleared with an appropriate disclaimer. The committee advocated for restructuring the board, minimizing direct government intervention, and streamlining the certification process. Although its two-part detailed report submitted in 2016 went largely unimplemented, it remains a seminal document in contemporary discourse on Indian film certification.

In April 2017, actor-director Amol Palekar filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the provisions of the Cinematograph Act of 1952, alongside the rules and guidelines amended in 1983 and 1991. He argued that granting pre-censorship powers—the authority to cut, alter, or delete scenes—to the censor board violates the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression for both filmmakers and audiences. Palekar highlighted that real-time digital media, television broadcasts, and investigative journalism are not subject to

pre-censorship. Imposing rigorous pre-screening exclusively on cinema constitutes arbitrary discrimination, thereby violating the constitutional right to equality under Article 14. The petition contended that the Supreme Court's 1970 precedent upholding censorship belonged to an era predating decentralized digital networks, rendering pre-censorship obsolete. Furthermore, the Cinematograph Act sets no objective qualifications for CBFC panel members, allowing individuals without artistic literacy to engage in arbitrary moral policing. Palekar petitioned the court to direct the government to enforce the Shyam Benegal Committee's recommendations. A Supreme Court bench led by Justice A.K. Sikri issued a formal notice to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the CBFC. In response, the Union Government filed an affidavit defending pre-certification, deeming it essential for a culturally diverse nation like India. Palekar's petition remained sub-judice for years.

More recently, on September 16, 2026, the censor board introduced several key revisions to the film certification framework, though the institution of pre-censorship remains intact. Under the updated guidelines, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting revised the aging 1991 directives after thirty-five years, mandating the removal of excessive violence, abuse against women and children, and explicit depictions of rape—requiring that even when narratively necessary, such depictions must not be shown in detail. Mandatory statutory warnings must accompany scenes depicting drug abuse or trafficking. Ambiguous phrasing or dialogue hinting at obscenity is prohibited, and titles themselves are subjected to scrutiny to prevent offending religious, caste, or social sensibilities.

The revised age-based certification framework structures ratings as follows:

- **U/A 7+**: Suitable for children above 7 years; parental guidance recommended for younger children.
- **U/A 13+**: Suitable for viewers above 13 years.
- **U/A 16+**: Suitable for viewers above 16 years.
- **A (Adult)**: Restricted to adult audiences.
- **S (Special)**: Reserved for specialized audiences (e.g., medical or scientific professions).

Guidelines on violence, child protection, and human dignity mandate that:

- Detailed techniques of committing crimes that could incite or glorify violence must be excised.
- Depictions of sexual violence, rape, or assault against women must be minimized and stripped of gratuitous detail.
- Depictions of children as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses of abuse are strictly banned, as are cruelties against animals or persons with physical or mental disabilities.
- **National Security and Judicial Integrity**: Content compromising sovereignty, national security, or diplomatic relations will be denied clearance, with strict oversight on provocative titles or material constituting contempt of court.

Concurrently, the Central Government reconstituted the CBFC board, appointing an 18-member panel for a three-year term under Chairman Shashi Shekhar Vempati, featuring figures such as Preity Zinta, Pankaj Tripathi, Suniel Shetty, Prosenjit Chatterjee, Pallavi Joshi, Priyadarshan, and Ricky Kej.

The OTT Market and the Illusion of Autonomy

Over-The-Top (OTT) media bypasses traditional broadcast distributors (such as cable or DTH providers) to deliver audio-visual content directly to devices over the internet. By allowing audiences to stream content on smartphones, smart TVs, or laptops at their convenience, OTT has dismantled the linear scheduling model of traditional television.

Where cinema was a collective, public viewing experience, television brought media into the domestic living room; the internet has further fragmented the household into isolated individual consumers. Today, visiting a cinema hall is an expensive affair; the cost of a two-hour multiplex or IMAX experience often equals an entire month's unlimited streaming subscription. Driven by an "all-you-can-eat" model powered by subscription and advertising revenue, OTT platforms offer narratives that traditional studios hesitate to produce. Themes such as mental health, queer identity, subcultures, and non-mainstream narratives find a home on OTT, while subtitles and dubbing erase geographic boundaries.

