

(ANTI-)CAPITALISM

The Imminent Promise and Fear of a Getaway Car

Raqs Media Collective

Comrade Crow, choose your flamingo. Choose your time. Fly.

(Raqs Media Collective 2010)¹

An Allegory About Time Under Capital

You have other plans. You have a getaway car.

You're on a roll, aren't you?

Your rearview mirror is so badly askew that you see far ahead whenever you look behind you.

There's no escaping the future when you pursue the past.

Now try saying that in your head the other way round (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

There is a story waiting to be told in numbers, and in two kinds of getaway cars. It's about art, and dissensus, and the sense of being valued. And like all stories, whether about rising temperatures or falling expectations or rolling bulldozers or shortening breath, it's a story about capital. That is why this text is a work-in-interruption, punctuated by voices from another work, *The Capital of Accumulation* (Raqs Media Collective 2010; see Figure 17.1), which listened to the ghost of Rosa Luxembourg to unravel the jagged ways of the accumulation of capital. There are other kinds of possession as well: of texts by works, of the anticipation of works yet to be, and of seepage from works undone. Each such moment is a strike at time.

There is a moment in our work, *Strikes at Time* (see Figure 17.2), in which we find ourselves at the industrial-post-industrial edge of our city, Delhi, in a time that could be twilight, as much as it could be dawn. It's 2011.

A man, who could be a worker building one of the city's metro lines, is still wearing a hard hat and reflective safety vest, with an intriguingly blue face, as if a god trying to disguise himself. He walks that twilight, trailed by a white Maruti Omni van with a luminous outline. This is a box-like car that transports people, and odds and ends, from anywhere to mostly anywhere. The car meanders, tracing patterns of light in the deepening blue twilight. A travel disobeying the rules of destination, and of its function in time.²

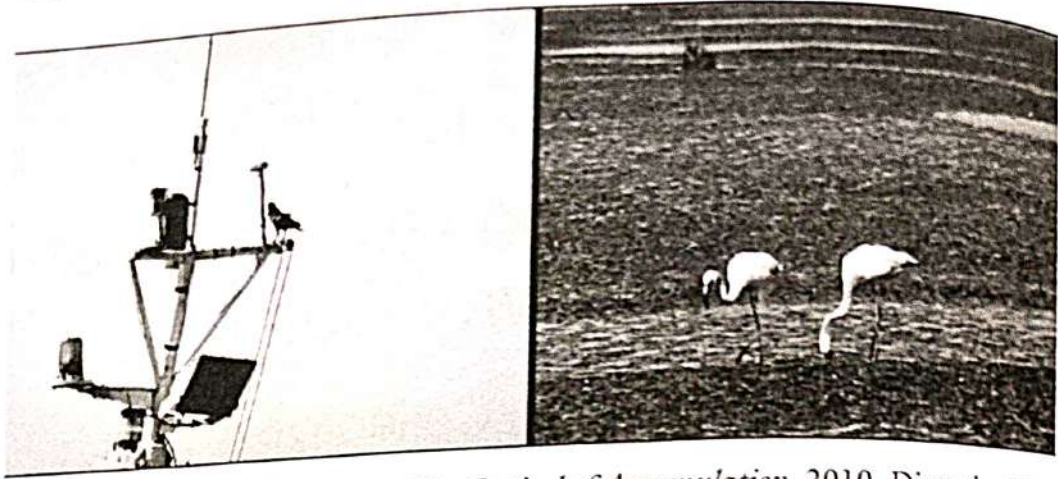


FIGURE 17.1 Raqs Media Collective, *The Capital of Accumulation*, 2010. Diptych video still. NEW.



FIGURE 17.2 Raqs Media Collective, *Strikes at Time*, 2011. Production still. NEW.

