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Molecular Aesthetics: Contemporary Art and Performance in Delhi

by

Karin Shankar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

Professor Trinh T. Minh-ha

Professor Jisha Menon

Professor Lawrence Cohen

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Abstract

Molecular Aesthetics: Contemporary Art and Performance in Delhi
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Karin Shankar

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Shannon Jackson, Chair

This dissertation examines how contemporaneity is variously encoded, embedded, and embodied in different medial combinations across the works of four artists and performers living and producing work in the National Capital Region of Delhi in India today. Experimental kathakali performer Maya Krishna Rao (b. 1953) ‘deterritorializes’ traditional kathakali gesture, breath, costume, and props to embody expansive ways of being, becoming, and relating alongside quotidian, middleclass, urban New Delhi frames. Filmmaker Amar Kanwar (b. 1964) mobilizes the microentities of dust, light particles, and ambient sound to blur and reformulate macro-categories of ‘center,’ ‘periphery,’ ‘rural,’ ‘urban,’ ‘underdeveloped,’ and ‘developed.’ Visual artist and sculptor Jagannath Panda (b. 1972) shapes, sculpts, molds, paints, and collages sewage pipes, glass, upholstery, bricks, and other urban materials in the satellite city of Gurgaon into ‘immanent’ (or emergent but as yet un-actualized) urban spatio-temporalities, revealing that human, animal, plant, thing, in the urban realm are always already partial expressions of each other. The artists’ workshop Khoj’s (1997) emergent community art practices offer ‘rhizomatic mapping’ as method to conduct a contemporary inquiry into this booming urban agglomerate’s spaces, publics, and infrastructure. Finally, my epilogue comments on Inder Salim’s (b. 1964) extreme performance art that violates the boundaries between his own dermis and the skin or surfaces of the city of Delhi to enact new modes of fluid and affective urban belonging.

Using a framework from the “artist’s philosopher” Gilles Deleuze, I posit that all these works “performatively enable,” (Rogoff 2006) shake or stir the modernist and still-pervasive binary distinctions between local/global, state/market, development/underdevelopment, tradition/modernity, and East/West, and bring into proximity these and other such grand divisions and categories. Underlying the boundaries between these categories is a stultifying spatio-temporal politics. Aesthetic forms that unsettle these divisions, then, also propel a necessary unsettling around linear notions of temporality and spatiality. Contemporary aesthetics might be the name for such a destabilizing and enabling force or, as in art historian and cultural theorist Simon O’Sullivan’s description, contemporaneity is that which produces “new combinations in and of the world, which would suggest new ways and times of being and acting in that world” (O’ Sullivan 2010).

In my discussions of separate artworks I turn to the *microlevels* of aesthetic practice to trace the “how” of the particular contemporaneity of the arts and performance milieu in Delhi of this moment. As such, I engage a Deleuzian framework to offer what he might term a “molecular” reading of contemporary art and performance in Delhi. If the “molar” relates to the well-defined wholes or masses, of modernist cultural discourse, and is the realm of representational thinking, then the molecular relates to that which destabilizes perception, and produce “encounters,” in the place of representation. Within the realm of artistic creation, the concept of molecular replaces hierarchies of matter and form, with the study of the interaction between matter and aesthetic *forces*. An understanding of contemporary aesthetics as molecular therefore pays attention to those practices that might release fixed and molar ways of being.

From India’s independence through to the 1980s, modernist playwrights, directors, dancers, performers, and visual artists were largely measured by the standards of a ‘molar’ center in Delhi. Art historians, cultural critics and socio-political observers mark the late 1980s and early 1990s as a decisive shift in Indian political economy, coinciding with economic liberalization reforms and the fundamentalization of politics at the national level. These forces played out as a binary polarization of subjectivities, temporalities and spatiality. From within these binds and impasses, the artists and performers I examine in this dissertation enact “contemporaneity” variously, articulating the possibilities of other more generative economies of sensing and knowing.

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Introduction

‘Contemporaneity’ as an Ethical Choice: Molecular Aesthetics in Delhi

Experimental kathakali performer Maya Krishna Rao (b. 1953) ‘deterritorializes’ traditional kathakali gesture, breath, costume, and props to embody expansive ways of being, becoming, and relating alongside quotidian, middleclass, urban New Delhi frames. Filmmaker Amar Kanwar (b. 1964) mobilizes the microentities of dust, light particles, and ambient sound to blur and reformulate macro-categories of ‘center,’ ‘periphery,’ ‘rural,’ ‘urban,’ ‘underdeveloped,’ and ‘developed.’ Visual artist and sculptor Jagannath Panda (b. 1972) shapes, sculpts, molds, paints, and collages sewage pipes, glass, upholstery, bricks, and other urban materials in the satellite city of Gurgaon into ‘immanent’ (or emergent but as yet un-actualized) urban spatio-temporalities, revealing that human, animal, plant, thing, in the urban realm are always already partial expressions of each other. The artists’ workshop Khoj’s (1997) emergent community art practices offer ‘rhizomatic mapping’ as method to conduct a contemporary inquiry into this booming urban agglomerate’s spaces, publics, and infrastructure. And finally, Inder Salim’s (b. 1964) extreme performance art violates the boundaries between his own dermis and the skin or surfaces of the city of Delhi to enact new modes of fluid and affective urban belonging.

This dissertation examines how *contemporaneity* is variously encoded, embedded, and embodied in different medial combinations across the works of these artists and performers living and producing work in the National Capital Region of Delhi in India today. The power of their aesthetic gestures might be what performance theorist Erin Manning has termed “minor,” or that force which “makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, [...] to articulate how *else* experience can come to expression in the here and now.”¹ I posit that the works of these artists “performatively enable,”² shake, or stir the modernist and still-pervasive binary distinctions between local/global, state/market, development/underdevelopment, tradition/modernity, and East/West, and bring into proximity these and other such grand divisions and categories. Underlying the boundaries between these categories is a stultifying spatio-temporal politics. Aesthetic forms that unsettle these divisions, then, also propel a necessary unsettling around linear notions of temporality and spatiality. Contemporary aesthetics might be the name for such a destabilizing and enabling force or, as in art historian and cultural theorist Simon O’Sullivan’s description, contemporaneity is that which produces “new combinations in and of the world, which would suggest new ways and times of being and acting in that world.”³

In a similar vein of thought, for Amy Elias, founder of the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present,⁴ the contemporary is an “ethical choice” and a “moving target.”⁵

¹ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, (Durham : Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

² I borrow this definition of the contemporary as “performative enablement” from curator and art historian, Irit Rogoff. See Irit Rogoff, “Academy as Potentiality,” in *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, eds. Angelika Nollert and Irit Rogoff (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006), quoted in Zdenka Badovinac “Contemporaneity as Points of Connection,” *e-flux Journal 11*, December 2009, accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/contemporaneity-as-points-of-connection/>

³ Simon O’ Sullivan, “From Aesthetics to the Abstract Machine: Deleuze, Guattari and Contemporary Art Practice” in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, ed. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’ Sullivan, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 196.

⁴ As stated on their website, the Association for the Study of Arts of the Present or ASAP is an “international, nonprofit association dedicated to discovering and articulating the aesthetic, cultural, ethical, and political identities of the contemporary arts.” It was founded at the University of Tennessee and launched in 2007. “Discover ASAP,” last modified 2013, <http://www.artsofthepresent.org/>.

Following her writings, the performers and artists I discuss in this dissertation, are located within a specific set of historical circumstances in Delhi and engage aesthetic tools to performatively “situate the present” in relation to a past (or pasts), while creating narratives and practices about a future and the nature of that futurity.⁶ I encountered these artists’ works during multiple field visits to Delhi between 2013 and 2016. I was specifically drawn to the works of Kanwar, Rao, Panda, Khoj, and Salim, all prominent actors in Delhi’s contemporary cultural milieu, for, dwelling in the realms between sensing/feeling and knowing, these artists’ practices mobilize somatic and sensory terrain differently to unsettle categories of thought and offer new knowledge about ways to inhabit the present.

In my discussions of separate artworks I turn to the *microlevels* of aesthetic practice to trace the ‘how’ of the particular contemporaneity of the arts and performance milieu in Delhi of this moment. As I “co-imagine”⁷ the small shifts in somatic domains that these artists’ aesthetic tools suggest, I engage a Deleuzian framework to offer what he might term a “molecular” reading of contemporary art and performance in Delhi. Gilles Deleuze’s writings (often in combination with Felix Guatarri) reshape the relations between art, philosophy, and ethics. Deleuze reminds us that rather than the study of high art, aesthetics is simply and profoundly the capacity to receive sensations. Using sound, color, light, movement, rhythm, texture, (and smell and taste), artists and performers are therefore equipped to expand our sensorial and perceptual interface with the world, thereby opening us to different ways of being and relating.⁸

“Molecular” belongs to the chemical and geological vocabulary that Deleuze mobilizes to inform his work on aesthetics and politics. If the “molar” relates to well-defined wholes or masses, and is the realm of representational thinking (defined as those schemas which reinforce our thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards the world), then the molecular relates to that which destabilizes perception, and produce “encounters,” in the place of re-presentation.⁹ In this Deleuzian dyad, neither ‘molar’ nor ‘molecular’ is privileged.¹⁰ To borrow Deleuze’s own example, when a teaspoon of sugar is dissolved in a glass of water, “the ‘whole’ is not the container and its contents but the action of creation taking place in the ionisation of the molecules of sugar.”¹¹ That is, the molar and molecular each discerns different effects and are deeply interrelated with the other.

Within the realm of artistic creation, the concept of molecular is central to Deleuze’s interrogation of hierarchies of matter and form, and his replacement of this hierarchical concern

⁵ Amy Elias, “The Contemporary, As Soon as Possible: Periodization vs. Relationality,” YouTube video, 1:00:04, filmed at Stanford University Humanities Center on May 30, 2014, posted on August 15, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc3aZQe5ARI>.

⁶ I very closely borrow from Elias’s definition of the contemporary here. See Amy Elias, “The Contemporary, As Soon as Possible: Periodization vs. Relationality.”

⁷ A term I borrow from dance scholar Andre Lepecki. Quoted in Larisa Crunteanu, “The Power of Co- in Contemporary Dance,” *Revista-ARTA*, January 16, 2016, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://revistaarta.ro/en/the-power-of-co-in-contemporary-dance/>.

⁸ This is the premise of Simon O’ Sullivan’s incisive work on Deleuze and “encounters” with art. See Simon O’ Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatarri: Thought beyond Representation*, (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006).

⁹ Tom Conley, “Molecular” in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 177, and Simon O’ Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guatarri: Thought beyond Representation*.

¹⁰ Conley, “Molecular,” 177.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

with a study of the interaction between matter and aesthetic *forces*.¹² An understanding of contemporary aesthetics as molecular therefore means paying attention to those practices that might release fixed and molar ways of being. Again, if the molar order corresponds to signification that “delimits objects, subjects, representations, and their reference systems,” then the molecular order is that of “flows, becomings, transitions, and intensities.”¹³ In this dissertation, molar modes may include: an epistemology of linear progress and development, the primacy of a closed unified subject, and a turn away from affect, the ineffable, or the spiritual, toward reason alone. The molecular, in contrast, is a force infusing transformations into each of these modes and categories. A constellation of related terms from Deleuze’s philosophical system—minor, micropolitical, de/territorialization, immanence, line of flight, (all of which I define in this introduction and through the dissertation)—inform the molecularity of aesthetics in Delhi’s urban contemporary.

And what of the contemporary? The contemporary as I conceptualize it here is deeply related to but marks a turn away from the concerns of the modern in India. In her seminal essay, “When was Modernism in Indian Art,” first published in 1993, art historian, critic, and curator Geeta Kapur describes a specific set of terms that defined the debates on modernist art (and performance) in India.¹⁴ Her writing is guided by a desire to “reperiodize the modern in terms of our own historical experience of modernization, and mark our modernisms so that we may enter the postmodern at least potentially on our own terms.”¹⁵ Defining modernity as a way of “relating the material and cultural worlds in the period of unprecedented change that we call the process of modernization,”¹⁶ Kapur reminds us that modernity was also a vexed ontological quest to “figure subjectivity” and create a potential consciousness.¹⁷ If modernism in the West was stimulated by an avant-garde that opposed the state-supported academic establishment, then, in these terms, India had no avant-garde since, through the early decades of the 20th century, “the rebellious and progressive features of artistic development were channeled into the nationalist cause for independence”¹⁸ —itself a truly transgressive call, imagining a new future. Charting the careers of artists in art schools and circles at Baroda, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and Shantiniketan from the 1930s through the 1980s, Kapur considers how nationalist art in India promoted the use of traditional motifs while modernism as cultural discourse sometimes considered these as progressive and at other times conservative. Such a contradiction was the result of racist colonial discourse that claimed India was lagging behind on the path to modernity.

Building on Kapur’s work, in *Art for a Modern India* (2009) Rebecca Brown has emphasized how for those producing art in the first decade after independence, the urgent need to define the newly independent nation India, was accompanied with the desire for industry, technology and a universal modernity (advanced by the West).¹⁹ Brown reemphasizes the

¹² John Marks, “Deleuze’s Molecular Vision” *ZKM Center for Art and Media* video, 37:59, July 17, 2011, <http://zkm.de/en/media/video/john-marks-deleuzes-molecular-vision>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Geeta Kapur, “When was Modernism in Indian Art,” in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, (New Delhi: Tulika Press, 2000),

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁹ Rebecca Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009), kindle edition, location 54.

centrality of colonialism to the production of a universal modernity, not simply as a “tangential motivating factor” but as a “constitutive element,” and how, within this framework, for post-independence artists, the ‘other’ (traditional Indian) needed to be not (yet) modern for the modern to utilize its aesthetic and spiritual “authenticity.”²⁰ Her book thus also hinges on the “paradoxical” quality of modernity as discourse in Indian art—as it negotiated indigenism and internationalism. Brown ends with a discussion of how this paradox is increasingly irrelevant from the 1980s onwards.²¹

Kapur was writing at a time when we were only beginning to see another trajectory and force, that in which the nation itself was reconfigured as an increasingly fractured, neoliberal, and globalizing cultural landscape. Concretely, these changes included the liberalization of the Indian economy and the birth of what Nandini Gooptu terms “enterprise culture,” a surge in the religious fundamentalization of national politics.²² In an article titled “Dismantled Norms” from 1996, Kapur anticipates how these changes might affect the subsequent production of contemporary art and performance. She names “possible avant-gardes-in-formation,” in the Indian context, or what has come to be known as contemporary art at the “cutting edge of community, nation, and market.”²³

This art will differ from western neo-avantgardes in that it has as its referents a civil society in huge ferment, a political society whose constituencies are redefining the meaning of democracy, and a demographic scale that defies simple theories of hegemony. The national cannot, then, be so easily replaced by the neat new equation of the local/global (as in so many ASEAN and other East Asian countries), nor even perhaps by the exigencies of the state/market combine. What we might look forward to, however, is not only emerging social themes, but a renewed engagement with art language, a radical compound of formalism and history. A calibrated exposition of subjectivity through motifs from private mythologies/interstitial images will match the task of grasping the shape of social energies in their transformative intent.²⁴

Following Kapur’s observations, this dissertation shows that the aesthetic tools of urban Indian artists and performers from the 1990s to the present have been different from the modern period, wherein from independence through to the 1980s, playwrights, directors, dancers and visual artists were, as Mitra has put it, “largely measured up to the standards”²⁵ of a ‘molar’ center in Delhi. Now, instead, artists and performers seek a more molecular, “contingent and contestatory” approach, reflecting shifts in political economy and the social sphere.²⁶

Prelude: Conversations on Contemporaneity at The Kasuali Art Center, 1988

The notion that the modern was passing, giving way to something new—“the contemporary”—had begun to surface amongst urban artists and intellectuals in India in the late

²⁰ Ibid., location 82.

²¹ Ibid., location 2008.

²² Nandini Gooptu, ed., *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media*, 1 edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2016).

²³ Kapur, 411. Though written in 1996, “Dismantled Norms” is included in Kapur’s collection of articles, *When was Modernism* (2000).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mitra 65.

²⁶ Ibid. Mitra articulates how these “contingent and contestatory” shifts have played out specifically in the realm of theater.

1980s. In June 1988, the Kasauli Art Centre,²⁷ in collaboration with the *Journal of Arts and Ideas*,²⁸ organized a weeklong seminar titled “A Critique of Contemporary Culture.” Convened by film theorist Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Geeta Kapur, the seminar brought together an interdisciplinary group of eminent cultural practitioners, artists, filmmakers, theater workers, and historians from Delhi and other parts of the country, including filmmaker Kumar Shahani, visual artists Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, and Vivan Sundaram, historian Sudipta Kaviraj, and theater artist Anuradha Kapoor, amongst others.²⁹ Seminar proceedings were released in two separate issues of the *Journal of Arts and Ideas* in 1990 and 1991.³⁰ The aim of the discussions was to take stock of the “commodification of traditional forms and artifacts, which were simply serving the State and the market.”³¹ In the actual encounter, however, this aim was overtaken by a move, as Kapur puts it, “to make thought work”; and specifically to make thought work with, around, and through “partisan ideas” on cultural practice.³²

In this regard, presentations and discussions at Kasauli strove to excavate current categories of understanding and the cultural praxes defined as ‘indigenism,’ ‘internationalism,’ ‘tradition,’ ‘modernity,’ ‘popular,’ ‘high,’ ‘folk,’ and ‘bourgeois.’ Discussants attempted to wrest these categories from their instrumentalized use in the, by then, increasingly congealed discourses of decolonization and nation building, and revitalize them for ‘contemporary’ engagement, hence the title of the seminar.

The critical conversations at Kasauli, and the special issues of the journal published two years after, took place against the shifting backdrop of a national economy on the brink of a debt crisis, the rise of ‘Hindutva’—a fundamentalist, politicized Hinduism—and the concomitant perceived erosion of secular, liberal values. Further, a robust women’s movement and the protests surrounding the Mandal Commission report on caste-based reservations were churning urban Indian society. Indeed, two watershed events were to take place just a few years following the seminar. In July of 1991, then finance minister Manmohan Singh announced the full liberalization of the Indian economy. Reforms included devaluing the rupee, reducing trade tariffs, removing quotas for imports, encouraging exports, and attracting more foreign investment, thus dramatically steering the economy away from the State-led *dirigiste* model, and the “license-permit-quota-raj.”³³ While already in the 1980s, the government had taken certain pro-business measures, it wasn’t until 1991, when India’s growing external debt had reached \$70

²⁷ The Kasauli Art Centre was founded in 1976 by artist Vivan Sundaram in Kasauli, a hill station in Himachal Pradesh, North India. The Centre organized regular artist residency programs and seminars to explore common grounds between artists, filmmakers, critics, architects, playwrights, and performers.

²⁸ The journal was published out of New Delhi by Tulika Print Communication Services, and is now no longer in circulation.

²⁹ The seminar including filmmakers Kumar Shahani, Arun Khopkar and Anup Singh; visual artists Ghulam Muhammad Seikh and Vivan Sundaram; theater makers and scholars Anuradha Kapur and Mohan Maharishi; literary theorists Susie Tharu and Kumkum Sangari; urbanist and architect A.G Krishna Menon; composer Madan Gopal Singh, political commentator Sanjaya Baru; and historians Sudipta Kaviraj and Ravinder Kumar.

³⁰ Full text of these journal issues is available via the Digital South Asia Library. Geeta Kapur, Kumkum Sangari, Indira Chandrasekhar, Madan Gopal Singh and Ashish Rajadhyaksha eds. “Dialogues on Cultural Practice in India” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 19, (New Delhi: Tulika Print Communication Services, 1990); and “Critical Frameworks and Inventing Traditions,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21 (New Delhi: Tulika Print Communication Services, 1991), Digital South Asia Library, Accessed 28 February 2015, <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/books/artsandideas/>.

³¹ Geeta Kapur, Kumkum Sangari, Indira Chandrasekhar, Madan Gopal Singh and Ashish Rajadhyaksha eds. “Dialogues on Cultural Practice in India,” 2.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2007) 684.

billion and, at one point, foreign exchange reserves dipped to an astonishing low of only two weeks worth of imports, that then prime minister Narasimha Rao gave Singh the green signal to formulate and execute the wide reaching reforms.³⁴

Following this, in December 1992, the Babri Masjid (mosque of Babur) in Ayodhya, built on the alleged birthplace of Ram, the mythological Hindu God of the epic Ramayana, was demolished by right wing Hindu activists. Processions and public meetings to “liberate” the spot where Ram had been born had already begun in the early 1980s, spearheaded by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the World Hindu Council.³⁵ In 1989, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Lal Krishna Advani took up the VHP’s call on a national scale by leading a *Ram Rath Yatra*, (Ram’s chariot’s journey), a politicized pilgrimage or *yatra* from Gujarat to Ayodhya. This *yatra* was instrumental in fomenting Hindu fundamentalist support that led to the destruction of the mosque.³⁶ The destruction was followed by months of rioting between Hindu and Muslim communities across the country. Performance history scholar Shayoni Mitra notes that the “scale, organization, and public spectacle of the destruction is considered a pivotal moment in postcolonial India’s history, marking the ascendancy of the Hindu right and the election of the BJP to central power in 1994.”³⁷

These two events were not unrelated, as many, including cultural critic and art historian Chaitanya Sambrani have noted, “reciprocities and causal linkages are implicit here: religious fundamentalist claims to place are fed by insecurities wrought by globalization and its accompanying exposure to other economic and cultural forms.”³⁸ The comprehensive and far-reaching effects of both these events consisted in the transformation of everyday consumer habits and practices, as well as the discursive narrowing of the straits of identity categories: national, anti-national, Hindu, Muslim, Hindutva etc. That is, these socio-political and economic events affected the sites and processes of subject formation in India in no insignificant way.³⁹

The conversations at Kasauli were also informed by an international trend wherein the post-1989 globalization of capital and the expansion of neoliberalism across emerging markets saw the repurposing of national and regional identities. As biennials and special exhibitions mushroomed, the art world solicited works that represented the ideals of multiculturalism, postcoloniality, and cosmopolitanism. In this bid, identities and attitudes forged in the struggle for decolonization were increasingly turning into cultural commodities for global consumption.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2007) 684.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 579.

³⁶ Shayoni Mitra, “Dispatches from the Margins: Theater in India since the 1990s,” in *Mapping South Asia through Contemporary Theatre: Essays on the Theatres of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka*, Ashis Sengupta ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Kindle edition, location 2360.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Chaitanya Sambrani, Kajri Jain, and Ashish Rajadhyaksha, eds., “Introduction” in *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India* (London : New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2005) 13.

³⁹ Rangan Chakravarty and Nandini Gooptu claim that the rise of politicized Hindu nationalism in India was a response to the perceived dangers of the wide-spread embrace of Western culture and globalization, on the one hand, and to the presumed threat to national security that the Muslim “other” presented. See Rangan Chakravarty and Nandini Gooptu, “Imagi-nation: the media, nation, and politics in contemporary India,” in Elizabeth Hallam and Brian Street eds. *Cultural Encounters: Representing Otherness*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 89-107.

See also, Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999, and Ashis Nandy et al. eds. *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ See for example, Andrea Buddenseig, *Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013); Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee and Terry Smith eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity*,

Those present at the Kasauli conference were cognizant that such transformations were not so much to be resolved as enacted, lived through, and negotiated. They urged for a move away from the cultural logic of an established or reified ‘postcolonialism’ towards an *ongoing* process that would “renew tradition’s purpose,” such that it would no longer simply “iconize an imaginary cultural continuity [...] the imaginary status of which is covered over and repressed.”⁴¹ In the seminar proceedings, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ were potentialized as “critique” and “life-sustaining practice” to meet the pressing questions of the time.⁴² For instance, noted ‘parallel cinema’ and documentary filmmaker Kumar Shahani points to a crisis of categorization and the need for discursive tools that would move past petrified understandings of tradition and mystifications of practice. Pushing through the “decorative surface of tradition,” Shahani outlined how seeking timing and rhythm for cinema in Indian musical traditions, would open to other vast and sensitive economies of understanding and experience. In his description of classical Indian music, he offers:

Any experience of playing or listening to Indian music proposes more than one single way of looking at things; anyone who has had the pleasure of going into the presentation of a *bandish* or *raga* will see that it actually broadens your way of approaching reality itself. [...] At the moment we do not have ways of articulating this.⁴³

At the same time, those at the conference were more than cognizant that indigenous forms were not automatically accessible to artists simply by virtue of their ethnicity. In this regard, theater practitioner Maharishi urged a move away from the auto-orientalizing (or auto-primitivizing) and fetishism of the “energy” of folk theaters and moreover, of “energy as autonomous from thinking.”⁴⁴ Kapur called for “breaking down [inherited] forms formally” and then us[ing] them, or not, “along the cutting edge of the contemporary.”⁴⁵ There was also an impetus to think about the mythologies created by Western traditions, to discover the links between cultural borrowings across the East and West, and to question conventions of perception. As filmmaker Khopkar offers, “what I am proposing is to examine a mode of painting that might use eye movement and yet function outside the sphere of “optics” i.e. outside of the conventions of the frame-as-window.” Visual artist Vivan Sundaram who was already working with installation, speaks of struggling with his relation to the modernist figural narrative mode: “I want somehow to create a body of work where the human figure, and works that don’t have the human figure, are not seen as oppositional, where the absence suggests a presence.”⁴⁶

Conference conveners chose to steer away from the conventional format of publishing précis of papers presented. Instead, edited transcripts of presentations and of the intensive discussions that followed, were published. Rich ideas, claims, counter claims, and questions fill the pages of the two special issues. Between question and answer, there emerges a slow and careful attempt at positioning the artist or cultural mediator, albeit temporarily, allowing the

Postmodernity, Contemporaneity, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); and Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Geeta Kapur, “Contemporary cultural practice: Some polemical categories,” *Third Text*, 4:11 (1990), 109-118, DOI: 10.1080/09528829008576267

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴³ Kumar Shahani, “Interrogating Internationalism,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 19, 11-12.

⁴⁴ Madan Maharishi, discussion on “Notions of the Authentic,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21, 14.

⁴⁵ Geeta Kapur, discussion on “Notions of the Authentic,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21, 16.

⁴⁶ Vivan Sundaram, “Tradition of the Modern,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21, 37.

reader today a view of the formation of artistic subjectivity itself at this critical cultural juncture between ‘modernity’ and the emergence of something new.

Finally, and significantly, practitioners voiced their concern about the prevalent “timidity” in engaging with cultural praxis in a truly critical way—tapping into its potential to formulate new terminologies and to address the “exclusion of the arts” from other areas of discourse.⁴⁷ This task of creating new terminologies was to fall on art practitioners and art critics—to create an expanded field of artistic production that would “give a kind of impetus to those who are not directly connected with art, philosophers or historians, etc.”⁴⁸

The seminar of 1988 therefore called on artists and intelligentsia in India to consider how “inventing traditions” might be taken to mean a constructive task of expanding the narrow passes of essentialized identity formations, while bringing “existential urgency to questions of contemporaneity.”⁴⁹ Transcripts reveal a palpable restlessness with the then existing institutions of cultural production and a questioning of what Mitra has termed the “hegemonies of space, gender, language, and caste that the original proponents of postcolonial culture promoted.”⁵⁰ National cultural policy was edified in 1953, when the education ministry established the Sangeet Natak Akademi, or the Academy of Theatre, Dance, and Music. 1954 saw the setting up of the Lalit Kala Academy (for Fine Arts) and the Sahitya Kala Academy (for Literature). The National School of Drama was set up in 1959, followed by the Kathak Kendra in 1964, a large multipurpose auditorium space, Kamani Auditorium, in 1971, and the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts in 1975.⁵¹ All of these institutions and spaces were situated at a junction named Mandi House, close to the parliament and government offices in central New Delhi.⁵²

Of particular retrospective interest to this dissertation is the way in which the term ‘contemporary’ took form at the conference. The Kasauli cultural practitioners appear to have been poised for the ‘contemporary’ as “event,” one grounded in individual aesthetic practices, “definitionally ambiguous in the present so that the future could be predicated at a higher level of consciousness.”⁵³ There appeared to be a consensus that questions facing the artist would emerge as much at the socio-political level as in the internal practice of the form and, in the words of Shahani, the repeated recognition of the “vitalizing in art of deeper resources to which we don’t have access in everyday life.”⁵⁴ I quote the discussions at Kasauli in some detail as they urge attention to the promises of the *aesthetic force* of culture, art, and performance in expanding conceptual and embodied offerings for daily life; questioning received (Western) notions on perception; and recognizing and negotiating new dilemmas in a neoliberal, global, nation space. They also explicitly point to the transformative intent of “revitalized,” “fragmented,” or “distilled,” tradition as distinct from schematized, coded, and listed “manageable wholes” such as the category of an “authentic” tradition would suggest.⁵⁵ Such a *molecularized* tradition would

⁴⁷ Kumar Shahani, “Inventing Traditions,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21, 25.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Geeta Kapur, “Contemporary cultural practice: Some polemical categories,” 117.

⁵⁰ Shayoni Mitra offers a succinct account of these cultural politics at the national level especially from the perspective of theater. See Mitra “Theater from the Margins,” 70. See also Erin Mee, *Theater of Roots: Redirecting the Modern Indian Stage*, (Kolkata: Seagull Books) 2008.

⁵¹ I borrow this brief dateline of when cultural institutions were set up from Mitra, “Theater from the Margins,” 70.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Geeta Kapur, “Contemporary cultural practice: Some polemical categories,” 113.

⁵⁴ Kumar Shahani, “Dialogues on Cultural Practice in India” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 19, 7.

⁵⁵ Discussions on “Notions of the Authentic,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 20-21, 7-19.

itself mark a ‘line of flight’ into a new assemblage of discourses, practices and affiliations—the contemporary.

At Kasauli, artistic practice was seen as intrinsic to the production of knowledge, and cultural theory was sought in its experimental and inventive dimension. That is, the critical or philosophical movement was conceived of as inseparable from the aesthetic movement. Both artistic and theoretical production were seen to exist in the realm of process, potentiality, and possibility, working towards a radically *contemporaneous* culture.

Fast forward to 2016. The changes that were brewing in the late 1980s and early 1990s are today fully stewed. The twin political-economic scenes of fundamentalism and neoliberalization are played out in the aesthetic mode as a binary polarization of subjectivities, temporalities and spatialities: developed/underdeveloped, value/waste, inside/outside, ‘we, the people’/others, pure/impure. From within these binds, the artists and performers I examine in this dissertation enact ‘contemporaneity’ variously, pointing to new, non-dualistic, and more productive economies of sensing and knowing.

“Capturing Aesthetic Forces”: Gilles Deleuze and Performance Studies

Together with Felix Guatarri, Deleuze is often considered a philosopher for artists, for his insistence on the transformative force of affective intensity.⁵⁶ Ultimately, Deleuze’s affirmation of on art and performance as modes of knowledge is deeply related to his understanding of aesthetic forces as immanent openings to the political. As O’Sullivan has suggested, in Deleuze’s work, aesthetics is the name for on the one hand “the rupturing quality of art—its power to break our habitual ways of being and acting in the world (our reactive selves); and on the other, for a concomitant second moment—the production of something new.”⁵⁷ In this definition, the aesthetic encounter is “always with an object of sense that in itself involves the short-circuiting of our cognitive and conceptual capacities.”⁵⁸

Of particular interest to this cross-media dissertation, Deleuze has offered insights on the “community of the arts”:

The question concerning the separation of the arts, their respective autonomy, and their possible hierarchy, loses all importance, for there is a community of the arts, a common problem. In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of *capturing forces*. The task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible. Likewise, music attempts to render sonorous forces that are not themselves sonorous. [...] Time, which is nonsonorous and invisible—how can time be painted, how can time be heard? And elementary forces like pressure, inertia, weight, attraction, gravitation, germination... how can they be rendered?⁵⁹

Performance Studies, as an inter-, trans-, or ‘un’discipline also embraces a wider range of art forms, but is perhaps not always aware of the Deleuzian significance of its lines of trans-arts inquiry. This dissertation therefore mines the capacity of Performance Studies to “capture

⁵⁶ See Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan, “Introduction: Deleuze and Guatarri and Contemporary Art” in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, ed. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

⁵⁷ Simon O’Sullivan, “From Aesthetics to the Abstract Machine: Deleuze, Guattari and Contemporary Art Practice” in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, (London: Continuum, 2003) 40-41,

forces” from many forms to work on a “common problem”—that of thinking through the aesthetic sensorium of contemporary works of art and performance for alternate spaces of contemplation and action in Delhi. Through a vivid conceptual vocabulary that I explore below, Deleuze’s thought intersects with the field of performance studies to offer art and performance as vital philosophical (and political) forces.

In this regard, I follow the work of performance studies scholars such as Laura Cull who have engaged deeply with Deleuzian philosophy for rethinking practical and theoretical performance research. Like O’ Sullivan, Cull highlights the implications of Deleuze’s philosophy of becoming, for scholars who “continue to privilege the notion of performance as representation” as anchored by its “imitation of an identity: ‘the world,’ ‘the play,’ ‘the self.’”⁶⁰ As Cull describes it, a primacy of Deleuzian ‘becoming,’ over imitation and representation, opens us to considering how bodies aren’t simply either being or imitating/representing, but rather, bodies enter into zones of contact with other entities and attitudes, such that the “speeds and affects” of these others allow for a breaking of bounded and discreet categories of being.⁶¹ In sum, Deleuzian philosophy urges an epistemological shift that would enable us to follow vital aesthetic forces (in literature, visual art, music, theater, and cinema), and their capacities to act upon thinking-feeling-sensing social beings. Such a view leads to another more immediate question for the community of arts: *how* might aesthetic forms (sounds, shapes, colors, being) be arranged “so that the subjectivity adjacent to them remains in movement, and really alive?”⁶²

Therefore, while this dissertation might appear to have separate chapters on film, on dance-drama, on visual art and socially-engaged practice, a Deleuzian perspective seeks to trouble boundaries that might divide these forms, instead offering tracks amongst them. Though I do consider each artist or artistic group in turn, instead of stretching and expanding the practice of research and writing to accommodate the obvious differences across medial forms, this dissertation—literally ‘a path’—takes form itself as an in-between space where the affects of potentiality released in each separate work/chapter meet to create a field of resonance for the molecularity of aesthetics in Delhi’s contemporary.

As their creative tools engender these “little routes” (in filmmaker Kanwar’s words) to new aesthetic experiences and philosophical spaces for contemplation, I consider these artist’s works as ‘events’ defined as a dislocation of thinking and habitual orientations.⁶³ In effect, the works of Panda, Kanwar, Rao, Khoj and Salim function like philosophy by producing concepts that break established frames of thought. As I show in the chapters that follow, concepts that emerge from their art and performance works may, in turn, influence other practices, from those of urban planning to feminist organizing and citizenship and land rights.

Throughout this work, I engage Deleuzian vocabulary hinged on the non-oppositional relations between the molar and the molecular. Deleuze has been well received as a philosopher of aesthetics, however, in India’s context, it is also perhaps useful to note the importance of Deleuzian philosophy to themes of postcoloniality. For instance, Simone Bignall and Paul Patton usefully remind us of how Deleuze’s articulation of the movements of de/reterritorialisation describing a “conceptual politics of capture and relative liberation” are central to questions of

⁶⁰ Laura Cull, *Deleuze and Performance* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶² This is the question that Guatarri has posed, quoted in Stephen Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guatarri*, (New York, London: Routledge, 2005) 164.

⁶³ Claire Colebrook “Introduction” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 4.

de/neo/colonization.⁶⁴ Similarly, Deleuze and Guatarri provide tools to think through hybridity, migrancy, and nomadism as well as minoritarian subjectivities and minor languages and their relation to majoritarian identities, discourses, and aesthetic forms.⁶⁵ These and other aspects of Deleuze's work have been engaged by postcolonial scholars, including Édouard Glissant, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Robert Young, and Réda Bensmaïa, amongst others.

Also relevant to this project is that Deleuze himself follows philosophical performance theory and practice from Antonin Artaud to Jerzy Grotowski—artists who themselves were heavily influenced by Eastern performance forms of Balinese dance, kathakali (especially Grotowski), and yoga, albeit in problematically Orientalizing ways. Also of import to the art and performance works discussed here, there is a growing scholarship on the intersections between Deleuze and Zen and Mahayana Buddhist philosophy in the works of scholars such as Simon O' Sullivan, Bronwyn Davies, and Tony See. Davies in particular articulates how both Buddhism and Deleuzian thought open up new ways of thinking through the challenges of neoliberalism. She describes how Deleuzian scholarship echoes with Zen and Mahayana Buddhist thought on the “interconnectedness of being,” and “resisting the pull of binaristic systems,”⁶⁶ resonant themes in this dissertation.

As with any theoretical system, Deleuze can be deployed such that either practice or theory is made subservient to the other. Here, instead, I attempt for the voices of the practitioners and their works to sit in productive tension with Deleuzian concepts. I include below a small glossary of key terms running through this dissertation. However, as will be clear in the separate chapters, the artists' works themselves provide the tools to produce more concepts. As Claire Colebrook reminds us, the significance of Deleuzian thought lies not in what is manifestly stated, but rather in the idea that what is said leads us to produce *another text* that itself opens further.⁶⁷

Molar, Molecular, Line of Flight

The ‘political,’ Deleuze and Guatarri suggest, does not refer to organizing, governing or policy-making alone; rather they offer three interrelated “political lines”: ‘the molar,’ ‘the molecular,’ and ‘lines of flight. Film and media scholar Patricia Pisters precisely summarizes the ways in which these lines operate: The molar line divides the world into binary oppositions (self/other, my territory/your territory, public/private). Pisters comments that this is the line associated with representational thinking, in which identity is formed on the basis of oppositions; the molecular line works on a more immaterial or invisible but no less political level, and includes the affective pushes—movement, color, sound, rhythm—of an aesthetic act. These “form cracks in the system” of the molar line.⁶⁸ Finally, ‘the line of flight’ is precisely where a system may break, a route through which the system might change its nature.⁶⁹ As Deleuze has

⁶⁴ Simone Bignall and Paul Patton, eds., *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Bronwyn Davies, “Intersection between Zen Buddhism and Deleuzian Philosophy” *Psyke and Logos*:32 (2011), 28.

⁶⁷ Claire Colebrook, “Introduction” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 3.

⁶⁸ Patricia Pisters “Introduction” in Patricia Pisters ed., *The Micropolitics of Media Cultures: Reading the Rhizomes of Deleuze and Guatarri*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002) 10-11.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

written, the line of flight marks new thresholds; it is the “hidden zone of the ‘and’ between seeming oppositions.”⁷⁰

Deterritorialization

A ‘territory’ may describe a habitat, lived space, way of being, or set of beliefs in which one feels at home. But to territorialize may also mean to restrict action and possibility.⁷¹ Deterritorialization describes “a movement producing change.”⁷² Deleuze offers the example of the different functions of the human mouth to elucidate the concept: “the mouth, tongue and teeth have their first territory in food, and in devoting themselves to the articulation of sounds and language, they *deterritorialize* themselves.”⁷³ Deterritorialization is followed by a reterritorialization of some kind, or the establishment of new, if temporary, regimes. Most generally, this term has travelled across the fields of aesthetic practice and discourse to describe radical breaks in the rules of representation. In the context of visual art, Deleuze turns to Francis Bacon’s portraiture, where a deterritorialization of the human face is realized through “chance manual marks” made by brushing, throwing, or rubbing paint on the canvas. In the unmoving frame of painting, these marks express the “spasms” of interior forces such that Bacon’s works present a new, resonant truth: that of the ‘body as meat.’⁷⁴ In literary art, Kafka’s works produces a “stammering and stuttering” *within* language itself to call into being a new community of writers and readers.⁷⁵

Minor

Drawing on Deleuze, Erin Manning describes the minor impulse thus:

The ‘minor’ invents new forms of existence, and with them, in them, we come to be. These temporary forms of life travel across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues.⁷⁶

According to Adrienne Edwards, ‘minor aesthetics’ references principles that “concern, guide, and operate differently, meaning often outside of, the normative formulations.”⁷⁷ A becoming minor is therefore a “creative process of becoming different or diverging from the majority,” with the majority being defined as the group that is closest to the norm or standard.⁷⁸ Therefore, a becoming minor entails subjecting this norm to continuously transform, or deterritorialize.⁷⁹ For this reason, a minor aesthetic does not have an audience (since it is not the repetition of the same); it invokes a new audience at each turn.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “Three Questions on Six Times Two,” *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 44-45.

⁷¹ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2000) 104.

⁷² Adrian Parr, “Deterritorialization/Reterritorialization” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 69.

⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guatarri, Robert Brinkley, “What Is a Minor Literature?” *Mississippi Review* 11:3 (Winter/Spring 1983), 19-20.

⁷⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 94 -96.

⁷⁵ O Sullivan, Simon, “From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice,” *Deleuze Studies*, 3:2 (2009).

⁷⁶ Erin Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 7.