Unlike the darkened theater requiring focused attention, OTT aligns with "second-screening" habits, enabling Gen Z to consume content alongside social interaction on Reddit, TikTok, Instagram Reels, or Discord watch parties. Features like variable playback speed (1.25x/1.5x), 10-second skips, and binge-watching cater to shortening attention spans. Recently, "micro-dramas"—episodic narratives consisting of 60 to 90 two-minute vertical videos—have gained immense traction among younger audiences through platforms like Kukku TV, Story, DramaBox, and ReelShort. These platforms monetize hyper-condensed hooks, charging micropayments or embedding invasive advertisements.

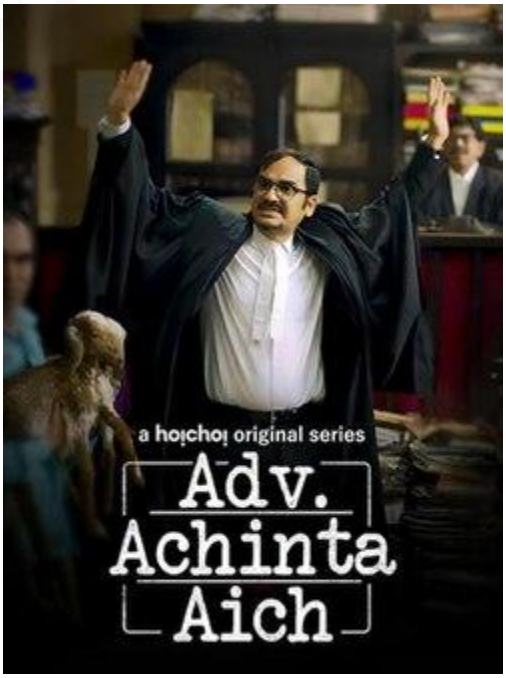
However, the OTT boom is also intertwined with structural labor shifts within the media industry. Delhi, once the news media capital of India during the post-privatization boom of the early 2000s, saw a rapid closure of independent channels following the COVID-19 pandemic. State media bodies like Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV were merged, while historic institutions like the Films Division, the Children's Film Society, and the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) were subsumed under the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC)—effectively dismantling their independent operations and causing widespread retrenchment of media workers.

In the Indian OTT landscape, regional content flourishes alongside English and Hindi programming. Internationally, platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ maintain market dominance, while JioHotstar leads the domestic Indian market through live sports (such as the IPL) and vast catalogs. Regional platforms like Hoichoi dominate Bengali content with detective franchises (*Feluda*, *Byomkesh*) and original dramas, while Bangladesh's Chorki has earned acclaim for realistic thrillers like *Mohanagar* and *Karagar*.

Across Asia, an OTT revolution is challenging Hollywood's long-standing cultural hegemony. Film director Jean-Luc Godard famously critiqued Hollywood, noting:
"Every time we say the word 'Hollywood,' it signifies the imperialism of a foreign commodity called cinema..."

Godard remarked that Hollywood was built by a group of hustlers, evolved into a bureaucracy run by agents and corporate lawyers, and produced films that reflected an unhealthy society without substantive artistic core. He quipped:
"If filmmakers built airplanes, every flight would crash. In cinema, those crashes are called 'Oscars.'"

Today, South Korea creates global brands with sophisticated screenwriting and psychological depth, Taiwan pushes boundaries with uncensored realism (*Light the Night*), Indonesia excels in dark thrillers (*The Night Comes for Us*, *Cigarette Girl*), and Malaysia and Brunei weave local folklore and heritage into digital series. While this represents a reclaiming of cultural identity, a closer inspection of production mechanics and visual grammar reveals a deeper structural truth. As Godard argued, the ruling class that invented cinema transformed it into a tool to disseminate bourgeois ideology.