Eleven billion tons of “things” sail the oceans each year by ship. And each year, a little more than 11 billion tons of “things” travel on trucks in the United States alone. How much would be traveling, in how many railway wagons, how many Maruti Omni pick up vans, trucks, and airplane cargo holds, down how many railway lines, highways, roads, streets, dirt tracks, airline routes, and ship lines, all over the planet?³

Capital needs a swifter wobble about the planetary axis, shorter seasons, brief lunch breaks, a snappier interval between one working day and another, something more pliable than that slow, variable capital, that wet mass called humans (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

In our lifetime, the idea of capitalism had first and foremost to do with mobility, with people, and things, becoming mobile, and agile. In India, from the mid-1970s onwards, the first industrial product to be sold as a “dream” to the population was an automobile, a “people’s car” imagined by a princeling, the rising son of a prime minister flirting with

tyranny (see Tripathi 2015; Jaffrelot and Pratinav 2021; Business Standard n.d.). His dream bubble took shape under the shadow of the internal Emergency of 1975–1977, when fundamental rights were suspended, and when the republic virtually became a vast preventive detention camp featuring a side business in demolition and forced sterilization.⁴ But, regardless of what happened, there was always that promise—of a car. A favorite slogan of the time was “the nation is on the move.” We all had to be going somewhere.

Like things conjured under dictatorships, the “people’s car” was a potent image lacking substance. It took a return to elections, the fall of governments, motions of confidence and no-confidence, and an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the Indian state and a Japanese car manufacturer (Suzuki) for the “people’s car” (named “Maruti” after the Hindu monkey god, swift son of the wind) to find its assembly line.

The Maruti-Suzuki 800, compact, lightweight, and relatively inexpensive, available against monthly installments and easy finance, made the “everyman” imagine a whole new culture of goods and services available to them.⁵ The car was the world. The world was this car. It felt new, and global, and oriental, and exotic, and high tech—all at the same time. It was not just a means of locomotion but also a capacity to be moved toward the idea of a new dawn (for a personal narrative on the possession of the Maruti, see Khurana n.d.).

Almost a quarter of a century later, in 2005, an even smaller car, the Nano, a diminutive hybrid dream cross-pollinated between a state-capitalist potentate—“the Left Front”—and India’s oldest industrial “family”—the Tatas—led to yet another automobile production fantasia, in the state of West Bengal, to be sold at the discounted retail rate of US\$1,000 per car. There was just one hurdle. The factory, to stand, needed to displace the very peasants who had benefited most from the Left Front’s land reform policies, and who had been its most faithful voters. They had handed the apparatchiks of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its less significant “Front” allies more than three and a half uninterrupted decades in office. The choice was between factory and farmland. And the farmers were in no mood to be shoved off their fertile ground (IANS 2016).

And so, the peasants spoke their mind. They wouldn’t give up their land. Three decades of “left” power erupted in brutal police and party militia attacks on bewildered peasants who had been the party’s most committed voters.⁶ The party and its regime could see nothing but a conspiracy to deindustrialize the region. The farmers—the party’s former followers in the fertile farmlands—caught the scent of betrayal and turned their back on the politics that they had helped build. And that smaller than small car, the Nano, sped away to the other end of the country, to Gujarat in western India, to bolster another mirage of seamless production. (On the nature of mobility of capital and the relationship of multiple institutions, see Raqs Media Collective 2015).

Can the relations that we desire be written in terms of addition and subtraction? Unravel a productivity index and you get plenty of detail. Eyestrain, repetitive stress injury, the toxicity of mercury, the shortening of breaks and the intrusion of the supervisor ... You also get daydreams, chitchat, gossip, rumours, the thousandfold daily mutinies and routine skirmishes between desire and order. A little more voltage in the soul to combat the exhaustion of the body, and then again some more. Who has ever measured “revoltage”? (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Meanwhile, in the hinterland of Delhi, at the Maruti factory in Manesar, a new kind of worker strode on to the shop floor. Dexterous with new technology, assertive of dignity, capable, in many instances, of transcending the old divisions of birth and tongue, caste and cuisine, prayer and pride. Alongside, as Maruti-Suzuki’s grip on the small car sector loosened with global competition, the need to maximize the extraction of surplus value increased

sharply. This meant an intensification of automated processes, and a speeding up of the assembly line. By 2011, inside the factory at Manesar, the most pronounced, the most vocal conflicts between labor and capital were over time, speed, and exhaustion.