⁷⁷ Adrienne Edwards, “Relishing the Minor: Juliana Huxtable’s Kewt Aesthetics” *Performa Magazine* January 14, 2016. <http://performa-arts.org/magazine/entry/relishing-the-minor-juliana-huxtables-kewt-aesthetics>

⁷⁸ Paul Patton, “Difference + Politics” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 77.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Immanence and becoming

Deleuze is considered a philosopher of immanence (as against transcendence.) Transcendence indicates that a lower order category is related to a higher one: from body to mind or from matter/being to God.⁸⁰ In this relation, mind is separate from body and yet body is “secondary” to the mind and “in its grasp.”⁸¹ By contrast, in an immanent relation, connection is highlighted over separation.⁸² The notion of becoming is therefore closely related to immanence, for it is a conviction that “worlds are always in process, and in transformation.”⁸³ In his conceptualization of becoming, Deleuze explicitly seeks to rupture the boundaries and binary divisions (again, self/other, now/then, etc.) that have dominated Western philosophy.⁸⁴ Becoming is therefore a “molecular” function and can be contrasted with the molarity of structures of domination, in which becoming is inhibited, “its flow territorialized” and made to fit into already existing categories.⁸⁵

Virtuality

To conceptualize this key Deleuzian term here, I paraphrase feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz’s writings on the same, for she lucidly articulates the political potency of the term. Grosz describes how the ‘past’ contains resources for multiple kinds of futures (including for those norms, standards and regimes that are currently in place). Regimes of power in the present can thus be seen to have “actualized” or made real some materials of the past, while leaving the rest “dormant,” “virtual,” or “potential.”⁸⁶ This implies that the ‘now’ can pull resources from that part of the past still untouched by the present—the virtual—to critically respond to the present, and to enable a different future.⁸⁷ In Grosz’ poetic language, the virtual contents of the past are thus the site for the “unravelling of the givenness of the present.”⁸⁸

Conceptualizing Contemporaneity: “to irradiate our present with the crepuscular light of an ever changing, unsettled *and*”⁸⁹

As should be clear from my earlier discussion of the contemporary in a Deleuzian frame, my goal in this dissertation is not to survey contemporary artistic production in Delhi as a whole. Following those practitioners at Kasauli, I seek contemporaneity as Kapur’s “existentially urgent call”, a mode of inquiry, a mode of action, and of subjectivation.⁹⁰ I adopt a targeted approach as I plunge deeply into a few select works of art and performance to demonstrate that close aesthetic analyses can offer a great amount of insight—perhaps otherwise unavailable—about

⁸⁰ James Williams “Immanence” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 128-9.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose, “Introduction,” in Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose eds., *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 15.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 253.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan, “Introduction: Deleuze and Guatarri and Contemporary Art” in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, ed. Stephen Zepke and Simon O’ Sullivan, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.

⁹⁰ Geeta Kapur, “Contemporary cultural practice: Some polemical categories,” 117.

the nature of our times, and possibilities for the future. The series of encounters with some of Delhi's most significant artists and performers today, also raises broader conceptual questions about contemporary artistic production in India. As a group, they open up new ways of thinking about contemporaneity in the cultural milieu of Delhi. Below, I outline two critical characteristics of contemporaneity that arise in these art works.

First, I speak of a 'performative enablement,' a term I borrow from curator and theorist of the contemporary, Irit Rogoff, for these works present the potential for new linkages across existing boundaries. That is, performative enabling is a 'becoming' across bounded categories. I trace such becomings following the molecular function of aesthetic tools. Categories are of course necessary to make sense of the world. I simply ask for more attention be paid to the making of major categories of State, self, community, etc. As these works move away from binary systems of categorization, this and that/here and there come together in some newer and 'contemporary' cultural formation. As such, these art and performances are those "which may irradiate our present with the crepuscular light of an ever changing, unsettled *and*."⁹¹ The 'and' or "in betweenness" that these works express is a zone of connectivity across various registers.

Second, and related, I speak not of finished works but of "works of potentiality." The contemporary innovations of the artists in this dissertation are probes of perception for grappling not only with things as they are but also things as they might be—that is, they offer a politics of potentiality. They provide lines of flight—directions of movement that are 'virtual' in the present—laden with potentialities and that thus have some force in engendering a future that is different from what we have now.

My method in this dissertation is to provide close, historically contextualized readings of select works. I also draw on ethnographic interviews that I conducted during several months of fieldwork between 2013 and 2016. Such an approach that dwells on close readings of specific artworks across media may seem to miss the 'big picture.' Instead, I would posit that tracing such a molecular history of the contemporary might, in fact, reveal much more about the effects and nature of the present than a more broad strokes approach. In choosing actors who were playing within the same cultural field (performing and visual arts in Delhi), I had a hunch that I would find aesthetic connections. However, I dived into this project with the risk of not knowing. Rogoff offers a term for such a risky pursuit: criticality. As Rogoff has described it, a practice of criticality (as different from criticism or critique) operates from a place of uncertainty, while drawing on a critical apparatus.⁹² This dissertation therefore also perhaps needs a similar kind of 'unknowing' critical consciousness to activate it, to follow the close readings of the artists' works, and supplement it with the reader's own journeys, outside-in, inside-out, and to the side, of molar arrangements. This dissertation itself is a minor gesture. Each of its sites exists within a different media and I urge a constant re-thinking of these media in complex relation to the other.

⁹¹ Geeta Kapur, "Contemporary cultural practice: Some polemical categories," 117.

⁹² I borrow this distinction between criticality and criticism/critique from curator Irit Rogoff. See Irit Rogoff, "From Criticism to Critique to Criticality," *eipcp* (01, 2003), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en/>. Rogoff states. "It seems to me that within the space of a relatively short period we have been able to move from criticism to critique to criticality - from finding fault, to examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to appear as a convincing logic, to operating from an uncertain ground which while building on critique wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in a relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating flaws, locating elisions, allocating blame."

A Molecular Itinerary Across Delhi's Urban Contemporary

In this cross-media dissertation, each site enacts the “performative enabling” of the categories of modernism differently, producing a new mode of contemporaneity in aesthetic practices in Delhi. In each chapter, I also provide a brief summary of the shifts in the contexts of making art and performance across media from the late 1980s to the present.

In chapter one, I consider the work of documentary filmmaker Amar Kanwar (b.1964). By introducing alterity into modes of seeing, specifically the tools of “witnessing inwards” and “plurivisionality,”⁹³ Kanwar troubles the contours of modern sovereignty. In its place, he sets into motion what cultural critic Lakshmi Padmanabhan has termed a form of “ambient citizenship.”⁹⁴ His films draw our attention to a ‘molecular’ milieu; a milieu made of dust, small gestures, the change in the current of a river, etc. until agglomerations of such micro particles fill the screen, unsettling *macroevents* of development or aggressive nationalism, thereby exposing how these same events themselves begin and end with “swarms and masses of microperceptions.”⁹⁵ With these tools, Kanwar attempts to see through, across, and to the side of various kinds of borders—between self and other, your territory and mine, waste and value, development and underdevelopment—that have defined conventional forms of citizenship. These border crossings merge the personal with the social to make them immediately political. His method contrasts to a genre of Nehruvian witness film, or documentary film where imposing and massive molar forms—dams, silos, and bridges of obdurate and unyielding stone—dominate other more fluid expressions of being and belonging.

In chapter two, I carry forward the themes of this dissertation into the medium of live dance-drama performance. I consider how feminist, experimental kathakali virtuoso Maya Krishna Rao’s experimental practice imbricates politics, aesthetics and sociality, dispersing kathakali’s expansive affective and emotional register into new terrain. Rao’s kathakali-inspired, corporeal gestures disrupt performances of normative feminine and neoliberal subjectivity. These gestures are performed alongside systems of New Delhi, middle-class, quotidian life, characters, and actions while probing the ‘virtualities’ or potentialities of these same systems; that is, within the frames of the everyday, Rao evokes potential for other ways of being and relating. It is to this capacity to actualize, at the edge of “where the actual is not- yet,” that the term ‘minor’ is attributed.⁹⁶ In contrast to the desire to produce a unified conception of ourselves, one with roots deep in the project of modernity, Rao’s minor gestures enact the potentiality of other kinds of subjecthood and agency. Inviting her audiences into zones of complexity and mutability drawn from kathakali practice, her performances also expose gender and sexuality as sites of creative enabling.

Chapter three moves to a third medium in its focuses on the work of visual artist and sculptor Jagannath Panda. Working with material from the rapidly urbanizing satellite city of

⁹³ Raul Fonet-Betancourt coins the term “plurivisionality” which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 1. See Raul Fonet-Betancourt, “An Alternative to Globalization: Theses for the Development of an Intercultural Philosophy,” in *Latin American Perspectives on Globalization: Ethics, Politics, and Alternative Visions*, (Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 235.

⁹⁴ Conversations with Lakshmi Padmanabhan at the annual American Society for Theater Research annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, 6-9 November 2015. Padmanabhan discussed how her current work looks at “ambient citizenship” (a concept put forth by Lauren Berlant), in Kanwar’s film installation, *The Lightning Testimonies*. See also Lauren Berlant, “On the Desire for the Political,” *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 223–63.

⁹⁵ Conley, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 177.

⁹⁶ Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 7

Gurgaon, Panda's canvases, sculptures, and assemblages featuring real urban material (sewage pipes, upholstery, bricks) in new combinations point to alternate, as yet invisible arrangements of urban material and reveal that human, animal, plant, thing, are always already partial expressions of each other. Across his work, plastic expression of various 'becomings' reveal urban change as an immanent process, one with many possible futures.

In chapter four, I examine the work of Khoj, an artist's residency space in the unauthorized Delhi neighborhood of Khirkee. Khirkee is a highly diverse community. In addition to migrant workers from within India, visitors from across the Global South (including Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Sudan), who come to Delhi as political asylees and for education, work, and medical tourism, have made their home here. The large neighborhood also has a sizeable community of transgender residents. Following their efforts to redistribute urban material in small ways, I track how the emergent community and social art practices in Khoj (and the neighborhood of Khirkee) may lead the researcher to a 'rhizomatic' map of the city itself, and reveal new kinds of global and local belonging when the molecularity of close human contact rubs up against shifting macro structures.

Finally, in the epilogue, I comment on performance artist Inder Salim's extreme performance art, as he pushes against the boundaries between his own dermis and the skin or surfaces of the city and on the Raqs Media Collective's global contemporary.

Each chapter also takes the reader through different and interconnected physical spaces in Delhi's art and performance ecology. These spaces present what Delhi's Raqs Media Collective have described as "the pragmatic, entrepreneurial, institutional energies and the visionary, radical and anarchic tendencies that striate Delhi's art scene."⁹⁷ I viewed Amar Kanwar's works in the glass and brick construction of the Devi Art Foundation—a not-for-profit art center in Gurgaon housing the collection of Lekha and Anupam Poddar, and at another private gallery, the Kiran Nadar Museum. Jagannath Panda works out of his massive studio and workshop in Gurgaon and I viewed his work at Delhi's the Nature Morte Gallery. Maya Krishna Rao performed in an open-air stage at the Max Mueller Bhavan as part of *Ignite*, a festival of contemporary dance, hosted by the Gati Dance Forum; I also attended her performance at Mandi House, at the National School of Drama festival, and a protest performance at Jantar Mantar, an eighteenth century observatory and protest site. Khoj, as mentioned, is in a highly diverse migrant community in Delhi's 'urban village' of Khirkee. Chapters may thus be seen to offer a form of a spatial tour in order to expose the cracks and bridges amongst and between different sites in this ecology.

⁹⁷ The Raqs Media Collective, "City Report: Delhi," *Frieze*, 1 June 2012, accessed 5 March 2016, <https://frieze.com/article/delhi>.

Chapter 1

Amar Kanwar's Lens: Documentary for an Ambient Citizenship

In this chapter, I consider the work of documentary filmmaker Amar Kanwar (b.1964). By introducing alterity into modes of seeing—specifically the tools of “witnessing inwards” and “plurivisionality,”⁹⁸ Kanwar troubles the contours of modern sovereignty and citizenship. In its place, he sets into motion what cultural critic and political theorist Lakshmi Padmanabhan (drawing from Lauren Berlant) has termed, a form of “ambient citizenship.”⁹⁹ More specifically, his films draw our attention to a molecular milieu—a milieu made of dust, small gestures, light particles, etc.—until agglomerations of such microparticles fill the screen, unsettling *macroevents* of development or aggressive nationalism, thereby exposing how these same events themselves begin and end with “swarms and masses of microperceptions.”¹⁰⁰ With these tools, Kanwar attempts to see through, across, and to the side of various kinds of borders—between self and other, your territory and mine, waste and value, development and underdevelopment, that have defined or bounded conventional forms of citizenship. This method is in contrast to the “state speak”¹⁰¹ of conventional modernist documentary in India, where imposing ‘molar’ forms of dams, silos, and bridges of unyielding concrete dominated other more fluid expressions of being and belonging.

In Kanwar’s works, the figure of the border in its material, conceptual, and aesthetic dimensions marks a philosophical and cinematic ‘event’¹⁰² that destabilizes fixed identities, spaces, and ideas, opening to alternate and expansive modes of seeing the contemporary moment. Further, under these new cinematic terms, filmmaker and viewer are not “separate entities trapped on either side”¹⁰³ of a cinematic device as border; instead, the screen is an “aperture” through which the viewer engages sensorially, kinesthetically, and critically in an interactive praxis of documenting truths.¹⁰⁴ The borders in Kanwar’s films are thresholds, not closings, nor zones of duality, and they invite critical new directions of thought and experience for documentary filmmaking. In this chapter, Kanwar’s focus on the internal complexities of the visual field and its resistance to singular seeing helps to shape a cinematic point of entry to the goals of this dissertation. Working in league with other sensory modes, his cinema encodes and

⁹⁸ Fornet-Betancourt, “An Alternative to Globalization: Theses for the Development of an Intercultural Philosophy,” 235, quoted in Michelle Dizon, “Vision in Ruins” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2011), xii.

⁹⁹ Conversations with Lakshmi Padmanabhan at the annual American Society for Theater Research annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, 6-9 November 2015. Padmanabhan discussed how her current work looks at “ambient citizenship” (a concept put forth by Lauren Berlant), in Kanwar’s film installation, *The Lightning Testimonies*. See also Lauren Berlant, “On the Desire for the Political,” *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 223–63.

¹⁰⁰ I borrow from Tom Conley’s evocative description of the movement of molecular parts “swarming” together to form molar wholes. See Conley “Molecular,” 177.

¹⁰¹ Arvind Rajagopal and Paromita Vohra, “On the Aesthetics and Ideology of the Indian Documentary Film: A Conversation,” *BioScope*, 3:1 (2012), 7–20, accessed February 28, 2014, DOI: 10.1177/097492761100300102.

¹⁰² As described in the introduction I use the term ‘event’ to describe a “dislocation of thinking and habitual orientation,” as defined by Colebrook. Claire Colebrook “Introduction” in *Deleuze Dictionary*, 4.

¹⁰³ Shanay Jhaveri, “In Conversation: Amar Kanwar and Shanay Jhaveri,” *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* interview with Amar Kanwar, 61:3 (March 2010), 92, retrieved on 4 March 2014 from *The Free Library*, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Amar+Kanwar+and+Shanay+Jhaveri.a0249464313>

¹⁰⁴ Michelle Dizon has elucidated his idea of the screen as aperture, in Dizon “Vision in Ruins,” 11-25.

anticipates a different consciousness within the ‘now,’ to be brought into existence.

As I examine Kanwar’s early film *A Season Outside* (1997) and his latest moving image installation *The Sovereign Forest* (2011-), I also focus on how his films are made with attention to the possibilities of meditative awareness and integration with the rhythms of his environment, and may be compared to what feminist, postcolonial, and media theorist Lata Mani has called “contemplative cultural critique,” which is an effort at transcoding between secular and meditative or spiritual understandings.¹⁰⁵ In doing so, Kanwar crosses another border—between two epistemes—to apprehend the non-dual nature of the world. Such a mode is not without difficulty or limit, but leads Kanwar to pose questions that he might not otherwise have asked, and offers the viewer ways to ponder and sense them in a manner she might not have previously considered.

Kanwar shot to international fame in the moving image art world when curator of global contemporary art Okwui Enwezor invited him to screen *A Season Outside* (1997) at Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany in 2002. Originally created for screening in more conventional theater venues and activist circles, the film has since been displayed in art galleries as a single channel projection. As an early example of Kanwar’s work and the first film in which he let go of the conventional expectations of the ways in which documentary “truths” were to be delivered at the time,¹⁰⁶ *A Season Outside* offers critical insight to his singular documentary filmmaking praxis. This 31-minute long, first-person, essayistic film begins in Punjab at the present day Wagah-Atari border between India and Pakistan and closes with images of a Tibetan refugee settlement in the outskirts of East Delhi. Traversing these geographic territories, Kanwar also explores the psychic, emotional, and affectively resonant terrains of borderlands. While the film is bookended by the immense shadows of the molar or dominant form of the State, it is in the film’s middle that the real politics of the work lie—a presentation of Kanwar’s struggle with the ways in which political borders cut *vertically* through the layers that make up an individual’s identity as much as they do horizontally across vast tracts of geography. The film’s ‘middle,’ or, more appropriately, the middle that Kanwar’s work begins with is this resonant micropolitical milieu consisting of border violence as experienced when folded into public ritual, manifest in individual thoughts, dreams, and memories, bleeding into community lore, and expressed in seemingly casual words or gesture.

As close readings of scenes of the film reveal, molecules (in the form of dust, light particles, ambient sound) often aggregate and throng or press into active masses of molar form and vice versa.¹⁰⁷ As such, drawing on Padmanabhan’s lyrical writing on Kanwar, I posit that Kanwar summons an “ambient citizenship”¹⁰⁸ into being. Such citizenship relies on “moving around recursively in an environment, gathering things up, changing the relation between what the senses collect and the constitution of political imaginaries and practices.”¹⁰⁹ His films thus open up a different and molecular somatic domain for “encountering the political.”¹¹⁰

Filming the Wagah border, Kanwar says, “in order to comprehend what was happening

¹⁰⁵ Lata Mani, *SacredSecular: Contemplative Cultural Critique*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Rajagopal and Vohra, “On the Aesthetics and Ideology of the Indian Documentary Film: A Conversation,” 11-12.

¹⁰⁷ I borrow from Tom Conley’s evocative description of the movement of molecular parts “swarming” together to form molar wholes. See Conley “Molecular,” 177.

¹⁰⁸ Discussions with Lakshmi Padmanabhan at the annual American Society for Theater Research annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, 6-9 November 2015. See also Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 223–63.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

outside, [I realized] it was necessary to comprehend what was happening *inside me*.”¹¹¹ Kanwar’s filmic works suggest that the dynamics of division create tiny shifts in our perception, causing the disruption of material, discursive, or conceptual assemblages along particular lines of flight to bring about new heterogeneities in the place of assemblages of binaristic molarity. The line of flight marks new thresholds; “it is the hidden zone of the ‘and’ between seeming oppositions.”¹¹² It is here that Kanwar’s film positions itself: India, Pakistan *and* the border; Hindus, Muslims *and* this line of difference between. Bringing molar forms into proximity, a ‘border’ or dual awareness is at the core of his work.

Film and moving image art are especially suited to enabling a micropolitical/molecular aesthetic engagement, for film techniques mix sound, image, words, and rhythm together to work on the “visceral register” of human sensibility.¹¹³ Film may thus expand or reorganize the horizons of the visible and the sensible and, in doing so, potentially change how we perceive and interact with the world. As film and political theorist William Connolly offers, the realm of the filmic micropolitical includes “organized combinations of sound, gesture, word, movement, and posture through which affectively imbued dispositions, desires, and judgments become synthesized.”¹¹⁴ In turn, attention to such intersections between technique and narrative will reveal how immersed we are “in the sea of micropolitics.”¹¹⁵

Micropolitical filmic praxis is evident in the visual methodology of filmmakers who move away from simply representing and narrating events in film to engaging deeply with the rhythmic, affective, and haptic (the senses of touch and proprioception) dimensions of film in their works, including Harun Farocki, Angela Melitopoulos, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Chantal Akerman and Adrian Paci amongst others. Writers and theorists of film, committed to a micropolitical critique, such as William Connolly, Laleen Jayamanne, Laura Marks, and Vivian Sobchak etc. in turn provide a specific and critical vocabulary to map the practices employed by image-makers to move their viewers and engage them bodily. “Haptic visuality,” “neuropolitics,” “thinking-feeling,” “resonance machines,” “fingery eyes” are some such theoretical tools.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, these theorists and filmmakers show how the potentiality of filmic media lies precisely in enabling (political) engagement at an intimate, bodily, affective (micro) level in addition to the intellectual register. Amongst filmmakers in India, such tools have surfaced primarily in the ‘parallel’ cinema works of Ritwik Ghatak, Mani Kaul, and Kumar Shahani. In the context of Kanwar’s films, these modes are translated into forms of witnessing, to probe the macro and micrological folds of history.

¹¹¹ Amar Kanwar. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, April 06, 2013.

¹¹² Gilles Deleuze, “Three Questions on Six Times Two,” *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 44-45.

¹¹³ William Connolly, “Film Technique and Micropolitics,” *Theory and Event* 6:1 (2002), accessed November 14, 2015, DOI: 10.1353/tae.2002.0003

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Jamie Lorimer provides a useful literature review of filmic micropolitics, from which I draw here. See Jamie Lorimer, “Moving image methodologies for more-than-human geographies,” *Cultural Geographies* 17:237 (2010), 240-1. See also, Jane Bennett and Michael Shapiro, eds., *The Politics of Moralizing* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6; Brian Massumi “The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens: A Semblance of a Conversation” 40 *Inflexions* 1.1 “How is Research-Creation?” (May 2008), accessed November 15, 2015, www.inflexions.org; Connolly, “Film Technique and Micropolitics”; Vivian Sobchack, “Embodying Transcendence: On the Literal, the Material, and the Cinematic Sublime,” *Material Religion* 4 (2008): 200, accessed November 14, 2015, DOI: 10.2752/175183408X328307. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 258; Laura Marks, “Preface,” *Skin of the Film*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xi.

From ‘Witnessing’ to ‘Witnessing inward’: Retooling the Essay Film

Most of Kanwar’s films and installations may be thought of as essay films, an “in-between genre”¹¹⁷ that combines documentary and fiction to investigate specific social and political realities. Described as “poetic,” “open,” “transgressive,” and “personal,” what separates the essay film from other non-fiction genres is that it presents ideas in a strong subjective voice.¹¹⁸ Timothy Corrigan posits that the essayistic indicates an encounter between a “protean self” and a public or social experience in which the experience of the encounter, and the development of a particular rhetorical stance toward it, continually “tests and undoes the limits and capacities” of that essayistic self.¹¹⁹ The essayistic subject becomes the *product* of changing experiential expressions rather than simply the producer of expressions. In Corrigan’s definition, the essayistic mode makes a dialectical demand for both a loss of self and a rethinking and remaking of the self.¹²⁰ In Kanwar’s mode of essayistic cinema, film operates on the affective-sensorial register, enabling a turn inwards and a micropolitical reordering of feelings, emotional stirrings, memories, intimate thoughts and questions, and in the process effects the unmaking and remaking of the voiceover narrator.

Coming of age in the 1980s, Amar Kanwar’s filmmaking praxis was shaped by violence that he witnessed in that decade and, in his words, “a crisis of democracy:”

Fundamentally, I have been making the same film all these years. My choice of profession had much to do with the times...the anti-Sikh massacres of 1984, my involvement in the post-riot relief camps, and subsequently in the campaigns for justice [...] then Bhopal happened a month later [referring to the highly toxic gas leak at the Union Carbide factory, one of the world’s worst industrial disasters]. Both incidents made it clear for a young student to see an institutional complicity. I saw a system that was directly or indirectly *for* the killing of people, *for* obfuscating the investigative process, *for* protecting the perpetrators. This is perhaps what led me to filmmaking, I sought a profession that would teach me to look at things around me again and to respond.¹²¹

Kanwar sought answers in what he terms “little routes” to a deeper understanding of the present and future.¹²² Such little routes are resonant with what Greg Seigworth describes as “attuning the body into new modes of attention—to that which circulates, sticks, resonates, gathers and dissipates [...] *to cluster and sometimes precipitate as events or episodes with distinct histories pointing toward new futures* [emphasis mine].”¹²³

In film theory, ‘witnessing’ has long been a rubric through which to think about the relationship between author, film and viewer. Specifically, a film that claims to witness implies a promise to testify or to offer an object or act as truth. It also implies a genre of event that demands witness. The official relationship between film and ‘witnessing’ was materialized during the Nuremberg trials, which set two precedents for the use of film in courts of law: film as

¹¹⁷ Nilgun Bayraktar, “Essay Film: Drifting Away from Documentary Conventions,” in *Moving Images Against The Current: The Aesthetics and Geopolitics of (Im)mobility in Contemporary Europe* (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2011)124.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-5.

¹¹⁹ Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne after Marker*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 43.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²¹ Amar Kanwar. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, April 06, 2013.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Greg Seigworth, “Reading Lauren Berlant Writing,” *Academia.edu*, retrieved 15 July 2016.

evidence in trials and the filming of trials themselves.¹²⁴ The rubric of ‘witnessing’ in the context of documentary film traces its development from this origin in juridical discourse to its emergence in the fields of human rights, citizenship, and media. While legal and holocaust studies paved the way for modern discussions of the relationship between witnessing and images, the interrelated fields of trauma and memory studies, and feminist theories of witnessing have also made path-breaking contributions.¹²⁵ More recent scholarship in critical race and sexuality studies, performance studies, and political theory argues for how material objects may also bear witness.¹²⁶ The questions of what can be borne witness and what cannot, how and by whom in film, have again been made relevant in recent years owing to a resurgence of the political documentary. The intersection of documentary and avant-garde film provide an expansive space to think through a specific aesthetics of witnessing in film media involving more and more of our sensory apparatus and redefining where and how truths may be found, as evident in the micropolitical/molecular tools outlined above.¹²⁷ Alongside film, witness literature expands ways in which to think about witnessing as aesthetic praxis.¹²⁸ Kanwar’s work on inward testimony makes apparent “a state of existence that may then become a part of social consciousness,” or as author Nadine Gordimer has put it, in the context of witness literature, he exposes “that shattered certainties *within* (are) as much a casualty as the shattered bodies in the streets.”¹²⁹ *A Season Outside* suggests a relationship between cinema and violence that is differently inflected, articulating a new role for both documentarian and viewer, as witnesses to violence.

Documentary to Build a Nation

While there is widespread documentary production in India, India’s documentary histories have not been recorded in a serious way. As Paromita Vohra observes: “Whether in film criticism, film schools or, to a lesser degree, the film community’s contextualization of itself, there is little sense of documentary history— almost a refusal to it.”¹³⁰ Documentary films have also been excluded from the canon of Indian national cinema, which principally considers mainstream commercial and ‘parallel’ films.

In recent years, several scholarly works have offered an overview of the contours of the field of documentary studies and practice in India. Among these, a special issue of *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, guest edited by Bhaskar Ghosh and Nicole Wolf (2012), with significant contributions by Madhushree Dutta, Arvind Rajgopal, and Paromita Vohra; Aparna Sharma’s *Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work* (2015); and Anjali and K.P. Jayasankar’s *A Fly in the Curry. Independent Documentary Film in India* (2016), have done valuable work in filling this gap. Sharma’s book in particular, is one that serves as a model for

¹²⁴ Lawrence Douglas, “Film as Witness: Screening Nazi Concentration Camps before the Nuremberg Tribunal” *The Yale Law Journal*, 105:2 (Nov.1995), 449-481.

¹²⁵ Kathryn Abrams and Irene Kacandes, “Introduction: Witness” in *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 36:1/2, (Spring-Summer 2008),13-27.

¹²⁶ See for example, Mel Chen, introduction to *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-20, and Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things” in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010) 1-19.

¹²⁷ Bill Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde” *Critical Inquiry*, 27: 4, (Summer, 2001) 580-610.

¹²⁸ Nadine Gordimer, “Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony,” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 26 (2009) 66–72. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5842.2009.01054.x

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rajagopal and Vohra, “On the Aesthetics and Ideology of the Indian Documentary Film: A Conversation,” 16.

this chapter for it offers a close exploration of contemporary documentary aesthetics and philosophy to stimulate creative interdisciplinary debates around the form.

In December 1947, a few months after India's independence, the Films Division¹³¹ was formed to promote documentary film and newsreel production and distribution. Under the influence James Beveridge, a student of pioneering Scottish documentary filmmaker John Grierson, who was making films for Burmah Shell in India at the time, documentary came to be valued for its instructional potential.¹³² In its early years, the Films Division undertook extensive production, around 200 documentaries and short films per year, making it one of the world's largest documentary producers of the era.¹³³

The 1950s and 1960s were an era of post-independence optimism and India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, described documentary as a tool to "build the nation, build a sense of citizenship and community."¹³⁴ As such, the formal elements of films of the era included verbocentricism—specifically the voice of an authoritative male speaking over images that served as evidence—and iconographies of industrialization, including the celebratory feature of public sector utilities. Arvind Rajgopal denotes this era of the documentary as one related to "state speech," with its precursors in colonial photography, surveillance media, and the "cinematic truth telling" of wartime.¹³⁵ He posits that the era of state-led national development (from 1947 through the 1970s) was "one long period of emergency communication," when leaders like Nehru argued that it was vital for the government to expend its energies on economic growth and limiting dissent.¹³⁶ While in its early years, the Films Division had also supported important aesthetic experiments, including in the works of P.V. Pathy, Mani Kaul, Satyajit Ray, Sukhdev, and M.F. Hussein, as these new works challenged the Film Division's institutional documentary form, experimentation increasingly came to be seen as frivolous and was discouraged.¹³⁷

From the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Sharma (quoting film historian Sanjay Narwekar) notes that there was growing appreciation among documentary filmmakers of how "complex the fabric of Indian democracy" was and recognition of the limitations of the Films Division's pedagogical style. This period saw the rise of such filmmakers as Anand Patwardhan.¹³⁸ Sharma then draws our attention to another shift in documentary making in India with the growth of Indian television from the 1970s onward, when documentary was tied to the ideals of mass communication.¹³⁹ Since documentary was now increasingly seen as a form of investigative journalism, educational programs such as Jamia Milia Islamia University's AJK Mass Communication Research Center were formed to train young documentary filmmakers. As Vohra says,

The documentary's *raison d'être* was social upliftment and therefore needed to be strongly grounded in realism, continued to persist in the Indian context. There is a certain

¹³¹ The division was first named the Film Unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It was renamed Films Division in 1948.

¹³² Aparna Sharma, *Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 15.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Rajagopal and Vohra, "On the Aesthetics and Ideology of the Indian Documentary Film: A Conversation," 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Sharma, *Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work*, 13.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

dis-ease that surrounds documentary films, which use stylistic elements related to fiction and experimental or popular cinema.¹⁴⁰

Finally, through the 1980s and into the 1990s, with the influence of postcolonial and postmodern theorists and filmmakers, fragmented and indeterminate subjective histories found their way into the documentary form in India.¹⁴¹ It is within this “epistemological shift”¹⁴² in documentary that Kanwar’s work lies.

A Season Outside (1997)

A tentative, intimate, poetic, and searching citizen’s address replaces the instructional and propagandistic voiceover of modernist documentary film—tied to the Nehruvian project of nation building—in Kanwar’s film, *A Season Outside* (1997). The architecture of this film resonates with the subject matter, which probes the molecular realm of large-scale violence. For much of the film, a stationary camera focuses on various real borders and border forms of life for lengthy takes, as the male voiceover, softly and incessantly accompanies with reflexive personal commentary. The film is also artfully interwoven with a soundtrack of a subtle drone, syncopated beats, and discordant diegetic ‘border’ sounds. All of this suggests that sensorial (visual, aural, and kinesthetic) ‘keys’ at various borderlines dramatize an exterior landscape while simultaneously causing an intimate engagement, via evoked sensation, such that the filmmaker (and viewer) are immersed in a coincidental act of documenting outward while turning to witness *inward*.

In *A Season Outside*, Kanwar announces a very specific charge for the film: “I’m trying to understand the dynamics of division and, in turn, find a method for dealing with conflict.”¹⁴³ His film is then a heuristic tool to probe the workings of violent division. In this exploration, he is extraordinarily attentive to the micropolitical impact of images and sounds on his own body-brain processes.



Figure 1: “It is difficult at this mythical line that is just 12 inches wide and maybe several miles deep.” *A Season Outside* (1997), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

¹⁴⁰ Rajagopal and Vohra, *On the Aesthetics and Ideology of the Indian Documentary Film: A Conversation*, 9

¹⁴¹ Sharma, *Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work*, 7.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *A Season Outside*, Dir. Amar Kanwar, Prod. Rajiv Mehrotra and Foundation for Universal Responsibility, (1997, New Delhi, India), DVD.

The film opens on the silhouette of barbed wire fencing against a night sky. In the foreground what appears to be a small outpost, its window open, is illuminated by two light bulbs. A soundtrack of a subtle drone, syncopated beats and discordant sounds accompanies. Cut to the light of day. Men dressed in blue approach the barbed wire. Cut to a thick white line painted on the asphalt. Cut to turbaned men, dressed in red, meeting men in blue at the line. The static camera captures goods trucks, security guards, and an elaborate system of barriers. Cut to a blurred close-up of red fabric and blue fabric. Zoom out. Focus sharpens as a male voice-over (Kanwar's own) interrupts the syncopated soundtrack,

Sometimes you reach a place and you have expectations, but then suddenly you start to see something else. At first I saw colors, I had thought ours wore red and theirs wore blue but instead ours were in blue and theirs were in red. I'm on the border with India and Pakistan and it's odd but I never imagined I would react to colors.¹⁴⁴

Cut to a medium-shot, waist-down, of men in blue and men in red at white line (figure 1). The camera tilts upwards and reveals the men in red passing heavy burlap sacks to the men in blue. The viewer sees that it is this exchange of goods at the border that causes the men (now identified as porters) to shift the weight on their feet—bracing themselves for the load, as though wrestling or dancing. The voiceover reveals his biographical interest in borders, intimating that his own family was rent apart by the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan:

I have a compass, which keeps spinning me into zones of conflict. It is a very peculiar feeling here because that very line scattered my family across the subcontinent [...] Now I wonder, who is watching: You? Me? Or [is it] someone else's memories? It is difficult when you search at this mythical line that is just 12 inches wide and maybe several miles deep.¹⁴⁵

Haunted by family history, directed by a compass within, and absorbed by a search for “possible answers,” the voiceover repeatedly seeks to uncover the question of “what is the dynamic at borders?” by paying close attention to the materiality of the border itself.

The trauma of Partition is a watershed period in the history of India and Pakistan but neither country has officially commemorated (in the form of a State memorial) the lives lost in the retributive violence between Hindus and Muslims. As Jisha Menon notes, quoting from the report *Millions on the Move*:

Between June 3, 1947, when the decision to divide India was announced, and August 15, 1947, the day of formal Indian independence from British rule, roughly 15 million people were displaced. What the government euphemistically called ‘the exchange of populations’ of Muslims into Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs into India resulted in the largest human exodus ever recorded. The disputed death toll ranges from 200,000 to 2 million: People died as a result of communal clashes, floods, starvation, exhaustion, and the proliferating cases of famine and cholera caused by unhygienic conditions. Approximately 83,000 women were abducted, raped, and killed. Innumerable children disappeared.¹⁴⁶

Menon also astutely describes how, despite the “institutional strategies of redress and reparation and the redemptive accounts of the nation’s nonviolent path to freedom, unruly memories of the

¹⁴⁴ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 7.

Partition defy efforts toward closure.”¹⁴⁷ The trauma of Partition is thus still unfolding in India and Pakistan’s political, social, and cultural and artistic scenes, thus stressing the inadequacy of strict periodization in the nation’s 70-year history, and space for more molecular accounts of this event.

Ruminating on the foundational questions of violence, non-violence, and the creation of the boundaries of the Indian nation-state, the figure of M.K. Gandhi is never far away for the filmmaker. These opening minutes of the film also feature a recitation (voiceover by Kanwar) of M.K. Gandhi’s testimony to the Hunter Disorders Inquiry Committee of 1919, where Gandhi outlined the relationship between truth and non-violence in his practice of *Satyagraha*:

Q: I take it Mr. Gandhi that you are the author of the *Satyagraha* doctrine”

A: Yes sir.

Q: With regards to your *Satyagraha* doctrine, so far as I understand it, it involves the pursuit of Truth and in that pursuit you invite suffering on yourself and do not cause violence to anybody else.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: However honestly a man may strive in his search for Truth, his notions of Truth may be different from the notions of others. Who then is to determine the Truth?

A: The individual himself would determine that.

Q: Different individuals would have different views as to Truth. Would that not lead to confusion?

[...]

A: That is why the non-violence part is a necessary corollary. Without that there would be confusion and worse.¹⁴⁸

Mirroring this exchange, in the closing scenes of the film, the same voice-over narrator reports on a conversation he has with a “Tibetan monk”¹⁴⁹ on the nature of nonviolent action:

Q: What is action?

A: Action is the embryo from which the future will arise.

Q: What is the specific action?

A: The decision to be non-violent [...] ¹⁵⁰

Archival footage of Gandhi is reshaped through the film as Kanwar places it in proximity to the materiality of mundane violence. The camera cuts to an episode of a second kind of ‘border dance’ and the viewer is offered more hints as to the form of this enquiry. It is the daily gate-closing ceremony at the Wagah border in Punjab and the pulsating soundtrack of the previous scene has given way to a refrain of diegetic border sounds that will recur through the

¹⁴⁷ Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁴⁹ *A Season Outside* was originally commissioned by the ‘Foundation for Universal Responsibility,’ of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This is a “not-for-profit, non-sectarian, non-denominational organization established with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to His Holiness in 1989.” Since then, the film has travelled widely and received critical accolades in national and international art and film circles, including the Golden Conch at the Mumbai International Documentary Film Festival in 1998, and the Golden Gate at the San Francisco International Film Festival in 1999. In the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, the Foundation “brings together men and women of different faiths, professions and nationalities, through a range of initiatives and mutually sustaining collaborations. The work of the Foundation is global in its reach and transcends nationalist political agendas. This Foundation will implement projects to benefit people everywhere, focusing especially on assisting nonviolent methods, on improving communications between religion and science, on securing human rights and democratic freedoms, and on conserving and restoring our precious Mother Earth.” From <http://www.furhhdl.org/>.

¹⁵⁰ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

film: marching and loud stamping, the ceremonial command of the guard, the clanging and grating sounds of opening and closing gates, etc. (figure 2). The camera zooms in on the face of an Indian personnel of the border security force. The rhythmic, quick in-and-out motion of his breath is palpable as he delivers the gate-opening command. A second gate, painted green for the Pakistani flag, opens. A Pakistani Ranger in black uniform comes into view as he mirrors his Indian counterpart's goose-kick, attempting a step that is higher, with more flourish. The guards are now face-to-face at the border. Spectators lined-up alongside both gates burst into applause at the spectacular, synchronized performance of bravado. As though responding to the spectators' applause, the stamping of boots, the release of dust, and the grating of the gates on their rails, the voiceover-narrator quietly breaks in: "1947. One division and the doors of several individual souls slammed open. One tremendous release of violence and even now, every sundown, we dance to its secret magic"¹⁵¹

"A wall often reminds of another wall."¹⁵² Following these opening scenes at the actual territorial border between India and Pakistan, the camera pursues a variety of public border scenes and choreographies, including everyday and ritualized or performed scenes of violent clashes at improvised 'borders' and dividing lines. In observation mode, the camera accrues a steady archive of border images and sounds including the particularly striking spectacle of ram fighting in Old Delhi (figure 3). As two men pat down a ram, a third traces a 'border' line in the loose earth with a stick, dividing the large circle of cheering male spectators into two viewing parties. The sport begins and two rams are released from opposite sides of the improvised arena. They charge at one another with such tremendous speed that their horns create a terrifying sound at the moment of collision occurring at the line.

The camera captures the collision a second time and then a third, in slow motion, as the listening-viewer helplessly anticipates that this sport will end in a spiral of dust and matter and the bloody cracking of horns, as the voiceover reflects: "It is a very nerve-wracking inertia when you see something and feel like you've just seen it before. Over and over again you hear the blow and sense the impact, even before it happens" (Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*).

¹⁵¹ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁵² Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Introduction" in *Elsewhere within Here: Immigration, Refugeesim and the Boundary Event*, (London: Routledge, 2011).



Figure 2: “1947. One division and the doors of several individual souls slammed open. One tremendous release of violence and even now every sundown we dance to its secret magic.” *A Season Outside* (1998), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.



Figure 3: “It is a very nerve-wracking inertia when you see something and feel like you've just seen it before. Over and over again you hear the blow and sense the impact, even before it happens.” *A Season Outside* (1998), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

By attuning to the sensorial or micropolitical ‘refrain’ of the seemingly intractable question of ‘border’ and territorial violence, or clashes at borders, Kanwar urges the viewer out of a mundane or binary consciousness and towards a radically expanded mode of bearing witness to violence that may be termed ‘witnessing inwards,’ following from postcolonial film theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha’s work.¹⁵³ The film therefore explodes conventional binaries of an ‘interior’ consciousness and ‘exterior’ experience, just as it shatters any certainty of where ‘this side’ of the border ends and ‘that’ begins, so that when the narrator says, “it is only by developing a relation with the inside that one can know the outside,” he refers as much to two interrelated levels of knowing as he does to connected territories on either side of the border. The physical border or impasse is also the threshold that paradoxically permits him passage across different states of knowing and bounded spaces. The “visible” political space has thus expanded. Further, as I discuss later, in undoing filmic form, disordering public geographies, and disrupting temporal frames, this film also deterritorializes the concept of the border in surprising ways without ever losing sight of the materiality of historical pain and violence that physical borders have caused.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze has offered, “If we want to grasp an event, we must not show it, we must not pass along the image, we must plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history.”¹⁵⁴ Following the opening scenes at the Indo-Pak border, in order to ‘grasp’ the ‘border event,’ Kanwar creates a ‘stack’ of images. Two rams, two guards, two pairs of feet at a borderline, two ‘molar’ wholes colliding. The *reality* of borders is set into motion, traveling across these scenes, from one molar whole, territory or being, to another, leading to new understandings of the border itself within the scenes.