For instance, the series *Advocate Achintya Aich* (released on Hoichoi in August 2026) depicts an attorney navigating political corruption, violence, and state coercion. Yet, despite his systemic marginalization, the protagonist appears impeccably groomed, navigating physical violence unscathed. Such polished depictions, distributed alongside narrative themes of state control, raise critical questions: What ideological messages are being subtly transmitted to the viewer?

Modern Philosophy, Digital Capitalism, and the New Visual Politics

The core objective of OTT platforms remains capital accumulation through subscriber growth and engagement metrics. When censorship intersects with corporate interests, the artistic integrity of cinema is compromised. Classic fiction historically maintained its radical "residue"—its subversive spark—by challenging established power structures. When state or corporate censors excise political, social, or psychological scenes, they do not merely trim runtime; they extinguish the work's critical soul, reducing subversion to a safe, consumable commodity.

Psychologists note that the human attention span has collapsed—from an average of 2.5 minutes in 2006 to a mere 36 seconds today. This "Short Attention Span" (SAS) phenomenon drives reactionary, polarized discourse on social media. The transition from the cinema hall to the OTT screen is not merely technological; it reflects a shift toward digital atomization. In

this ecosystem, explicit censor boards are increasingly replaced by algorithmic governance, market pressures, and creator self-censorship.

Fearing political backlash, legal litigation, or loss of corporate sponsorships, streaming executives act as pre-emptive censors during the script development stage. This invisible self-censorship is far more insidious than state censorship, as it stifles creative subversion at its inception. Managed by data analytics, algorithms prioritize low-risk entertainment while marginalizing narratives addressing religious extremism, minority rights, or state violence.

In India, OTT regulation operates under a three-tier framework established under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules:

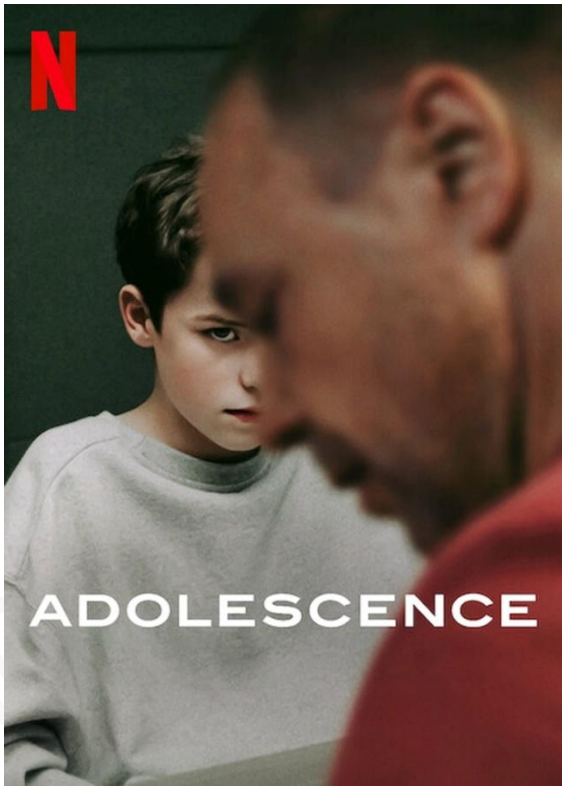
1. **Tier 1**: Internal grievance redressal mechanisms and content evaluation committees within individual platforms.
2. **Tier 2**: Self-regulatory bodies formed by publishers, such as the Digital Publisher Content Grievance Council (DPGC).
3. **Tier 3**: An inter-departmental committee overseen by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Parameter	**Theatrical Cinema (CBFC)**	**OTT Platforms**
Legal Framework	Cinematograph Act, 1952	IT (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules
Regulatory Body	Central Board of Film Certification (Government-appointed)	Self-regulation via three-tier grievance mechanism
Censorship / Approval	Mandatory pre-release clearance and mandated cuts	No mandatory prior approval or state pre-censorship
Classification	U, U/A (7+, 13+, 16+), A, S	U, U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, A (Self-classified)
Access Control	Enforced by theater management	Enforced via digital parental locks and age verification
Statutory Warnings	Mandatory static on-screen warnings for smoking/alcohol/drugs	Disclaimers required at commencement or scene onset

Globally, regulatory approaches vary significantly. The United States relies on voluntary industry ratings (MPA, TV Parental Guidelines) coupled with robust parental controls without

a state censor board. The European Union enforces the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) to combat hate speech and protect minors. Singapore's IMDA maintains strict classification guidelines, whereas China enforces total state censorship over digital content.