At first, the repetition of these ‘border images’ through the film only serves to show the voiceover narrator’s awareness of their recurrence. From this ‘nimbus’¹⁵⁵ of images, the narrator proceeds to concepts (“I’m trying to understand the dynamics of division and, in turn, find a method for dealing with conflict.”). Repetition now appears to be a tool to find an underlying pattern for border conflict. In scene after scene, this pattern reveals itself in three aspects: the border line itself (in images of barbed wire, dividing walls, glass shards on boundary walls, or lines traced in the earth); the force or energy released in any violent collision; and finally, the voiceover narrator’s own litany of repeated words referring to a ‘slamming open’ and ‘shutting close’ of souls, gates, doors, windows, eyes. It is this cluster of effects—“these rhythms and registers and intuitions [that] rise to the surface, finding cross-patterns and interferences” that I term an ambient citizenship.¹⁵⁶ Representations of the violent events of Partition themselves never appear visually, but the voiceover narrator’s speech is interspersed with brief aural-images of the sheer horror of Partition-era violence: “putrefying remains,” “impaled,” “bloated body,” always reminding the viewer of the filmmaker’s originary scene before returning to the anonymity of the “dynamics” of the more mundane collisions and aggression she views on screen—a street theater performance in which Tibetan ‘monks’ are pushed to the ground by baton-wielding ‘Chinese’ security forces, both sides played by Tibetan exiles in Delhi;

¹⁵³ Trinh, T. Minh-ha “Witness” keynote address, GWS 20th anniversary at UC Berkeley, 7 October 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema: The Time-Image* (U of Minnesota Press, 1989), 244.

¹⁵⁵ I draw from Toni Morrison here. She uses the term “nimbus” to speak of a method of accumulating images to access an archive that is incomplete, in her article, “The Site of Memory,” in *Inventing the Truth*, William Zinsser Ed., (Houghton Mifflin company: New York, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ Greg Seigworth, “Reading Lauren Berlant Writing,” Academia.edu, retrieved 15 July 2016.

interspecies violence, with a stray puppy being pecked at by crows; a casual act of violence by one little boy pushing over another.

Kanwar's contemplative approach also reverberates through the film's sound design—a complex mix of diegetic “border” noises, and an extra-diegetic sonic territory of unfamiliar twanging strings and light percussion of various hues and volumes, create an affective field that is at once knowable (the border sounds) and strange, to interact with the deeply reflexive voiceover narration.

Linda Williams has argued that the presence of bodies in film has direct bearing on a spectator's own bodily experiences, in the capacity of the spectator's body to invoke “an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on screen.”¹⁵⁷ Susan Foster describes kinesthesia not only as “the feeling of moving which the person experiences in the body in the act of moving” but also the feelings which “permit us to respond with overall bodily tension as we watch a runner cross the finish line or an angry child throwing a tantrum [...] Kinesthesia, in short, implies an intimacy with the other that is sustained by an intimacy with the self.”¹⁵⁸ The suggestion is that spectators of these moving events receive them as an aesthetic force with the whole of their body. In *A Season Outside*, repeated scenes of violently colliding bodies translate vigorous affects across sensory modalities and have the same effect, such that the viewer too begins to sense a growing and “nervewracking inertia.”¹⁵⁹

As the attentive viewer-listener's own body become a mass of tense and flinching muscles at the moment of on-screen collision, she might shut her eyes to close out the visceral stimuli, involuntarily draw in her breath, or recoil in her chair. Such a muscular tightening in the viewer is the embodied impact of the micropolitical work a film might perform. Alongside the viewer-listener's own bodily response, the voiceover-narrator bridges sensation and thought as he gives voice to a flood of dreams, memories, facts, snatches of conversation, and personal reflections that correspond to the sound and image signals of violent collision on screen.

Kanwar's film is very personal and yet, with each frame, exceeds this specificity. In one scene, an elderly woman looks out of her window at a military parade below. The camera angle and light on the woman inside the window remain stationary while the scenes of the parade in the street below are arranged as jump cuts, ‘skipping’ quickly to present different angles. The voiceover says,

I remember a story from my mother. In panic women would hammer nails and jam the windows to prevent men from coming in. Women and children had to be quickly taken across the border. I keep dreaming a mixed up dream. About my mother with a hammer and nail but no windows. When there is violence inside your own home where do you escape?¹⁶⁰

The stillness of the camera on the elderly woman indoors in contrast to the choppy, *discreet* moments of time passing outside presents the viewer with a time-image, inviting her into a world of altered duration; the duration of trauma—“a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world.”¹⁶¹ Scholar of literature, trauma, and testimony Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an

¹⁵⁷ Williams, Linda, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess,” In *Film Genre Reader IV*, Barry Grant ed. (University of Texas Press: Austin, 2012), 162.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted by Carrie Noland, in *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009) 14.

¹⁵⁹ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

event that is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” and one that is therefore “not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.”¹⁶² If the voice-over narrator’s mother and grandmother speak of an experience that is, thus, “not fully assimilated,” then *A Season Outside* also asks (albeit from the perspective of a male inheritor of violence) what it means to make a film about a violence that is marked by the ways in which it “*simultaneously* defies and demands witness,” to borrow from Caruth.¹⁶³

In this manner, in scene after scene, Kanwar’s film deliberately and insistently, affects the multiple registers in which meaning making occurs—the intellectual and the sensorial, or the viewer’s body-brain processes. Confronted with multiple borders or ‘closings,’ it is as if the voiceover-narrator metaphorically, materially, and creatively turns his inquiry to a route along which he is free to advance—inwards. The voiceover-narrator proceeds cautiously, allowing these three aspects of the ‘border event’ to act upon him. Such a special inward journey can be compared to what postcolonial feminist theorist Helene Cixous has termed a “difficult *ascent*, downwards”—a strenuous ‘climb’ or effort that a writer must take to re-apprehend surface effects of events, by reflecting profoundly on (or descending deep into) one’s own and a form of collective unconscious.¹⁶⁴ This is in contrast to those that live only in a world external to themselves so that when they speak, “they only point to the world out there from a largely unquestioned position.”¹⁶⁵

Each scene of the film is itself intentionally slow, marking the pace of a dedicated practice of looking inwards. The ‘inside’ of the mind that Kanwar asks the listening-viewer to contemplate is neither abstract nor mystified. After repeated images of border collisions have perhaps stirred a listening-viewer’s body, spurred by the voice-over narrator’s own contemplations, she is offered word-imagery, a distilled mimeograph, for all that she has witnessed so far when Kanwar suggests, “[if] you look for answers inside, you discover particles with different truths and perhaps in the clash of their haughty orbits lies the root of violence” (Kanwar, *A Season Outside*). In doing so, the film opens a new field of vision as the viewer is challenged to reconsider the borders between her own sensory-visual perception, conscious thought and unconscious knowing, and on the difficult nature of violent division in the image of these clashing ‘particles.’ (The voiceover narrator offers this particular image following a consideration of his own desire to sometimes “smash the aggressor.”)

If a viewer-listener realizes this molecular method of witnessing inward, her external attention to the dust raised in the boot-stomping border-closing ceremony or the dust released in the clash of the horns of the ram fighting can “pulverize the world” and at the same time “spiritualize dust.”¹⁶⁶ That is, in the brief moments of these affecting micropolitical scenes, Kanwar brings together “philosophies of relation, chemistries of being, and perception in cinema” around violent affects.¹⁶⁷ Relatedly, dust itself, or what Sanskritist David Shulman calls the “non dual stuff of reality,” including motes of light, pollen, ashes, powder, earth etc. are a privileged medium of knowledge and awareness in South Asian visual and literary culture.

¹⁶² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 4.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Helene Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans. Susan Sellers and Sarah Cornell, New Ed edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.

¹⁶⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Elsewhere within Here: Immigration, Refugeesim and the Boundary Event*, 56.

¹⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), quoted in Conley, “Molecular,” 178.

¹⁶⁷ Conley “Molecular” 173-4.

Charting its presence as micrological and cosmological vibrant matter across classical, medieval Sanskrit and Telugu texts, Shulman evokes a moment from the *Naishadhiya Charita* by Sri Harsha (written in the 12th century, CE) that is strikingly similar to Kanwar’s visual essay. A verse from the epic poem expresses the philosophical conception of the ‘mind’ itself as atom-sized particulate matter that may “learn about hyper velocity from the dust of horses’ hooves.”¹⁶⁸ In this contemplation, the mind itself is being observed—as awareness unfolding, distinct from the brain.¹⁶⁹



Figure 4: “I had never felt time spin so fast. I look into its vortex and a few centuries pass by. I see the rise of community and the formation of a collective identity.” *A Season Outside* (1998), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

In another telling scene, Kanwar’s camera travels to Anandpur Sahib, a town in Punjab, not far from the border, where a Nihang Sikh festival is in progress, commemorating a 16th century event in which this pacifist community “formally took up arms against Mughal rulers, to defend religious and cultural identity,” as the voiceover reminds us. The festival marks this particular day that a “powerful argument” was made to turn to violence when all other means had failed.¹⁷⁰ It is a mesmerizing scene of Sikh men on horseback, tracing circles in the dust, brandishing sacred weapons in elliptical motion, celebrating the occasion (figure 4). The sounds of the horses’ hooves, the image of rising whorls of earth, and the heady music from the *Gurudwara* accentuate the various levels of dizzying circular motion in this scene. Again, as the

¹⁶⁸ David Shulman, “The Inner Life of Dust: A Bottom-Up View of South Asia,” (Avenali Lecture at the Townsend Center for Humanities, University of California at Berkeley, 18 Feb 2016).

¹⁶⁹ Lata Mani, “Meditation and Mind,” January 20, 2016, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.latamani.com/blog/2016/1/20/meditation-and-mind>.

¹⁷⁰ Amar Kanwar. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, April 06, 2013.

viewer-listener feels herself kinesthetically responding to the swift spinning movements on-screen, she is simultaneously made aware of the voiceover-narrator's physical, geographic, and temporal disorientation and to the corresponding stirring of reflections and memories within him:

I do not know which space and time I am spinning in. Sifting through nameless people stumbling by chance into a conflict that began a few hundred years ago [...] the doors of several souls slammed open. I have never felt time spin so fast. I look into its vortex and a few centuries pass by. I see the rise of community and the formation of a collective identity.¹⁷¹

Like the visionary Lebanese author Elias Khoury's own repeated questioning in another witness text, *Little Mountain*, "what were you doing in the ancient garden 300 years ago?"¹⁷² Witnessing the circular motion and gesture in a festival that has itself cycled through many generations, Kanwar seems to suddenly realize, bodily, that in this space he cannot search for the line between legend and reality, memory, and history. The relation between the voiceover narrator's reflexive speech and the images or sounds projected onscreen is one in which neither precedes the other in significance or order of creation. The suggestion is that the voiceover-narrator-filmmaker doesn't entirely control the effects of these encounters with border-lines, border-clashes, and border-identities which produce embodied shifts—"spinning," "shifting," "stumbling"—in the filmmaker's thinking, again gesturing to a micropolitics at work. Kanwar's film defies origin because at times, palpably, sensory border experiences voice him. The filmmaker is born simultaneously and multiplies with this work—an example of the profound self-making and unmaking process characteristic of the essayistic film. The space of memory and autobiography is where the historical, personal, mythical, and, as Kanwar shows, the spiritual meet intricately.

Deterritorializing the Border

Under the "pressure" or conspicuous presence of repetitive motifs—border collisions, gestures across the border, and border-violence inflected speech—the material border itself is brought into relief, "floating," as filmmaker and Deleuzian theorist Laleen Jayamanne might put it, in its scenic context or suggesting an "autonomous existence" from it. This allows the border itself to be deterritorialized:¹⁷³ it expands, it contracts, it becomes mobile. In the film's last scene, Kanwar travels to a Tibetan refugee settlement in East Delhi and he wonders if he will find wisdom with "those who have been forced to seek refuge—the border people" for whom relation to the border very immediately undoes and redoes identity:

One flash of violence and thousands of identities tossed in the wind. It's like a frontier town here, a Tibetan refugee camp, pushed to the city's limits and strangely sharing a wall with an observation home for destitute boys. For some reason all of the margins have snuggled together.¹⁷⁴

Here, Kanwar further complicates a spatial understanding of the border as not something that is stable, but rather multiple and also a shifting threshold to perhaps form new alliances in an

¹⁷¹ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁷² Khoury, Elias, *Little Mountain*, Trans. Maia Tabet, Picador: New York, 1989.

¹⁷³ Here, I draw terms from filmmaker and theorist Laleen Jayamanne's discussion of filmic deterritorialization. See Laleen Jayamanne, "Forty Acres and a Mule Filmworks 'A Spike Lee Joint': Blocking and Unblocking the Block," in ed. Patricia Pisters, *Micropolitics of Media Culture: Reading the Rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari*, (Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), 235-249.

¹⁷⁴ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

undercommons of marginalization, and the film's deterritorialization of the border emerges clear. By bookending the film with two specific instances of border conflict, the 1947 partition and Tibet, Kanwar has shown the border to be a historical, geographically animated artifact that is entangled with highly visible forms of power.

However, through the film, the border is also shown to be the defining line between self and other and precisely the terrain of ethics. As a coda to the film, the voiceover-narrator describes a conversation with a 'Tibetan monk' about exiled peoples and receives answers related to Gandhi's philosophy on the relativity of truth ("Truth lies between all different regimes of truth"), a necessary accompaniment if *satyagraha* (soul force and civil disobedience) were to be effective. In this brief final reported dialogue, the language of border collision—"slamming open," "shutting close"—is replaced with a different movement vocabulary: "to push and retreat, always with the aim of enhancing dignity." The suggestion is that the decision to be non-violent, as it is with the decision to be violent, can be imagined as a different sort of profound micropolitical dance on the border between self and other, in the mind and felt in the body.

At the end of the conversation, the narrator-voiceover appears to still struggle with the notion of nonviolence as strategy. Reckoning with these borders is an incomplete and on-going project:

Q: (Kanwar): What is action?

A: (Monk): Action is the embryo from which the future will arise.

Q: What is the specific action?

A: The decision to be non-violent. Being non-violent is to intervene actively. It is to use any opportunity to push your position but to retreat when wrong. Ask yourself, can you find a way to tell your opponent to retreat and at the same time genuinely enhance their dignity?

Q: What tools would you have?

A: The decision again is the greatest tool.¹⁷⁵

The final scene of the film takes place at the sunset ritual of border closing at Wagah, where the film began. Kanwar recognizes sunset as a time when "endings and beginnings meet and, for the shifting light, nothing is entirely evident to the eye."¹⁷⁶ In its penultimate scene, the film features a quick series of cuts to the borders we have traversed. Rather than cleaving (apart) at the border, all the borders trespassed so far in the film are brought together to see the picture anew. The viewer recalls now that the scenes in the film are not a repetition of the same, differences between the scenes include varied values of gesture, image, and sound at the border. Additionally, in each scene folded within the story of violent collision are other elements, such as men on a present-day train from Wagah to Attari wave at the camera as the voiceover-narrator speaks of the "ghosts" of partition-era trains that carried refugees dead and alive. In a recent article about the Wagah-Attari border ceremony, author Fatima Bhutto speaks of noticing guards wink or smile at each other, even during the performance of nationalistic aggression.¹⁷⁷ In another scene, the Nihang Sikh festival commemorating the day the community took up arms to defend its religious and cultural identity is also a gathering coinciding with the harvest. As Kanwar puts it, "thousands of people attend this festival, flowing in and flowing out of the town.

¹⁷⁵ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*.

¹⁷⁶ Trinh, *Elsewhere within Here: Immigration, Refugeesim and the Boundary Event*, 74.

¹⁷⁷ Fatima Bhutto, "From Lahore to Amritsar," *Conde Nast Traveler*, October 9, 2015, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.cntraveller.in/story/lahore-amritsar/>.

Here, a religious gathering is also a fair which turns into a party which can turn into a sermon, which can turn into just something to do.”¹⁷⁸

These moments and images are lines of flight suggesting alternate narratives. On the one hand these images are connected to the story of violence; on the other hand these images seek to deterritorialize memory and perception, bringing them into contact with different presents and futures.¹⁷⁹ This is an alternate type of commemoration of a wound that hasn’t been commemorated; not a marking of before and after but still a mode of temporal engagement. Kanwar’s filmmaking work is one of slow and careful selection, sensing and evaluation, seeking to transform the viewer’s relationship to ethical witnessing. In these borderlands and between these shifts in border-scenes, Kanwar seeks the opening to a channel, an “elsewhere within the here,”¹⁸⁰ or ‘a season outside’ to grapple with the ‘border event’ outside and within himself.

Plurivisionality in *The Sovereign Forest*

In his most recent moving image installation, *The Sovereign Forest* (2012-), Kanwar’s exploration of sovereign nationhood and of its geographic and psychic territories shifts as he considers the borders the State draws between the rural and urban, the center and periphery, and the developed and underdeveloped. As Kanwar addresses the violence of ‘development’ by rural dispossession and posits new articulations of the notion of sovereignty—both for the forest (or the commons), the artist, and the citizen-witness—in this installation, his exploration of new ways of seeing transforms into what decolonial philosopher Raoul Fournet-Betancourt has called a “plurivisionality.” In turn, here, the form of ambient citizenship enacted in *A Season Outside* reaches an aural crescendo in the co-mingling of sounds of the forest, acres of landfill, and the story of two unacknowledged disappearances—“everything circulates, sticks, resonates, gathers and dissipates” to point to the possibilities of new future arrangements.¹⁸¹

Kanwar describes *The Sovereign Forest* as ongoing research, exploring the social and environmental impact of mining on local agricultural communities in the state of Odisha, which contains some of the largest reserves of bauxite in India.¹⁸² While positioned in solidarity with struggles in this Eastern Indian region, *The Sovereign Forest* ultimately raises global questions around democracy, the future of the commons, and the possibilities for collective stewardship of land and resources. The moving image installation consists of multiple, filmic, sculptural, pictorial, tactile, and sonic elements.

The central piece in *Sovereign Forest*, is a 42-minute single-channel projection titled “The Scene of Crime” that is composed of brief filmed sequences, labeled ‘maps,’ featuring agricultural and forest lands that fall within sites being acquired by the Indian and multinational mining corporations Vedanta, POSCO, and Tata. In Kanwar’s words, “Every location, every blade of grass, every water source, every tree that is seen in the film is now meant not to exist

¹⁷⁸ Public Program of The Menil Collection, “What Does Peace Look Like?” A Conversation with Amar Kanwar and Josef Helfenstein, October 2, 2014, YouTube video, 1:06:47, posted February 10, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CZFRwSDWkk>.

¹⁷⁹ Here I refer to Laura Marks for her description of the ways such lines of flight or “apertures,” as she calls them, may work in film. See, Laura Marks, “Signs of the Time: Deleuze, Peirce, and the Documentary Image,” in Gregory Flaxman, *The Brain is a Screen*, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 194.

¹⁸⁰ I borrow this phrase the title of Trinh T. Minh-ha’s work, *Elsewhere within Here: Immigration, Refugeesim and the Boundary Event*.

¹⁸¹ Seigworth, “Reading Lauren Berlant Writing.” I borrow from Seigworth for the evocative way in which he describes an affective political ambience being created.

¹⁸² Amar Kanwar. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, April 06, 2013.

anymore.”¹⁸³ As the viewer is drawn in to sensory engagement with the fluid movement of trees, wind, water, and grass in these ‘maps,’ short pieces of poetic text appear on screen to reveal the story of a woman’s search for her disappeared beloved, who, the viewer gathers, was killed or apprehended for organizing protests contesting the appropriation of this land. (It bears noting that in one of the locations where Kanwar was filming, Niyamgiri, indigenous activists have since temporarily succeeded in preventing the Vedanta mining corporation from pursuing operations.)¹⁸⁴ *The Sovereign Forest* also features a second short film, “A Love Story,” set in Ghazipur, a landfill on Delhi’s city limits, exploring the themes of rural-to-urban migrancy, waste, and intimacy at this urban margin. A single sentence unites both films, “The suddenness of your/his disappearance is hard to believe,” an enunciation expressing the many forms of forced separation that continue to take place in the name of development.

The movement of experimental documentary moving images into the art gallery has been especially noticeable since the 1990s, as evidenced in the plethora of scholarly, artistic and curatorial interventions exploring the “documentary turn” in contemporary art.¹⁸⁵ The result has been an increased melding of fictional and non-fictional genres and the diffusion of some conventional documentary practices across varied media platforms. Once in the ‘white cube,’ film and video installations expand the possibilities for cinematic storytelling—nonlinear narration, looped films projected at frequent intervals, new modes of display and presentation with sculptural and architectural elements and multiple screens or projections, etc.¹⁸⁶

As film and performance studies scholar Nilgun Bayraktar puts it, interacting with moving images spatially, in turn, creates a new spectator who is compelled to consider the “materiality of the apparatus (the screen, monitor, and movement through gallery space) together with the referentiality of the image,” whilst inhabiting the particular space-times of both—image on screen, and presence in the gallery—thereby receiving a web of references and multiplying potential experiences of meaning-making.¹⁸⁷

When I viewed the installation at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2013, the two films “The Scene of Crime” and “A Love Story” were looped and projected on large screens on opposite walls of the exhibition space; on one end, viewers were enveloped by images of a verdant landscape marked for destruction, on the other end by an expanding landfill (figures 5, 6 and 15). These large-scale wall projections juxtaposed the erosion of the rural agrarian economy with the related creation of marginalized urban dwellers. This particular placement also illuminated the various ways in which development projects map the earth as either ‘productive’ or ‘wasteful’; in an inversion, the abundant Odisha landscape is ‘wasteful’ if not mined, while rural migrants escaping a devastated agrarian sector tend to a growing landfill under hazardous conditions.¹⁸⁸

In a space between the viewing areas, spectators apprehended other elements of this vast installation; a collection of “evidence” in the form of 266 varieties of carefully labeled endangered, indigenous rice grains, poetry, music, folktales, fingerprints, land records, tax

¹⁸³ *The Sovereign Forest*, Amar Kanwar, Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2012-13, exhibition brochure.

¹⁸⁴ Shobha R., “Niyamgiri adivasis’ victory against Vedanta is a landmark for land rights in India,” *Daily O*, May 14, 2016, <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/vedanta-loses-niyamgiri-forest-rights-act-tribals-ativasi-odhisha-mining-land-acquisition/story/1/10627.html>, accessed June 6, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Film in Contemporary Art*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013) 157

¹⁸⁶ Bayraktar, *Moving Images Against The Current: The Aesthetics and Geopolitics of (Im)mobility in Contemporary Europe* 2011. 171

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 172-3.

¹⁸⁸ See Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree N. Reddy, “The Afterlives of ‘Waste’: Notes from India for a Minor History of Capitalist Surplus,” *Antipode* 43(5):1625-1658, 2011, Wiley Online Library, accessed 1 June 2013.

receipts, proofs of occupancy, news articles, and, finally, records of those indebted farmers in the region who have taken their own lives (figures 7 and 8).

The Sovereign Forest's heterogeneous cluster of sculptural, pictorial, and sonic elements draws the spectator into a space in which, as she weaves her way through the installation space mines and forest, workers and farmers, women, men, and children, politicians, CEOs, corporate security, police, NGOs, aluminum ore, stones, trees, seeds, artist, curator, museum, you, and I are displaced, and re-understood. The installation physicalizes the relationality of different elements in the development apparatus and encourages and foregrounds multiple truths. *The Sovereign Forest's* sculptural quality—and its facilitation of a particular mobilization and participation of spectators—enables a new politics of form and a different experience of ‘witnessing’ and visibility. Reflecting on his own increasing prominence in the art world, Kanwar refreshingly insists on a clear *continuation* of purpose across his experiments with cinema in various formats:

The questions or dilemmas I approach create their own expression of form. The point is not that I have worked with single and multiple-channel films, it is that, like so many others, I have worked extensively with images and sound, and it is this process that continues, and travels in different ways to multiple spaces. All spaces may then open, physically and metaphorically, and we could begin to temporarily re-address the matrix of what works and what belongs.¹⁸⁹



Figure 5: A visitor watches “The Scene of the Crime,” from Amar Kanwar’s *The Sovereign Forest* at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Available at <http://www.ysp.co.uk/exhibitions/amar-kanwar-the-sovereign-forest-other-stories>.

¹⁸⁹ Jhaveri, “In Conversation: Amar Kanwar and Shanay Jhaveri.”



Figure 6: A visitor watches “The Scene of the Crime,” from Amar Kanwar’s *The Sovereign Forest* at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Available at <http://www.ysp.co.uk/exhibitions/amar-kanwar-the-sovereign-forest-other-stories>.

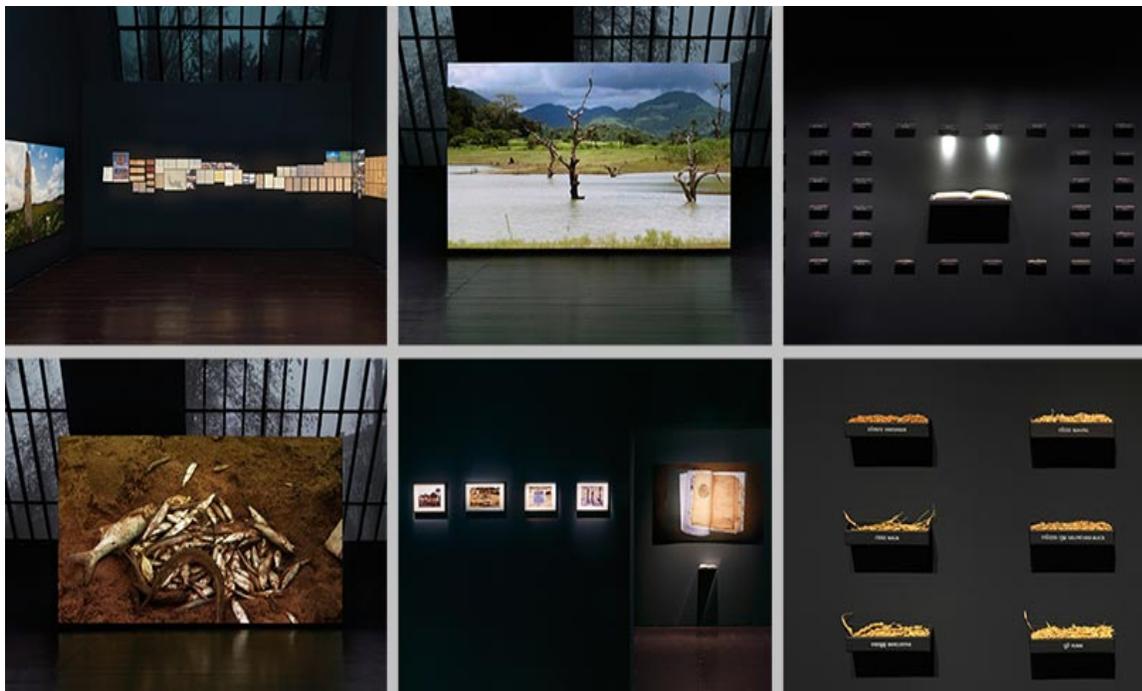


Figure 7: Various elements of Amar Kanwar’s installation *The Sovereign Forest*. Image courtesy of the Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2013.



Figure 8: A visitor takes a closer look at the 266 varieties of indigenous seeds on display in Amar Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest*. Image courtesy of the Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2013.

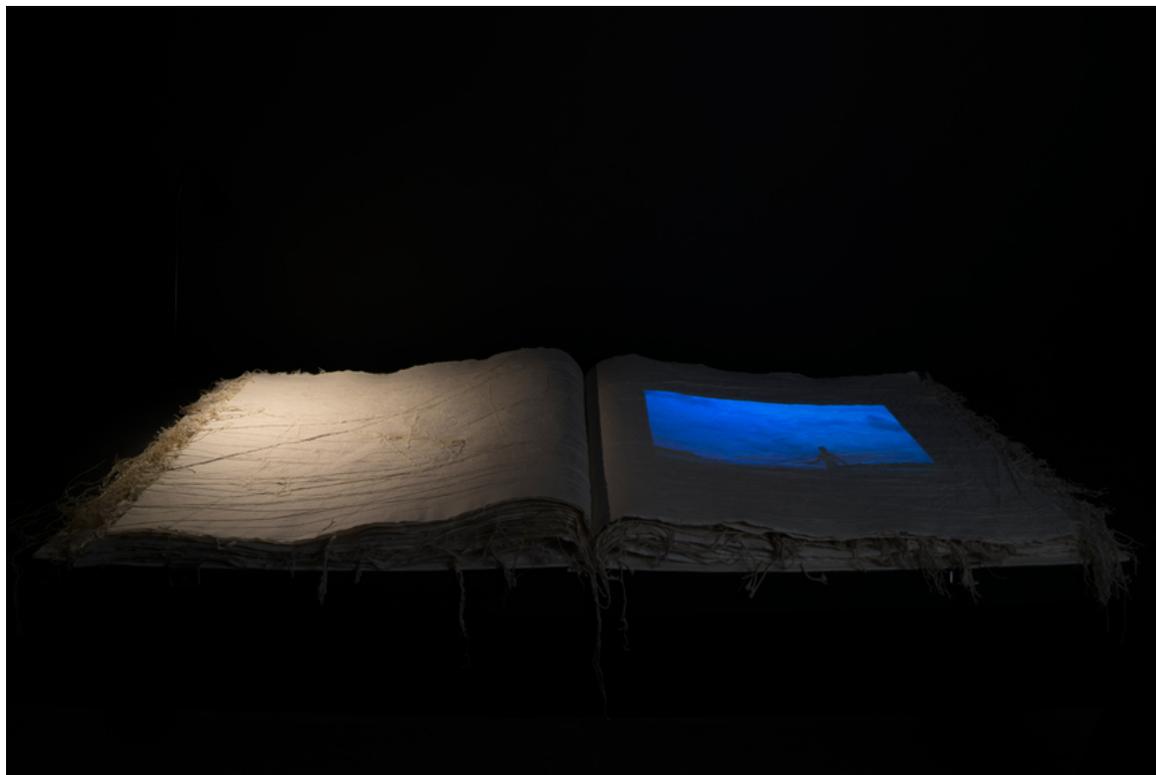


Figure 9: Banana fiber cine-book in Amar Kanwar's installation *The Sovereign Forest*. Photo by Jonty Wilde, available at: <http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/TheSovereignForestOtherStoriesAmarKanwar>

Against one wall of the space, a particularly striking component of the installation consisted of digital projectors beaming down moving images onto three large books. The pages of these novel 'cine-books' were made from ivory-colored banana leaf paper. This handmade paper itself was fibrous and textured. Each book had fragments of text printed on the left-hand page and a moving image projected on the right-hand page. The viewer could turn the pages to read the text, while the moving images projected from above changed too (figure 9). As Anne Rutherford has written in her review of the installation, the image projected onto the fibrous material of the paper together with the textual narration, enables a deeply "tactile encounter" for the viewer-reader and creates a new "cine-material structure."¹⁹⁰ The first of these books was titled "The Prediction" and chronicled the assassination of Shankar Guha Niyogi. Niyogi founded the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM), a mass movement of workers, peasants and *adivasi* (indigenous) peoples in 1977.¹⁹¹ Some weeks before his murder in 1991, Niyogi recorded a message in which he predicted that mining industrialists would kill him. As Kanwar describes it, there are two predictions in 'The Prediction': "Niyogi predicted his own assassination; and the second prediction was the reason for his assassination—he warned of a severe onslaught on the

¹⁹⁰ Anne Rutherford, "Moving image installation, the embodied spectator of cinema and Amar Kanwar: Learning from intermediality," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* (12:3, 2014), 230, accessed January 8, 2015, doi: 10.1386/ncin.12.3.225_1

¹⁹¹ Emilia Terracciano, "Disappearing Worlds: An Amar Kanwar installation captures life and its extinction," *The Caravan: Journal of Politics and Culture*. 1 February 2014, accessed January 8 2015, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reviews-and-essays/disappearing-worlds>

forests and minerals of the region.”¹⁹²

In her review of the installation, Emilia Terraciano recalls that among the images projected onto the banana fiber paper in “The Prediction,” was the image of a yellow piece of paper inscribed with Niyogi’s motto: “Create while you resist!” These words directly connect the Chhattisgarh protest actions of two decades prior with *The Sovereign Forest*.¹⁹³ Indeed, while Chhattisgarh may be the neighboring state, it marks the same geological terrain as Odisha—the same hill ranges, the same river systems and the same forest.

The second folio titled “The Constitution,” consisted of titles of imagined chapters “missing” from every country’s constitution. A third book titled *Time* (2013), is a detailed, week-by-week account of the civil actions taken against South Korean company POSCO’s claim to Odisha’s land and resources. This book produces what Kanwar calls an ongoing “timeline of the resistance.” In the gesture of turning the pages of this folio titled *Time*, past bonds with present. The viewer has the sensation of being con-temporary: meeting with time, meeting in *Time*, inhabiting and witnessing one timeline of resistance within a larger one.

The elements in all three folios invite contemplation and there is no expectation for a genre-specific mode of viewing. As she encounters open-ended texts together with sequences of strikingly projected moving images, the viewer-reader shifts between states of knowing, not knowing, and unknowing. She also experiences the sensations of light and obscurity, and considers the meanings and forms of historical time and narrativity. The reader-witness thus interacts with the pages of the book to actively create a subjective experience of viewing and reading an archive.

Kanwar describes *The Sovereign Forest* as a ‘proposition’ for a multivalent space that is simultaneously art installation, exhibition, library, memorial, archive, and an “open call for visitors to offer more evidence in a public trial: ‘The Sovereign Forest vs. The Republic of India.’”¹⁹⁴ The archive, what is generally considered a dusty, official State institution, has been transformed. Kanwar says of this collection of “evidence,”

With the state continuously reinventing its rationale for this sale (of Odisha’s land) to corporations, all basic understandings become reversed, nullified and meaningless. Facts become fiction, deception is advertised, multiple forms of violence take place [...] it is less and less possible to comprehend what is valuable, what is needed, what is gained or lost...¹⁹⁵

In this context, he “searches for different methods to see, show, sense, perceive”¹⁹⁶ the meaning of the loss of this land. Kanwar’s archive therefore elicits from the viewer-spectator alternating modes of attention: aesthetic reception, personal reflection, activism, and intellectual work.

The Sovereign Forest is permanently open for public viewing at the Samadhrushti Campus in Bhubaneswar, Odisha and has been presented in numerous other venues including Documenta 13 (2012), the 11th Sharjah Biennial (2013), the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2012–13) and most recently at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2014). The work itself is always growing as new pieces are added each time it is mounted. For instance, when exhibited in Yorkshire the installation also included a room with 157 photographs and documents—a selection from the

¹⁹² Stephanie Bailey, “On Sovereignty: Amar Kanwar in Conversation with Stephanie Bailey,” *Ibraaz.org*, November 26, 2014

¹⁹³ Terraciano, “Disappearing Worlds: An Amar Kanwar installation captures life and its extinction.”

¹⁹⁴ *The Sovereign Forest*, Amar Kanwar, Kochi Muziris Biennale, 2012-13, exhibition brochure.

¹⁹⁵ Stephanie Bailey, “On Sovereignty: Amar Kanwar in Conversation with Stephanie Bailey.”

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

version of *The Sovereign Forest* that has been displayed at the Samadrusti campus since 2012, in which materials relating to the struggle there are continuously added. The Yorkshire installation also included six sound installations, titled “Listening Benches.”¹⁹⁷ There too, visitors were encouraged to create an archive of that region’s own troubled history with mining and workers’ rights, encouraging transhistorical and geographical connections with Odisha. Thus as Rutherford has noted, this multimedial installation has a flexible and contingent structure allowing various components of its form to be placed in changing and context-specific assemblages.¹⁹⁸ In this way, the installation itself grows to assume the shape of a moving ‘development apparatus’ that is also an “infrastructure of feeling,”¹⁹⁹ personal, local, national, and global in scale, drawing from a precarious rice grain variety to memories of Yorkshire’s coal mines.

Mapping the “The Scene of Crime”

The longer of the two films featured in *The Sovereign Forest*, “The Scene of Crime,” (42 minutes, single channel) is a film without dialogue, structured as ten ‘maps.’ The maps are not a conventional exercise in cartography but rather a sequence of long takes and close-ups of particular views of Odisha’s vast, vulnerable landscape from Bedal district to the Kudurmashi industrial area. The opening captions reveal that all of the scenes have been filmed on land that is marked for acquisition. Alongside the ‘maps,’ in the form of short pieces of poetic text, the viewer receives the story of a woman’s search for her disappeared beloved. As the narrative of this parallel text proceeds, the viewer-reader is given to understand that the woman’s beloved was killed or apprehended for organizing protests against the companies taking over his farmland. He is missing and his body has not been found. The viewer reads:

The judge refused to accept evidence of his murder
So he is neither dead nor alive
She searches desperately for him
Sometimes amongst the dead, sometimes amongst the living.²⁰⁰

Trapped between the absence of evidence admissible in court, and the evidence of his absence everywhere, his body remains officially unmourned.

The viewer is introduced to this crime, though, through scenes of immense natural beauty. In the establishing shot of “The Scene of Crime,” captioned ‘Map 1,’ a *dhoti*-clad fisherman traces an arc with his arms as he throws his net into the water. Subsequent maps feature a startled herd of goats emerging in slow motion from a thicket, slow and extreme close-ups of green ferns rustling in the air, flying fish darting in and out of the river, and an empty wooden boat testing the strength of a fraying rope, as it threatens to flow away with the current. Freed from the tyranny of fast cuts, the viewer is invited to engage in a form of “panoramic perception;” her eyes look left and right, upward and down, observing details that would pass unnoticed under a speedier regime of visuality and image making.²⁰¹ She sees a community meeting under a water tank, half-alive fish in the sand, and tombstones. Each of these shots is given a duration that seemingly exceeds its signification, in what Matthew Flanagan refers to as

¹⁹⁷ Terracciano, “Disappearing Worlds: An Amar Kanwar installation captures life and its extinction.”

¹⁹⁸ Rutherford, “Moving image installation, the embodied spectator of cinema and Amar Kanwar: Learning from intermediality,” 234.

¹⁹⁹ Seigworth, “Reading Lauren Berlant Writing,” 6.

²⁰⁰ Amar Kanwar, *The Scene of Crime*, 2011.

²⁰¹ Matthew Flanagan, “Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema,” *16:9 Filmtidskrift*, (November 2008), accessed August 09, 2014, http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm.

an “extended deferral of the imminence of editing.”²⁰²

Unlike *A Season Outside* in which Kanwar’s voice accompanied each frame, here the only sounds in the film are sumptuous diegetic ones—a teeming chorus of birds or crickets chirping, the music of the gushing river and of trees rustling in the wind. Sound carries over from one frame to another and mixes with sounds from an entirely different frame, emphasizing the boundless, overflowing, non-linear quality of sound as a mode of knowing. At the same time, each of the shots speaks also to our sense of touch, or our haptic sense. As the camera skims the surface of water and rocks or brushes against fields of paddy, the screen emerges as a skin connecting different aspects of this land. The effect of such techniques is to privilege the material presence of the scenes over any sort of merely representational image or map.²⁰³ In these slow visual, aural, and haptic maps, Kanwar therefore restores a certain ‘fullness’ to external images of the land, which is a form of challenging power and its “rubber stamped” maps, giving back to images “all that belongs to them,”²⁰⁴ including their varied intensities, values, and resonances. At the same time, the experience of such slow duration within each frame expresses that the audiovisual events depicted on screen are indicators of processes stretching out into infinity beyond the image presented—the speeds of the forest itself. Each “map” here is then much more expansive than an official chart, and the story of “she” and “him” exceeds one personal tragedy.

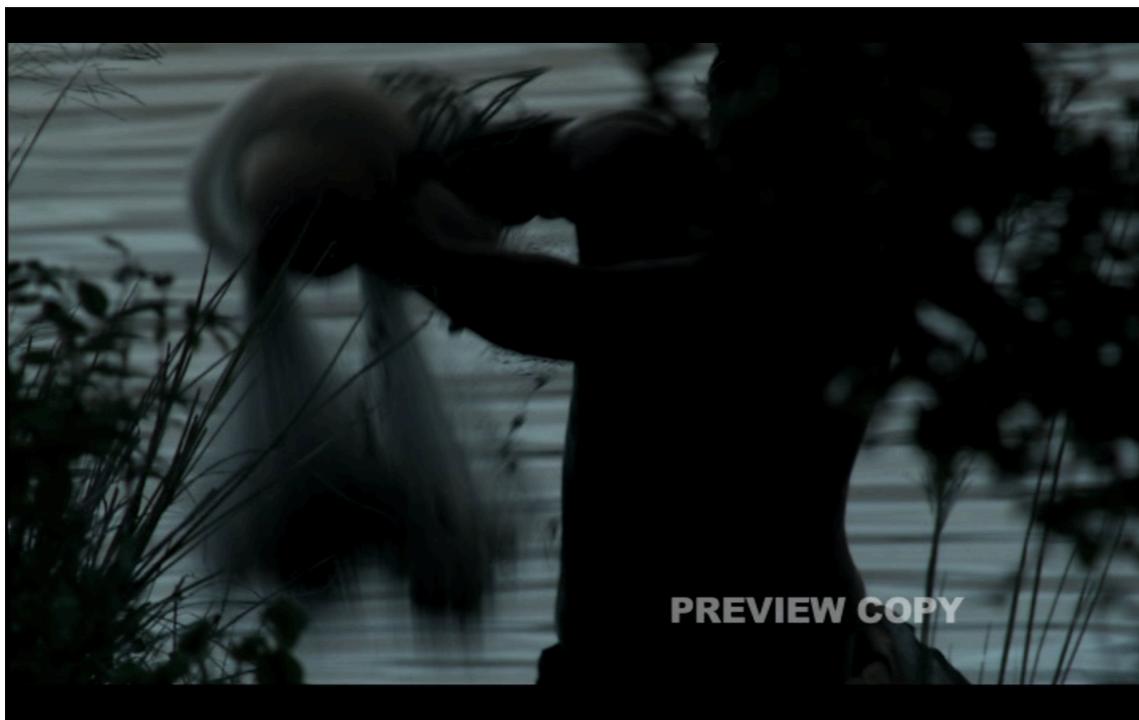


Figure 10: *The Scene of the Crime* (2011), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

It may be said that the viewer encounters each scene as a milieu or simply an infinite block of space-time (not as a limiting map as the labels instruct us). Brian Massumi suggests that the term ‘milieu’ combines the meanings “surroundings,” “medium” (a term from chemistry), and “middle.” “Every milieu is vibratory,” or a milieu is a “direction *in motion*,” incomplete and

²⁰² Matthew Flanagan, “Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema.”

²⁰³ In thinking of the screen as skin, I draw from Laura Mark’s writings on haptic cinema in *Skin of the Film*.

²⁰⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 43.

amenable to change.²⁰⁵ When milieus such as the sea and shores meet, they “transcode and traduce each other” to produce different rhythms, or indications of relation.²⁰⁶ The milieu is the middle of things, that space in-between where becomings occur. When the human story of the disappearance and the milieu of the landscape meet, they work on each other revealing the profundity of new, contingent stories and rhythms, at the border between map, territory, story and land.



Figure 11: *The Scene of the Crime* (2011), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

What sort of time is the viewer being presented with? We inhabit our own restlessness, heightened attention, boredom, or contemplative distraction, the slow geological time of the forest, fast-paced development time, the enduring and desperate time of a woman’s search for her beloved (his “sudden” departure, her “aching” eyes, “days filled with uncertainty” etc.). In this ‘slow’ film, with her body keeping time, the viewer senses all these rhythms. However, “nothing here wants to add up to a whole.”²⁰⁷ With these different rhythms of temporality inscribed on land, mind, body, and experienced in troubled copresence, Kanwar’s slowness ultimately offers a mode of productive “de-synchronization.”²⁰⁸ That is, as film and media theorist Lutz Koepnick writes of the aesthetic of slowness: “Rather than firmly situate the subject in a centered sense of place and self-presence, slowness [may] deny our desire to be in full command over our movements through and meanings of time.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual and A Thousand Plateaus*, xvii.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Here, I borrow from Lutz Koepnick’s analysis in, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) 207.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Consequently, this de-synchronization leads the viewer-listener to apprehend a different kind of multiplanar chart at this interval; the positions from which meaning is made transform and multiply, creating a new map of relationships. “This map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.”²¹⁰ The installation is itself like a forest or a rhizome—multiple and lateral, calling for heterogeneous forms of engagement. The forest and its elements guide form.



Figure 12: *The Scene of the Crime* (2011), dir. Amar Kanwar. Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/amar-kanwar/>

In Map 5, the camera makes its material presence known in a starkly different way as the images onscreen and the stories of the disappearances (of land, livelihood and the man) directly align for the first time. The map begins in a mode by now familiar to the viewer, with the camera focused on the silhouette of a butterfly on a branch, so still its movement is barely perceptible. This sequence lasts for several seconds until the butterfly flies away. The camera cuts to a cow chewing on grass by some tombstones. The bell around its neck makes a deep, hollow sound. At this point, a loud sound (thunder? gun shot?) intrudes upon the audiovisual frame. Alongside, the following text appears:

She sees him in everything.

They would meet where the fireflies filled the trees.

He said his friend Nidhan had found old land deeds, sealed with the date 1897.

He told her he had a sound bomb.

It just made a noise to scare without injuring.

She told him about the Rapid Acquisition Force.

They could acquire land within a day.

²¹⁰ Deleuze and Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 12.

1. measurement of land
2. calculations
3. demolition
4. eviction
5. acquisition²¹¹

The sound alerts our body to more violent rhythms. The pace of the film speeds up as the viewer receives grainy nighttime footage of what appears to be an industrial site or the premises of a factory lit by streetlamps. The camera captures blurry and shaking images of a crowd of people dispersing, pursued by security forces in riot gear. The viewer-listener hears screams. Tear gas bombs explode, obscuring the viewer's vision. The only 'map' the viewer has fully been able to grasp is that of conflict.



Figure 13: *The Scene of the Crime* (2011), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

The written story 'ends' in a deluge of tears and a proliferation of maps, territories, plans:

One night she had a strange dream.
 In the far distance, was Nidhan's house.
 The house was filled with a hundred maps of Kalinga.
 Photos and newspaper clippings were all over the walls.
 It was here that she wept for the first time.
 They talked about him for many months.
 And so began preparations for the trial,
 The Sovereign Forest versus the Union of India.²¹²

²¹¹ Kanwar, *The Scene of Crime*.

Building on analysis from the previous section, a ‘witnessing inwards’ is now transformed into what Philosopher Raul Fornet-Betancourt calls to see “plurivisionally.” Plurivisionality involves “thinking across multiple planes” and asking how the disappearance of these other planes are involved in the function of neoliberal thought.²¹³ Fornet-Betancourt offers that “by making the surface of the planet uniform, neoliberal globalization takes hold of the contextualization of the world; that is, it arrogates for itself the power to configure the forms of culture.”²¹⁴ As Dizon writes in her critique contesting the “oneness” of vision and marking vision and visuality as social facts, to enable such plurivisionality is especially pertinent for all those subjects who are forced to live beneath “spatial and temporal occupation.”²¹⁵

Love in Precarious Times

A second film is projected on a screen opposite *The Scene of Crime*. *A Love Story* is a five-minute long visual essay documenting the figures of two workers in a landfill. Part-documentary, part fiction, the film provides an urban counterpoint to *The Scene of Crime*. In Kanwar’s words, *A Love Story* recounts, through a series of “distilled,” images, text, and music in four short acts, the end of a love story between two migrant workers on a landfill. In contrast to the lush vegetation that fills up the screen in *The Scene of Crime*, *A Love Story* is filmed entirely on a sprawling landfill in Ghazipur at Delhi’s city limits. The landfill is a margin, a border and as the city expands, the landfill gets pushed further and further away too. It is often rural migrants who work on these landfills, driven to this border by an eroded rural economy (the process of rural dispossession documented in *Scene of the Crime*). Consequently, the ‘real’ border between the rural and the urban is one that is shifting and constantly redefined. The landfill on screen is a multihued grey that defies the absolutes of black and white.

In the film, the viewer does not see close-ups of people but silhouettes or distant figures. A bulldozer moves mountains of trash as though it were, to borrow from Frederic Jameson’s writing on the (im)possibilities of cognitive mapping in times of intense capitalistic acquisition, the “ghostly profile of the entire architectonic of global neoliberal development,” also encapsulated in the trans-historic and trans-geographic connection the installation encourages between Yorkshire’s miners and Odisha’s indigenous rice grain.²¹⁶ The geology of this trash heap, the silhouettes of workers on the landfill wearing no protective clothing as birds of prey circle, also speaks to the production of some humans as waste under the present development regime.

²¹² Kanwar, *The Scene of Crime*.

²¹³ Fornet-Betancourt, “An Alternative to Globalization: Theses for the Development of an Intercultural Philosophy,” 235. Quoted in Dizon, xi-xii.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Dizon, xii and 3.

²¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 1991, 415.



Figure 14: *A Love Story* (2010), dir. Amar Kanwar. Image courtesy of Marion Goodman Gallery, NYC.

In contrast to the imagery, a gentle, playful intimate love story unfolds as text on screen:

ACT I

The suddenness of your departure is still hard to believe

No moment is worth living anymore

ACT II

And yet it seems I can wait for her forever

I remember I had said

If I were to describe how beautiful you are

You may think that I'm making a proposition

ACT III

You had answered

That depends on the words you use

ACT IV

It has been a long time

The suddenness of your departure is still hard to believe

The many tones of gray, the blank screen separating the “acts,” and the spare poetic words evoke multiple dimensions of illumination and opacity. The pairing of love and loss runs through both the films *A Love Story* and *Scene of the Crime* and they share one line, “the suddenness of his departure is still hard to believe,” since, for Kanwar, an unending separation is at the core of the current development project:

If I were to open up separation, I would see separation takes place in multiple ways. So if I were to understand this, then I would understand newer things, newer meanings in life. Separation becomes a frame for me to see everything in life. That’s what these films are about. Both of these are about the sudden disappearance of a loved one. There is a huge amount of forced separations that is taking place all over the world which you see manifested in migration...when they separate from their lands and homes, they also separate from their families, their trees, their loved ones, their food, their songs...so *A*

Love Story is about that. And separation is a cascading process, you don't separate once, or migrate once, it's a continuous process, it's painful. You resettle, you get torn, you resettle, you get torn...each separation opens up multiple separations on the edges of the urban.²¹⁷

As if to punctuate the border or marginal quality of the landfill, the soundtrack to the film is the continuous sounding of a *tanpura*. The *tanpura* is a classical Indian instrument, which usually provides the underlying 'drone' or harmonic base for the performance of a *raga*. "I picked the quietest instrument, not magnificent, ordinary but essential—the *tanpura*,"²¹⁸ says Kanwar. Seemingly relegated to the margin, making space in the foreground for a melodic instrument or voice, the *tanpura* in fact not only clarifies the scale structure, but actually makes it possible to develop very complex modes. In "The Paint of Music," Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that *tanpura* players are said to be "tuning their own soul as they tune their instruments" and the listeners, in turn, tune themselves to the *tampura*.²¹⁹ The *tanpura* thus creates an "evolving pitch" to be shared among performers, listeners, and instruments. Elsewhere, in "An Acoustic Journey," Trinh continues, "the effect of music is to solicit a situation of perpetual intertuning," one in which vibrations are exchanged, shared, and transformed.²²⁰ Such is the ethos of Kanwar's moving image works and their engagement with contemporary conditions. Striving to *name* or pin down its infinite microtones is impossible, and so he must offer ambient pictures. Paradoxically, it is his quest for *precise* documental language, which yield such seemingly slow, open, and flexible structures of engagement.

This chapter has explored Amar Kanwar's documentary tools as they perform a molecular, ambient citizenship in contrast to the "state-speak" conventions of Nehruvian-era documentary. In the next chapter I turn to the experimental performance practice of Maya Krishna Rao in which she enacts, what I term, a "minor" gestural praxis to blur the edges around closed identities. If the desire to produce a unified conception of ourselves has direct roots in the project of (Western) modernity, then, Rao's minor gestural repertoire invites audiences into zones of complexity and mutability around questions of selfhood.

²¹⁷ Amar Kanwar. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, April 06, 2013

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Trinh, *Elsewhere within Here: Immigration, Refugeesim and the Boundary Event*, 91.

²²⁰ Ibid., 57.

Chapter 2

Minor Gestures: Maya Krishna Rao's Experimental Kathakali Performance

The 'minor' invents new forms of existence, and with them, in them, we come to be. These temporary forms of life travel across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues.

—Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*²²¹

Towards a Minor Practice: “Not not-Kathakali”



Figure 15: Maya Krishna Rao in *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

Dressed in fishnet stockings, a faux leopard skin-print miniskirt, and a hot pink halter blouse, her long white hair catching the stage lights, Maya Krishna Rao (b. 1953) begins *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good Show*, her one-woman, Kathakali-comedy-cabaret with a segment titled, “Stress of City Living. Living Beauty. Driving Beauty. Beauty Living.” In it, she parodies a scattered, upper-middle-class, hyper-sexualized talk show host offering advice on luxury cars and ‘facial yoga.’ Rao triumphantly presents her absurd tip of the day on skin care: “Never remove a blackhead from the backseat of a black Opel Astra [a luxury car]. It NEVER works.”²²² Through the monologue, her language is similarly muddled as she negotiates dominant neoliberal urban values of surface and profit to bizarre, comic, and unsettling effect. Indeed, as

²²¹ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 7.

²²² *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show*, written and directed by Maya Krishna Rao, National School of Drama, 15th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, New Delhi, January 11, 2013.

social historian Nandita Gooptu has noted, the neoliberal reforms in India have gone hand in hand with the emergence of an enterprise culture and of an “enterprising self.”²²³ Here, Rao brings such an enterprising and consumerist subjectivity alive in a flamboyant, older, feminine body and exaggerates the grotesque dimensions of such how she imagines such subjectivity to be.

Like Rao’s other experimental works, this show incorporates a variety of forms including cabaret, comedy, live music, and video. Glimpses of Rao’s virtuosic kathakali training are apparent through the show as she draws on gesture (*mudras*), breath (*vayu-prana*), and facial expression (*rasabhinaya*) from the classical repertoire in a range of intensities to layer her storytelling. Rao’s contemporary practice therefore imbricates politics, aesthetics, and sociality, retooling the kathakali form in a manner that disperses its expansive affective and emotional register into new terrain. Migrating between quotidian gestures and framed kathakali-inspired *mudras*, her rhythmic hand movements conjure the various actions and objects described in her monologue. In one instance, her hands gracefully simulate the motion of the piston of a car while also suggesting a sexual act, before fluidly moving to her temples to perform a de-stressing facial massage. In another, she offers her “television audience” (seated in the darkened theater) heartfelt advice for when they might be stuck in traffic: “Take in a deep breath with the car’s intake of fuel and exhale with the exhaust of fuel.”²²⁴ All the while she is seated on a chair, her legs crossed at the ankles, with slices of cucumber cooling her inner thighs.

This is the first of multiple sequential roles that Rao embodies in *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good Show*. Structured as a series of disconnected episodes, the show is steeped in the absurdities and excesses of “everyday existence in an urban Indian location,” as the program notes state, and offers commentary on multiple themes from democracy and terrorism to gender roles, entertainment, fitness, and food.²²⁵ In this live, seventy-five minute, multi-medial, non-linear performance, Rao swiftly transforms from talk show host to psychic chef, followed by an U.S.-returned, over-zealous jogger/enterprising yogi, Machiavellian politician, and an elderly version of her own self. The set is spare, save for the chair she is seated on, and her props include mainly food items such as the slices of cucumber, a watermelon, spices, and a large model of a fish. The series of “unruly” women characters in this show are willing to be offensive and they are grotesque—if we follow Katherine Rowe’s exposition of how this category is often projected on the female body when it “makes a spectacle of itself through pregnancy, age, weight or other violations of proper feminine bodily containment.”²²⁶ Further, as Priyam Ghosh has argued, by favoring exaggeration and artifice and drawing on popular and consumerist culture, Rao’s spectacles are campy in aesthetic, interrogating modes of gendered sub/objectification, and “simultaneously claiming and rejecting” a range of stereotypes associated with women in Delhi.²²⁷

²²³ Nandini Gooptu, ed., *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media*, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2016).

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show*, written and directed by Maya Krishna Rao, National School of Drama, 15th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, New Delhi, January 11, 2013, Program notes.

²²⁶ Rowe, K., *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press Film Series, 1995, p. 11.

²²⁷ Priyam, Ghosh, “Locating Camp and Parody in Maya K. Rao’s Deep Fried Jam and Non-Stop Feel Good Show,” Academia.edu, retrieved 15 January 2016.

Rao's polymorphous performance with comedic material, swift changes, and multisensory stimuli appears to feed the audience's own continuous drive for feel-good, easy entertainment while also broadly parodying the contemporary urban Indian socio-political scape. However, across and within each sketch, Rao's unique and expansive gestural work performatively disrupts fixed understandings of (gendered) being and presents new experiences of duration and space. As Rao sweeps up these many individual personas in a continuum of breath, *mudra*, and rhythm, rupturing their constituted limits, her works also draw focus to endless variations and mutability in performances of feminine identity. In these and other works, by operating within and through kathakali's inner and outer structures—what kathakali scholar Phillip Zarilli has termed its “psychophysical”²²⁸ mode of creation, its epic-narrative, choreographic and gestural grammar—Rao's specific critical labor is realized in the *materiality* of her experimental practice, especially her repertoire of unique gestures and facial expressions. These new gestural articulations can be seen to “unclasp her own body from the social conditions that have produced it,” with regards to her habitus as performer and 63-year old Delhi woman.²²⁹ Additionally, Rao's surprising and sensual interactions with objects on stage (such as the cucumber slices placed between her thighs) reveal that the work's content lies largely within the spectator's embodied and affective response to such ‘newness;’ Rao's performance is not only an object to be interpreted by the audience, but rather a process to be experienced kinesthetically and sensorially.



Figure 16: Maya Krishna Rao in *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

²²⁸ Phillip Zarilli, Jerri Daboo, and Rebecca Loukes *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

²²⁹ See Stephen Zepke's use of the Deleuzian term, “unclasp,” in Stephen Zepke, “Becoming a Citizen of the World: Deleuze between Allan Kaprow and Adrian Piper,” in Laura Cull, *Deleuze and Performance*, 123.



Figure 17: Maya Krishna Rao in *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

If the embodiment of the modern Indian cultural project can be seen in and through national dance, then Rao plays on the edges of such form, pushing classical kathakali to access new socio-political domains, a way of becoming a guest, stranger, or nomad within her own training. And while the *Non-Stop Feel Good Show* and Rao's other works are not kathakali, they are "not-not kathakali."²³⁰ In scholar of South Asian theater Shayoni Mitra's words:

A vigorously urban aesthetic does not impinge on her [Rao's] ability to play mythological characters from the Indian epics or vice versa. At the same time, the residual synapses from her kathakali repertoire are always archived in her body. To use Richard Schechner's formulation of the double negative in performance as re-stored behavior, Maya Rao, [...] is not the kathakali dancer, but at the same time she is not not the kathakali dancer.²³¹

Building on the themes laid out in the introduction to this dissertation, this chapter considers Rao's experimental gesture as "minor." Here, I borrow from the work of Gilles Deleuze and the inventive formulations of Erin Manning and recently, Hentyle Yapp.²³² As quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, according to Manning, the minor is a movement that "travel(s) across the everyday, stirs existing socio-political structures, and activates new modes of perception, in order to invent a new language that speaks in the interstices of major tongues."²³³ Rao's kathakali-inspired corporeal acts disrupt performances of normative feminine subjectivity. These gestures are performed alongside conventions of quotidian life while seeking the 'virtualities,' potentialities, or otherness of these same systems; that is, within the frames of

²³⁰ Mitra "Dispatches from the Margins: Theater in India since the 1990s," 84.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Hentyle Yapp, "Minor China: Affect, Performance, & Contemporary China in the Global," (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2014).

²³³ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 7.

the everyday, Rao evokes potential for alternate ways of being and relating. It is to this capacity to actualize, at the edge of “where the actual is not- yet” that makes her gesture ‘minor.’²³⁴ My particular analysis of Rao’s gesture as minor traces the movement of a kathakali *mudra* that has traveled in unexpected ways. In migrating, their vital kinetic sensations and multilayered signifying possibilities create new cultural valences and alternative spectatorial experiences for contemporary audiences.²³⁵

The word *mudra* has been translated from Sanskrit as ‘gesture’ but also as ‘mark’ and ‘seal.’ In the traditional kathakali form, *mudras* are most basically understood as conventionalized hand gestures belonging to a system of signification or a code of expressive movement. They serve several purposes, from the decorative, to the mimetic, to a literal “speaking” of the text, including an articulation of grammatical endings. *Mudras* also evoke the qualities of an object and abstract concepts of beauty and love.²³⁶ In kathakali’s intertwining philosophical and material registers, *mudras* are more expansively considered as “world revealing” modes of knowing, touching on multiple layers of consciousness.²³⁷ In *Agency and Embodiment*, scholar of gesture, Carrie Noland, describes the everyday significance of gesture as a technique of the body: “a way of sleeping, standing, running, dancing, or even grimacing that involves small or large muscle movements, consciously or unconsciously executed.”²³⁸ She employs such a flexible definition to name any use of the body that can “become a source of kinesthetic feedback, and thus agency.”²³⁹ Further, she provocatively posits that, similar to verbal performatives, *all* gestures *realize* the action they denote, working to “bring into being, through repetition, a body fabricated specifically to accommodate their execution [emphasis mine].”²⁴⁰ Gestures are, therefore, also the means by which cultural conditioning is “simultaneously embodied and put to the test.”²⁴¹

Rao’s minor gesture links these critical conceptualizations and regimes to offer a gestural praxis that blurs the edges around closed identities in order to create new embodied relations between separate entities, things, ideas, feelings and affects. If the desire to produce a unified conception of ourselves is one with roots deep in the project of modernity, then, Rao’s minor gestural repertoire invites audiences into zones of complexity and mutability. Finally, her performative practices also expose gender and sexuality as sites of creative enabling in patriarchal urban spaces.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on Rao’s first experimental performance *Khol Do* and two cabarets, *Deep Fried Jam* (a ‘socio-political cabaret’) and *The-Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (a ‘cabaret-comedy’). I conclude with a brief comment on her latest choreopoem, *Walk*, to

²³⁴ Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 7.

²³⁵ See Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness’s analysis of the varied work of such “migrating gestures,” in Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness eds. *Migrations of Gesture*. (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2008).

²³⁶ Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex*, 129

²³⁷ In a telling anecdote, Zarrilli recounts V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar “life-long appreciator of kathakali” and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Kerala’s description of the form: “Kathakali is like a vast and deep ocean. Some may come to a performance with their hands cupped and only be able to take away what doesn’t slip through their fingers. Others may come with a small vessel, and be able to drink that: And still others may come with a huge cooking pot and take away so much more!” in Phillip Zarrilli, “An Ocean of Possibilities: From Lokadharmī to Nātyadharmī in a Kathakali Santānagōpālam,” *Comparative Drama*, (28:1, Spring 1994) 67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41153681>, accessed October 5, 2014.

²³⁸ Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, 15-16.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

articulate the choreopolitical range of gestural ‘events’ in Rao’s experiments with the contemporary.

“Breathing Through the Eyes”

Rao has been producing work as a dance and theater artist, director, writer, educator, and activist in Delhi for three decades. Through the late 1970s and 1980s, alongside her classical kathakali practice, Rao taught and performed political and feminist street theater with the collective Theatre Union (consisting of theater practitioners and feminist activists Anuradha Kapoor, Tripurari Sharma, Urvashi Butalia, and Rati Bartholomew).²⁴²

In her recent book chapter “Dispatches from the Margins: Theatre in India since the 1990s,” Mitra astutely analyzes Rao’s practice as part of an urban avant-garde in India, alongside artists such as Kapoor, Anamika Haksar and Zuleikha Chaudhari. Mitra suggests that, while this avant-garde isn’t to be considered ‘Indian’ in an essentialized way, “locality is coded” into these performances such that they make for an “organic and indigenous” avant-garde.²⁴³ She historicizes Rao’s radical aesthetic as stemming from her feminist and activist street theater praxis, as well as from contemporaneous movements in the visual arts in India in the 1980s, and transnational exchanges of aesthetics and ideas resisting the globalized commodification of culture.²⁴⁴ Mitra describes that the characteristics of such a performance avant-garde in Delhi have included intimate, non-linear, non-naturalistic, non-narrative, technological, and multi-perspectival modes of creation.²⁴⁵

Trained in classical kathakali at the International Center for Kathakali in New Delhi by Guru Madhava Panikkar, Rao specialized in the study and performance of specifically masculine kathakali roles. This lends her contemporary, experimental, feminist form a particular awareness; as she says, “now, in making work, the male and female lie along a continuum for me; especially in terms of a creative energy.”²⁴⁶ Kathakali (literally ‘story-play’) is a four-hundred-year-old, stylized dance-drama form combining dance, theater, music, and mythological tradition that continues to flourish, primarily in Kerala, today. The form has been patronized by the Sangeet Natak Academy as one of India’s eight classical dance forms. Traditionally only performed by men, over the past several decades not only has the form had women practitioners, but all-women troupes such as the Tripunithura Kathakali Kendram Ladies Troupe (formed in 1975) perform regularly on national and international stages.²⁴⁷

Developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, kathakali performances express an exuberant physicality and draw on episodes from the Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, or stories from the *Puranas*, in a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam.²⁴⁸ Dancers do not vocalize the dramatic text themselves. Instead, onstage vocalists deliver the verses in a form of Karnatak music singing, accompanied by an orchestra usually consisting of the percussive *centa*, *maddalam*, and *itekka*, and brass symbols.²⁴⁹ Gestural movement is traced by articulated

²⁴² Mitra, “Dispatches from the Margins: Theater in India since the 1990s,” 82.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁴⁶ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁴⁷ Diane Daugherty and Marlene Pitkow, “Who Wears the Skirts in Kathakali?” *TDR* (1988-), (35:2, Summer, 1991), 138.

²⁴⁸ Phillip Zarrilli, *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*, (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1999) xi.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

fingers, hands, and arms, and together with facial and eye expressions, they render the dramatic component of kathakali. These components are interspersed with sections of “pure dance” or virtuoso footwork in a bent-knee position that exemplifies the form’s grounded use of weight. Kathakali’s ornate costuming and elaborate makeup transform the actor into a wide variety of idealized and archetypal characters. This *vesam*, (costume and make-up), determines not only the outward appearance but also suggests to the audience the elemental good, evil, “radiant, “ripe,” true, passionate, divine, or “special” nature of each character.²⁵⁰ Noble male characters use green face make-up and anti-heroes red. Certain characters wear a white facial border, or *chutti*, made of thick sheets of rice paper to focus attention on the inner face and eyes.



Figure 18: Maya Krishna Rao performing the role of Ravana. Photo credit, S. Thyagarajan. Image courtesy of the artist.

Rao began exploring storytelling outside of kathakali’s traditional frames in the early 1990s, because, as she explains,

It was too easy to be satisfied or absolutely content as an artist and therefore even complacent, to a certain degree [within the kathakali ‘body-mind’]. The form is enormously rich, tremendously difficult, energizing and fulfilling, but I was restless.²⁵¹

Firmly maintaining her debt to the form in her experimental practice, she continues,

[But] I’m not sure I would have ended up with these kinds of resources to dip into in my contemporary work, were it not for kathakali, where you train your body and your mind. And every part of you is trained separately—your face, your feet, your legs, your torso...my muscles carry the memory of this training, and the awareness of a certain condition of rhythm and the channeling of breath for focus [...].²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Zarrilli, *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*, 53-5.

²⁵¹ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁵² Ibid.

Kathakali actors receive several years of rigorous training in an embodied regime consisting of physical exercise such as stretching, jumps, basic footwork, and massage; *mudras* or hand gestures (24 basic ones, with permutations and combinations multiplying that number); facial expressions (*rasabhinaya*) including special eye movements; detailed choreography, complex dance, and movement patterns; and intimate knowledge of the performance texts.²⁵³ According to Zarilli, at the heart of kathakali actor training is the dialectical engagement of the actor's 'inner' and 'outer' processes, animated by waking, controlling, and circulating the actor's breath. Zarilli terms this a psychophysical mode of acting, that is, acting practiced as embodied consciousness.²⁵⁴

Rao describes how her training was centered on this particular understanding of the breath and its relation to the embodiment of emotions:

So for instance, if I were to evoke falling in love, I would see and absorb each specific aspect of the love object that appears before me. My guru would instruct me to *breathe through the eyes*, and close off all other openings, to enliven this connection. The visualization is in the body and there is a transformation in me.²⁵⁵

The directive "breathe through the eyes" makes sense in the understanding that circulating and modulating the actor's breath through her body is the key to opening her sensorial and perceptive apparatus. The coded hand and facial gestures then transform with varying intensities of feeling, in Rao's words, to "fine tune" the connection between exterior world and inner body-mind, with the breath blurring the distinction between these two spaces.²⁵⁶ Consequently, breath itself is a transformative element, in which vibrant inhalations and exhalations onstage also carry viewers from moment-to-moment of emotional feeling, affective resonance, *rasa* (usually translated as juice, sap, or aesthetic essence and delight), and unanticipated reflection.

With such mastery of the flow of the breath, the aim for every advanced dancer is to be so accomplished that "doer" and "done" are one—or as Zarilli puts it, the practitioner reaches a stage of being-doing in which one is free to practice the principle of "non-action in action."²⁵⁷ In her experimental practice, Rao expressed this ideal as one of a "full emptiness": "As a kathakali actor, I'm always full [of training] and empty [open] to the element of surprise I encounter in improvisation."²⁵⁸

Displaced Stance, Deterritorialized Gesture

In formal kathakali itself, there is some tradition of improvisation and individual variation among actors performing specific roles. When actors such as Rao have experimented in a mode outside of kathakali—and there have only been a few who have²⁵⁹—they utilize a wide variety of improvisatory techniques employing the "disciplined awareness, energetic engagement, and consciousness" from their psychophysical trainings, as Zarilli notes.²⁶⁰ In Rao's experimental

²⁵³ Zarilli, Daboo, and Loukes *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, 70-2.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵⁵ Maya Krishna Rao, "Kathakali for the Contemporary Performer," lecture-demonstration curated by Karin Shankar, Bancroft Studio, UC Berkeley, April 9, 2015.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Zarilli, Daboo, and Loukes *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, 68.

²⁵⁸ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁵⁹ Astad Deboo, one of the forefathers of contemporary Indian dance, experimented with kathakali form. See Katrak, Ketu Katrak, *Contemporary Indian Dance: Creative Choreography towards a New Language of Dance in India and the Diaspora*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁶⁰ Zarilli, Daboo, and Loukes *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, 2.

work, therefore, kathakali is not reduced to a mere “style,” category, or set of persuasive techniques, rather the form is mobilized for its affective potentialities to activate everyday scenes differently. As I will explore in the next section in close readings of select works, Rao’s attention to her own processes of forming and deforming breath, conventional *mudras*, footwork, and facial expressions, are propositions for new ways of being, acting, and relating in the “now.” For instance, describing how the basic physical stance of kathakali leads her to new modes for contemplating contemporary New Delhi scenes, Rao says,

Kathakali begins from a tension, a displacement, so, for instance, my knees are splayed and bent in the characteristic stance and the feet are set wide apart, toes pointing forward. The outer side of the sole of my foot rests on the ground...from this stance [she demonstrates], I observe everything around me—here and now—differently.²⁶¹

Rao’s suggestion is that bodily displacement also *displaces* her attention away from the conventional, and towards an altered or minor perceptual mode that resides alongside the everyday. That is, displacement as bodily experience transfers to displaced modes of thinking seeing, listening, smelling, tasting. Rao expands on this idea to suggest that when everyday material—news snippets, socially normative dress and behavior codes, consumption patterns etc., meet with kathakali’s conventions they produce these minor spaces of performative exploration. Rao does kathakali differently not only merely by leaving behind its costuming code and performance text, but by repeating, deconstructing, distorting, and combining its gestural and expressive vocabulary, to infuse both the everyday and kathakali with an alterity.



Figure 19: Maya Krishna Rao in *Ravanama* (2012). Image courtesy of the artist.

²⁶¹ Maya Krishna Rao, “Kathakali for the Contemporary Performer.”

In much of kathakali choreography, the actor moves in a square on a small stage, usually four to five feet in width and five to six feet in length. Additionally, only single props are used, such as a stool, on which an actor may rest, climb like a mountain, or lift to mime strength. Rao's engagement with such sparse scenic elements liberate rather than constrain her contemporary work, as she explains, "I had to evoke the entire cosmos in this small space, so this kind of expansive conceptualization of space and objects frees me, when I'm working with everyday things."²⁶²

Rao's move towards experimental kathakali can therefore be conceived of as a de- and re-territorialization of conventional kathakali tools. 'Deterritorialization,' a term catalyzed by Gilles Deleuze to describe "a movement producing change,"²⁶³ has travelled across the fields of aesthetic practice and discourse to describe ruptures in the rules of representation. As noted in the introductory chapter, Deleuze offers the example of the different functions of the human mouth to elucidate the concept: "the mouth, tongue and teeth have their first territory in food, and in devoting themselves to the articulation of sounds and language, they *deterritorialize* themselves."²⁶⁴ In the context of visual art, Deleuze turns to Francis Bacon's portraiture, where a deterritorialization of the human face is actualized in and through "free manual marks" made by brushing, throwing, or rubbing paint on the canvas. In the unmoving frame of painting these marks express the "spasms" of interior forces such that Bacon's works present a new, resonant truth, that of the 'body as meat.'²⁶⁵ In literary art, Kafka's works produce a "stammering and stuttering" *within* language itself, stretching language to its limit, to call into being a new community of writers and readers.²⁶⁶

'Disarticulate' is a useful word for the work that Rao's experiments perform, for her deterritorialized gestures *lead* her minor, experimental form; these renewed gestures are hinges or joints capable of altering a perception or line of thought. I consciously draw from Deleuze to 'co-imagine'²⁶⁷ alongside Rao's experimental works not only because his writings on creative movements and "becomings" lend themselves to conversations around experimental aesthetics and align with my own theoretical sympathies, but also because Deleuze follows in the tradition of philosophically-oriented performance theory from Antonin Artaud to Jerzy Grotowski, who themselves were heavily influenced by Eastern performance forms of Balinese dance, kathakali (especially Grotowski), and yoga—albeit in problematically orientalist ways that beg interrogation. As such, placing Rao's praxis beside Deleuzian-inspired conceptual vocabulary resuscitates philosophical connections that bind across space and time, and remind of critical 'borrowings' by the West, while also surfacing the impossibilities of binaristic distinctions between theory and practice, 'West' and 'East,' traditional and modern. Such juxtaposition also points to the radical contemporaneity of 'theory from the South.'²⁶⁸

²⁶² Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁶³ Adrian Parr, "Deterritorialization," *Deleuze Dictionary*, 69.

²⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, Feliz Guatarri, Robert Brinkley, "What Is a Minor Literature?" *Mississippi Review* 11:3 (Winter/Spring 1983), 19-20.

²⁶⁵ Deleuze, Gilles, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

²⁶⁶ Constantine Verevis, "Minoritarian + Cinema," *Deleuze Dictionary*, 170.

²⁶⁷ A term I borrow from dance scholar Andre Lepecki. Quoted in Larisa Crunteanu, "The Power of Co- in Contemporary Dance," *Revista-ARTA*, January 16, 2016, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://revistaarta.ro/en/the-power-of-co-in-contemporary-dance/>.

²⁶⁸ Jean and John Comaroff, "Theory from the South: A Rejoinder." *JWTC*. 2012. Web. 07 Oct. 2012.



Figure 20: Maya Krishna Rao in *Ravanama* (2012). Image courtesy of the artist.

‘Living Moments’ in *Khol do* (1993)

Khol Do (Open it) was Rao’s first experimental piece, an hour-long, one-woman pantomimed adaptation of a short story by partition-era writer Sadat Hasan Manto, performed in 1993 and revived in 2006. Describing her process, she offers, “in kathakali, the actor does not speak on stage, the mouth is never open because energy is lost through the mouth, it was very difficult for me to begin talking in my improvisations o *Khol Do* did not have any words.” She began exploring speech on stage only after this experience, passing long hours in the studio uttering incessant and meaningless strings of words and sounds. In these early improvisations, she also stripped away classical hand *mudras*, using only a few select gestures combined with everyday movements. Rao’s deterritorializations in *Khol do* and two other performances I examine below (*Deep Fried Jam* and *Non Stop Feel Good Show*) perform minor gestures, which, in turn, create embodied conceptual tools. These include “living moments,” “embodied unmakings,” and “sensorial ruptures.”

The historical and social context of *Khol do* relates to the large scale, violent migration of people across the subcontinent in 1946 and 1947 (mainly along the Punjab border), a period that ended with the division of India and the creation of Pakistan. As social anthropologist and scholar of the Partition Veena Das has described it, the bodies of women were “topographies of violence” on which the meaning of Partition was inscribed in two distinctive ways: “on the one hand, through the infliction of masculine violence (in times of disorder), and on the other, through the politics of remembering and forgetting (in times of restoring normality).”²⁶⁹ (Additionally, as mentioned in chapter one, memories of Partition continue to shape relations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs on the subcontinent, and as Menon has noted, contemporary

²⁶⁹ Veena Das, “National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children,” *Critical Events*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

religious conflicts revisit and revise Partition narratives.²⁷⁰ The early 1990s when Rao first devised this piece was a time of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims, following the demolition of the Babari Masjid.)

Khol Do follows a traumatized father, Sirajuddin, trying to piece together the happenings leading up to the abduction of his daughter, Sakina, in a refugee camp during Partition. He remembers holding her hand on the platform of the train from Amritsar in India to Lahore in Pakistan, and then chaos in the crowd, with flames and looting.²⁷¹ In a nightmarish flash, he recalls Sakina's *dupatta* (scarf) falling and him bending down to pick it up and losing sight of Sakina thereafter. As Rao retells the tale, "it is bitterly ironic that the instant in which a distracted Sirajuddin bends down to pick up the scarf to protect his daughter's dignity is the very instant that four men abduct (and later repeatedly rape) Sakina."²⁷² Manto's original story continues on to Sirajuddin's search for and eventual reunion with Sakina in a devastating scene in a doctor's tent. When the doctor simply asks his assistant to open the window flap to let the light in with the imperative "*khol do*," an exhausted, wounded, and sexually violated Sakina begins to open the drawstrings of her pants, so accustomed is she to the command "open it."

Rao does not move to this world-shattering ending of the story, but chooses to build her performance on the particular moment that Sirajuddin picks up Sakina's scarf, a moment she refers to as a "living moment,"²⁷³ a vibrating point in experience that is open to any number of potential futures but is contingently fixed in one way. The moment is heavy, pulsing with a bundle of emotions and affects: tension, disbelief, regret, anger, sadness, irony, bitterness, fear, surprise, hope. Sirajuddin, with the sun beating down on him, desperately searches for Sakina, all the while reliving the precise circumstance of her disappearance. The only prop on stage is Sakina's blue scarf. Dressed in a white *kurta*, Rao embodies Sirajuddin's desperate search to the soundtrack of Phillip Glass's "Glassworks," her hands, face, and body form recognizable kathakali *mudras* for water, mirror, flower, fear, as she also evokes simple, incomplete actions and gestures: breathing into her elbow, caressing her face, squatting, moving her eyes from side to side, activating the geographic and psychic terrain of Sirajuddin's present in her body, while her facial expressions pass through the spectrum of *bhavas* of love, fear, compassion, sadness, peace. As Rao describes it, "I'm creating a space where several disparate actions picked from my improvisation create an atmosphere."²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Menon, *Performance of Nationalism*, 7.

²⁷¹ Maya Krishna Rao offering her synopsis of the story, "Kathakali for the Contemporary Performer."

²⁷² Maya Krishna Rao, "Kathakali for the Contemporary Performer."

²⁷³ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁷⁴ Maya Krishna Rao, "Kathakali for the Contemporary Performer."



Figure 21: Maya Krishna Rao in *Khol do* (2006). Image courtesy of the artist.

In one sequence, holding her face she pounds her fists into the floor—is this Sirajuddin’s waiting game or his anxiety? Standing on one leg, she cradles her other knee, and covers her face with Sakina’s scarf. She bends down on all fours and carries the light scarf on her back. She makes a turban of the scarf, uses it as a blanket, plays dice on it, and wipes her face with it. She counts, looks away, counts again, repeatedly dropping and picking up the scarf again and again; too many times to count. These repetitions evoke the instant of Sakina’s abduction as a durational trauma rather than a discreet moment. Sniffing and then smelling the air, she opens her mouth full. With open mouth she seems to ask for water, or shrieks, and then mimes the loss of her voice. She jumps, she whirls around, she falls. Through these sequences, Rao as Sirajuddin appears to be trying to “come into contact with the speeds and affects of another body,”²⁷⁵ and indeed, to cross the threshold of his contained self through breath, stance, gesture, and facial expression, such that Sirajuddin, consumed by intense grief and anxiety, *becomes* the search himself, finally metamorphosing into Sakina at the performance’s end.

That is, in Rao’s tremendous interpretation, Sirajuddin has become the longing for his daughter—his ontological position is no longer stable. Sirajuddin is not just crossing the border between India and Pakistan but also the boundaries of his own body. In her first foray into experimenting with *kathakali* form, Rao thus offers an intense encounter and profound communication beyond representation. While offering insight into the possible effects of trauma, in Rao’s practice, a “living moment” also proposes an altogether new relation with any ‘event.’ It is the potential, the minor, in the event, materialized as a transformative zone opening to possibilities that were previously invisible, and an occasion for things and bodies to be altered.

²⁷⁵ In my analysis, I borrow from Laura Cull’s definition of becoming in the Deleuzian frame: “Becomings constitute attempts to come into contact with the speeds and affects of a different kind of body, to break with a discrete self and to uproot the organs from the functions assigned to them by this ‘molar’ identity.” See Laura Cull, *Deleuze and Performance*, 7.

The whole performance can perhaps be considered a minor gesture in so far as it connects the event (Partition) from the “governant fixity”²⁷⁶ of the major to the body itself and to relations between bodies.



Figure 22: Maya Krishna Rao in *Khol do* (2006). Image courtesy of the artist.

A Trickster’s ‘Embodied Unmakings’ in *Deep Fried Jam*

In a shift from *Khol do*, Rao’s more recent works have largely been comedic and satirical, stressing the performativity of contemporary urban gender roles. Rao expresses grotesque, hyper-femininity in her shape-shifting *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (2013)—a scene of which I have outlined at the start of this chapter—and androgyny in her very first ‘socio-political cabaret,’ *Deep Fried Jam* (2002).

Rao’s choices in both shows can be linked to the *kari* role of Kathakali. Kathakali has three female character types: the noble heroine or *minukku*; the *lalita*, who is exactly alike in appearance to the *minukku* but is actually a dangerous seductress; and lastly, the *kari* or demoness role.²⁷⁷ Pitknow notes that while *lalitas* “make a pretense toward goodness,” *karis* do not. Even among the all-women classical kathakali troupes practicing in Kerala today, it is often considered “unsuitable” for a woman to play a *kari* who wears “big exposed false breasts and communicates in exaggerated, satirical gestures.”²⁷⁸ Rao’s contemporary version of the *kari* is a trickster, transgressing and queering traditional South Asian tropes of femininity through her specific understanding and minor mobilization of gesture. Here, I read *kari* through a lens of the minor. Again, according to Adrienne Edwards, ‘minor aesthetics’ references principles that “concern, guide, and operate differently, meaning often outside of, the normative formulations of

²⁷⁶ Erin Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 7.