Consider Philip Barantini's Netflix series *Adolescence*. Centering on a 13-year-old accused of murdering a classmate, the four-part series explores the toxic influences of online incel subcultures and algorithmic radicalization. Filmed entirely in continuous single takes (one-shot per episode), the series presents an unvarnished, unbroken psychological reality. When moral authorities advocate censoring such raw portrayals under the guise of protecting youth, they often shield systemic failures from public scrutiny.



Yet, an unedited single take can also operate as a deceptive illusion. Because cinema began as continuous footage before the invention of montage, viewers naturally associate uncut shots with authenticity. However, when complex single-take techniques are deployed using immense capital to simulate "uncut truth," the technique itself can function as a psychological mask, conditioning audiences into passive acceptance.

Visual truth in cinema does not require hyper-visible spectacle. Masters like Robert Bresson demonstrated in *A Man Escaped* and *Mouchette* that restraint and omission can convey profound political and philosophical truths. Jean-Luc Godard utilized jump cuts and disruptive aesthetics to break cinematic illusion, famously declaring:
"Photography is truth. Cinema is truth twenty-four times per second."

Similarly, Luis Buñuel utilized surrealism to attack bourgeois morality, while Federico Fellini dismantled religious and state orthodoxy through chaotic, dreamlike visual politics.

In his seminal 1935 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, German philosopher Walter Benjamin observed that traditional artwork possesses an "aura"—a unique presence in time and space. Mechanical reproduction strips the artwork of its aura, liberating it from ritual and making it accessible to the masses, yet simultaneously exposing it to mass manipulation.

In the digital era, OTT media accelerates this dynamic. As corporate capital and state apparatuses merge to police the digital frame, the new visual politics of streaming platforms creates an illusion of boundless freedom while quietly enforcing strict ideological boundaries. Here is the translation of the concluding section of the essay into academic, Harvardian English, maintaining the critical rigor, theoretical prose, and analytical depth of contemporary media, cultural, and philosophical studies.

Critical Theory and the Visual Politics of OTT

When classic cinema streams effortlessly onto the small screens of smartphones via OTT platforms, Walter Benjamin's seminal thesis finds its contemporary realization. Art was once the repository of **"cult value."** Traditional or ritual-anchored art was grounded in cultic or monumental significance—rooted in its inherent sacredness, esoteric meaning, and spatial-temporal exclusivity.

(In contemporary critical discourse, "cult" is not restricted to fringe religious sects; rather, it describes a social system or demographic exhibiting blind, absolute devotion to an individual, ideology, technology, or brand. In the modern era, its defining characteristics include hyper-psychological control, authoritarian leadership or systemic influence, and isolation from mainstream critical consciousness—manifested through uncritical allegiance, strict behavioral regulation, and the rapid algorithmic dissemination of digital content as commodified data.)

In the digital era, this cult value is systematically subordinated to **"exhibition value,"** repurposed to serve the imperatives of capital accumulation. The traditional experience of film viewing—contingent on collective presence within a physical theater at a specific time and place—endowed cinema with an elevated, distinct aura. Continuous streaming on smartphone screens destroys this uniqueness of space and time. Art is reduced to a readily accessible commodity, causing its foundational **aura** and cultural authority to dissipate.

Under digital capitalism, art ceases to be merely a physical commodity; it transmutes into raw **data**. It is engineered and deployed to capture fleeting human attention rapidly, sustaining the unfettered circulation of global capital.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ART	
TRADITIONAL CINEMA (Cult Value)	---> DIGITAL STREAMING (Exhibition Value)
- Anchored in space, time, & aura	- Infinite reproduction on screens
- Collective, ritualistic viewing	- Isolated, atomized consumption
- Sacredness & intrinsic authority	- Transmuted into commodified data

In formulating structural anthropology, French anthropologist **Claude Lévi-Strauss** posited that culture operates as a symbolic system exposing the unconscious structures embedded within society. Lévi-Strauss established the theoretical foundations of structuralism through key concepts:

- **Binary Oppositions:** Human cognition interprets the world through dualistic antitheses—Nature vs. Culture, Good vs. Evil, Life vs. Death, The Raw vs. The Cooked.
- **Mythemes:** Just as phonemes or words constitute the minimal units of language, "mythemes" represent the fundamental structural units of myth. Through repeated

narrative iteration, these mythemes organize into an overarching unconscious framework.

- **Mediation:** Myth utilizes narrative and visual structures to reconcile deep-seated political and social contradictions, offering psychological resolution and maintaining social equilibrium.

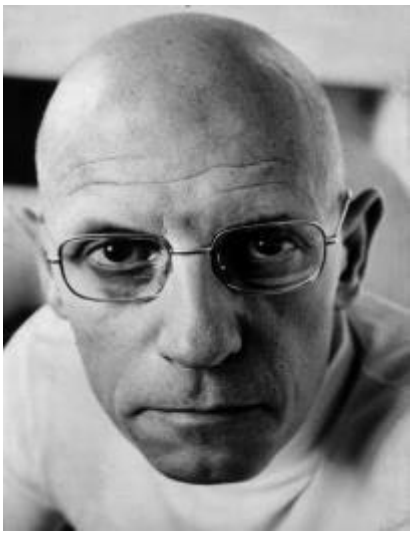
According to Lévi-Strauss, myth resolves real-world contradictions; this is precisely the operational mechanism of visual politics on OTT platforms. In real society, severe grievances

build around class inequality and pervasive state surveillance. On OTT screens, an isolated protagonist or anti-hero defeats a corrupt system or malevolent corporation (as seen in *Money Heist*). In reality, this narrative resolution effects no actual transformation of the socio-economic structure; instead, viewers experience a virtual victory that neutralizes their collective angst through mediated **catharsis**. Thus, capital-driven OTT platforms generate multi-million-dollar revenues by commodifying anti-capitalist narratives, ultimately preserving social stability. Just as Lévi-Strauss uncovered the deep structures behind indigenous mythologies, contemporary OTT platforms construct a **modern digital mythology** that subtly governs our unconscious and shapes political discourse.

Ideology, Surveillance, and the Aesthetics of Control

In his 1970 essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Marxist philosopher **Louis Althusser** demonstrated that the state maintains dominance not merely through Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) like the police or judiciary, but through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as education, media, and cultural institutions. The alignment of mainstream "godi media" provides direct evidence of this dynamic. The relentless drive to subject OTT platforms to state censorship validates Althusser's thesis. While OTT emerged as a capital-driven commercial medium, it initially provided a relatively uninhibited arena for critical expression. However, once the state recognized its potential to foster subversion and counter-hegemonic subjectivities, it activated its censorship apparatus. The joint surveillance exercised by censor boards and home ministries represents a deliberate attempt to convert OTT platforms into robust Ideological State Apparatuses designed to safeguard ruling-class interests.

THE STATE APPARATUS ON SCREEN	
REPRESSIVE APPARATUS (RSA)	---> IDEOLOGICAL APPARATUS (ISA)
- Direct coercion (Police, Judiciary)	- Discursive control (Media, Arts)
- Enforces law via physical force	- Shapes subjectivity & ideology
- Intervenes upon overt dissent	- Pre-empts dissent via censorship



Michel Foucault's analytics of power elucidate how visibility and discipline function in modern spaces. In *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault articulated a decentralized model of power—one that does not merely emanate top-down from a sovereign center, but capillary-like, saturates every fiber of the social body. Modern OTT censorship and algorithmic oversight represent contemporary manifestations of Foucault's **Panopticon**. The digital content creator operates under the consciousness of an unseen, omnipresent gaze; this fear of constant surveillance breeds the internal discipline and self-regulation that Foucault conceptualized. State apparatuses and transnational corporations jointly construct a surveillance ecosystem wherein radical political dissent, body politics, and non-normative sexuality are categorized as deviant or criminal and systematically disciplined.