²⁷⁷ Marlene Pitkow, “The Good, the Bad, the Ugly: Kathakali’s Females and the Men who Play them,” In *Between Fame and Shame: Performing Women—Women Performers in India*, ed. Heidrun Brückner, Hanne M. de Bruin, and Heike Moser, 223–244, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 223.

²⁷⁸ Diane Daugherty and Marlene Pitkow, “Who Wears the Skirts in Kathakali?” 144.

beauty in philosophical discourse on art.”²⁷⁹ *Kari* as minor therefore deterritorializes normative aesthetics in order to produce a new audience and a new consciousness.

To flesh out and bring gesture to her version of a *kari* trickster in her socio-political cabarets, Rao draws from a femme archetype, Helen, who was a Bollywood seductress and cabaret dancer in films of the 1960s and 1970s. Helen, in her own life, was a refugee of French-Burmese parentage and entered the film industry in the 1950s as a chorus dancer. Media theorist Lawrence Liang notes that it was Helen’s outsider status that enabled her to move from Hindi cinema’s domestic spaces to nightclubs and other locations of pleasure and transgression.²⁸⁰ Liang offers that as the ‘other’ of the chaste Hindu heroine, “Helen’s sexuality was an on screen transgression sustained by the racial and ethnic ambiguity that marked her.”²⁸¹ This ambiguity enabled her to negotiate many roles including an Anglo-Indian neighbor, a gangster’s “moll,” a Spanish courtesan, and a Chinese spy.²⁸² Watching Helen in the movie hall was a “private invitation to a collective transgression” for the audience.²⁸³ Further, Helen, like Rao stretched expectations of age and gender, having danced on screen for three decades from 1951 to 1981, out lasting many younger stars.²⁸⁴



Figure 23: Helen in *Mr. & Mrs. 55*. Available at www.bollywoodbegum.blogspot.com

Rao describes how, in approaching her cabaret performances, she developed experimental gesture through exploring a corporeal stance in relation to objects (costumes and props) inspired by Helen:

I was fascinated by Helen, I was always enamored by her slinkiness (sic)... her fishnets, the length of her leg. So when I put on a mini-skirt and fishnets, it isn't so

²⁷⁹ Adrienne Edwards, “Relishing the Minor: Juliana Huxtable’s Kewt Aesthetics” *Performa Magazine* January 14, 2016. <http://performa-arts.org/magazine/entry/relishing-the-minor-juliana-huxtables-kewt-aesthetics>

²⁸⁰ Lawrence Liang, “Not Quite Lust: An Outsider called Helen,” *academia.edu*, retrieved 15 May 2016.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Jerry Pinto, *Helen: The Life and Times of an H-bomb*, New Delhi: Penguin India, 2011.

much about the skin that I am bearing but about holding my body differently and then the mind starts working differently. This is gesture.

At this, Rao demonstrates, holding out a teacup,

So now, depending on how I place myself in connection to this teacup, it will start speaking to me. If I can only see the lip, it can, all of a sudden, become tantalizing...so if you *put yourself in an unusual energy or stance and you feel a kind of tension that pulls and pushes in unexpected ways* [...] it takes control of your body and mind [Emphasis my own].²⁸⁵

Observing her everyday, as if anew, from an altered stance in relation to objects or events, Rao's words suggest that her consciousness "dives inward" in a proprioceptive²⁸⁶ move, engaging with the bodily sensations of the unusual stance towards the teacup. As Diedre Sklar might express this, perhaps with Rao's eyes opened wide and her fingers articulating, thigh muscles tightened, spine elongated, and breath flowing freely, she "turns awareness inwards to feel her own body as a continuum of kinetic sensations,"²⁸⁷ inviting openings to new bodily posture and meanings, different from both kathakali and quotidian frames. For Rao, then, gesture performs a rupturing of conventional ways of relating to objects, people, and forms. Gesture in such new relation alters perceptual and behavioral habits, unmaking known form. Relatedly, Rao's surprising use of props may be regarded as a rejection of predetermined actions and as an ensuing enablement of new bodily behaviors, qualities, or abilities—this is the difficult work of a 'minor' gesture.

Rao continues:

When I improvise physically in this manner, the teacup isn't a teacup. Instead, all objects shimmer with life. My brain does not register them as objects in the form of what you and I call a teacup. I see colors, I see forms, I feel a rhythm and in this reverberation, larger, different forces are revealed and activated.²⁸⁸

Rao's cabarets are intimate one-woman shows, with live music. Her costume and make-up are usually flamboyant and sensual. She addresses the audience directly, often plays multiple roles, and uses live video feeds or projection. *Deep Fried Jam* (2002) is a collaborative, improvised 'jam' with musician Ashim Ghosh and videographer Surajit Sarkar. The performance has conventionally taken place on a thrust stage in an intimate black box space. The *Jam* is a multisensory display and experience involving a range of stimuli. These include the sight and imagined texture of the performer's fantastic costume (a sequined miniskirt with feather bustle, a net blouse, and fishnet stockings, splashes of silver paint on her body); the sight of other audience members (whom she often addresses directly); food materials (salt and flour) on stage; the sound and vibrations of live music, including familiar rock tunes from Jimmy Hendrix to the Beatles; a live video feed projection; spoken verse; the kinesthetic impact of gestural and movement sequences; and, as in any high-energy presentation, the sight of Rao's glistening sweat, and the sound of her controlled breath.

²⁸⁵ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014

²⁸⁶ See Diedre Sklar on 'proprioception,' in "Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge" in Noland, Carrie, and Sally Ann Ness, *Migrations of Gesture*, 91

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Maya Krishna Rao, interview by Karin Shankar, digital recording, New Delhi, India, June 25, 2014



Figure 24: Maya Krishna Rao in *Deep Fried Jam* (2002). Film recording courtesy of the artist.

Like the later *Non-Stop-Feel Good-Show* (2013), this early cabaret strings together disparate sketches in which Rao comments on the contemporary cultures of “everything, from war to food” in urban India. In the wake of the 2002 riots in Gujarat, Rao’s show begins with a verse asking about the precarious minority position of Muslims in India. She then covers themes from nostalgia for the once tree-lined streets of Delhi and the purple stains of *jamun* fruit from these trees, to the deep purple color of carrots in war-torn Kabul. These sketches present no narrative continuity; it is, as the title suggests, more appropriate to think of this work as an expression that is slow cooked, with various elements folded in to deepen its color and flavor.

Here, political concerns do not appear in a didactic way but rather, as Mitra has appropriately described of Rao’s work “as an incipient environment in which this mediation of female subjectivity unfolds.”²⁸⁹ Musician Ghosh’s slow tuning and testing of microtones on the electric guitar, create the soundscape for Rao to enter into: her voice arrives first, scating, garbled, laughing, announcing her appearance on stage. In this early cabaret, although inspired by Helen, Rao contrarily assumes a more androgynous style of hair, make-up, and movement. Rao moves on to a second sketch in which the audience catches her in the middle of a phone transaction. She wears dark glasses and a sneer curls her lip, as she says in a richly dark, deep chest voice “I’m sorry we don’t deal in that anymore, but we could have it arranged for you.” She sits down with her back to the audience, slides her bottom along the floor of the stage, lies down flat on her back, lightly spreads apart her knees and claims “satisfaction guaranteed,” she then rises up quickly assuming the role of ‘The Tycoon,’ according to the program notes.

“So let’s shaaaaaaake on that one,” she says elongating the word “shake” as the guitar

²⁸⁹ Mitra “Dispatches from the Margins: Theater in India since the 1990s,” 83.

tunes itself to her tone, allowing the audience to encounter the multiple potential affects contained in this one word.²⁹⁰ Ashim Ghosh provides an even paced rhythm on the *dhol*, modulating his levels as Rao speaks:

So let's shake on that one. Sign on the dotted line then.
 We're doing fine fine fine fine
 We're doing fine fine fine
 It's a price-line and sometimes you have to tweak...
 It's doing all right
 You and me we're doin' fine.

Presumably commenting on an inflationary priceline, she assumes the opening kathakali stance and mimes a two foot-long, taut 'rope,' the "price-line," between her hands. The basic position, with the feet planted firmly apart and toes gripping the ground creates a dynamic of oppositional forces as energy is pushed down from the navel through the feet into the ground and pushed up through to support and awaken the upper body, face, arms, and hands.

Balancing on the outer sides of the soles of her feet every muscle in her body is tense, as she simulates "tuning" or raising the 'priceline' further. She evokes this increase by embodying a tightening of her muscles through the specific work of directing her breath, in this ready-to-work stance. Guitar tunes to voice, breath tunes to gesture and the audience's attention is heightened as minute changes within Rao's apparently still body manifest as the tense gathering of live energy within her hands.

Still holding the stance, addressing the audience directly, Rao manipulates this captivating kinesthetic effect as she asks in the same deep tone, her breath quickening, drops of sweat beginning to form on her face:

"Well, do you want to know where it comes from, all of my streeength? You want to know where it comes from, the shine of my teeeth? You'd like to experience that *hot air* (emphasis) that lies between my hands?"

²⁹⁰ See Laura Cull on "minor" usage of words in performance in *Deleuze and Performance*.



Figure 25: Maya Krishna Rao in *Deep Fried Jam*, 2002.

With these lines, rhythmically and tauntingly she brings the materiality of gesture into focus: the ‘hot air’ between her hands is biomedical heat (thermal) energy or kathakali *vayu prana* coursing through her body, as the effect of holding the posture causes her to work up a sweat. As suddenly as she evokes this multivalent, vital sculptural moment, Rao destroys it with a casual flick of her hand. The high tension of stance and gesture is undone and the audience is left to imagine as to which future position this striking gesture may have lead the figure on stage.

In her work on queer gesture, Juana Rodriguez offers,

A gesture can only suggest, and that suggestion functions as its form of seduction. Titillating, the gesture is a risk and an invitation to guess its aspirations. The gesture is ephemeral, it has already passed, but its impression lingers in the air, and seeps into the skin. It enters the psyche of the other like a threat, or a promise.²⁹¹

The seduction of Rao’s show lies in this “partial” nature of gesture, “[its] reticence to fully establishing the interpretive closure of an action.” To quote Rodriguez, “[gestures] never pretend to fully articulate their intent”²⁹² except perhaps to suggest that fixed ideas of femininity may be corporeally unmade and set into disequilibrium. Indeed, Priyam Ghosh has written eloquently of how Rao’s portrayal of androgynous characters in *Deeper Fried Jam* open up a

²⁹¹ “Gesture and Utterance: Fragments from a Butch Femme Archive.” In *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies*, edited by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, 282-9, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 284.

²⁹² Ibid.

space in which “alternate and less feminine or differently sexualized images of women are possible.”²⁹³ Similarly, her tycoon character and “reverse macho” performance of Jimmy Hendrix’s rock anthem ‘Purple Haze’ in another moment of the *Deep Fried Jam* cabaret are parodies of normative masculinity.²⁹⁴ Ghosh offers that emergent LGBTQ groups in Delhi identify with the androgynous performances portrayed here and in other pieces, and over the past several years, Rao has come to be an iconic figure for queer activists who often operate in the same field of cultural production—urban, middleclass.²⁹⁵

Similarly, in another sequence, gesture is mobilized and its materiality and means of presencing revealed to perform Rao’s specific labor as a classically-trained female dancer on stage and to shift expectations of such performances. She begins the scene with a sketch titled “dancing in slow motion,” in which she alludes to the particular ‘slow’ economy of her kathakali training and primes her audience for how to receive her work.

I learn to send arrows, arrows, arrows,
 In slow motion, I learnt to look you in the eye
 In slow motion.
 I let it go go go
 I let it flow flow flow
 I learn to walk sloooow
 Every emotion under the sun: a crawling of my flesh, slow, a dripping of my sweat, slow,
 a bullet through my heart, slow, a smile...I loved you slow.

Just as the audience grapples with this demonstration, she continues,

I’m supposed to dance the dance of life (She forms gestures with her hands as she simultaneously describes the process of creating them.)
 To link one hand with the other
 To let it go go go
Ganga maiya [mother Ganges]
 flow flow flow (Evoking the classical graceful flowing mudra for a river.)
 Oh just slow slow slow
 From the top of the mountain to the bottom of the sea
 and what happens in between is up to my imagination
 That’s my job as a dancer
 So if I held one hand up like that and held another one up
 Would it say something to you? Would it? Would it? Would it?

At this juncture Rao pauses to include rapid and spectacular kathakali eye motions. She concludes with words that directly convey the ‘fleshliness’ of the body that is the material of this spectacle as, increasing the speed and volume of her speech, she recites,

So with my eyelid stuck to my eyeball,
 and my nail stuck to my toe,

²⁹³ Ghosh, “Locating Camp and Parody in Maya K. Rao’s *Deep Fried Jam* and *Non-Stop Feel Good Show*.”

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

and my brain stuck to my cell,
 I'm a DANCER.
 And once that dance lesson was over
 My mother said come on, learn to walk first.

In this sketch, Rao simultaneously stages the making and unmaking of a kathakali dancer on the contemporary stage. “Do not be taken by the spectacularity of my performance,” she appears to be saying, while breaking down her *mudras*. At the same time, she invites us to think about what it means to truly *learn to walk* referring to how in the cosmic register of kathakali, the everyday register, and that of Zen Buddhism and similar formations of meditative thought/action, attention to one's body while walking can be transformative. In these practices, as Lutz Koepnick has written on the aesthetics and politics of walking, the power of physical motion lies in realizing movement “towards the unseen and unknown.”²⁹⁶ In experimental sequences such as these, Rao creates openings to activate different kinds of audience engagement in the moment-to-moment of the ‘now,’ presenting the experience of duration, space, becoming, unbecoming, through the body's gesture. In making kathakali gesture strange in these ways, Rao also suggests that she is breaking away from the compulsion to repeat at the individual, and social levels, and through her minor practice, invites the formation of a new kind of audience.

Sensorial ruptures in *The-Non-Stop-Feel-Good Show*

In contrast to exploring an androgynous aesthetic in *Deep Fried Jam*, Rao's multiple, outlandish, even grotesque feminine forms in *The-Non-Stop-Feel-Good Show* (talk-show host, psychic cook, over-zealous, America-returned jogger, Machiavellian politician, an elderly version of her own self) mobilize gesture to express curiosity about the geologies of their bodies, exhibit an openness to knowledge acquired through sense perception—specifically the proximal senses of taste, smell, and touch—and enact transgressions of exterior body and interior mind in their everyday being-in-the world. In particular, I want to draw attention to Rao's interaction with food on stage.

Rao engages food elements not only to inform her gestural work but also to greatly reinvigorate the audience's sensory relation with happenings on stage. In one moment in the *Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show*, Rao is on a quest to enact the perfect advertisement for a holiday on an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Her prop is a watermelon. She begins by taking a bite out of the fruit, commenting on how juicy it is and after a few more mouthfuls she proceeds to place the melon on her head and rub it all over her face and body, also anointing the audience members with it on her way off-stage.

In Rao's performance, the melon is sacrificed in a liberating gesture in which a named object (melon) becomes a sensuous thing. The audience's senses are opened again to a new kind of pleasurable engagement with happenings on stage. They cannot merely consume this scene, but wonder and are curious. Postcolonial theorist Lata Mani has written of how the sensory realm occupies a privileged position in market-driven economies:

The invitation to consume, is framed as an invitation to touch, feel, smell, taste ever more things, ever more intensely, ever more frequently. The increased currency of “more,” “extreme,” “beyond” is linguistic evidence of this. Nothing is ever enough. ‘More’ always beckons. The ordinary pales against the allure of the extreme. Pleasure is seen as the product of a chase; one which constantly requires breaking the sense barrier

²⁹⁶ Koepnick, Lutz, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, New York: Columbia UP, 2014, 220.

in experiencing something more or different. There is a contradiction and a reversal here. While one pursues pleasure to satisfy the senses, it is now being argued that to really experience pleasure one needs to go *beyond* the senses, at the very least beyond one's current experience of them. This positions the senses as mere receptors. The senses become subordinate to a concept of pleasure."²⁹⁷



Figure 26: Maya Krishna Rao in *The Non-Stop-Feel-Good-Show* (2013). Image courtesy of the artist.

Following this, Rao's action of putting the watermelon on herself also allows her to assume an "alterity" akin to "madness."²⁹⁸ The impact of making such a move, as Deleuzian art and performance scholar Stephen Zepke might say, is to revivify sensations of, in this case, a familiar food object. Rao produces an event that "begins and ends the moment it occurs."²⁹⁹ Further, by untethering personal desires from those of an aspirational society (via this unusual commercial for a tropical getaway), she displays a means of gesturally untrapping herself from market-driven conceptions of the human and to ever widen the discursive space of our understanding of subjectivity.

A Choreopolitical Walk

In her response to the protests around the December 16th 2012 brutal rape of Jyoti Pandey, Rao created the piece *Walk*. "I know from doing the work that when you're in a rhythm, the imagination works quite differently. I enter something like a condition of rhythm...I

²⁹⁷ Mani, Lata, *The Integral Nature of Things: Critical Reflections on the Present*, New Delhi: Routledge, p. 160

²⁹⁸ Stephen Zepke, "Becoming a Citizen of the World," in *Deleuze and Performance*, 123.

²⁹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, "One Less Manifesto," trans. E. dal Molin and T. Murray, in T. Murray (ed.), *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 240.

open my senses because the atmosphere is rife.”³⁰⁰ *Walk* developed from Rao’s observation of young people walking for days outside Parliament, through December-January 2012/13. The performance consists of Rao simply walking on stage to spoken verse and a consistent beat. Her performance, though, is an expansion of what the act of walking means. She sees it as the “line between thinking, doing and reflecting.”³⁰¹ Her first steps are hesitant on the stage as she counts, one, two, three...embodying the concept that with each attentive step forward, “one receives wide open and deep into oneself, the gifts of the universe.”³⁰² What this implies is that to walk is to extend mind and body through slow physical movement.³⁰³ Scholars like Trinh T. Minh-ha have discussed walking as feminist praxis and adopting a witness-like stance.³⁰⁴ Rao recites, “Walk...I want to walk, not at nine, ten, eleven but at twelve midnight on the streets.”

Lutz Koepnick’s description of the aesthetic power of walking is resonant with Rao’s own thinking:

The physical mobility of walking is of critical importance to the merging of perceptual registers, for it is the experience of our own body in motion that here enables us to open up to the possibility of expanding the boundaries of ourselves and remap our bodies and minds relations to the spaces around us. It displaces the fixity of things and in a controlled manner relinquishes some control over one’s perceptions, sensations and thoughts.³⁰⁵

Andre Lepecki has written about choreopolitics as that moment when dance and movement become categories to redefine action and time. More specifically, choreopolitics is an embodied movement which would enable a “redistribution and reinvention of bodies, affects, and senses, through which one may learn how to *move politically*, how to invent, activate, seek, or experiment with a movement, whose only sense (meaning and direction) is the experimental exercise of freedom”³⁰⁶ (emphasis mine). Lepecki turns to Hannah Arendt on his definition of freedom as “the capacity to begin something.”³⁰⁷

Rao’s gesture of walking with a new consciousness presents this same capacity. As political praxis and radical engagement, her minor, experimental *kathakali* gesture is a being, doing, knowing, activated in performance, to evoke a new consciousness.

Gesture is semantic
 Gesture creates social space
 Gesture creates an ‘affective landscape’
 Gesture is radically relational
 Gesture is a creative tool
 Gesture generates sensation
 Gesture is an invitation
 Gesture is a mode of knowing

³⁰⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “One Less Manifesto.”

³⁰¹ Fieldwork interview with Maya Krishna Rao August 2015.

³⁰² See Trinh T. Minh-ha, on “walking,” in Trinh, T. Minh Ha. *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event*. New York: Routledge. 2011. Print.

³⁰³ Koepnick 220.

³⁰⁴ Trinh, T. Minh-ha “Witness” keynote address, GWS 20th anniversary at UC Berkeley, 7 October 2011.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Lepecki, Andre *Choreopolitics and Choreopolice: or the Task of the Dancer*, Winter 2013, Vol. 57, No. 4, 20.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

In this chapter I have shown how, thinking and performing with notions of the minor, Rao leads us to a much-expanded conceptualization of gesture (as above), to infuse the here and now with more possibilities. In the next chapter, I carry similar themes forward to a new medium. I examine the work of visual artist and sculptor Jagannath Panda as he offers an ontology of urban “becoming” in the new satellite city of Gurgaon (located 20 miles from Delhi and part of the National Capital Region), to expand possibilities of the urban.

Chapter 3

Immanent Urbanism in Jagannath Panda's Art and Sculpture

The city as egg (or an immanent urban mode)³⁰⁸



Figure 27: Jagannath Panda, “City Breeds” (2005), oil on canvas, 54”x90.” Image courtesy of the artist.

Jagannath Panda’s large format oil on canvas, *City breeds* (2005), created the year he moved to Gurgaon from Delhi, features an egg hovering over a beam. The beam is painted in the attention-grabbing yellow and black markings of construction hazard signs, and is itself suspended mid-air over a flat cityscape. These low-rises are more reminiscent of neighboring Delhi’s modernist concrete government housing blocks than of the spectacular built form of the new urban space of Gurgaon.

32 kilometers (20 miles) west of New Delhi, the rapidly expanding satellite city of Gurgaon forms part of the National Capital Region’s metropolitan area, is one of the biggest hubs of outsourcing companies in the world, and has been central to Delhi’s dream of becoming a global city.³⁰⁹ The effects of the liberalization of the Indian markets have also manifest in the country’s urban built form. Real estate industry deregulation, for instance, has had a tremendous impact on peripheral urban land, such as Gurgaon once was.³¹⁰ In the past 25 years, Gurgaon has

³⁰⁸ Here I am inspired in method by Clarice Lispector’s meditations in her short story, “The Egg and the Chicken,” and discussions around this text in a seminar with Professor Trinh T. Minh-ha, Fall 2009, UC Berkeley. See Clarice Lispector, *Selected Cronicas*, Trans. Giovanni Ponteiro, (New Directions Publications: New York, 1984).

³⁰⁹ Tathagata Chatterji, “The micro-politics of urban transformation in the context of globalisation: a case study of Gurgaon, India,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 36: 2 (2013), 274, and Veronique Dupont, “The Dream of Delhi as a Global City,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35.3 (May 2011) 533–54.

³¹⁰ As Gavin Shatkin has written, “liberalization in Gurgaon provid[ed] new incentives and opportunities for developers, investors and landowners to form political coalitions that could exercise the necessary political and/or

grown from a cluster of hamlets on the outskirts of Delhi to a ‘millennial’ urban space of 1.5 million people.

Jagannath Panda is a migrant to Gurgaon. Born in a small town near Bhubhaneswar, Odisha in 1970, he received training in 19th century Oriya palm leaf manuscript painting before moving to M.S. University, in Baroda, to study sculpture. A degree at the Royal College of Art in London and a residency at Fukuoka University in Japan followed this. Panda moved back to Delhi in the early 1990s and to Gurgaon in 2005.³¹¹ Since moving to Gurgaon, Panda has been tracking this city’s astronomical growth in his sculptures and canvases, for over a decade.

On the horizontal axis of the canvas, the egg functions as an interruption and curiously resembles the techno-aesthetic of flamboyant, performative, ultra-modern corporate constructions in Gurgaon, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Dubai and other millennial or global ‘breeds’ of city (the iconic egg-shaped ‘gherkin’ building at 30 St Mary Axe, London, for instance). Panda’s visual archive typically includes material from the city of Gurgaon and mythological imagery from palm leaf paintings of the *Geet Gobind* (12th century poet Jayadeva’s *Song of Govinda*).³¹² His works also employ surrealistic distortions of scale and weight to create intense urban dreamworlds. In the *Geet Gobind*, the beginning of the cosmos is the egg, and for surrealists, the egg signifies new life or an intrauterine state, and is also related to the eye and vision. The egg, as organic form, is itself the definition of ‘development,’ ‘becoming,’ or ‘immanence’—miniscule differentiations in the (vigorously transforming) egg emerge as major differences in the final creature. The egg therefore traces and links meaning as it meets performative architectural forms, crossing South Asian and Euro-American visual culture and philosophical genealogies. To categorize, pin down, or crack open an egg is to destroy it. An alternate mode of knowing would be to recognize that it cannot be apprehended immediately, to imagine its weight and fragility, and to actively read its ‘immanence,’ or speculate on its development, while suspending fixed and bounded categories of thought.³¹³

A creative reading of *City Breeds* offers the painting itself as method to apprehend the new urban space of Gurgaon. *City Breeds* also contains the conceptual seeds of Panda’s later engagement with Gurgaon’s urban matter. The eggshell, for instance, foreshadows the artist’s interests in exploring and repurposing Gurgaon’s urban surfaces, including its glass-faced buildings and overpasses, to trouble understandings of the ‘urban’ as defined by external form. And the egg itself recalls the fluidity, interactivity, and transformation of Gurgaon’s urban elements and processes, resonant themes in his later works. The egg prefigures Panda’s commitment to exposing spatial anxieties around a city’s interiority and exteriority, and questioning the strict separation of matter, subjects and objects, that belong ‘inside’ the urban, from those that do not; the eggshell is both inside and outside at once and the (interior) invisibility of the egg is inextricable from its (exterior) supervisibility.³¹⁴ The egg-canvas, egg-like building and incubating egg, or ‘becoming city’ therefore demand a new epistemology—one of ‘immanence’ or existing within, (as opposed to a transcendent critique that would seek

coercive power to seize control of land and push through new development.” Gavin Shatkin, “Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 6. See also Annapurna Shaw, “Metropolitan City Growth and Management in Post-Liberalized India,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 44–62.

³¹¹ Gayatri Sinha, *Jagannath Panda*, exhibition catalogue, Berkeley Square Gallery June 29–July 15, 2006, 4.

³¹² The *Geet Gobind* or *Song of Govinda* is a work composed by the 12th century poet, Jayadeva, in present day Odisha.

³¹³ Lispector, “The Egg and the Chicken.”

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

explanations for city-making in outside forces alone, including those of globalization, neoliberalization etc.)

In this chapter, I engage the themes of this dissertation, within the media of visual art and sculpture. Panda's works open this urban space to a different direction or orientation than that laid out in real estate plans, pointing to a future that is indeterminable. As he says, "the idea of rapid development raises many questions—what are we hurtling towards? Each material I work with has the potential to transform into something else. I keep discovering what these materials can be."³¹⁵ Through such creative renderings and repurposings, Panda's works express Gurgaon's 'molecular becoming,' or a conviction that the urban is always in process and transforming. His canvases and sculptural works, based in the materials of Gurgaon, are attempts to disrupt boundaries between rural/urban, outside/inside, past/future, nature/culture, animal/human, animate/inanimate that have undergirded discussions of development in this new urban space and have thus territorialized alternate views of how cities might take form.

Gurgaon's break-neck speed growth is a manifestation of a new form of urbanization unfolding across the country, challenging inherited conceptions of the urban as a "fixed, bounded and universally generalizable settlement type."³¹⁶ The speed, scale, and scope of urbanization here demand a supple, alternative cartography to grasp change. I posit that Panda's work offers one such alternate view, inviting us to consider the urban as a space of "immanent" change, wherein contact, contingency, and contagion amongst different urban bodies and affects create the city.



Figure 28: Luxury residential apartments (commissioned in 2013) by the Indian franchise of French architecture firm, Maison Edouard Francois, in Gurgaon's sector 71. "The residential towers are implanted like trees, creating a calm and green environment. The rooms are oriented according to the principles of vastu, an ancient doctrine on how the laws of nature affect human dwellings. A space in each residence is reserved for divinity altars. Three separate circulations are organized for inhabitants, guests, and services. The apartments make use of materials such as marble and wood and have large interiors, including double height spaces, and offer 360° views onto the surrounding landscape." Source: <http://www.edouardfrancois.com>

³¹⁵ Jagannath Panda, Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014.

³¹⁶ Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "Towards a new epistemology of the urban?" *City*, 19:2-3 (2015), 151.

‘New New Delhi’

Touted as the ‘new New Delhi,’ with direct connections to the capital via the Delhi Metro and only thirty minutes from the airport, Gurgaon is where Delhi’s desires for the future are being realized. As urbanist Tathagata Chatterji describes it, “with more than forty shopping malls, eight five-star hotels, seven golf courses, state-of-the-art ‘business parks’ housing the offices of two hundred and fifty Fortune 500 companies, and large numbers of elite high-rise apartment blocks,”³¹⁷ Gurgaon caters to aspirants of a ‘global’ lifestyle. The satellite city is also a center for food and entertainment with leisure spaces such as ‘Cyber Hub’ and ‘Kingdom of Dreams’ offering every Indian and global cuisine, and Vegas style live entertainment shows.

The precipitous nature of urban growth here, driven by the private real estate sector in a milieu of what urban theorist Shubra Gururani terms “flexible planning,”³¹⁸ has given rise to many paradoxes in the urban socio-material of Gurgaon, perceptible in the city’s fragmented spatial regime.³¹⁹ Gurgaon is very wealthy, contributing a significant amount to India’s gross domestic product; however, unlike cities of similar wealth, it lacks a central grid for electricity, water and waste.³²⁰ These lapses in city-wide public services are a function of Gurgaon’s peculiar development. The Haryana Urban Development Authority, the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon, and private developers each have overlapping or ambiguous jurisdiction, but little coordination in their functions here.³²¹ The city has no discernible center and, as architects Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar describe it, the plush residential enclaves and office complexes are like “floating islands” separated by Gurgaon’s old village settlements.³²² While technology and business sector employees have moved to Gurgaon from Delhi, from across the country, and across the globe, rural migrant workers—largely from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand—have also been drawn to the city for employment, moving Panda to term Gurgaon as a space for “everyone’s utopia.”³²³ The latter provide security, domestic and other services to Gurgaon’s gated urban enclaves while themselves grappling with inadequate housing, public transportation, electricity, water supply and other amenities. At the same time, the dreams of new, young white-collar professionals working in Gurgaon’s global corporations,

³¹⁷ Chatterji, “The micro-politics of urban transformation,” 274.

³¹⁸ According to Gururani, “flexible planning” encompasses a range of political maneuvering techniques—exemptions, compromises, adjustments, and, on occasion, force to acquire land. She describes how, in the late 1980s, Kushal Pal Singh, millionaire property developer and owner of Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), the company that first started building in Gurgaon, maneuvered this special domain of urban interactions, manipulated regulatory laws, and, with approvals granted by political leaders of the Congress Party, alongside caste patronage and kinship negotiations, succeeded in acquiring large tracts of agricultural land here. Singh’s vision had been to construct a city for the emerging middle class, however upon obtaining land from farmers, plot-by-plot (amounting to a total of 3,000 hectares) DLF constructed vast residential and commercial complexes with no overall plan for the city. See Shubra Gururani, “Flexible Planning: The Making of India’s ‘Millennium City,’ Gurgaon” in *Ecologies of Urbanism in India* Eds. Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013) 121-122.

³¹⁹ Chatterji, “The micro-politics of urban transformation,” 274.

³²⁰ Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, *Gurgaon Glossaries*, (Mumbai: CRIT Studios, 2013), www.crit.in, accessed 4 January 2014.

³²¹ Shruti Rajagopalan and Alexander T. Tabarrok, “Lessons from Gurgaon, India’s Private City,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, October 24, 2014), <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2514652>.

³²² Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, entry for “underground” in *Gurgaon Glossaries*.

³²³ Jagannath Panda. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014

and inhabiting these offices and luxury apartments, too, meet unhappily with the lack of civic conveniences.³²⁴

Gurgaon also faces resource shortages and environmental challenges; the city has almost exhausted its groundwater, with an estimated 30,000 borewells being sunk even as the water table recedes each year.³²⁵ Similarly, demand for electricity far outstrips supply, and in the face of frequent power cuts, most apartment and commercial complexes rely on their own generators. Gurgaon developers are, therefore, compelled to promise their more elite residents ‘environments’ rather than homes, to match their aspirational lifestyles, in gated communities with clubs, gardens, parking, laundry, security systems and other “one button” services.³²⁶



Figure 29: Gurgaon’s skyline. Available at <http://www.ethicalhomes.in/the-incredible-rise-of-gurgaons-real-estate/>

Developers who shaped Gurgaon are now premier builders at the national level, reconfiguring the peri-urban areas surrounding the metropolises of Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata, and the space thus joins a global urban landscape of similar new cities in Asia, such as Guangzhou and Zhengzhou in China. As studies of Asia’s urbanisms increasingly center on puzzles posed by the ‘splintered’ development of new satellite cities, hybrid city spaces, private cities, ghost cities, and peripheral zones, the new urban space of Gurgaon too, is under academic scrutiny.³²⁷ Mainstream media accounts of Gurgaon in the past decade have tended to focus either on the city’s astronomical rise and developer-driven planning or on its fragmented infrastructure and the environmental risks of rapid development, and not on the particular new intensities of urbanization here. As Gururani notes, such accounts generally follow one of two narratives: Gurgaon as artifact of “neoliberal Indian economic success,”—a spectacle city that

³²⁴ Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, entry for “Project” in *Gurgaon Glossaries*.

³²⁵ “The Gurgaon Syndrome in Indian Urbanization,” *LiveMint*, August 1, 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/2uaCyQWMEqomDw2Dj8LGTJ/The-Gurgaon-syndrome-in-Indian-urbanization.html>, accessed August 3 2016.

³²⁶ Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, entry for “Project” in *Gurgaon Glossaries*.

³²⁷ See, for instance, Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy Eds. *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Wiley Blackwell: Sussex, 2008.

was produced by the innovative strategies of private capital; or as “malaise,” attributable to unregulated or unsystematic planning, “endemic” to a Global South context.³²⁸ Both these narratives meet their imaginative limit in Gurgaon, where, because of its particular pattern of urban growth, conventional distinctions between city and village, global and local, networked and isolated, sustainability and environmental hazard, formal and informal, are blurred.

Here, I suggest that Panda’s works offer an entirely new look at Gurgaon, based in the satellite city’s own urban material. The space of Gurgaon is not mere context for Panda’s art. In his large format acrylics and monumental sculptures, Panda sculpts, paints, collages, and molds the animate and inanimate material of Gurgaon in such manner as to provoke sensation and thought about the role of objects, animals, and materials in producing Gurgaon.

His canvases, sculptures, and assemblages featuring construction machinery, high-capacity roads, bricks, sewage pipes, upholstery, glass, birds, dogs, beehives etc. in new combinations, point to alternate, as yet invisible, arrangements of Gurgaon’s matter. In contrast to the hegemony of urban plans seeking to carve space for the more efficient movement of capital, across Panda’s work, plastic expressions of various becomings, reveal urban change itself to be an ‘immanent’ process—one with many possible different futures. His works suggest that all plans are open to “becoming unrecognizable, becoming other, becoming artistic,”³²⁹ and reveal that human, animal, plant, thing, are always already partial expressions of each other in the urban realm. In this proposition, the mobility or fluidity of capital is *not* opposed to the fixity of places, subjects, and objects; or, capital alone is not that which possesses creative potential.³³⁰ Rather, Panda’s works signal that change in a city comes from the often unpredictable interactions of its own materials, as connections are made and unmade and re-made horizontally, immanently, rather than (only) as a result of vertical hierarchies.³³¹

Such a proposition is different from the struggles espoused in urban works by Indian modernists such as F.N. Souza, Bhupen Khakhar, Sudhir Patwardhan and others, who produced art in a different era of city making. Their largely figural narrative canvases attempted to engage the social and physical realities of fast changing city life (mainly in Bombay) and its impact on human relations. Panda’s works, in contrast, are in a new city, that of Gurgaon, and feature very few human beings, though their mark is everywhere, in depictions of domestic spaces and consumer goods. Instead animals, puppets, and mythological figures tug at other times and spaces, to conjure up alternate futures in Gurgaon. Panda’s works gesture to an expanded field of urban art and sculpture, one that in its expression of potentiality is close to the discipline of urban planning and policy.

As the Delhi based Raqs Media Collective have noted, “while both urban art and urban policy can be described as designs on the surface of the [city’s] future, if the first acts to extend the imagination, to bring forward the future into the present, the latter cherishes predictability, to ensure that the present repeats itself in the future.”³³² Making use of visual notes and materials

³²⁸ Gururani, “Flexible Planning,” 122.

³²⁹ Elizabeth Grosz commenting on the effectivity of an “ontology of becoming,” notes that a commitment to viewing political projects as “becomings,” rather than fixed beings or entities, opens them to new directions/orientations, “beyond planning and control in the present, that makes all plans at best provisional, open to revision, and always in the process of transformation.” This is what I suggest Panda’s becomings gesture towards. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, (Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin), 2005.

³³⁰ Ozan Karaman, “An Immanentist Approach to the Urban,” *Antipode* 44:4 (2012), 1288.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 1289.

³³² Raqs Media Collective, “A Letter to Amalia Jyran, Who will be Fifty Four in 2061 CE,” Catalogue of the 6th Momentum Biennial, 2011.

from Gurgaon, Panda's works hold the promise of contingency—that everything could be different from how it is now and that the urban could be imagined differently. Such a view exposes how 'development' might itself be unsettled to indicate a co-present awareness of the world, rather than a world where a regressive past gives over to an advanced or developed one.

In the next section I describe in broad strokes, the relationship between art, the urban and modernism in post-independence India followed by analyses of Panda's immanent approach to the urban.

'Hope and Disappointment': Art and the Urban in Post-independence India

Indian modernity marks a movement from village, to city, to a transnational space, that is not unidirectional, with each space registering "different aspirations and affiliations."³³³ In a chapter focusing on 'the city' in *Art for a Modern India 1947-1980*, Rebecca Brown examines film, visual art, architecture and sculpture to argue that post-independence artists engaged images of the urban to express the twin faces of "hopefulness" and "disappointment" in India's postcolonial development project.³³⁴ Tracking Nehruvian era rhetoric, Bollywood films *Sree 420* (1955) and *Waqt* (1965), Gieve Patel's artwork rendering working class lives in Bombay, Ram Kumar's expressions of the sacred city of Varanasi, as well as Charles Correa's Bombay architecture and its evocation of an "Indian relation to sky and space,"³³⁵ amongst other urban objects of analysis, Brown shows how the city was imagined and figured as a complex modern space across post-independence Indian art and architecture.³³⁶

According to Brown, attitudes toward the city were framed by a material context of inadequate housing, transportation, and sanitation infrastructure, as cities such as Bombay attracted rural migrants.³³⁷ In addition, the Partition had also brought millions of refugees to Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and elsewhere.³³⁸ If the nationalist movement had led to an appreciation of the village space, and a questioning of the assumptions of Western style modernity, under Gandhi, then science and technological development in village and city spaces were central to Nehru's postcolonial government. All these factors complicated the relationships between the urban and the rural, "the factory and the farm, the village and dense *mohalla* (city neighborhood)," with these complex intervals playing a role in the construction of a modern India.³³⁹ As she puts it, the city was an "ideal metaphor" for Indian modernism: "between the local and the international, the Indian and the Euro-American, the ancient past and the 'not yet.'"³⁴⁰

Therefore, from the 1940s through the 1960s, as the figure of the city assumed prominence in the national imagination, there were noticeable shifts from the received tradition of painting landscapes to painting cityscapes and streetscapes. Artist-witnesses in the Progressive Artists Groups in Bombay and Calcutta such as F.N Souza, K.H. Ara, M.F. Husain, Rabin Mondal, Jogen Chowdhury, and others rendered the struggles of the urban poor—pavement dwellers, street vendors, prostitutes etc. For women artists of the time, the urban was a space of resistance, autonomy, anonymity, and escape. In the late 1960s and 1970s, if Goji Saroj Pal's

³³³ Gayatri Sinha, ed. *Art and Visual Culture in India: 1857-2007*, (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009) 4.

³³⁴ Rebecca Brown, In *Art for a Modern India 1947-1980*, Kindle edition, location 1672.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, location 329

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, location 913.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, location 1666

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, location 1660

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, location 1663.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, location 1673.

works expressed women's gradual visibility in spheres beyond the domestic, Nasreen Mohamedi's produced meditative works in the 1970s detailing arduously the delicate and precise lines of geometric architectural spaces, urban streets and grids.³⁴¹

Art historians Roobina Karode and Shukla Sawant describe how, in the following two decades, up to the 1990s, artists responded to heavy-handed state power, (including the two-year emergency instituted by Indira Gandhi), the crushing of student and union movements, and the rise of religious fundamentalism in politics. Their response, Karode and Sawant note, was to engage with urban transformation in two ways—as citizens (this manifest as collectivized bodies of activist-artists making political interventions in urban public space for e.g. SAHMAT); and as subjective individuals chronicling everyday struggles and paradoxes.³⁴² Karode and Sawant describe these 'everyday' works as "painted allegories and narratives to renew political language" about human relations.³⁴³ This can be seen in the works of Sudhir Patwardhan, Gieve Patel, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Arpita Singh, Nalini Malini, Krishen Khanna, Anupam Sud, Jogen Chowdhury and a host of other artists.

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked another shift in relations between art and city. Globalization had begun to change the face of Indian cities as the prevalent logic of urban development planning began to shift. State actors began to play a very different role in urban development than they had in the pre-liberalization period. As Shatkin has put it, "they act[ed] less as stewards of a modernist future, and more as promoters of private sector visions of change [...] to glean more value from land."³⁴⁴ Through the 1990s and 2000s, artists such as Bharti Kher, Sudarshan Shetty, and Subodh Gupta have each fashioned an identity in line with an emergent or "new India" in a transnational space, as they work across sculpture, installation, and moving images, using everyday objects, practices, and imagery to offer commentaries on a radically altered Indian urban subjectivity. Kher's use of multiple, mass-produced, *bindis* as a motif to express contradictory and hybrid femininity and Gupta's stainless steel utensil sculptures commenting on middle-class aspiration and consumption are characteristic works. These artists are contemporaries of Panda, whose work, as I will show, is in conversation with theirs.

George Yúdice has argued that culture became an "expedient commodity" from the early 1990s onwards, as urban economic stimulation was seen as related to urban creativity.³⁴⁵ Likewise, in India, the reforms of the 1990s brought contemporary museums, art fairs, commercial art districts, private galleries, and performance venues, such that in the past two decades, Delhi has become a central player in the region's art market. Delhi's largest contemporary art event, the India Art Fair, drawing thousands of visitors and collectors, and generating many millions of rupees in sales each year, is testament to this.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Roobina Karode and Shukla Sawant, "City Lights, City Limits: Multiple Metaphors in Everyday Urbanism," In *Art and Visual Culture in India: 1857 – 2007*, ed. Gayatri Sinha, (Mumbai: New Delhi: Marg Foundation, 2009), 190-205.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Gavin Shatkin, "Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38:1 (2014), 6.

³⁴⁵ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Use of Culture in the Global Era*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. Quoted in Melissa Heer, "The Breath Within the Breath: Contemporary Performance Art Practices in India." PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2015, 57.

³⁴⁶ The India Art Fair 201 website states: "India Art Fair is South Asia's leading platform for modern and contemporary art and portal to the region's cultural landscape. Founded in 2008, India Art Fair has become the bedrock of a now booming cultural community with connections to every level of the market. Building on these

As art historian and scholar of Indian performance art, Melissa Heer has noted, very much a part of the global “experience economy,” the India Art Fair is as much a platform for contemporary Indian artists, as it is for promoting Delhi’s role on the global arts *and* economic stage.³⁴⁷

Indeed Indian art saw its biggest boom period from 2005-2008. Khullar notes that the Indian art market grew in value from \$2 million in 2001 to \$400 million in 2008.³⁴⁸ Art from India was suddenly selling at exponentially higher prices than in the decade past and Indian auction houses such as Saffronart and Osian became major spaces to learn about, acquire, and promote of Indian art.



Figure 30: Subodh Gupta, *Faith Matters* (2007-10), sushi belt, motor, steel, stainless steel, aluminum and brass utensils. Image available at www.bbc.com, review of Gupta’s works.

In India’s robust economy, main collectors on the art scene were privately wealthy Indians (both resident and non-resident), from older industrialist families, as well as newer beneficiaries of the country’s high growth rates—entrepreneurs from the high tech and financial industries. During these years, several private initiatives and galleries sprang up across metropolises including the Kiran Nadar Museum in Delhi, housing large private collections of modern and contemporary Indian art. Likewise, in Gurgaon, the not-for-profit Devi Art Foundation, is considered one of the country’s best contemporary art spaces and houses the private collection of industrialists Lekha and Anupam Poddar, while also hosting regular experimental exhibitions.³⁴⁹

foundations, India Art Fair is expanding its programming to reflect South Asia’s immense diversity in the visual arts and to provide a platform for innovation across disciplines and exchange, throughout the region and the world.” For more, see: The India Art Fair 2017, <http://www.indiaartfair.in/>.

³⁴⁷ Heer, “The Breath within the Breath” 59.

³⁴⁸ Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations*, 6.

³⁴⁹ Somini Sengupta, “In India a Busy Fair and a Spirited Art Scene,” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/arts/design/31summit.html>. See also, Steven Madoff, “India’s Art: Booming

Gurgaon too has grown to become a hub for contemporary art in urban India. As art journalist Jyoti Dhar writes, “there is a popular saying within the National Capital Region’s artist community: you start out in Ghaziabad [a city of the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh that forms part of the National Capital Region], then, if all goes well, you move to Delhi, and then, if you do really well, you move to Gurgaon.”³⁵⁰ Dhar notes that as a space peripheral to Delhi, artists began to move to Gurgaon in the 1990s for its cheaper rents. However, this satellite city itself was growing too fast. With soaring real estate prices, Gurgaon very quickly became unaffordable for all but a few artists, who have since grown to be the biggest names in contemporary Indian art, including the aforementioned Subodh Gupta and Bharti Kher, as well as Arunkumar HG, art and design duo, Thukral and Tagra, and Panda.³⁵¹ Indeed Gurgaon, as emergent art and culture capital, has produced Panda the artist, as much as it is produced by him.

Immanent urbanism and Jagannath Panda’s art

In his works, Panda is reminiscent of Deleuzian inspired ‘immanent urbanists’ who hold that the city is not a fixed node but a milieu in continual formation, expressed variously in generative ideas such as ‘urban socionatures,’ ‘cyborg urbanisms’ ‘urban metabolisms’ or ‘urban assemblage’ etc.³⁵² Immanent urban thinkers deliberately and closely consider unique city objects, subjects, processes, affects, and interactions for what they might reveal about a city’s uncertain future(s). Deleuzian city planner and theorist Jean Hillier usefully describes an immanent theory of change through the example of the multiple ‘cocktail effects’ of air and water pollution:

“[air and water pollution] exemplify immanence whereby individual elements, connected in new relationships, may interact and develop different collective properties not implicit within their singular components.”³⁵³

Such urban theory describes a city’s constant unfolding or becoming and may be contrasted with ideas of transcendence, which refer to “absolute or universal ideas ‘out-there’” that shape urban materials and behavior.³⁵⁴ An immanent urban theory of Gurgaon would therefore conceive of this space as one of potentiality, which contains unpredictable elements. For Hillier, the art practices of Diego Velázquez, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Salvador Dali and Julie Mehretu offers inspiration for such theory. In the same way that the Surrealists and Cubists (and more recently, Mehretu), incorporated multiple perspectives on space and time in single works, and thus operated in a fourth dimension or a “utopian concept of being experienced in the future,”³⁵⁵ to assemble known elements into “a picture not hitherto existing,”³⁵⁶ for Hillier, the urban plan, too, must enact such speculative arrangement of urban elements, actors and processes. In Hillier’s refreshing view, strategic planning practitioners are therefore also artists,

and Shaking,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2007,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/arts/design/07mado.html>.

³⁵⁰ Jyoti Dhar, “Rethinking the Peripheral,” in *Motherland: Gurgaon*, May 9, 2013, <http://www.motherlandmagazine.com>.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² See Colin McFarlane for a summary of such new and productive theory, in “Assemblage and critical urbanism,” *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 15:2 (2011) 204-224.

³⁵³ Jean Hillier, *Stretching Beyond the Horizon: A Multiplanar Theory of Spatial Planning and Governance* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2007), 59.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 68

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

“experimenting with paths and territories, working simultaneously between past/present and the future, in a creative agonistic realm between presence and absence, manifest and latent”³⁵⁷

Useful to place in conversation with Panda’s artwork is *Gurgaon Glossaries*, an artwork in a similar immanentist mode, by Prasad Shetty, Rupali Gupte and Prasad Khanolkar, from Mumbai’s Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT.)³⁵⁸ In *Gurgaon Glossaries*, they mine Gurgaon’s urban fabric for, what they term, ‘micronarratives.’ Taking the form of photographs and short pieces of descriptive text, the *Glossaries* consist of a display of one hundred ‘terms’ unique to Gurgaon. When exhibited at the Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon, black-and-white images of Gurgaon’s high-rise apartments, street signage, corner shops, malls and parking lots (shot in the style of visual fieldnotes) and brief textual commentaries on Gurgaon life and matters, including stories, reflections, found text, mini-ethnographies, lyrical prose, vignettes, or speculative narratives, were mounted on 8”x 11” cards on the gallery wall.

Gupte describes how *Gurgaon Glossaries* began:

“We started with more or less reactionary assumptions and ways of looking at Gurgaon—developer dominance, environmental unsustainability, accelerated neoliberal urbanism etc. but during our preliminary fieldwork, we realized that settling, it’s finding *it’s own terms* to do so. We decided to compile these terms or ways in which the city settles [...]. Terms; not only as new words and phrases, but also new ways of doing things, new things, new relations and new practices. *Gurgaon Glossaries* is a compilation of such terms by which the city of Gurgaon has been settling. ‘Settling’ here is not necessarily a resolution of city forces, nor is it a peaceful coexistence of different people and practices. It is rather a set of processes by which things get worked out—the elaborate mechanics, which keep the city in a perpetual state of becoming.”³⁵⁹

The *Glossaries* include terms such as ‘White-Collar Revolutionaries’, ‘100 Families with Kitchen Gardens’, ‘Social Entrepreneurs’, ‘Phone Card for Migrant Workers.’ Spread out on the wall as separate terms, the *Glossaries* encourage looking at Gurgaon as assemblage, or, in Claire Colebrook’s definition, a “complex constellation” of these various terms—objects, bodies, expressions, affects, territories—that come together temporarily and in various different ways to “create new ways of functioning.”³⁶⁰ Interactions between human, animal and material components form the assemblage. Considering urban space within this paradigm, “urban actors, forms or processes are not defined by prior existing or essential properties but rather by the assemblages they enter and reconstitute.”³⁶¹ Arranged on the gallery wall, visitors were encouraged to form surprising groupings to reveal new ways in which disparate elements of the city might come together to make the city “work.” Their work thus expresses a consciousness of the immanent quality of space-making processes in Gurgaon, similar to Panda’s own work that I examine below.³⁶²

³⁵⁷ Hillier, 30

³⁵⁸ Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, *Gurgaon Glossaries*.

³⁵⁹ Email correspondence with Rupali Gupte, March 12, 2014.

³⁶⁰ Colebrook, Claire, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 17.

³⁶¹ Colin McFarlane, “Assemblage and Critical Urbanism,” 208

³⁶² Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, and Prasad Khanolkar, *Gurgaon Glossaries*.

Jagannath Panda's Art

Panda says of his move to Gurgaon in 2005:

“[...] my older work was entirely different. Moving here was a turning point in my artwork. Gurgaon has ‘development’ happening everywhere, in front of me, behind me. I was effortlessly witness to it, participant in it. The city itself is partly barren, partly highly developed, partly rural. Since moving here, I explore the various urban surfaces I see here, negotiating their qualities.”³⁶³

His style combines modernist sculpture and painting, intricate brushwork, fabric collaging on both sculpture and canvas, and the deliberate use of found, malleable, objects. Panda's training in the mythic structures of Oriya palm leaf painting is evident across canvases. He notes that with this training, he never considered ‘arts’ and ‘crafts’ as separate but rather as tools to explore more possibilities in his own practice. Palm leaf miniature paintings feature intricate illustrations inspired by scenes from the 12th century poet Jayadeva's *Geet Gobinda* (song of Govinda), detailing the love between the Hindu God Krishna and Radha in the Vrindavan forests. The poem inspired art forms across the Indo-Gangetic plain. As art historian Sinha offers, “the beauty and power of Jayadeva's poem travelled from his native Kenduli village in Odisha across the breadth of India to the distant Punjabi hill kingdoms. There it inspired the Pahari schools of painting—an efflorescence of illustrated manuscripts that envision the love of Radha and Krishna.”³⁶⁴

Sinha observes that Odisha itself serves as Panda's ‘distant beloved,’ “an ideal that creates the location of otherness, so valuable to his critique of urban heterotopia,” while Panda's own position as an urban migrant offers him a “synaptic” vision—one taken from “afar and within, both in historical and spatial time [...] like a rapidly shifting lens that enlarges scale and encapsulates detail.”³⁶⁵

Panda's work from 2005 to the present has been a rupture from his previous art, as the ‘matter’ of Gurgaon became his exclusive focus. His canvases and sculptures employ recognizable elements from a typical Gurgaon scene and assemble these elements into a picture of reality that does not currently exist vis-a-vis these materials' relative placement and relations to other elements in that scene. Thereby he offers a creative and speculative or immanent cartography of the city—an image of the city's ‘virtual’ or potential. Glass-faced office towers appear to spring from or tilt and careen in multiple directions. Some show decay, or infestation by ants or beehives. They block and distort views of the cityscape, assume mysterious silhouettes, and present urban orders beyond Gurgaon's divided spaces. Alongside construction and machinery, the action and participation of goats, beehives, geckos and serpents claim space and animate urban scenes, while humans usually feature as shadows, puppets, decentered distant forms, or as extensions of the plant, mineral, and animal urban world that surrounds them. Further, repeated Hindu and Buddhist mythological motifs open up to an alternate spatio-temporal system, within the now/here. Panda frequently makes use of such sources, intrigued by the “story within a story structure of mythological events” and how these may lend his works the

³⁶³ Jagannath Panda, Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014.

³⁶⁴ Gayatri Sinha, *Jagannath Panda*, exhibition catalogue, Berkeley Square Gallery June 29-July 15, 2006, 4.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

qualities of multiple perspectives and levels of meaning.³⁶⁶ More generally, his engagement with a mythological past dilates the present moment's compulsion to accelerate in development time. For instance, in *The Epic* (figure 32), the ultra modern glass faces of buildings alongside the mythological figures of Ravana and the wing of Garuda, create a tension between the sacred and secular, and tradition and technology, also overturning the stultifying spatio-temporal politics that undergird these distinctions. Gallerist Peter Nagy describes Panda as “one of the few artists of his generation who has been able to work with religious imagery without succumbing to the powerful trap of kitsch.”³⁶⁷ By drawing on resources from other times, Panda indicates possibilities for multiple futures, for “open pathways and indeterminable consequences” alongside “regularities, norms and predictabilities” that we currently expect.³⁶⁸ These mythological, animal, and other times can thus unravel what philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has termed “the givenness of the present.”³⁶⁹ In this and other works, Panda often presents different moments of time and different dimensions of space in the same canvas or sculpture. As such, each point of view in the canvas is rendered unstable, and known objects are made unfamiliar (see figure 31). In turn, the observer of such work is invited to actively follow the canvases' many perspectives and the artist's creative gestures. In these works, time and space are malleable. The suggestion is that Panda (and the viewer) continually transform both urban space and time in order to give meaning to their intimate and everyday acts.



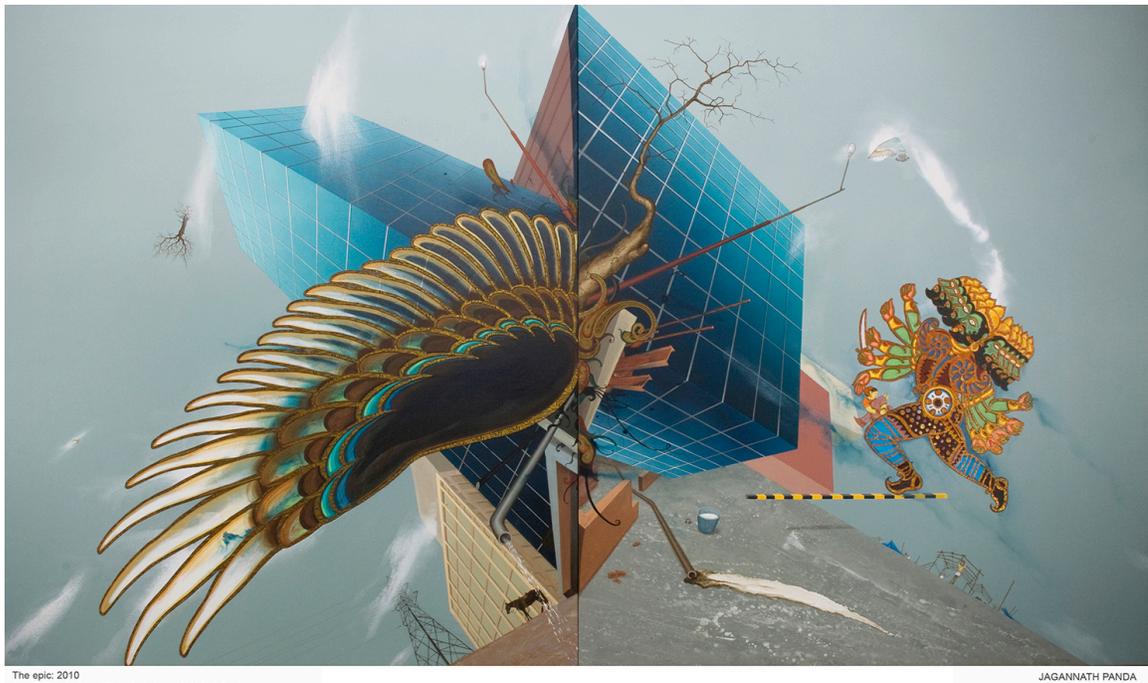
Figure 31: Jagannath Panda, *Beginning of a Story* (2007), acrylic, fabric and glue on canvas, 55.5”x102” Image courtesy of the artist.

³⁶⁶ Jagannath Panda, Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014.

³⁶⁷ Jagannath Panda, artist profile at Christies, <http://artist.christies.com/>

³⁶⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature*, 253.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.



The epic: 2010
Acrylic, Fabric, Glue, (Diplyche) : Size 13' X 7' 6 Feet

JAGANNATH PANDA

Figure 32: Jagannath Panda, *The Epic* (2010), Acrylic, Fabric, Glue, 13'x7'6". Image available at www.artsome.com

Panda's canvases and sculptures make use of techniques from collage (fabric collage to texture the skin of an animal, the trunk of a tree, or the upholstery of an interior scene, is one of Panda's preferred techniques), assemblage art, combine painting, construction art—all visual (and tactile) forms of expression that, through the use of 'real' objects in inventive form, embody discontent with the limits of representation, thereby not only expanding the range of possibilities for visual art, but narrowing the gap between 'Gurgaon art' and 'Gurgaon life'.³⁷⁰ Panda does not paint or sculpt in order to reproduce or copy the city of Gurgaon-as-model.³⁷¹ Instead, Panda opts to "reverse" the orthodox rules of representing, mapping or charting a city as he repurposes Gurgaon's familiar material platform to new, surprising and multiple effects.³⁷² These repurposings are 'immanent' to Gurgaon's present for they are revealed in his use of actual Gurgaon material. By interchanging and destabilizing the relations between urban model (the city of Gurgaon) and urban copy (his Gurgaon-based art), his art performs not a matching of the two, but instead, functions to create associations that mutually enrich and reciprocally transform the possibilities presented by art practice and urban planning, and the relations between the two.³⁷³

Panda's formal tools perform conceptual shifts in the viewer's apprehension of Gurgaon's thick, new urbanity and the nature of urban development there. His urban compositions and constellations engage recognizable Gurgaon motifs and material in fantastic,

³⁷⁰ Here I draw from Simon O' Sullivan's analysis in O Sullivan, Simon, "From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice," 249-51.

³⁷¹ In his profound analysis of the artworks of Francis Bacon, Deleuze offers an example of how artists might "reverse" the relations between model and copy. See Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 86-87.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

distorted, layered and collaged form, functioning as “glitches” to complicate the smooth functioning of dominant thought about this city space.³⁷⁴ Ultimately, Panda’s aesthetic techniques, offer visual (and tactile) “shocks” to established categories of thought, to borrow a phrase from Brian Massumi.³⁷⁵ In the analysis that follows, I describe two immanentist strategies emergent in Panda’s work on Gurgaon’s urbanism: a spatial ‘spilling’ (across the borders of inside/outside, urban/rural, technological/mythological etc.) and a temporal ‘folding,’ to trouble the even surface of current mainstream Gurgaon representations, the city’s present and its possible futures.

Contact, contingent, contagion: ‘spilling’ across borders of space

Across his canvases and sculptures, Panda reminds us that ‘space’ is a “becoming,” rather than a “being,”³⁷⁶ always unfolding in unpredictable ways. Spatially, Gurgaon is splintered; a manifestation of the fragmented praxis or “selective first-worlding” of this city.³⁷⁷ In her seminal article “Bodies-Cities,” Elizabeth Grosz argues that a city’s spatialization helps to orient sensory and perceptual information.³⁷⁸ Panda’s art works give rise to an emergent set of spatial ideas, expressed here in the motif of ‘spilling,’ which disrupt the existent organization of mental images or sensory and perceptual information there. Space in Panda’s canvases, therefore, is more like time, “open to becoming other than itself.”³⁷⁹

Panda engages the particularity of Gurgaon’s spatial dimension by focusing on Gurgaon’s terraces, revealing them to be liminal spaces of exchange and ‘spilling,’ across spatial boundaries. Private gated residential enclaves are exemplary of Gurgaon’s built form and within these enclaves, the residential balcony and terrace are iconic architectural features. Commercial real estate billboards, advertising luxury Gurgaon living, feature images of terraces and balconies as protected, private spaces affording a privileged (bird’s eye) view of the city. Panda’s *Terrace* series however betray a Gurgaon where very little is contained. The heights of his balconies or terraces depict the spilling over of the interiors of high-rise apartments into their exteriors, and the reverse, with bold implications for urban planners. This material overspill disrupts boundaries of inside and outside, public and private space, and gestures towards new forms of neighborliness, sociality and commonality.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁴I draw from Simon O’ Sullivan’s analysis of the glitch. See O’ Sullivan, Simon, “From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice,” 250-1.

³⁷⁵Brian Massumi, *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁷⁶Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 116-7.

³⁷⁷Chatterji, 274.

³⁷⁸Elizabeth Grosz, *Bodies-cities*, In B. Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and space*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1992.

³⁷⁹Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 116

³⁸⁰As Armaan Alkazi has noted, the architecture of a gated community, with its regulated public space, complicates divisions between inside and outside: “*Andar* (inside) and *Bahar* (outside) has been a central organizing principle of the home throughout North India. This division comes in part from the caste-based division of pollution and purity, but in equal measure from classed notions of privacy. *Andaar* and *Bahar* do not map easily onto the public-private divide that is often theorized in Western contexts. [...] *Andar* and *Bahar* are relational categories and context-specific. For instance, [Waldorp argues] in gated communities, ‘public’ space, outside the homes, inside the gates, is also considered inside [...] The division is a boundary-making activity between dirty and clean, order and disorder. These activities help make meaningful patterns of activities, people and materials. The divisions become increasingly more demarcated as securitization, such as the installation of gates, takes place.” See Armaan Alkazi, Mullick, “Gated Communities in Gurgaon: Caste and Class on the Urban Frontier” Paper 114 (2005), 51-53, *Bard Digital Commons* http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2015/114.



Figure 33: Jagannath Panda, *Love Terrace* and *Terrace I* (2006); Acrylic and fabric on canvas, 6' x 4'. Image available at www.saffronart.com

In *Terrace I* (2006), a crow perched on an iron rod, taking the form of a feeler, looks on as clothes hang over the balcony. The crow is scavenger and also mythological messenger traversing the space between past, present and future.³⁸¹ A tiger skin also hangs out to dry, and in the distance, on another balcony, the terrace space's disruption of neat divisions of interiority and exteriority is mirrored in a man wearing a tiger-stripe shirt, vomiting or purging what is inside, out. As Sinha offers, the tiger skin, referenced in several other of Panda's works, may be seen as a metonym for failed attempts at environmental conservation and rapid development, and also a reminder of the forest animals of the *Geet Govind* (palm-leaf manuscript art Panda is trained in).³⁸² The foreground of a parallel canvas, *Love Terrace* (2006), features the mythological coupling of Radha and Krishna, entwined in an erotic pose. Their bodies are intricately patterned, in fabric emerging from a flowerpot and replicated in a balcony far away. A tail of smoke leaves the window of a third apartment, polluting the air between all three spaces. Both canvases suggest that Gurgaon balconies—in-between spaces not quite outside or inside—are viewing areas to experience desirous, dangerous and abject forces. Laura Marks reminds us that the words 'contact,' 'contingent' and 'contagion' all share the Latin root 'contingere,' meaning to have contact with and to pollute.³⁸³ Panda's *Terrace* works pollute viewers' ideas of neat separation. Scenes of love and of vomiting may also be seen as scenes in which "the body attempts to "escape from itself, rejoining the field or material structure."³⁸⁴ In the spilling or bleeding across surfaces in Panda's *Terrace* frames, Gurgaon itself is presented as a threshold, a

³⁸¹ Gayatri Sinha, *Jagannath Panda*, exhibition catalogue, Berkeley Square Gallery June 29-July 15, 2006, 5.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), xii.

³⁸⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, 16.

zone enabling crossings between substances and entities—in this case, the seemingly fantastic possibilities of a ‘becoming-tiger’ (see also the tiger mask on the boys face in figure 34 below), a ‘becoming-crow,’ a ‘becoming-pattern;’ these becomings spread in his canvases, overspilling the limits of the system of organization or separation at hand. As urban plans for Gurgaon attempt to keep out and separate, performing their own distribution of the sensible—the rural from the urban, animal from human, shopping mall from street side *chai* vendor, Panda’s works express a bleeding across surfaces of separation. His works thus challenge the viewer to consider the parameters of a radical urban plan which would take into account the idea that in the urban realm, human, animal, plant, thing, are always already expressions of each other. His art helps us understand both the “multiplicities and relationalities of entities and the potentialities of what we/places/cities might yet become.”³⁸⁵ Panda’s rendering of the balcony also suggests a look at other interstices, and intervals in the urban for such possibility.



Figure 34: Jagannath Panda, *Family Deluge* (2012), acrylic, fabric, and glue on canvas, 36” x 60”. Image courtesy of the artist.

His later works like *Family Deluge* (figure 34) feature a spilling or contagion so vigorous that the frames of the painting itself cannot contain it. Now the checked cotton shirt of a working-class Gurgaon resident (evident from his bicycle, in a city of cars) and one who possibly provides any number of domestic or ‘one button services’) leaves traces or is mimicked on the walls of a Gurgaon tower, and this same fabric shirtsleeve falls off the canvas, echoing shirts folded over balconies in earlier work. In this canvas, urban skyscrapers are reduced to grids or constructed ideals providing support to spatial planning. In contrast, the fabric layered over them, as well as the flood, the movement of human figures, the flowers, and the ambiguous colored marks, all gesture to the fact that various trajectories, desires, and conflicts *build* space rather than being contained in space. The deluge, itself referring to environmental hazard also features

³⁸⁵ Hillier, *Stretching Beyond the Horizon: A Multiplanar Theory of Spatial Planning and Governance*, 71.

the working family at its forefront. The tiger mask on the face of a young boy looks back eerily at the viewer, echoes a motif from other canvases (recall the tiger skins hanging out to dry in *Terrace I*), and denies appropriation, as it repeats, slips, and slides across Panda's work in various forms, hinting at shadow, potential, or 'virtual' systems that might organize Gurgaon material.

Apart from his *Terrace* series, across his work, Panda's engagement with the concept and form of 'skin,' models Gurgaon as a space that forgoes an inside/outside bias altogether. Skin, which is both boundary and gateway between any supposed 'inside' and 'outside,' negates discreet spaces and fixed borders. In Panda's work, skin, is a political and active form, emphasized throughout his oeuvre, but most evidently in his series of upholstered goat sculptures. Like many of his Gurgaon peers including Gupta and Kher, Panda has not exhausted the ability of the tactile realm of sculpture to trouble the surfaces of historical time.

It may be useful here to offer a brief description of the itinerary of modernist sculpture in India before continuing with an analysis of some of Panda's key sculptural works. Shivaji Panikkar describes in broad strokes, two significant trends that dominated modern Indian sculptural practices till the late 1970s, after which there was a shift in modes of practice. From the 1940s through to the 1960s, sculpture was dominated by an international formalist mode of 'quasi-figurative-abstraction' as exemplified in the works of Pradosh Das Gupta, Sankho Chaudhuri, Dhanraj Bhagat, Adi Davierwala, Pilloo Pochkhanawala amongst others. This was followed by an 'indigenizing' trend in the following two decades wherein progressive artists started to move away from Western idioms. In the art schools of Madras, Baroda, and Delhi, sculptors like S. Dhanapal, Janakiram and Kanhai Kunhiraman engaged frontality, "craftsmanly skills," decorative embellishment and linearity. For instance, Kunhiraman turned to Theyyam, a north Kerala folk performing art for inspiration, and Janakiram engaged a 'crafts' technique of beaten sheet metal in his work, to add varying visual and textural rhythms to his works.³⁸⁶ The period from the late 1970s through the 1980s can be seen as a continuation of the "indigenizing" mode and a prominent woman sculptor of the era, Mrinalini Mukherjee, made use of jute and hemp in her massive sculptural forms to evoke plant and human forms like "totem effigies."³⁸⁷ In the 1980s, Panikkar notes a break in these sculptural modes, inspired by an earlier cleavage in painting. The shift in painting had been marked by a move towards "localized figural narration," coinciding with the international success of "pop naturalism." This was evident in the works and teachings of Bhupen Khakhar in Baroda and K.G. Subramanyam in Shantiniketan and both artists influenced the sculptural idioms taken up by their students in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁸⁸ In these years, pedestals and "truth to material," were discarded as audiences were invited to communicate with sculptural presences in more direct ways. Panikkar sites the feelings of disease, mystery and "magic" in the sculptures of Krishna Chatpar, as characteristic of the era. Closely related are the works of Ravinder Reddy from the 1980s onwards, who derived a "decorative vocabulary imbued with urban wit and earthy village metaphors."³⁸⁹

I describe Reddy's work here in some detail for Panda can be seen to follow in a similar tradition. Reddy was among the first few at Baroda who experimented with fiberglass. His choice of medium was related to its being a "neutral" material of industrial manufacture, without

³⁸⁶ Panikkar Shivaji K, "Twentieth-Century Indian Sculpture The Last Two Decades". In *Art and Visual Culture in India: 1857 – 2007*, ed. Gayatri Sinha (Mumbai and New Delhi: Marg Foundation, 2009), 176-79.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 180

³⁸⁸ Ibid

³⁸⁹ Ibid

the characteristic “glow of marble, the tantalizing patina of bronze, or the moonlit luster of polished aluminum.”³⁹⁰ His technique includes casting clay molds in fiber glass and then painting over the fiber glass in car paint, making its sumptuous surface “impenetrable,” thereby setting the stage for the form to fully express its “mass and gravity.”³⁹¹ Characteristic of his work are large, sensuous, and bold female forms, covered in gold or other bright paint. These sculptures are adorned in the style of South Indian temple sculpture figures, while also drawing inspiration from contemporary urban and rural erotic and street culture. Most of his sculptures look frontally with wide-open eyes. In spite of their this-worldly sensuality, these sculptures evade appropriation with their supernatural stare and almost comic, totemic presence.³⁹²

Panda draws from this lineage at Baroda, where he received his sculptural training. And while Panda’s art is very much a part of the contemporary art market, his sculptures offer a similarly multivalent, ambiguous, sensuous/tactile event, refusing to be simply consumed. Amongst Panda’s other influences are the large scape sculptures of Louise Bourgeois and the Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara.³⁹³

Animating the goat in Gurgaon and Gurgaon in the goat

Domesticated goats belonging to farmers in the villages that lie amidst Gurgaon’s urban sprawl can be seen grazing in empty lots and on construction sites across the city. They are witness and testament to the rapid and intensive process of urbanization here. The ubiquitous Gurgaon goat therefore appears often in Panda’s work, cavorting through construction sites, drinking from puddles in the potholes on roads, collaged over with magazine or newspaper, and, in their most uncanny appearance, as sculpted forms made of fiberglass, fabric, and glue. Always featured with open eyes looking back at the viewer, these goats appear strikingly life-like except for their brocade coats. The use of diverse materials on this single sculptural subject enables the artist to speak with multiple voices. Across his series of sculpted goats, (figures 35 and 36 feature the works *Scapegoat II*, and *Nowhere I*) this Gurgaon protagonist is a symbol of the remaining *abadis* or village settlements in and around the millennial city; of sacrifice (‘scapegoat’) to the process of development; and of Gurgaon itself as vast former ‘goatscape.’

Panda’s unhomey upholstered goats (at home in an art museum) at first appear siteless, alone, and camouflaged. But thinking with and through his sculptural materials, these goats create uncanny juxtapositions and contradictions. They trigger a whole constellation of references engaging the intimate (aspirations for luxury home living) and the immense political economic questions of the effects of aggressive urbanism. In doing so, the goats suggest that urban Gurgaon’s ‘outside’ (animal/rural) is always already a part of its ‘inside’ (luxurious urban settlement), thus these sculptural forms inhabit a place of ex-timacy. (In another canvas, *Goat Pulling* a goat pulls at and chews on an urban backdrop, its body is now a laced-up leather shoe—another ‘extimate’ animal.)³⁹⁴

Panda’s goats also offer a new understanding of processes of territoriality. In *Nowhere I*, the goat sheds its own upholstered skin, which then forms a brown “grassy” patch, fenced in, or

³⁹⁰ Ajay Sinha, “Contemporary Indian Art: A Question of Method” *Art Journal*, 58:3 (Autumn 1999), 36.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 38-39.

³⁹³ Jagannath Panda. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014

³⁹⁴ Extimacy is a composite of the words ‘exteriority’ and ‘intimacy’ coined by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to offer a replacement for all form of dualism between exterior world and interior self.

territorialized by wrought iron gates. Underneath the goat's shedding skin, is more brocade and a patch of tiger skin, revealing a constant process of de- and re-territorialization as well as connection with other unlikely entities in Panda's Gurgaon world. In *God and Goat* (2007) a goat sits atop a tin trunk—an artifact commonly used by rural migrants in their move to the city. In this last example, the sculpture functions as a reflection on the discourse on displacement. From the goat's belly button an umbilical cord leads to a ball or an egg, the suggestion of a curious, altered Gurgaon world.

Panda's goats, usually exhibited with his other canvases and sculptures invite the viewer to enter a different urbanscape, a virtual/potential Gurgaon, that combines elements of actual Gurgaon. Art such as his blurs the boundaries between what belongs in the 'new urban' and what does not, allowing for repurposings, reimaginings, and reinventions of urban space.



Figure 35: Jagannath Panda, *Scapegoat II*, 2006, fabric and fiber glass, 37”x 58.” Available at www.saffronart.com



Figure 36: Jagannath Panda, *No-Where I* (2009), fabric and fiberglass, 37''x 58'' in. Image courtesy the artist.

Glitches in Gurgaon Time: ‘Folding’

Panda’s art and sculptural works performatively articulate the heterogeneity of the contemporary moment. His works express a restlessness as they labor against the surge of linear development time. For instance, Panda captures the accelerationist force in the rhetoric and practice of Gurgaon’s development, in works such as *Echoes of Intensity* (2011) (figure 37) and *Immersion* (2008), each depicting the hurtling, implosion, or explosion of urban development material: pipes, construction machinery, trees, bricks, staircases etc. These imploding/exploding fragments can be read as the aggressive dynamics of capitalist urbanization in which sociospatial, material and vital alignments are “rendered obsolete and eventually superseded through the relentless forward motion of the accumulation process.”³⁹⁵ Viewed askance, however, the hurtling urban catastrophe takes on the quality of a strikingly still sculptural assemblage. There is a reversal here, instead of animal head mounted on the wall, the stag is witness, and the debris of rapid development becomes the object of display, allowing the viewer a moment of reflection and a consideration of change as experienced by non-human animals. Framing the urban material is a third temporal form, that of the *mandala* or cosmic time. In Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the *kalachakra*, or “time-wheel,” is a conception of temporality including both the birth and death of the universe and the time of individual bodily and spiritual practice. The *kalachakra* does not distinguish between the past, present and future as successive periods of time or maintain linear causality.

As Gurgaon’s material connections and structures are shattered in this maelstrom of construction/destruction, desire/panic, the viewer also notices that order folds into chaos in these canvases, with Panda’s attention to minute detail—the sepals and pollen tube of a blooming

³⁹⁵ Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, “Towards a new epistemology of the urban?”, 168.

flower, the animated fur on animal skin, individual honeycombs in a beehive, the sharp barbs on a wire—each forms the center of a separately unfolding spatio-temporal scheme and story. According to Panda, such attention to detail is a gesture towards bringing to presence ‘life’ itself.³⁹⁶ The painting also offers a space at its center that is still—a different point of departure or potential.

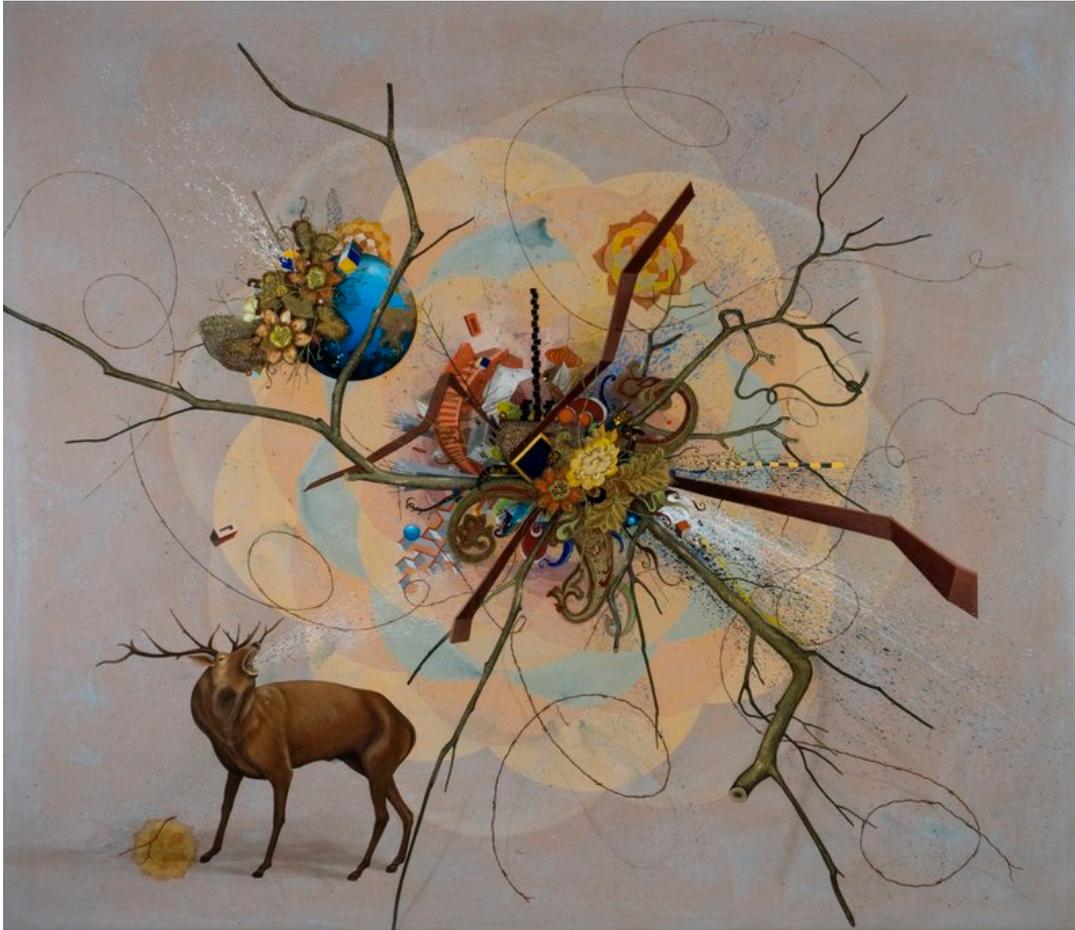


Figure 37: Jagannath Panda, *Echoes of Intensity* (2010), acrylic, fabric, glue on canvas, 6'.6" x 7'.6" ft. Image courtesy of the artist.

An External Appearance (figure 38) shows the cavernous interior and scaffolding of a building under construction. Long iron rods interrupt the canvas to take on organic form, like so many feelers sensing the city. Gurgaon is a space in which developers apply repeatable architectural typologies and formulas (malls, luxury apartments, offices) across the city. In such a landscape, as Alan Ruiz has offered, the unfinished structure can be seen to index “the rhythm of capitalist time,”³⁹⁷ or the city’s financial health and its ability to attract more global capital. At the same time, Panda’s paintings of the innards of such construction also serve as shadow images of current and future infrastructural disease and dis-use.

³⁹⁶ Jagannath Panda. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014

³⁹⁷ See also Alan Ruiz’s analysis in “No Stop City,” *Invisible Culture*, Issue 23, 29 October 2015, Accessed 1 November 2015.



Figure 38: Jagannath Panda, *An External Appearance* (2006), acrylic on canvas. Image available via artnet.com

Elsewhere, in his repeated use of fabric to layer his sculptures and canvases, his works engage texture to complicate or elaborate on Gurgaon’s logic of linear growth and development by also introducing combination and mutation. “Cult of Survival II” is an imposing 12-foot high serpent-sculpture made from sewage pipes and mixed media. Here, in a variation of the classic Ouroboros form, the plastic pipe is entangled and features two serpent heads simultaneously consuming the other to nourish themselves. Across Greek, Chinese and Indian mythology, the snake is a zone of both good and evil. The twisted pipe with layers of expressive material integrates seemingly unrelated or opposing elements into a new forms and processes. The surface of Panda’s sewage pipe-serpent is a zone of incorporations and excorporations—on each face of the pipe, appears a different skin, sewage transforms into flowers on one face, a snail crawls on another, on a third surface of the pipe body, woven brocade creates the appearance of snakeskin. Panda says that these material details are drawn from observations in Gurgaon where a leak in a large water pipe may create a natural fountain to irrigate flowers, or provide water for people without ready access, to consume. This pipe can therefore enable “another life,” as he puts it, or another *life-line* which is also a line of flight pointing to an alternate distribution of urban material and resources.³⁹⁸

To exhume the normally subterranean pipe in such imposing vertical form also surfaces anxieties about the unsustainability of current urban cycles, and the magnitude of resource depletion and waste here (though still far less than cities in the West). The physical twisting of Panda’s sewage-pipe serpent thus materializes relations between the time cycles of life and death, waste and value, sewage and water, while also summoning questions of access to and exclusion from infrastructural support systems—waste, water and waste-water are among the most pressing concerns for the sustainability of the city’s fragile infrastructure today. Expressions of the chronic shortages of water, effluents in the Yamuna river, and the privatization of drinking water are, as Sinha has noted, part of a continuing discourse on urban

³⁹⁸ Jagannath Panda. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 16, 2014

Gurgaon's troubled relationship with water across Panda's works.³⁹⁹ The sculpture may be read as a metaphor for Gurgaon's urban water system but presents itself as a plane of immanence that includes both life-giving or vital and deathly forces and therefore presents alternate possibilities.