Audiences once migrated to OTT platforms seeking refuge from the heavy-handed cuts of theatrical censor boards. Over time, however, that optimism has eroded. Behind the rhetoric of creative autonomy lies a sophisticated, invisible, and multidimensional regime of visual politics.

In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, philosopher **Gilles Deleuze** rethought the moving image, demonstrating that modern cinema provides a direct presentation of time—the **"time-image."** In a Deleuzian sense, the OTT network functions as a **rhizomatic field**—a decentralized, non-hierarchical structure lacking a single center or fixed boundary. Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceptualized the rhizome as an interconnected, multi-layered matrix where any point can connect to any other. Today, the state apparatus seeks to flatten this vast, non-linear digital expanse back into a manageable, one-dimensional line.

Furthermore, Soviet filmmaker **Sergei Eisenstein** conceptualized dialectical montage as a revolutionary method, asserting that juxtaposing collision-driven, conflicting shots sparks a cognitive explosion in the viewer's consciousness. Both state authorities and corporate conglomerates recognize that if the radical potential of montage falls into the hands of the public, it threatens to dismantle the discursive foundations of established power.

Structural Mythemes, Semiotics, and Deconstruction

State censorship aims to construct a singular **"master myth"** that neutralizes ideological pluralism. The convergence of platform algorithms and state censorship boards enforces a form of artificial cultural homogenization, mechanically regulating the spontaneous flow of organic culture.

On streaming platforms, binary structures manifest explicitly across popular series:

- State/Law vs. Crime/Underworld (e.g., *Mirzapur*)
- Religious Purity vs. Moral Decay (e.g., *Sacred Games*)
- Unfettered Capitalism vs. Human Survival, or Childhood Innocence vs. Extreme Violence (e.g., *Squid Game*)

This visual politics is constructed through high-contrast lighting, costume color palettes, and camera angles. Framing "virtuous" characters in warm, direct light while casting "antagonistic" figures in heavy shadow represents a modernized visual articulation of Lévi-Strauss's binary codes. *(Interestingly, we witness OTT content coming full circle back to traditional cinema—as seen with the theatrical release of the web series Mirzapur in movie theaters. The re-emergence of a new digital medium within an older format is itself a deeply political maneuver.)*

Furthermore, specific **visual mythemes** recur endlessly across web series:

RECURRING VISUAL MYTHEMES
1. Top-down Drone Shots : Emphasizes individual insignificance within urban capitalism.
2. Desaturated Blue Tones : Signals systemic corruption, gloom, and moral decay.
3. Hyper-Kinetic Editing : Mimics shortening cognitive attention spans.
4. Binary Spatial Splits : Visualizes stark class divides and social inequality.

Through the repetition of these visual codes, specific socio-political assumptions are naturalized into absolute truths within the viewer's consciousness.

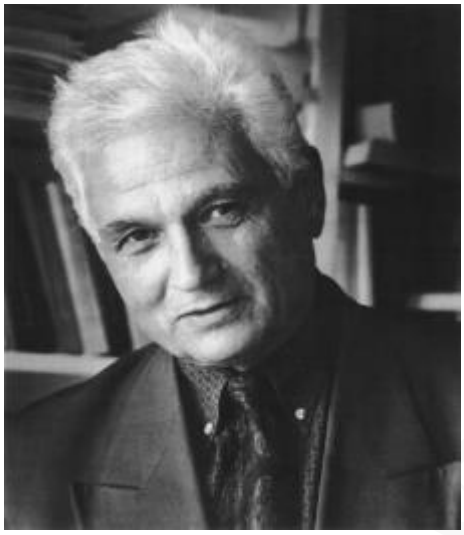
In analyzing visual signs, semiotician **Roland Barthes** demonstrated in *Mythologies* and *The Death of the Author* how images and texts generate multi-layered, polysemic meanings (**polysemy**). For Barthes, a visual image possesses no single, fixed meaning; rather, the viewer constructs meaning based on their socio-historical position.