Figure 39: Jagannath Panda, *Cult of Survival II* (2011). Image courtesy of the artist.

Coda: Bathtubs on the highway

In a recent photo essay, Gurgaon-based artist and researcher Namrata Mehta shows that Gurgaon is littered with bathtubs. She writes, “they appear abandoned on sidewalks, under lone trees, beside shacks, found in piles of rubble, left at intersections. Some bear the plastic marks of their previously protective covers. Others move location over time. Some are adopted by street vendors as storehouses for coconuts or firewood.”⁴⁰⁰ The reason for this is that Gurgaon, being a “uniquely investor-driven city,” is a space where approximately 70 per cent of real estate is purchased as an investment to rent out or sell.⁴⁰¹ As such, bathroom fixtures such as a tub or luxury Jacuzzi increase the value of properties. However, Mehta notes that in recent years, surplus housing stock and Gurgaon's poor public service infrastructure have led to a fall in the gains from such investments and more people buy an apartment in Gurgaon to live in rather than as an investment. Bathrooms are then re-done and bathtubs discarded as residents prefer the more eco-friendly shower in this city with a water crisis.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ From the exhibition catalogue for *Nothing is Solid*, catalogue of solo exhibition by Jagannath Panda at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai in 2007.

⁴⁰⁰ Namrata Mehta, “Suds and the City: The Abandoned Bathtubs of Gurgaon – in Pictures,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2016/jul/21/abandoned-bathtubs-gurgaon-india-pictures-broken-toilets>, Accessed 21 July 2016.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

Looking at these photos (that could very well be a Panda painting or sculpture) and employing some of the thinking that Panda’s speculative and experimental art inspires—it is clear that in Gurgaon, urban objects, urban dwellers, and built environments perform and “group themselves situationally” to compose a form of urban life.⁴⁰³ These situational groupings may then be activated further, in many different ways, depending on “the sets of sociotechnical practices and networks they are linked with.”⁴⁰⁴

In this chapter, I have explored how, in the generative space between a transitioning urban present and an uncertain urban future, Panda’s art assumes profound import to offer an immanent story about new urbanism, as an alternative to conventional urban plans. Relatedly, in the next chapter I offer a view of new and emergent art practices in Delhi and propose that these practices function as “urban procedural projects,”⁴⁰⁵ or projects that reveal the ways in which urban community, space and time are continually made and unmade. This is an indeterminate and ongoing process and suggests new roles for both the art organization and curator, as each is compelled to attend to the molecularity of human interaction against the macrottextures of rapid urban change.

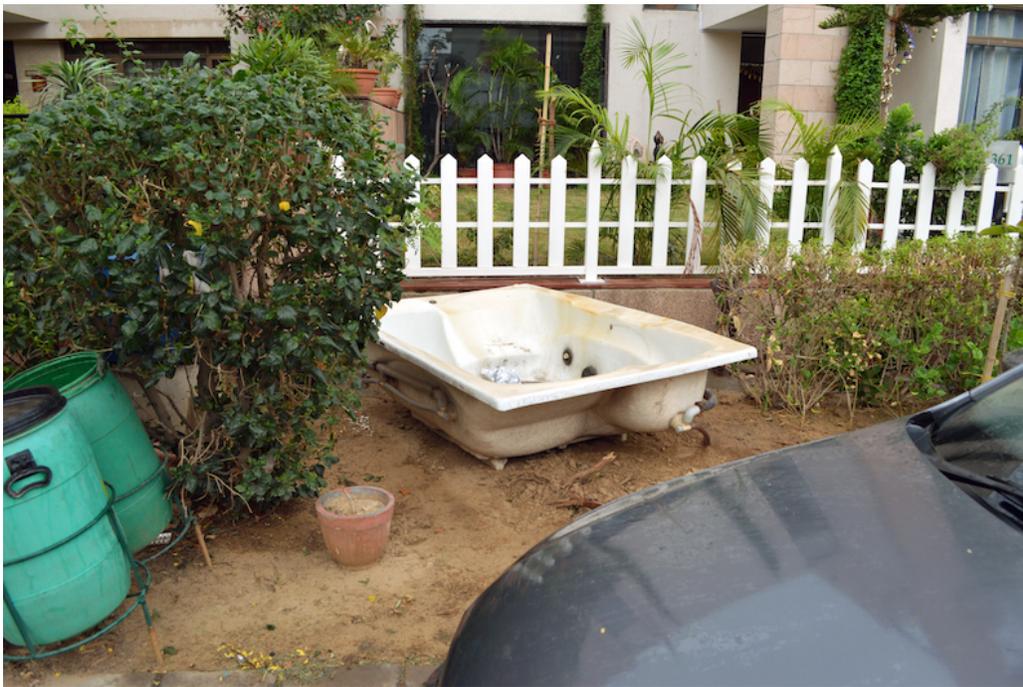


Figure 40: Namrata Mehta, “The Abandoned Bathtubs of Gurgaon,” 2016, available at www.theguardian.com

⁴⁰³ Ignacio Fariás, “The Politics of Urban Assemblages,” *City* 15, no. 3–4 (August 1, 2011): 366.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ I borrow and modify usage of this term, “urban procedural project,” from Janica Tomic’s work describing the history-making television show *The Wire* as an “urban procedural” rather than a “police procedural” serial. See Janica Tomic, “From Scandinavian Detective Films to *The Wire*” *Generic Attractions: New Essays on Film Genre Criticism*, María del Mar Azcona and Celestino Deleyto eds., (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2010) 247-59.

Chapter 4

Urban Procedural Projects and Rhizomatic Curation: Socially Engaged Art Practice at *Khoj*

‘Contemporaneity’ as Interconnectedness

In recasting the nature of the ‘contemporaneity’ of artistic production in Delhi, in this concluding chapter, I take Paul Rabinow’s recent extensive writings on paradigms for contemporary inquiry in the field of anthropology as a starting point. Rabinow suggests that we understand the contemporary as mode or manner in which things in the present can be taken up as “interconnected problems [...] with reference to their emergent form and temporality.”⁴⁰⁶ As Anthony Stavrianakis offers, he does not refer to a theory of the contemporary, nor to forms of knowledge, nor forms of practice that are contemporary, in themselves, but rather it is “the mode in which things are taken up that make it contemporary.”⁴⁰⁷ According to Rabinow, work on and in the contemporary is a provocation to “take up phenomena and relations in the world in relation to a different set of problems and conceptual interconnections.”⁴⁰⁸ In the field of art history, scholar and curator of art from India, Atreyee Gupta, calls for a reintroduction of a ‘politics of place’ in to the conceptualization of contemporary art and contemporaneity, on the one hand to “replace the obscurity of the global, of the ‘no-history, no-nation, no-place,’” of works on the contemporary art market and on the other to consider “a new ethics for transformational art practices that has emerged through the politics of locality.”⁴⁰⁹ Placing Rabinow’s and Gupta’s observations in conversation, this chapter brings history and place together to discuss how new and emergent art practices in one neighborhood of Delhi expose a radical interconnectedness or contemporaneity.

More specifically, this chapter focuses on the work of one of the most prominent artists’ workshop spaces in Delhi, Khoj International Artists’ Association and its socially engaged art practice. Socially engaged art is the preferred general term amongst artists in Delhi for a heterogeneous group of emergent practices “driven by a common desire to establish new relationships between artistic practice and other fields of knowledge production.”⁴¹⁰ Such practices straddle disciplines of urban and environmental studies as well as experimental pedagogy, anthropology, sociology and participatory design etc. The focus and medium of such creative practice is intersubjective space and experience as well as, more ambitiously, social transformation and the redistribution of material resources. Art historian Grant Kester argues that the remarkable proliferation of these new artistic practices across North, South, and Central America, Europe, Africa and Asia, “are a mark of our singular, contemporary, cultural moment.”⁴¹¹

Khoj (meaning ‘quest’) is a site where aesthetic practices have been formed, deformed

⁴⁰⁶ Anthony Stavrianakis, “What is an Anthropology of the Contemporary,” Field Statement no. 1 (Concept Labor), April 2009, http://anthroposlab.net/wp/publications/2009/10/fs_anthro_of_contemp.pdf, Accessed January 15, 2016.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. 4

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Gupta, Atreyee. “The And: An Expanded Questionnaire on the Contemporary” in Field Notes 01 (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2012) 76.

http://www.aaa.org.hk/cms/Content/upload/download/fieldnotes/fieldnotes_issue_01_single.pdf. Accessed, March 11, 2014.

⁴¹⁰ Grant Kester, *Field Journal*, <http://field-journal.com/about>, Accessed January 15, 2016.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

and transformed, in entanglement with Delhi's neoliberal urbanization, and, for this reason, present a compelling case for a manner of 'contemporary' inquiry, understood as a radical being-with or an "interconnectedness," following from Rabinow. Rabinow's definition of contemporaneity, in turn, invites new thinking about the role of socially-engaged art curators in acting upon and making visible such interconnection, as the mark of a uniquely contemporary art practice.

Khoj's work and its history are intimately tied to its location in Khirkee Extension, an 'urban village' of South Delhi. Former curator of Khoj, Rattanamol Johal, describes how the term urban village describes former villages that the expanding city has encroached upon.⁴¹² Johal notes that the zoning and administration of these villages is distinct from the urban wards surrounding them, thus creating an "in-between space of unplanned construction and property speculation."⁴¹³ Such developments then come to occupy a legal grey space of "unauthorized" urban settlement type.⁴¹⁴ Today, Khirkee has become known among migrants (both from within India and across the Global South) as a neighborhood for affordable rental accommodation—a result of its unauthorized status. In addition to migrant workers from within India, visitors and immigrants from across the Global South (including Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Uganda and Sudan), who come to Delhi as political asylees, and for education, work, and medical tourism, have been drawn to Khirkee. The large neighborhood also has a sizeable community of transgender residents.⁴¹⁵ Khirkee can thus be seen as a space-time "frothing with plural identities and objects," as cultural critic and curator Noopur Desai has put it.⁴¹⁶ Urbanist Abdoumalique Simone offers that paying attention to such intensities of an urban fabric—it's complex arrangement and interactions between "people, objects, territories, climates," and the "movements, folds, expulsions, gatherings" (and other spatio-temporal formations) in which these same dense interactions manifest, is significant for all urban practitioners, for they hold the potential to "redistribute urban material."⁴¹⁷

Khirkee's particular socio-political space of difference allows for new aesthetic praxiological possibilities at the Khoj workshop located within. Since Khoj's beginnings in Khirkee in 1997, its practices have produced meanings that can perhaps only now, two decades later, be theorized. I posit that a map of Khoj's activities in Khirkee reveals the aesthetic logics released when the molecularity of the physical proximity of strangers' bodies (prejudices, rumors, desire) rub up against the shifting macrostructures of rapid urbanism, migration, and unbalanced infrastructural development in Khirkee and Delhi. Therefore, to borrow from anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, to study the intimate here is not to turn away from these larger structures but to relocate *their conditions of possibility*.⁴¹⁸

In this chapter, I hold that the rootedness or immanence of Khoj's practices in the

⁴¹² Rattanamol Johal, "Windows on an Urban Village," *Participatory Urbanisms*, Karin Shankar and Kirsten Larson eds. UC Berkeley Global Urban Humanities Initiative, 2015 www.part-urbs.com

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Pritha Chatterjee and Aditi Vatsa, "Bharti's midnight raid may fade but Khirki won't be the same again," *Indian Express*, January 26, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/khirki-and-walls/>.

⁴¹⁶ FICA, Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art and Noopur Desai, "Public Art Seminar," filmed April 5, 2016, YouTube video, 2:06:44, posted 22 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr7_f8CydY

⁴¹⁷ Abdoumalique Simone and Abdelgahni Abouhane eds., *Urban Africa: Changing Contours of Survival in the City*, (Dakar: Codesia Books, 2005), 10.

⁴¹⁸ Anne Laura Stoler, "Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 13.

Khirkee neighborhood cause specific art interventions to move beyond genres of art practice and towards what I term “urban procedural projects,”⁴¹⁹ or projects that reveal the ways in which urban community, space and time are continually made and unmade. This is an indeterminate and ongoing process and suggests new roles for both the art organization and curator, and a different understanding of the social. In Khirkee, at times such urban procedural projects have produced real material gains and redistribution of resources in an unauthorized—and therefore underserved—community, as in the *Aapki Sadak* [your street] project. In this initiative, Khoj and the Khirkee community jointly articulated their goals for improved pedestrian infrastructure in the neighborhood through a series of deliberative community meetings over eight months. These meetings produced an implementation plan that was then presented to (and accepted by) the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.⁴²⁰ However, more often, because of Khoj’s insider-outsider position, the arts organization has been compelled to respond to rifts and pressures within the neighborhood, presenting the opportunity for curators and artists to propose and perform new temporary orderings of the social in this space, as in the case of Shaina Anand’s *KhirkeeYaan* a collaborative video work that I examine in detail in this chapter. Finally, as I trace the itinerary of one curator at Khoj, Aastha Chauhan, I offer that Khoj and Khirkee enable a “rhizomatic” route for her practice, and, in her own words, the necessity of occupying a particular “border position.”⁴²¹

Rhizomes are subterranean tuberous structures that send out shoots and roots laterally to connect to other entities. As Deleuze and Guattari describe it, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.”⁴²² Instead of linearity or verticality, the rhizome offers horizontality, and infinite connections, without fixed origins, entryways or exits. By terming a curatorial route or map as rhizomatic, I refer to the ways in which the curator’s work expands horizontally in the particular space-time of Khirkee. In expressing horizontality rather than verticality, the curator’s practices enable seemingly unconnected ideas to become connected easily. Such a mapping project is different from merely tracing a pre-given pattern.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ I borrow and modify usage of this term, “urban procedural project,” from Janica Tomić’s work describing the history-making television show *The Wire* as an “urban procedural” rather than a “police procedural” serial.. See Janica Tomić, “From Scandinavian Detective Films to *The Wire*” *Generic Attractions: New Essays on Film Genre Criticism*, María del Mar Azcona and Celestino Deleyto eds., (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2010) 247-59.

⁴²⁰ “Aapki Sadak at Khoj,” <http://khojworkshop.org/programme/aapki-sadak/>, accessed July 2016.

⁴²¹ Aastha Chauhan. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 15, 2015.

⁴²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 21.



Figure 41: Khoj, New Delhi, (2013). Photo credit: Niyati Upadhyaya

Revisiting the ‘social turn’ in art practice

While the global contemporary art world—of which Khoj partakes, has experienced a “social turn” over the past two decades—in Delhi’s context, such practices also have precursors in a rich tradition of participatory and activist theater of the 1960s-1990s (continuing today in the work of the people’s theater group, Jana Natya Manch, and several university campus theater groups) and in the work of collectivized bodies of activist-artists such as SAHMAT. Socially engaged art and its “dialogical aesthetic”⁴²⁴ are defined and understood differently across contexts. However, a common factor is that all such work seeks to disrupt and reassemble previously “sovereign” forms of agency and subjectivity in the work of art, through interventions in production and reception.⁴²⁵ The concept of “relational aesthetics,” introduced by Nicholas Bourriaud in a book of the same name in 1998, was a significant attempt to theorize the social turn in art practice. Bourriaud’s critical appraisal of relational aesthetics responded to a number of artworks from the 1990s that sought to activate social relations through experiences as shared meals (Rirkrit Tiravanija), a hammock slung in the MOMA garden (Gabriel Orozco), a loudspeaker transmitting Turkish jokes in a Copenhagen square (Jens Haaning), amongst other propositions, that would create “microtopic” spaces and moments of relation.⁴²⁶ As art historian and philosopher of aesthetics Jason Miller has noted, Bourriaud’s writing in *Relational*

⁴²⁴ Grant Kester describes a dialogical aesthetic as those works in which the viewer “answers back [to the artist or artworks] and in which those responses have the potential to reshape and transform the work itself over time.” See Grant Kester, “The Device Laid Bare: On Some Limitations in Current Art Criticism,” *e-flux Journal* #50 12/2013 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-device-laid-bare-on-some-limitations-in-current-art-criticism/> accessed 20 December 2014

⁴²⁵ Shannon, Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Routledge, 2011

⁴²⁶ See Jason Miller for a summary of these debates between Bourriaud and Bishop. Jason Miller, “Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond,” in *Field, A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, 3 (2016) <http://field-journal.com/issue-3/activism-vs-antagonism-socially-engaged-art-from-bourriaud-to-bishop-and-beyond>.

Aesthetics was also “prescriptive,” asking for an expanded conception of the work of art beyond a marketable, consumable object-centered ontology.⁴²⁷

Miller notes that critics lamented Bourriaud’s seemingly uncritical embrace of social participation in art and at the forefront of such scholarship was art historian Claire Bishop, who argued that in Bourriaud’s account of relational art it wasn’t clear how such works ought to be valorized as art.⁴²⁸ In contrast, Bishop offered “relational antagonism,” or an aesthetic of dissonance, confrontation and “dissensus,” as opposed to the “consensus” of shared meals etc., in her influential essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” published in the journal *October*.⁴²⁹ In her view, relational antagonism is evident in the works of artists such as Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn. Sierra’s controversial works including *Workers Paid to Remain inside Cardboard Boxes* (1996-98) have often involved hiring labor to conduct menial tasks to elucidate the nature of the exploitation of wage labor under capitalism. In analyzing the aesthetic and political mode of such art events, Bishop cites the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe extensively. Laclau and Mouffe describe antagonism as “the limits of society’s ability to fully constitute itself.”⁴³⁰ As conditions of possibility for the existence of a pluralist democracy, “conflicts and antagonisms constitute at the same time the condition of impossibility of its final achievement.”⁴³¹ Under this schema, the relations set up by the relational aesthetics of an artist like Tiravanija are not intrinsically democratic as they rest too comfortably on a ‘microtopian’ view of society, of “community as immanent togetherness.”⁴³² By contrast, Bishop offers that the relations in Santiago Sierra’s works such as *The Wall of a Gallery Pulled Out, Inclined Sixty Degrees from the Ground and Sustained by Five People*, Mexico City (2000) (the parameters of which are often simply stated in their titles), are marked by sensations of dis-ease rather than utopian belonging. While this and others from Sierra’s oeuvre “embed themselves into other institutions” of immigration, the minimum wage, homelessness etc., in order to emphasize the inherent injustices or divisions, “[Sierra] neither presents divisions as reconciled nor as entirely separate spheres [...] the fact that his works are realized moves them into the terrain of antagonism [...] and hints that their boundaries are both unstable and open to change.”⁴³³

In the past two decades or so debates on the ethics of socially engaged art practices have therefore been framed in a dualistic manner. As performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson summarizes in her book *Social Works*, the “critical barometers to measure the place of social art works is split between the poles of: 1) social celebration versus social antagonism [as discussed above]; (2) legibility versus illegibility; (3) radical functionality versus radical unfunctionality; and (4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy.”⁴³⁴ While Bishop and others argue that socially engaged artworks are at risk of privileging the first term in these pairings, Jackson has shown that these pairs of modes of working cannot be entirely disentangled. Additionally, as Grant Kester, art historian and editor of *Field*, a new journal on socially engaged art practice, points out, “socially-engaged art’s very self-definition assumes the problematic counterpoint of a

⁴²⁷ Jason Miller, “Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond.”

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October 110*, Fall 2004.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 67

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid., 72.

⁴³⁴ Jackson, *Social Works*, 48

‘socially disengaged’ art practice,⁴³⁵ raising the question, when is art *not* social? As Miller looks back at these debates in his recent article in that journal, he concludes that there is a “gross disparity” in the form of critique that has been leveled against antagonistic art works and those that seek ‘consensus’:

“Critics have rightly targeted the ostensible absence of aesthetic evaluation in the ethical treatment of relational aesthetics. But should we not be equally concerned, if not perhaps more concerned, about the absence of ethical criteria in the aesthetic estimation of antagonistic art? It is difficult to see the celebration of relationality in the work of [Rirkrit] Tiravanija or [Liam] Gillick, however naïve or unreflective, as anything but a trivial academic concern next to the melancholic affirmation of [Vanessa] Beecroft’s genocidal theater or [Santiago] Sierra’s exploitations as aesthetically appropriate forms of antagonism.”⁴³⁶

More generally, Miller notes that while antagonistic works “raise conscience” this is seen not only as an ethical value but rather as an “ethical priority that shields the artist from any other form of ethical critique.”⁴³⁷ Miller continues, that though apparently politically progressive, this assumption is a “revised formulation of romanticism’s appeal to aesthetic autonomy, an attempt to separate the aesthetic as a privileged domain of critique.”⁴³⁸ He defends socially engaged art criticism in which the interface of sociality, politics, ethics, and aesthetics serves as a “catalyst,” rather than obstacle, to the critical evaluation of such art.⁴³⁹

Cognizant of these important debates that have contoured the field, and picking up on Miller’s call for the nexus of these various strands to serve as critical catalyst, I offer a different order proposition for the consideration of socially-engaged art practice in Delhi. Linking the useful conceptual vocabulary from Mouffe, Bishop, and Jackson, I explore how the specifically “urban procedural” nature of projects at Khoj/Khirkee might advance the critique of socially-engaged art practice as a uniquely “contemporary” exercise, that is, one that is committed to excavating the quality of “interconnectedness” as mode.

In *The Urban Experience*, urban geographer David Harvey offers a succinct observation and large methodological question about approaching the capitalist city, thus,

The capitalist city is the arena of the most intense social and political confusions at the same time as it is a monumental testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism’s uneven development. How to penetrate the mystery, unravel the confusions, and grasp the contradictions?⁴⁴⁰

I offer socially engaged art practice critique as one potential tool to begin “unraveling” urban confusions. Relatedly, taking into consideration Khirkee’s growth and demographic as an urban village, and its particular relation with other local, national, and global spaces, I articulate a new, horizontal, and rhizomatic role for the socially engaged curator here.

⁴³⁵ Grant Kester, “Editorial” in *Field, A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, 2 (2016), <http://field-journal.com/issue-2/kester-2>

⁴³⁶ Jason Miller, “Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond.”

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 229-230.



Figure 42: Mural by Yantr in the street outside Khoj, Khirkee Extn (2013) Photo credit: Karin Shankar



Figure 43: A lane in the urban village of Khirkee (2011). Image available via Khoj online at www.panoramio.com

Delhi's 'Urban Villages'

Noopur Desai has noted that the growth of participatory, interdisciplinary and alternative experiments in art practice in Delhi, in spaces such as Khoj and Sarai (a think-tank and urban laboratory started by the Raqs Media Collective), is deeply entangled with movements of global (and regional/national) capital and influenced by local or micro-dynamics of dominance and difference in specific Delhi neighborhoods.⁴⁴¹ These spaces are thus areas of tremendous creativity even as they challenges the concept of the “creative city”⁴⁴² as a model of urban economic growth. In Delhi, as in several other cities of India, changes in urban built form since liberalization are an ongoing process. Urban theorist Annapurna Shaw has written about how with the diminished presence of the State in the urban realm, and its invitation to private capital to speculate in the urban land economy, the real estate and construction industry have become the major shapers of urban form.⁴⁴³ This has produced distortions and inequality of access,

⁴⁴¹ Noopur Desai, “Introduction: Public Art Seminar,” FICA.

⁴⁴² See, Landry, C. (2000). *The Creative City: A toolkit for urban innovators*, London: Earthscan.

Florida, R. (2002). *The rise of the creative class—and how it is transforming leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

⁴⁴³ Nupur Desai, “Introduction: Public Art Seminar,” FICA; Annapurna Shaw, “Metropolitan City Growth and Management in Post-Liberalized India,” 44; Asher Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics: World Class City Making in Delhi*, New York: OUP, 2015 and Veronique Dupont, “The Dream of Delhi as a Global City,” 533. Dupont notes that “the ambition to develop Delhi as a global city is rooted in the liberalization reforms of the 1990s. Parts of the city region were integrated with the global economy, providing international firms with investment opportunities and outsourced services, while the metropolitan area emerged as a significant agglomeration of Export Processing Zones. The development of modern infrastructure, high-end residential complexes and exclusive shopping malls, in line with the rise of consumerism and middle-class ideology, has spectacularly transformed the urban landscape. This drive for global competitiveness involving image-building has had negative consequences, especially for the

manifest in two simultaneous processes: those of the peripheralization of the urban poor; and of ‘enclaved urbanism’ in gated residential communities, large corporate and commercial blocks, and privatized spaces of leisure. A third peculiar feature of the city’s break-neck speed development is that of the ‘urban village,’ of which Khirkee is a prime example.

Khirkee is a village dating back to the medieval era, with traces of its rich past in the still standing 14th century Khirkee Masjid (mosque) at one end of the complex. Khirkee means window, and the mosque was named for its heavy stone lattice windows. Khirkee village had faced middle and upper-middle class urban residential expansion into its surrounding farmlands from the 1960s to the 1980s, as a result of policies by the Delhi Development Authority.⁴⁴⁴ Today, the village “core” (known as *lal dora* or “red thread” for the way in which it is depicted on the Delhi Master Plan) continues to be considered the “village” administratively, as it is zoned exclusively for residential construction and falls under the jurisdiction of the village *Panchayat*, not the municipality of the city.⁴⁴⁵ The land surrounding this core while formerly used for cattle grazing etc. is today considered “unauthorized” for any form of construction, but, as Johal notes, has in fact become a “grey zone for speculation and construction.”⁴⁴⁶ Developers, real estate brokers, and the city government constantly tussle here. Owing to the complicated relationships between these actors, local politicians, and the land mafia, some constructions are swiftly demolished and others are given a pass.⁴⁴⁷ Khoj is in one such unauthorized section of Khirkee, known as Khirkee extension.

Through the 1990s, with Delhi’s burgeoning population, demand for rental housing in Khirkee grew and many landlords there converted their old houses into apartments to cater to the increasing numbers of migrants. These migrants initially consisted of those employed in the hospitals and malls that had newly sprung up in the vicinity (and indeed these new constructions together with a new metro line and station made the neighborhood attractive to newcomers to the city).⁴⁴⁸ As Ajoy Mahaprashasta writes, “Khirkee extension” soon became one of the densest extensions in Delhi with builders constructing vertically and haphazardly.⁴⁴⁹

In spite of this flurry of construction, Khirkee’s unauthorized status has also meant that there are no regular water or sanitation lines nor municipality-maintained streets/street lighting. Mahaprashasta writes “monsoon inundation, leaking drains, and electricity theft have made daily living difficult in this overgrown village.”⁴⁵⁰ As a result, in spite of its prime location rents have not increased as much as they might have. Khirkee therefore opened up to those seeking low-cost accommodations, including migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, students from across the country, and also several African nationals (mainly students and lower income professionals).⁴⁵¹ These ‘outsider’ communities have found other neighborhoods of the city less

poor, through ‘cleansing’ the city of slums and other alleged undesirable elements, and has exacerbated socio-spatial polarization. Delhi’s experience thus exemplifies the problematic implementation of a Western construct — the global-city model — in a metropolis of the South characterized by strong socio-economic inequalities as well as the ascent of urban entrepreneurialism and its translation into a ‘revanchist city.’”

⁴⁴⁴ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Aastha Chauhan. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, January 15, 2015 and Ajoy Mahaprashasta, “Properties of Prejudice,” *Frontline*, February 21, 2014, <http://www.frontline.in/politics/properties-of-prejudice/article5652588.ece>, accessed March 20, 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ajoy Mahaprashasta, “Properties of Prejudice.”

⁴⁵¹ Pritha Chatterjee and Aditi Vatsa, “Bharti’s midnight raid may fade but Khirki won’t be the same again.”

welcoming. Today, Khirkee's population is about 50,000 people, among which one may count a generous number of foreign nationals (from Uganda, Nigeria, the Congo, Afghanistan and, Iran), artists, students and members of the transgendered community.⁴⁵²

Conversations on Public Art and Social Practice

On April 4, 2016, a seminar to take stock of the ways in which public art and social practice were being produced in the city took place in New Delhi, supported by the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art.⁴⁵³ Researcher and curator of social art practice Noopur Desai convened the seminar. She began by outlining the need for a conceptual framework to understand the complex ways in which socially engaged art is conceived, produced, and received by various publics in different local contexts in India.⁴⁵⁴ In this regard, she underscored the need for interdisciplinary and experimental models of inquiry to provide an adequate methodology for the same. At the seminar, practitioners, curators and critics offered propositions for how such an inquiry might take place. Veteran artist Vivan Sundaram, who has made use of trash, refuse, and detritus in a long series of urban-ecological works, spoke of a 'new New Delhi'—a fragile city being transformed on a daily basis, "one which we are forever building, even while it is ecologically steadily crumbling."⁴⁵⁵ He proposed that artists and curators view 'waste' as an analytic and practice as well as a 'supplement' to dominant representational practices of, and within, the megacity of Delhi. For instance, in his ensemble of installations titled *Trash* (2008) he works collaboratively with wastepickers who are members of the non-governmental organization Chintan: Environmental and Research Action Group in New Delhi, to perform the "discursive construction of the megacity-as-waste" by representing an urban totality through intricate and complex, ordered arrangements of garbage.⁴⁵⁶ Performance artist Inder Salim articulated the necessity of singular art actions that would move back and forth between big publics and smaller publics, offering a greater variety of tools for resistance to hegemonic formations within the capital city. Such actions could include reaching into a repertoire of gestures from various protest movements—most recently, the stone pelting gesture of Kashmiri youth—or evoking mythical, transgressive personalities from the city's past, such as the naked Sufi saint Sarmad, to historicize present crises and to embody and embed them in the subsoil of experience. Vasudha Thozhur spoke of Delhi's "fractured psyche."⁴⁵⁷ Having worked with survivors of the Gujarat riots of 2002, she described a praxis that would chart new cartographies of relation through revitalized collaborative art ecologies and the introduction of "living vocabularies" that would shake up established hierarchies of the political.⁴⁵⁸

It is worth recalling for the reader that I opened this dissertation with a report on another seminar—on the theme of the 'contemporary'—that took place in Kasuali in 1988. One future of that 'contemporary' revealed itself at the 2016 seminar (which, incidentally, also featured participants from Kasuali, Vivan Sundaram and Geeta Kapur). This later seminar, its topics and

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, "Seminar on Public Art: Part II," YouTube, 2:53:17, 21 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtUB7KZFNS8>, Accessed, 22 April 2016.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Tania Roy, "Non-Renewable Resources: The Poetics and Politics of Vivan Sundaram's Trash." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2013): 265.

⁴⁵⁷ Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, "Seminar on Public Art: Part II," YouTube, 2:53:17, 21 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtUB7KZFNS8>, Accessed, 22 April 2016.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

the discussion it raised, reflect how new art practices, alternative art spaces, and forums have emerged alongside the post-1990s proliferation of art museums, biennales and global exhibitions.

If, as described in the introduction to this dissertation, the participants at Kasauli discussed the critical and creative potentialities of an emergent contemporary aesthetic form in the face of an increasingly ossified national cultural policy, the 2016 seminar explored questions in a dramatically different art-making context. The lack of public space and funding, the influx of private monies for the arts, the aesthetic dimensions of urban citizenship and urban inequality, as well as the critical role of creative curatorship in this milieu, were all discussed. In particular, the seminar sought to take stock of public art practices in the context of the “changing morphologies” of Indian cities, and to discursively engage the “social turn” in the space of contemporary art in India.⁴⁵⁹ As the Kasauli seminar had explicitly called for a role for the arts in other areas of practice, “for art to give a kind of impetus to those who are not directly connected with art, philosophers or historians,”⁴⁶⁰ so also, by the 2016 seminar, a rapidly transforming metropolitan milieu, fervent cultural and identity politics, inequitable development policies, and the degeneration of natural resources have enabled a new dimension of this expanded field of the arts to surface.⁴⁶¹ As such, practitioners at the seminar recognized an urgent need to “clarify the position of the artist in relation to the efforts of activists, ecologists, archivists, educators, and social workers,”⁴⁶² as well as to the government and different urban publics. The role of the curator emerged as an important piece in this new public and social arts ecology, a position unaddressed in clear terms in 1988. The urban curator in 2016 was seen as a figure who might propose vital new combinations of urban space, the ecological realm, and social relations, in new, rapidly transforming, and divided city neighborhoods.

“Delhi Loves Me?” Placing Khoj in the Khirkee neighborhood

Khoj was created in 1997, with a gift by Robert Loder, founder of the Triangle Arts Trust. Sood describes its place on India’s art scene of the time:

At a time when Indian artists felt isolated and unsupported, Khoj provided the possibility for young practitioners to create an open-ended, experimental space for themselves on their own terms. Khoj would be a space where they could make art independent of formal academic and cultural institutions and outside the constraints of the commercial gallery.⁴⁶³

Initially hosted in a farmhouse in the outskirts of Delhi, Khoj was set up to be an “incubator”—as founder member and artist Anita Dube describes in the first Khoj catalogue:

“Our aim was to function as an experimental art laboratory that would bring artists together from different parts of the country, from the subcontinent, and from around the globe, setting up a co-operative, non-hierarchical work situation where dialogue, exchange and transfer of information, energy and skills could take place as an intensely lived experience. Khoj is an emblem of our vision of working together in difficult situations, somehow pushing under the establishment’s grain the rubric of creating sensitizing encounters, opening up insularities and closures, to address the binary

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. And FICA website, <http://www.ficart.org/>

⁴⁶⁰ Kumar Shahani, “Inventing Traditions,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 25.

⁴⁶¹ FICA website, <http://www.ficart.org/>

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Pooja Sood in “Mapping Khoj: Idea, Place, Network,” shared with author via email.

polarisations that have hardened into unchangeable positions both inside and outside.”⁴⁶⁴

Indeed Kapoor describes Khoj as a successor to the discussions and residencies ten years prior at Kasauli.⁴⁶⁵ She notes that the founding of Khoj coincided with artists’ desires to “work with perishable materials and temporary structures, with erasable signs and the artists’ own body.”⁴⁶⁶ These global art trends were manifest on the Indian art scene as a result of transformations in political economy and changing cultures of consumption.

In its early days, special emphasis was placed on enabling dialogue between third-world artists. The form of extended six-week residencies where artists lived and worked together encouraged experimentation. Sood recollects,

“Some of Khoj’s earliest workshops had Japanese artist Fuji Hiroshi spending a week cleaning a sewer to enable goldfish to live, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera collecting the workshop’s used teabags to make art on memory and history, and Delhi’s Sheba Chhachhi resurrecting personal stories of abandoned mill workers in Modinagar.”⁴⁶⁷

Khoj acquired a permanent home in Khirkee in 1997. Funding has come from a diverse variety of Indian and international arts foundations, private trusts, NGOs and governments, including the Triangle Arts Trust, Jindal Art Foundation, the Norwegian Embassy, and the Goethe Institute, New Delhi. For Sood, a priority for Khoj is ensuring its sustainability and autonomy. Describing the funding ecology here she says:

We live by three-year grants. Every three years we spend so much time and energy trying to fund our projects for the following three years. We have to get out of our funding cycles. It gets very tiring. We’re trying to build a corpus of funds first, so that at least we can look after our infrastructure needs and all our salaries and overheads are taken care of.⁴⁶⁸

The arts fraternity in India too has been very supportive of Khoj, for as Sood puts it, they see the need for an “agile” space such as Khoj is.⁴⁶⁹ In 2011, 40 leading Indian artists donated works to raise funds for Khoj’s infrastructural needs. More recently, Khoj benefitted through a Christies’ auction of art donated by ten artists, including Anish Kapoor, Atul Dodiya, Subodh Gupta, and Bharti Kher.⁴⁷⁰

Since 1997, while Khoj continues to host experimental international artist residencies, and provide mentorship and studio space to emerging Indian artists, the organization focuses considerable energy on its social practice and community arts programs, which are embedded in the everyday life of Khirkee. Commenting on the praxiological possibilities that Khirkee presents for an arts organization such as Khoj, and of how inseparable the aesthetic practices at Khoj are from its location in that neighborhood, co-founder and current director, Pooja Sood says:

“When Khoj was first set up here, this neighborhood had a large migrant working population from Bihar and Nepal. It was a fairly poor area. And we chose to rent studio

⁴⁶⁴ Pooja Sood in “Mapping Khoj: Idea, Place, Network,” shared with author via email.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Geeta Kapur in “A Phenomenology of Encounters at Khoj,” shared with author by Pooja Sood via email.

⁴⁶⁷ Pooja Sood in “Mapping Khoj: Idea, Place, Network,” shared with author via email.

⁴⁶⁸ Pooja Sood. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, July 02, 2014.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ See Poonam Goel, “In search of serendipity: Pooja Sood, Director of Khoj International Artist’s Association,” *Your Story* February 13, 2015 <https://her.yourstory.com/pooja-sood-khoj-international-0213>, accessed July 3, 2016. And, “Inspiring Contemporary Art in India,” *Christies* December 4, 2015, http://www.christies.com/features/Khoj_Interview-5356-1.aspx

space here because we could afford it. As an arts space you cannot be an ivory tower... but we must have *seemed* as such to the community because of our art residencies and all the international artists it would draw. So, at that time we started to think about what sort of relationship we wanted to build with our neighborhood, with Khirkee.”

Over the years, it also became increasingly clear that there was no ‘outside’ to the art at Khoj; Khoj and Khirkee were inseparable, brought into proximity by processes of urbanization and held together in many tangible and intangible ways—from the teashop round the corner that Khoj artists and curators would order their refreshments from, to friendships with neighbors. Several of Khoj’s early projects began with small aesthetic gestures. Khoj’s first works were murals on the walls in this lane. Simultaneously, small stores in the neighborhood were offered makeovers of their shop fronts. This initial engagement has since become more critical, in line with artists’ search for responses to a transforming urbanscape. For instance, in a short term residency, invited artist, Navjot Altaf worked on a project titled “Delhi loves Me?” where she interviewed several people in Khirkee, from the cobbler, to the chai seller, to the autorickshaw driver and asked them how they felt about the city and if “Delhi loved them.” Altaf then made stickers based on these interviews and worked with the auto rickshaw union, to put them on the backs of vehicles all across Delhi. Sood describes how these stickers carried tough messages before the Commonwealth Games (held in 2010)—in preparation for which, large informal communities were displaced in ‘beautification’ drives. In Hindi, these stickers declared: “Sheila Dixit [then Delhi Chief Minister] wants Delhi to become Paris or London but what is to become of us Delhiwallahs?” Another read, “Will you stop this back-breaking inflation? You who run Delhi, won’t you show some contrition?” Some were strident, others poetic, all were in verse. As these stickers crisscrossed the city on the backs of the ubiquitous green three-wheelers, they challenged the branding of the city by the current dispensation, and inflected the “world class city”⁴⁷¹ discourse with a mobile and indeterminate subaltern voice.

Sood holds that one of the biggest shortcomings of Khoj’s initiatives in the first decade of its existence was their rapidity—too many, too soon, without pause for reflection in between. She notes,

“we’ve done hundreds of projects [here], some which have been more successful than others. All have been enriching to our understanding of what Khirkee can be and it’s helped us come to grips with the complexities of socially engaged art, specifically in this neighborhood. At times we felt like some artists seemingly preyed on information from Khirkee for their own aesthetic projects, which is a huge ethical problem...and then there were other artists for whom their art practice was a deep process of unpacking a situation.”⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ See Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy Eds. *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Wiley Blackwell: Sussex, 2008.

⁴⁷² Pooja Sood. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, July 02, 2014.



Figure 44: Installation at a barber shop in Khirkee (2012). Photo courtesy of Khoj. “Two artists gave the shop a makeover working around the image of the AIDS ribbon (because a lot of AIDS education takes place in barber’s shops). They created this beautiful sculpture of the AIDS ribbon, with antique barber’s scissors, all of which were bought from Old Delhi, and of course the barber there loved it so much because it was a show-stopper. He would turn around and say, “*yeh toh mere dada pardada ke kenchiyani hai!*” (these scissors are my grandfather’s and great-grandfather’s!) Which became a kind of myth that was all his and that he enjoyed.” Pooja Sood, interview by Karin Shankar, August 2014.

In its engagement with Khirkee today, Khoj mainly focuses on long-term projects, including consistent programming for youth in the neighborhood around football, cricket, and hip-hop, and an urban farming project. Sood describes how these initiatives are valuable because they energize the young people of Khirkee and help them approach entrenched boundary lines around caste, class, and religious identities. Sood also underscores Khoj’s continued commitment to experimentation, as she says, “whether a new way of looking at things, or a new way of making art, we want to support emergent artists and practices.”⁴⁷³

Khoj’s long-term projects in Khirkee and the maintenance of a platform to sustain these, together with its consistent use of experimental methodologies of art-making, enable its aesthetic interruptions to assume an urban procedural mode. Again, such a mode reveals the ways in which urban community, space, and time are continually made and unmade. In this regard, I offer a close look at one such project in Khirkee, Shaina Anand’s participatory video installation, *KhirkeeYaani* (2006), wherein the antagonistic, agonistic, and microtopical moments of various

⁴⁷³ Pooja Sood. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, July 02, 2014.

social articulations reveal the “non-positivistic”⁴⁷⁴ nature of Khirkee’s urban-ness. *KhirkeeYaan* shows how specific and potential Khirkee microcommunities take form and dissolve in unique ways, between the four quadrants of a video interface, with the backdrop of macropolitical urban change.

KhirkeeYaan (2006)⁴⁷⁵

Shaina Anand, an artist from the Mumbai-based media collective CAMP, created a participatory art piece titled *KhirkeeYaan* over a three-week residency at Khoj in April 2006. This work marked a turning point of sorts for the kinds of practices that were to follow at Khoj—practices that increasingly engaged Khirkee’s microcommunities in longer-term aesthetic projects.⁴⁷⁶ *KhirkeeYaan* combines the words *khirkee* (window) and *yaan* (vehicle), and is also the plural for the word ‘window’ in Hindi. A “window vehicle” presumably allows for a view of the other, where one hadn’t been possible before, or perhaps offers a shift, or movement in such a view.

Anand is committed in her art practice to enabling access to low-cost video and audio technology. As such, several of CAMP’s projects have focused on community television and neighborhood-generated media, as well as the critique of and experimentation with video as a documentary medium.⁴⁷⁷ By allowing for “open loops” between the production, reception, and consumption of media at the same time, such that “subject is performer, voyeur is subject, performer is auteur, audiences are witnesses and so on,”⁴⁷⁸ Anand attempts to dis/reassemble the process of documentary filmmaking. Such an open loop allows for heterogenous voices to continually reshape the ‘document’ of community-based documentary media.

KhirkeeYaan consisted of generating seven televisual episodes in and around Khirkee. In these episodes, “eye level communication” between participants was necessary and there was no cameraperson.⁴⁷⁹ Each episode networked four separate locations, within a 200-meter radius of each other, with an open-circuit television system—a close alternative to CCTV surveillance technology.⁴⁸⁰ Through cameras and microphones, live video and audio was transmitted across these four sites.

Anand describes the installation:

The cameras sat on top of the TVs, and the audio-video [feeds] from the four views were connected to a quad processor and audio mixer. This quadrant comprising of sound and image from all four locations was fed back to the TVs, allowing the subject/viewer/performer/audience to interact with others in the frame. Video became the “site” for these interactions and conversations. The “television” produced conversations, performance, and rapidly evolving subjectivities, all happening in “local”

⁴⁷⁴ See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*

⁴⁷⁵ I am very grateful for Ratanamol Johal’s introduction to this artwork, published in *P[art]icipatory Urbanisms*, and for the other resources on Shaina Anand’s *KhirkeeYaan* that his article led me to.

⁴⁷⁶ For instance, Khoj resident artist Sreejata Roy is working on a number of long-term projects with teenage women and their mothers in Khirkee including producing an neighborhood magazine, mapping the neighborhood, a bicycle yatra etc.

⁴⁷⁷ Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan,” <http://chitrakarkhana.net/text/KhirkeeYaan.pdf>, and <http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/mumbai/anand/index.html>, accessed January 2016. See also, Rattanamol Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

time. [...] Television screens and cable form micro-terrestrial networks that are built on site. Negotiations take place during each step of the production, and outcomes are unpredictable and participatory, enabled by person-to-person consent and immediate “micro-contracts. The intervention is meant to be self-organized, unplanned, and collaborative.”⁴⁸¹

The screens/interfaces at each site were activated by local residents—as Johal notes, these subjects were positioned very differently (“they were of various religions and castes, regional provenance, race, nation, socio-economic class, and longevities of local residence”⁴⁸²) all living in a dense neighborhood. Dialogue at each station was expected to unfold in indeterminate ways amongst Khirkee’s neighbors and strangers. Each episode lasted about an hour. The television was thus transformed into a box to look into and look out of, at once a space of virtual and social encounter expected to embolden participants to share local experiences.



Figure 45: Shaina Anand’s *Khirkeeyaan* (2006). Image available at www.chitrakarkhana.net

In describing *Khirkeeyaan*, Anand also recalls a television show from 1986-7, Saeed Mirza’s *Nukkad* (street corner).⁴⁸³ The serial portrayed the daily tribulations of lower-income and working class folk trying to make a living in Bombay. The neighborhood street corner or *nukkad* was where members of the community would gather to share stories, jokes, dreams, and

⁴⁸¹ Shaina Anand, “notes on Khirkeeyaan,” [chitrakarkhana.net](http://www.chitrakarkhana.net), and <http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/mumbai/anand/index.html> accessed January 2016.

⁴⁸² Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁴⁸³ Shaina Anand, “Micromedia Ecologies,” *The World in my Street: New Urban Imaginaries* <http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/mumbai/anand/index.html> accessed March 2016.

struggles. As social theorist Ashis Nandy puts it, *Nukkad* was invested with the “vision of a society or a lost Utopia. That vision is often built on the lower income neighborhood’s capacity to recreate a community, sometimes even an entire village with its own distinctive lifestyle.”⁴⁸⁴ Anand notes that *Nukkad* created television history, for “it broke the golden rule of a nascent TV serial and broadcast industry. Never before had more than two or three characters occupied the frame, which would shift between three or four principal locations. *Nukkad* burst onto small screens across the country with a cast of sixteen and the location never changed.”⁴⁸⁵ The serial was very popular, and was broadcast to millions of Indian homes via national television. Anand laments that today, the post-liberalization “aspirational revolution” has no place for such teleserials, and spaces like Khirkee, aren’t represented on television.⁴⁸⁶

In *KhirkeeYaan*, video functions as a shared and shifting boundary between different spaces and people in Khirkee. Scholar and video artist Michelle Dizon reminds us that following its Latin root, the word video translates to “I see.” This is a statement that illuminates how video entails vision that is not solely related to the eyes, but is “more broadly entwined with the transparency of a subject, its sight, and its presence. Video (I see) [...] is coupled with power.”⁴⁸⁷ With this understanding in mind, a consideration of recordings of the open-circuit TV communication between Khirkee residents—who are marked by the politico-economic histories of migration and rapid urbanization—lends itself to an urban procedural project, as the communications reveal the “microtextures of macroquestions” affecting the subjects in view.⁴⁸⁸

Interactions across the interface did not produce smooth communication, instead, as Johal notes in his critique of the artwork, “disjuncture, communication lapses, slippages, misunderstandings, and guarded sharing abound”⁴⁸⁹ abound, as well as the occasional blackouts and loss of reception etc. Further, various forms of seduction or obstructions in the conversations between the parties mark power relations in the neighborhood. Below I offer a brief summary of the episodes, all available on the artist’s YouTube channel, ‘Pad.ma’ (a public access digital media archive)⁴⁹⁰, as well as on the *KhirkeeYaan* project website. For the first two episodes I also draw from Johal’s written descriptions.⁴⁹¹

The television interface in *KhirkeeYaan* functioned variously as reflection, as trick mirror, as game, as welcome mat or threshold, as a meeting ground for sharing personal struggles and strategies for survival, and, in one instance, as a channel for vertical, top-down (mis)communication. Ultimately, in each of these relatively short interactions (each episode, barring one, lasted about an hour) what remains invisible and unspeakable—the *molecularity* of the conversation between Khirkee residents—identified by their molar wholes as local, Muslim, Nepali, upper caste etc., directs us toward a different way of seeing the neighborhood. That is, for this viewer, the changing morphology of the role of the socially engaged arts organization as community interface, and of the shifting idea of Delhi itself as a city of migrants emerges, hovering delicately over the tight space between the four quadrants of communication.

⁴⁸⁴ Ashis Nandy, “Introduction: Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum’s Eye View of Politics” in *The Secret Politics of our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, (London: Zed Books, 1999)11.

⁴⁸⁵ Anand, “Micromedia Ecologies.”

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Dizon, *Vision in Ruins*, 1.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁴⁹⁰ Pad.ma is a public access digital media archive started by CAMP and a consortium of other activist media NGOs. <https://pad.ma/B/player>

⁴⁹¹ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

*The window-vehicle is a reflection*⁴⁹²

At one television hub placed in a corner shop on a typical Khirkee street that Johal describes as containing, “a Sai Baba Hindu temple, property owned by upper caste Hindu landlords and rented to daily-wage laborers, small businesses offering services (teashop, barbershop etc.), Khoj (a significant architectural presence itself), and a turn off into Muslim majority Hauz Rani,”⁴⁹³ Baby Uncle, the upper caste Hindu owner of this shop in which the television was set up, is boisterous.⁴⁹⁴ The hour is late, with him dominating the conversation. Conversations amongst those gathered around the television hub turn uncivil as outsiders (migrant workers coming to Delhi from the rural areas of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal) and Muslim members of Khirkee are at the receiving end of aggressive exchanges.⁴⁹⁵ The discussion turned into a “string of abusive and polarizing statements around caste, class, religion and places of origin,”⁴⁹⁶ to the extent that the artist herself breaks role and intervenes, “We don’t listen to each other [...] we all think our opinion is most important [...]”⁴⁹⁷ In this episode of *KhirkeeYaan*, Baby Uncle expresses his higher place in the social structure, while the artist herself turns didactic and disciplining.

*The window vehicle is a trick mirror.*⁴⁹⁸

Anand decided to recreate this episode to address some of the prejudice in the conversation that had taken place earlier. In the second iteration, she hired National School of Drama actor, Tanmoy Sarkar, to pose at a teashop as a migrant laborer from Bengal. The hope was that this would ensure a more controlled and peaceful dialogue.⁴⁹⁹ The episode, as expected, turned out somewhat differently, with Sarkar immediately establishing kinship with another Bengali, and exchanging notes on the insecurity experienced by migrant workers in the city. Johal describes what transpired as under:

“A few minutes later, a Muslim preacher (maulvi) appeared at the tea shop and Baby Uncle [upper caste owner of the shop] proceeded to provoke him by asserting that all terrorists are Muslims, to which the maulvi responded with exasperation and accused the media of being irresponsible and biased (he assumed a news program was being filmed). Aastha, from Khoj, appeared at KT’s Salon to remind everyone that one of the most heinous acts of terror committed in the recent past were the 2002 riots in Gujarat under right wing Hindu politician, Narendra Modi [then the Gujarat Chief Minister, now India’s Prime Minister]. The interaction continued, taking twists and turns, with a good measure of spontaneous poetry, couplet recitals and jokes being shared, closing with a teenager rebutting Baby Uncle’s cockiness!”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹² This interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #3. I paraphrase this description and also the following episode from Johal’s own analysis of *Khirkeeyaan*, in Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.” The rest of the episodes I viewed (and thereafter summarized) on the Public Access Digital Media Archive, Pad.ma at <https://pad.ma/B/player>.

⁴⁹³ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ This interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #7

⁴⁹⁹ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village.”

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

While the first iteration ‘failed’ in creating an alternate space, and rather simply offered a reflection of entrenched positions in the community, it took the interference of an actor role-playing an outsider migrant worker to shift the conversation, if even slightly. The success of this outsider however perhaps lay in the fact that he hadn’t the habitus of the position of migrant worker and his place in Khirkee’s social hierarchy.



Figure 46: Shaina Anand’s *KhirkeeYaan* (2006). Image available at Available at www.chitrakarkhana.net

*The window vehicle is a game.*⁵⁰¹

A group of Khirkee adolescents gather around the television installations, set up in four different lanes. They pretend to be auditioning for the reality music show “Indian Idol” and sing out Bollywood love songs.⁵⁰²

Television screens are networked between tailoring workshops, a hand embroidery workshop and a leather goods workshop. The workers use the television to sing for each other, joke with and occasionally mock those others working in the neighboring shop. An India-Pakistan cricket match is on, and a migrant tailor claims the cricketer Mahinder Dhoni for himself as they are both from the state of Jharkhand, the others tease him about how many runs Dhoni is going to score. This same tailor makes an earnest attempt at friendship, calling out in verse to the men in another quadrant: “Bhai Saab [brother] will you be a friend? Making friends isn’t a big deal, but honoring it is. Like fallen flowers whose fragrance endures, distance won’t make our friendship different.”⁵⁰³ Class-based jokes abound with the tailors calling each other “tea seller.”

⁵⁰¹ These interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #1 and Episode # 4

⁵⁰² Video viewed on <https://pad.ma/B/player>. See also Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan,” [chitrakarkhana.net](http://www.chitrakarkhana.net), and <http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/mumbai/anand/index.html> accessed January 2016.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.



Figure 47: Shaina Anand's *KhirkeeYaan* (2006). Image available at Available at www.chitrakarkhana.net

*The window-vehicle is a welcome mat.*⁵⁰⁴

Here the televisions are networked between the domestic spaces of four Nepali women, three of whom have been in Khirkee for a while, one has just moved to Delhi with her husband. The women laugh and joke. One is asked her caste, she says *adivasi* (tribal). Another asks if she has had a “love marriage” [versus an arranged match] while confessing to having one herself. The two women then giggle, saying “that’s why we’re arranged on the same side of this TV screen too!” This comment is again followed by peals of laughter. The session ends with one of the women saying “just what will they think of us if this is shown in our village...oh they will say, these women are like this!”⁵⁰⁵

*The window-vehicle is a platform for strategizing.*⁵⁰⁶

In another episode taking place between women’s homes and a beauty salon, stories and strategies about how to deal with negligent and alcoholic husbands emerge. “Don’t fall into the mess of calling the police, deal with it yourself, don’t let him come near you” one woman warns.⁵⁰⁷ Another suggests that the woman take her husband’s money from his pocket so that he doesn’t spend it on alcohol. A third proclaims she is very happy without her husband.

*The window-vehicle is a vertical hierarchy.*⁵⁰⁸

Here a local “doctor” gives advise on avian flu and eating chicken as well as growing tall. The conversations are humorous, if somewhat uncanny and troubling, as he offers decidedly suspect solutions to skin problems, while accusing a cheeky youngster of indulging in “bad

⁵⁰⁴ This interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #2. Video viewed on <https://pad.ma/B/player>. See also Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan,” [chitrakarkhana.net](http://www.chitrakarkhana.net), and <http://www.cookplex.com/mystreet/mumbai/anand/index.html> accessed January 2016.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ This interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #6. Video viewed on <https://pad.ma/B/player>. See also Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan.”

⁵⁰⁷ Video viewed on <https://pad.ma/B/player>. See also Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan.”

⁵⁰⁸ This interaction was filmed and archived as Episode #5.

activities.”⁵⁰⁹ This is the only installation that was set up vertically, between two parties, with the male doctor answering questions by prospective patients and curious onlookers.

A few times across the episodes, the participants make reference to the recording device and video screen. For instance, when there are glitches in communication or when seeing oneself and the other in adjacent quadrants, provokes comment about newly discovered familiarity or strangeness. Sometimes, participants engaged in literal *jugalbandis* or contrapuntal duets, such as in the “Indian idol” episode. In the more contentious exchanges, participants held on to prejudices, until the artist/curator staged interventions.

Reviewing these videos, I am reminded of postcolonial theorist Trinh Minh-ha’s evocation of the multiplicity of I’s and you’s at any interface.⁵¹⁰ At one level of the project, ‘I’, a Khirkee resident see ‘you’ a neighbor and/or a stranger and ‘you’ see me. At a second level, I see myself, seeing you, at a third, I see you seeing me, (wherein to see also includes to hear, to behold, to acknowledge, to engage). In this perplexing game of mirrors, windows upon windows, *KhirkeeYaan* reinforces that ‘I’ does not exist before an experience, but simultaneously with, and the neighborhood and city is constantly made and remade in the ‘inter,’ the space between that permits encounter. What is also of note is how each session produced a different form of interface—to reflect, understand, act on, sense, and create Khirkee. The work also shows that it is as much the product of the imagination of individuals featured as of the artist.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau ask for a sociological perspective that does not view society as the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself, (whatever the source of this logic: forces of production, or a neoliberal city etc.); rather, every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. As an analytical tool, Laclau and Mouffe offer an articulatory practice that would both constitute and organize social relations. If the social only exists, therefore, as a “partial effort for constructing society,” then antagonism is the “experience of the limit of the social.”⁵¹¹ However, there is an operation (or articulation of moving social pieces) through which the impossibility of fixed meanings of the social is momentarily overcome, and “real” effects are produced.⁵¹² It is in this always unstable operation of moving social pieces articulating differently that artworks such as *KhirkeeYaan* offer glimpses of new and old micro-communities and forms of sociality in Khirkee.

Intuitively cognizant of these dynamics and of the multiplicity of the social, director of Khoj, Pooja Sood, says of socially engaged practices at Khoj in the near future:

“I think we will need to bring in anthropologists, sociologists, intellectuals, the government, more members of the community and especially community leaders, to work with us. It’s going to be difficult but the good news is that so far, we have a good reputation and Khirkee and Khoj are a part of the same economy, we order our chai from here, and get our groceries from across the road. The local carpenter knows us... I think we’ll just have to build on that a lot more, we’ll have to build on the number of partners we have in the city.”

The footage from *KhirkeeYaan* is now archived on Pad.ma as well as on the project’s website and has since been distributed on DVDs to participants, exhibited in the neighborhood,

⁵⁰⁹ Video viewed on <https://pad.ma/B/player>. See also Shaina Anand, “notes on KhirkeeYaan.”

⁵¹⁰ Trinh T. Minh-ha *Woman Native Other*, (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1989); 94.

⁵¹¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London: Verso, 1985) 125.

⁵¹² Ibid. 136-138

and toured galleries and festivals around the world. Indeed, when viewed outside of Khirkee, either online, or in the white cube of a gallery space, *KhirkeeYaan* opens out to another set of complex relations between subjects on screen and spectator. As the spectator looks from the outside-in, and across the quadrants, at the intricate entanglement of aesthetics and politics of *KhirkeeYaan*, various questions about video, “I see,” come to bear, and she must interrogate her own relation to the images, the conversations, and gazes before her. Will the micropolitics of locality be lost to the global gallery flaneur? Or, will *KhirkeeYaan* offer a window into the making and unmaking of urban neighborhoods and urban citizens in the megalopolis, along the planes of uneven development and migration? The first leaves *KhirkeeYaan* in the “no-history, no-nation, no-place,”⁵¹³ space of global contemporary art, and the second suggests it is a radically contemporaneous piece inviting the spectator’s reflections on her own interconnectedness with the scenes on the screens. As she views content being generated before her eyes, the subjects on screen may also appear to rightfully pose the question, “why [and how] are you looking at me?”⁵¹⁴ The experience of the contemporary art-viewing subject reveals another layer of work by this window-vehicle.

Postscript to *KhirkeeYaan*

In recent years, the rampant racism against African nationals in the metropolises of India has received national and international coverage. The African nationals of Khirkee (a more sizeable population in the past seven or eight years) are not exempt from this. On 16 January 2014, at midnight, Somnath Bharti, law minister under the fledgling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi conducted an unauthorized raid of a private home in Khirkee. Residents of the house were Ugandan immigrants who were believed to be running a drugs and prostitution racket.⁵¹⁵ Bharti said he was acting on complaints made by other Khirkee residents, but he didn’t have an official search warrant. Local policemen refused to participate in the absence of a warrant. The mob of people accompanying Bharti stopped two Ugandan and two Nigerian women in the street and forced them to provide urine samples for testing for drugs. (These illegally collected samples later tested negative.)⁵¹⁶ Bharti had been accompanied by television and news media cameras, and alongside official news reports, several amateur videos of the raid also surfaced on social media. Additionally, major news networks hosted debates on racism against African nationals in Indian cities, including one featuring Khirkee residents. In this second window into Khirkee, the world has entered. The incident shook Khirkee, and while many landlords and older residents were in favor of the illegal and racist raid, several progressive groups in the city organized anti-racist protests.⁵¹⁷

Aastha Chauhan, an independent curator working with Khoj (whose work I will examine in greater detail below) wrote an open letter titled “Somnath Bharti and the terrible everyday racism of a South Delhi Mohalla” which subsequently went viral.⁵¹⁸ Chauhan notes that in her

⁵¹³ Gupta, 77.

⁵¹⁴ Drawing on Ariella Azouly’s work on photography, Dizon describes how imagining that such a question is being asked by the subjects of photographs propels a reversal of the gaze and might be seen as an ethical demand. Dizon “Vision in Ruins,” 76.

⁵¹⁵ Johal, “Windows on an Urban Village,” and Ajoy Mahaprashasta, “Properties of Prejudice.”

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Aastha Chauhan, “Somnath Bharti and the terrible everyday racism of a South Delhi Mohalla,” *Yahoo News*, January 20, 2014. <https://in.news.yahoo.com/somnath-bharti-and-the-terrible--everyday-racism-of-a-south-delhi-mohalla-045401258.html>. Accessed July 5, 2015.

ten years working as a curator in the neighborhood, neither does “it erupt in violence, nor is it a locality where people have a strong shared sense of community,” and yet, the most blatant forms of violent prejudice against the African community have been a constant even before the raid. She reports a Cameroonian woman’s ‘African kitchen’ and a Nigerian youth’s barbershop being vandalized, as well as other instances of violent attacks on the community.⁵¹⁹ With the support of three other artists affiliated with Khoj, she organized *Antarrashtriya Khirkee* (International Khirkee), a festival of food and performance. Khoj’s institutional response to the raid was to commission works that would raise awareness about the centuries long connections between India and Africa, in a series of residencies involving artists from both continents, titled *The Coriolis Effect: Currents Across India and Africa*.⁵²⁰ Khoj also screened a film made by four young Somali teens living in Khirkee, but as Aastha describes it, many in the African community at Khirkee had decided to go underground and these events were not as well attended.

Working independently and perhaps more effectively, Chauhan’s initiatives raised awareness about the magnitude of racism in Khirkee. She jokes about being an “accidental activist” but there is a more than an element of truth here. Navigating Khirkee takes myriad skills and includes the unsettling and redefining of many terms including activist and artist, in the face of incidents such as Bharti’s unauthorized raid. When Chauhan talks about creating an other activist space in Khirkee, she asks that it needn’t be one of *naarebaazi* or sloganeering, but an opening and a realm of negotiation, “this is especially needed in a space like Khirkee where many of those involved in the Residents Welfare Association do not want the African nationals or transgender community there,” she adds.⁵²¹ In the next section, I discuss how Chauhan’s role in Khirkee can be seen as rhizomatic.

A Rhizomatic Role for the Curator

Chauhan headed Khoj’s community arts program between 2004 and 2010 and returned as a consultant in 2014, continuing to work with Khoj on its socially engaged projects. Reflecting on her work in Khirkee, Chauhan takes issue with the fact that artists “leave things as proposals.”⁵²² Instead, Chauhan can be seen to engage the aesthetic logics of Khoj’s art projects to rupture conventional ways of thinking about and doing the work of social practice curation. Her curatorial actions trace a rhizomatic route—beginning with an aesthetic gesture, landing on unexpected socio-political nodes, which then open further into new and indeterminate aesthetic and political territories. Such a route emerges from her practice-based understanding of the singularities of the role of a Khirkee based curator.

Trained in sculpture, Chauhan describes how when she first started mapping out the Khirkee community and its spaces, she realized that working there as an artist would mean assuming a number of roles including “line manager, producer, and friend,” meanwhile concerns about funding and timelines forced her to categorize her practice in more specific ways.

Reflecting on her experience she states:

Funding becomes the language to describe practice here—so whether or not you are ‘social practice’ or ‘community art’ depends on if you take money from an NGO, or from an arts foundation. Where you get your funding from determines what you name

⁵¹⁹ Aastha Chauhan, “Somnath Bharti and the terrible everyday racism of a South Delhi Mohalla.”

⁵²⁰ “Coriolis Effect,” www.khoj.com, accessed Jun 8, 2016.

⁵²¹ Aastha Chauhan. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, July 02, 2014

⁵²² Ibid.

your project. Another problem is the timeline, or the problem of timelines in the art world—what I mean is that artists start to think backwards—I’m not sure this makes sense. You can’t, for instance, work out why the youth is angry in one year or six months, it’s a much longer project. Socially engaged art practice can become, in my view, a tool for using creative practices to keep society busy through tokenistic play, while the issues at the heart of social discontentment are often buried beneath timeline driven engagements. I am comfortable saying that while at Khoj, my work straddles art, activism, urban design, and anthropology and many other things. The strength of the work that I do is in the fact that it is on the border.⁵²³

Walking this “border” allows Chauhan to follow the indeterminate and horizontal directions that unravel from each discreet social art practice intervention, as I examine briefly in the examples below. Chauhan’s own work in Khirkee initially begin with safe aesthetic and pedagogical exercises, from inviting artists and community members to paint murals on Khirkee’s walls, to running a toy-making workshop with children of the construction laborers who were working on the mall across the street. It took her a few years to build a relationship with members of the neighborhood, which itself was in constant flux. Meanwhile, it became increasingly clear that on some very material terms, there could be no separation between Khirkee and the art that was being produced in Khoj— as Chauhan describes it, the perils of an unauthorized neighborhood including the potholes in the roads, traffic congestion, anxiety around parking caused by the mall across the road, or flooding during the monsoon season, were all urban hindrances affecting Khoj and the community. Chauhan considers this relationship as the substrate to all of Khoj’s art interventions.

Describing the early days of her practice here, Chauhan says, she would go out into the community and work with young people who wanted to volunteer with the arts organization. Offering another alternative to the term ‘curator,’ she describes how she would introduce herself as a *kalakaar*; (literally a creative person, an art maker, a do-er, and practitioner) and “someone who is nonviolent”:

“I’ve come to realize that this was the right term to use, I am much more than an artist here. There are many stories that have been shared with me by members of the Khirkee community that I can never repeat because they have been shared with me in confidence. Dark stories. I’m still unable to precisely articulate what my role is but the fact that I keep getting calls from folks in the neighborhood means that I’m needed at some level—“*Asatha didi idhar ao, police tang kar rahen ha*” (elder sister Aastha, please come over here, the police is troubling us etc.?)). Additionally, relationships here may have a transactional quality. Volunteers do want the publicity, the protection, the cultural capital, the space that Khoj has and why not?

Other projects have included tracing the medicinal plants that grow in one square mile around Khirkee, and relatedly, transmitting “grandmother’s remedies and free advise” that would use these herbs, in a radio show of the same name: “Gharelu nuske and muft ki salah,” on a small community radio network in Khirkee. In projects such as these, Chauhan blurs the line between the rural and the urban, a line reinforced by urban policy makers who seek to place Delhi on the map of global cities. Her interest in community radio led her to become acquainted with the

⁵²³ Aastha Chauhan, “Blurred Lines: Art ,Activism, Popular Culture and Social Change,” *Tate working papers* (20 November 2015) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/learning-research/working-papers/blurred-lines>

Community Media Center in Chamba, in Uttarakhand. Now, while she works on an urban farming initiative in Khirkee, she is conscious of the fact that the food crisis (food security and sovereignty) will have to be addressed in the rural sector, and the urban crisis (one manifestation of which is the urban village) is very much associated with rural disinvestment. She offers this couplet from Chamba:

*Pahad ka pani
 Aur pahad ki jawani
 Pahad ke kaam nahi ayyi*

“The mountain’s water and the mountain’s youth—were never put to any use for the mountain”⁵²⁴ (with the mountain metonymically standing in for the generations that have lived and worked there.) I call Chauhan’s route in Khirkee rhizomatic because one project opens to the next, the urban farming initiative leads Chauhan to the rural community radio and back again to Khirkee. Chauhan’s experience suggest that etching the contours of a map of her work in Khirkee would bring into relief the radical contemporaneity of disparate actions and entities across an otherwise seemingly unconnected time-space. One could begin such a map, from any of her or Khoj’s initiatives. For instance, since 2010, Khoj and Chauhan have been involved in a hip-hop initiative in collaboration with HeRa aka Netrapal Singh, a b-boy of Indian origin who moved to Mumbai and then Delhi, from New York City in 2008. HeRa opened the Tiny Drops’ Delhi center at Khirki Extension in 2010 to teach hip-hop, and several bboy groups began to form there, such as Khirkee’s own SlumGods.

Tracking the hip-hop initiative amongst Khirkee youth *horizontally* or rhizomatically would entail following their interaction with other connected ‘worlds’ spread throughout the city and beyond. Visual anthropologist and one time Khoj resident artist Ethiraj Dattarayan conducts research along these lines. He posits that recent international immigrant youth who have come to Delhi to access education and economic possibilities or to escape political uncertainty and violence in their own countries, as well as migrant youth from within India, embody an “aesthetic citizenship” by utilizing the globally circulating dance and music form of hip-hop to “make themselves visible in the same moment that Delhi itself is shaping its image as a world class city and prime destination for investment capital.”⁵²⁵ Hip-hop has been embraced by young people of different class, caste, racial and ethnic positions in Khirkee. Dattarayan suggests that these immigrant and migrant youth engage the form together with social media networks to “fashion themselves and their settlement communities as part of a world class urbanity in the making.”⁵²⁶ Considering this one project at Khoj horizontally, reveals an entirely new story about refugee youth, hip-hop, neoliberal Delhi, #BlackLivesMatter, YouTube communities etc. Chauhan too, works with the SlumGods. Following several ‘park jams’ in Khirkee, the SlumGods want to start their own clothing company to help with bringing money to their families. Chauhan notes that she sees no issue with making their hiphop space a commercial space, but it will be a community space as well.⁵²⁷ With Chauhan’s guidance, the b-boys have

⁵²⁴ Aastha Chauhan. Interview by Karin Shankar. Digital recording. New Delhi, India, July 02, 2014

⁵²⁵ Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan, “Aesthetic citizenship; popular culture, migrant youth, and the making of ‘world class’ Delhi” (January 1, 2015). *Dissertations available from ProQuest*. Paper AAI3709442.

<http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3709442>

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ FICA and Aastha Chauhan, “Public Art Seminar,” filmed April 5, 2016, YouTube video, 2:06:44, posted 22 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr7_f8CydY

just recently started designing and selling t-shirts under the brand named Dilli 17 (Delhi 17), Khirkee's own zipcode. thus once again local citizenship is intrinsically and aesthetically connected to global geopolitical forces.

Mapping and unravelling Khoj's social art practices may thus produce something in the direction of what cultural theorist Fredric Jameson would call a "cognitive map" of the contemporary Global South megacity. In an oft-quoted portion of his seminal text, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues for the necessary emergence of "an aesthetics of cognitive mapping." Cognitive mapping is an aesthetic, political and pedagogical project that could describe the social space of our historical moment—at the time of his writing termed late capitalism or postmodernity—and the "totality of class relations on a global scale."⁵²⁸ Works under this aesthetic would allow individual and collectivities to grasp their local situation in a globalized world, and "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole."⁵²⁹ A deep study of works at Khoj and Khirkee might reveal the beginnings of just such a radically contemporaneous, socio-political map.

⁵²⁸ Jameson 415-16

⁵²⁹ Jameson, 51.

Epilogue

“Relations, only relations”⁵³⁰

In this dissertation I have analyzed the “molecularity” of aesthetic tools used by artists and performers in Delhi today to complicate how we think about and experience a heterogeneous “now.” Using a Deleuzian framework, I have suggested that these artists work to *performatively enable* the boundaries around static or “molar” forms and conceptions. It is to this enablement that I have given the term molecular. More specifically, I have shown how, in the particular local context of Delhi, Kanwar, Rao, Panda and Khoj engage aesthetic forces to unsettle the neat distinctions and borders we draw around “their” territory and “ours,” normative and alternative subjectivities, development and underdevelopment, rural and urban etc., and to instead, view these categories as processes in continual transformation. Therefore, rather than offering mere representations or reflections of the world, these artists and performers propose ways in which we might inhabit this world, differently. At base, their works thus express a deeply ethical impulse.

In this epilogue, I offer two parting aesthetic gestures that spatialize contemporary aesthetics in Delhi: Raqs Media Collective’s global contemporary, and performance artist Inder Salim’s intimate contemporary. Each is ultimately interested in enacting a radical “being-with,” or in surfacing “*rishtay, sirf rishtay*,” (“relations, only relations”).⁵³¹

The Raqs Media Collective are much more widely known internationally than in their home city of Delhi, and through their appearances as artists and curators at major international art fairs and biennales in the past few years (including most recently being named the chief curators for the 11th Shanghai Biennale to be held in November 2016), they mark the global face of contemporary art from India. Raqs Media Collective (hereafter referred to as Raqs) are Delhi-based media practitioners Jeebesh Bagchi (b. 1965), Monica Narula, (b. 1969) and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (b. 1968). They have been producing work as artists, curators, and filmmakers for over two decades and their approach to making, exhibiting, and discussing their work has consistently been collective. In these turbulent and densely interconnected times, Raqs is committed to what they call, “kinetic contemplation.”⁵³² Describing how the Collective’s name is also a performance of this ethic, Sengupta offers:

Raqs is a word in Persian, Arabic and Urdu and means the state that ‘whirling dervishes’ enter into when they whirl. It is also a word used for dance. At the same time, Raqs could be an acronym, standing for ‘rarely asked questions’ ...!⁵³³

‘Sarai’ is the name of the urban media research center that they founded in Delhi in 2000, and its name evokes a tradition of hospitality and nomadism:

In this sense, for us, the creation of Sarai was about providing ‘a home for nomads’ and a resting place for practices of new-media nomadism. In medieval Central and South Asia, sarais were the typical spaces for a concrete translocality, with their own culture of custodial care, conviviality, and refuge. They also contributed to syncretic

⁵³⁰ “*Rishtay, sirf Rishtay*,” or “Relations, only Relations,” is the title of Raqs Media Collective’s talk at the “Muma Boiler Room Lecture.” See, Raqs Media Collective, “Muma Boiler Room Lecture,” filmed July 11, 2015 in Brisbane, Australia, Vimeo video, 1:17:44, posted November 12, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145584222>.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Quoted in Benfield, “Apparatuses, Globalities, Assemblages: Third Cinema, Now,” 50.

languages and ways of being. We would do well to emulate, even in part, aspects of this tradition in the new-media culture of today.⁵³⁴

Both terms ‘raqs’ and ‘sarai’ indicate a refusal to separate thinking and doing or contemplation and creation, and movement and stasis, while also invoking several times and spaces.

Raqs’ notion of globality does not ascribe to a hierarchical categorization of center and periphery, East and West, then and now. A work that performs this position intricately is their 2015 short film, *Fever Fever*, in which they intervene in a story of assassination and sacrifice from the ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Raqs has evoked the epic multiple times in their work, referring to it as “the original hyperlinked text”⁵³⁵ for its elaborate and interconnected composition. In this six-minute film, Raqs animates a still photograph of a frieze from a twelfth century Hoysala Temple. (The original photograph was taken by art historian Gerard Foekema and is in the Special Collections of the University of Leiden, where Raqs were doing research.)

The frieze depicts the episode of the burning of the house of lacquer (a highly flammable substance) from the *Mahabharata*, in which the Kaurava princes attempt to assassinate their cousins, the Pandava princes, in order to prevent them from taking control of the kingdom of Hastinapur. The house of lacquer in which they had invited the Pandavas to lodge was to be the site of this murder by fire. Ultimately, in the epic, the Pandavas escape and instead of their bodies, the bodies of tribal subalterns are consumed in the flames. As Raqs puts it,

“A story of competing elites, a hydro-carbon fire-storm and the sacrifice of subaltern lives something that feels like it was written only yesterday. The fuel, bitumen, is thought to be a substance that is evenly distributed between the fire locked in stone (petroleum and petroleum derivatives), fever, and the rage, greed, and anger in men's hearts.”⁵³⁶

In the last minutes of *Fever Fever*, a deep-sea diver descends into the frame. He has plumbed the depths of time, to “be-with” those in the house of lac. The screen washes over with a blue light and the viewer is left with an image of the diver in the cozy interiors of a blue room with five stone sculptures by his side. The diver is us, or Raqs, or a radical subjectivity that creatively visits the past, taking with her information and technology (the diving suit) from the present. She makes this journey only in order to (re)-enter, again, and again, the “here and now” equipped with new resources to expand narrow conceptions of the present and, therefore, future. As Raqs say of the task of this deep-sea diver—a figure, an image, a body and a concept that has entered many of their works:

“Where and when to dive into the thick of things?
How much pressure to sustain?
How much ballast to offload?
How much, or how little oxygen, to take on board?
The best thing to do is to identify a rift, some place
Where tectonic forces are hard at work and play.
Where things are hot and thick and close. Signs of
Volatility mean signs of life.”⁵³⁷

⁵³⁴ Quoted in Benfield, “Apparatuses, Globalities, Assemblages: Third Cinema, Now,” 50.

⁵³⁵ Raqs Media Collective, “Muma Boiler Room Lecture.”

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

Near the river Yamuna in Delhi, Inder Salim enacts another kind of contemporaneity or “being with,” one of intimate and extreme acts. Kashmiri-born, Delhi-based Salim considers his first performance to have taken place in the late 1980s, when he renamed himself from Inder Tickoo (a Hindu Kashmiri name) to Inder Salim (a Hindu first name and a Muslim last name). This renaming attempted to render irrelevant the question, “Are you Hindu or are you Muslim?” posed by those trying to locate the artist’s position on political tensions in Kashmir.

In Delhi, Salim responds to the city’s own eviscerating urbanism viscerally, by pushing against the boundaries between his own dermis and the skin or surfaces of the city. Across all his works, he seeks to enrich the vocabulary of aesthetic protest by tapping into the potential of the protesting body itself.⁵³⁸

Salim’s “extreme” performance art with nudity, pain, and excreta, often evoke revulsion and accusations of being sensationalist. Yet, as Jennifer Doyle so astutely reminds us in her work on “difficult art,” such emotions prohibit a closer questioning of what this art might mean. Speaking of his own subjectivity and likening it to the river Yamuna in Delhi, Salim says,

Subjectivity, just like a river, is not static. When we want to work out a definition of the river, at what point of time in this river’s journey do we mean? Most of the rivers are drying up. There is the term ‘river,’ but is the Yamuna in Delhi a river? It’s a *Naala* [drain]. The name river does not help us understand the nature of the river. The river is a composite body, a layered body, the speed of the river at the bottom is different from the middle is different from the top. Two banks and water is an inadequate definition. It has toxic and organic material, but what are the possibilities at the river’s surfaces and its depths?⁵³⁹

In his performance “Dialogue with Power Plant, Shri! across a Dead River” (2002) Salim cut off a piece of his little finger and threw it into the Yamuna. This was an attempt to create a personal and profound relationship with a dead river. He says,

I mixed pain with pain, dead with the dead. I saw how the stinking, dead, murky water of a river is, in fact, an extension of our own pulse. [...] The whole world is in the process of becoming a dead river and we have to do something urgently to return it to life. Never in the history of mankind has there been such a crisis. Everything...aesthetics, demands a fresh outlook. Years later, I made an auto portrait of my hand against my face [with the negative space of the cut finger revealing his eye], and I titled it “I had to amputate to see.” You have to surrender something or announce the disassociation of your favorite part to see. So this is a humble effort to see the relationship of the body to the river.⁵⁴⁰

Salim holds that such embodied performative gestures have helped him understand power structures at “a very deep level in the body, at the molecular level.”⁵⁴¹

In aesthetic philosophies such as Salim’s intimate experiences are keys to respond to and push against immense political, economic and social questions. As he says, “we have to discover that performance art can be debated in a very detailed manner at this level. [We must] listen to the echoes of the body.” With such a view, Salim suggests (and reminds) that the mere presence

⁵³⁸ FICA and Inder Salim, “Public Art Seminar,” filmed April 5, 2016, YouTube video, 2:06:44, posted 22 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr7_f8CyrY

⁵³⁹ Inder Salim, “Visual and Material Arts: Crossing A Dead River: Context of Performance Art in India,” *Sahapedia Online*, filmed in January 25, 2015, Kolkata, India, YouTube video 34:19, posted March 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvRcoYXLyK4>

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

of the body in public enables infinite, if sometimes painful, possibilities for new embodied understandings of social space.

Another notable performance evoking such infinite understanding from an intimate act, is “Sarmad,” (2007). Here Salim attempts to inhabit the queer subjecthood of a uniquely Delhi historical persona, that of the 16th century naked Sufi saint Sarmad, who, Salim informs, was in love with a boy named Abhay Chand from a Hindu family, “such intimacies help you understand you are living in the city,” he says. “My moments of nudity as Sarmad or in other works intensify understandings of the garment rather than the body alone. For me, there has to be a mental readiness to touch anything. There is no outline on the body which would stop it from connecting with other materials.”⁵⁴² The garment here is real as well as metaphorical, referring to all form of public cover.

For Salim, who is one of only a few performance artists in the city, contemporaneity, or an interconnectedness with a time and place, can only occur with deeply personal and intimate gestures. As Doyle has suggested in her work on such productive “difficult” art, the fact that Salim’s work confronts us with our own limits regarding pain, blood, nakedness, and death, also brings us face to face with the *stuff* of living a life: “vulnerability, intimacy and desire,” and “the things that make life hard.”⁵⁴³

Thus far, the year 2016 has had moments that have burst through the skin of time on India’s socio-political-scape as “evental sites,”⁵⁴⁴ or sites from within which new truths may emerge. There has been a resurgence of culture wars in the nation—over the question of beef eating and performances of patriotism, for instance. Alongside, urgent protests by minoritarian, Dalit, subaltern, secessionist, and feminist forces have emerged in new form and force on college campuses and on streets. The present moment thus seems to be asking for a valid aesthetics for these times. In such an instance, the question, “why a Deleuzian view of aesthetics now?” (Put to me, generously, by one of my committee members), may be doubly pertinent, for as Nathan Jun reminds us, Deleuze’s project is at base, ethical, forcing us “not to understand these things as they are but as they might be: the conditions of possibility for thinking, doing, and being otherwise.”⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Salim, “Visual and Material Arts: Crossing A Dead River: Context of Performance Art in India.”

⁵⁴³ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 20.

⁵⁴⁴ See Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, Trans. Peter Hallward, (London and New York: Verso, 2002) 41.

⁵⁴⁵ Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith, eds. *Deleuze Connections: Deleuze and Ethics*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 3.

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