Insidious censorship attacks precisely this polysemic potential. The state strives to constrain images into a **monosemic** framework—a single, fixed interpretation—fearing that polysemic readings will expose the fractures within the state's power structure. OTT

censorship thus functions as an authoritarian drive to lock visual media into a pre-approved political narrative.

MONOSEMIC VS. POLYSEMIC READINGS	
MONOSEMIC CENSORSHIP	---> POLYSEMIC DECONSTRUCTION
- Imposes a single, state-approved reading	- Unlocks infinite interpretations
- Forces visual text into rigid narrative	- Reading shaped by viewer position
- Erases ambiguity to protect power	- Exposes ideological contradictions

Yet, no matter how reinforced the invisible cage of censorship becomes, the spontaneous impulse of art and the human drive for liberation cannot be permanently contained. **Deconstruction** reveals that meaning lacks an ultimate, fixed origin; significance is continuously deferred through difference (**Différance**).



As **Jacques Derrida** theorized, the space between the visible frame on screen and the invisible, auto-censored silence is the realm of *différance*. When a scene is excised, its absence resonates with greater force. That which censorship attempts to erase acquires a potent political presence through its very absence—generating a heightened, phantom-like hyper-reality in the viewer's imagination.

Derrida's concept of *différance* encapsulates a dual operation: **to differ** and **to defer**. Meaning is never fully present or complete; it is perpetually postponed along a chain of signifiers. Driven by market demands and serialized formats, much of OTT content keeps final meaning in suspension. Through cliffhangers, multi-season arcs, and open endings, narrative resolution is repeatedly deferred, locking the audience into a continuous search for closure.

Moreover, contemporary OTT visual politics frequently employs multi-perspective storytelling to demonstrate that absolute objective truth does not exist—reality is constructed and contingent. By complicating character motivations, highlighting the moral decline of protagonists, or revealing the complex social histories of antagonists, OTT visual politics frequently subverts traditional moral binaries (Good vs. Evil, Hero vs. Villain, Margin vs. Center).

Derrida emphasized that meaning does not reside solely with the author, but emerges dynamically through the reader's engagement. Viewers on OTT platforms are not passive consumers. By pausing, skipping, adjusting subtitles, or navigating interactive narratives (such as *Bandersnatch*), the viewer becomes a co-creator of the visual text.

Through the lens of Derridean philosophy, the multi-layered narratives of OTT platforms—despite market constraints—confront the viewer with a fluid, pluralistic reality through the deconstruction of absolute truths and the deferral of meaning. State censorship represents a reactionary effort to suppress these pluralistic possibilities. Consequently, OTT censorship is not merely an administrative directive to sanitize dialogue or eliminate objectionable scenes; it is a far-reaching political project aimed at colonizing human perception, critical thought, and the collective imagination.

This constitutes the central contradiction of the digital age. Yet the struggle persists: state intervention cannot fully extinguish the multifaceted eruption of visual expression. In director Pradipta Bhattacharya's 6-episode indie web series *Birohi* (streamed on the independent platform *Uribaba*), a primary school teacher in post-independence India is forced to strip off his clothes and wade across a river with his bicycle balanced on his head due to a complete lack of basic infrastructure. Through ironic visual comedy, the narrative holds up a mirror to real-world developmental failures. This, too, represents a distinct form of counter-hegemonic visual politics on digital platforms.

When the state attempts to regulate OTT content, its underlying objective is to suppress democratic rights and silence dissent. Yet, the dialectical tension between the cinematic frame and the censor's shears preserves the history of critical thought. On digital platforms, the visual politics of human creativity continuously re-emerges to contest established power.

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