Repeatedly, over a year, workers refused to leave the factory at the end of their shifts, “de-occupying” the shopfloor to wrest it from management control—for a few days, a week, ten days—opening the space for leverage for negotiating managerial deferrals. One day in 2012, things broke down when a worker was abused by a supervisor because he had asked for a loo break. Fatigue turned to rage. Workers charged on the building, the cars, the machines, the glass cubicles of managers. It was a riot. A human resources manager choked in the fumes and did not recover. Other factory workers started rallying by not leaving their factories. A commando unit was posted in Manesar.⁷ Maruti’s chief executive officer, the head of the company, surmised that class war had set in. The heady fantasies of speed and comfort that had emanated from India look dented (Sengupta 2011; Singh and Sarda 2015).

The long process of imprisonment and bail hearings started, and 150 workers were arrested as instigators and participants, while many more retrenched. Prosecution lawyers had argued in the courts, and in the media, that the sentiment of investment had to be saved. Finally, with the trial, sixteen workers were given a life sentence.⁸

We are all numbers today. A datum, a statistic, a measure. How many are we? How much of ourselves are we? How deficient or how much in excess are we? (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Within three decades the acceleration of capital as movement had hit a speed bump. The car turned rusty, missed parts, started, stopped, and started again. Mobility is a matter of negotiated intermittence.

The Insignificance, or Significance, of Minuscule Fractions

How discontinuous, how surprising, how interrupted, how asynchronous, how mysterious, how quixotic things have been. And there’s no accounting for contingencies, either—for the perversity of protagonists distributed all across the mud flats of time, nourishing themselves on signs of life drowned in the water. Flamingos getting russet by the hour as they feed (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Art, the stuff that moves the world, and moves around the world, is a minuscule fraction of the value of all that gets produced in the world. That value, which is sometimes called “Gross World Product” (GWP), the combined gross national product of all the countries in the world, was calculated as being something around US\$87.5 trillion in 2019, a little before the global COVID-19 pandemic slowed things down, just a little. Exactly ninety-nine years before 2019, in 1920, when the world was still emerging from the Great War and the Spanish flu, the value of GWP had hovered around US\$1.7 trillion. This means that in the time it took, from 1920 to 2019, for a year less than a century to pass, the value of things produced in the world rose by US\$86 trillion. This is what the last hundred years look like (for the world GWP figure for 1920, see DeLong n.d.).

A significant proportion of the approximately 3.65 billion people on Earth who are currently of working age (about 50% of the total population of roughly 7.3 billion people) are making many more things, and much more value, than all that has ever been made since homo became sapiens in the Savannah. Capital moves and mobilizes the human through varying intensities of breakdowns, grandiosities, abandonments, and fecundities. Fueled, felled, possessed, discarded, given to many addictions to alertness, humans keep alive and tend to getaway vehicles. This is also what the last hundred years have been like. (For figures of the world’s working population, see Ritchie and Roser 2022).

The trajectory of art in India has ranged from the nervous excitement of auctions in the 1990s (shot through with anxiety of the banishment of its best-known artist⁹), to the whirlwind of the 2000s (alongside a proliferation of artist-led infrastructures), to the slowing down in the second decade of the twenty-first century (though also an effervescence of micro-actions of collective initiatives by artists), and to the pandemic-induced troubles of today as we waken from quarantines (and search to suture broken conversations).

A crate with a work of art that we have made gets loaded on to a Maruti Omni van that waits at the mouth of the narrow lane that fronts our studio in an urban village in Delhi. From there, it will go to a warehouse, then on to a truck and, crossing customs, loaded onto an airplane, or taken to a port and loaded onto a ship. This happens along with the filling in and attestation of many documents. This done, the crate flies or sails the high seas in a container, passing through zones of unrest and protest, war and refuge, fraying and friendship, construction and devastation. After a few days, or some weeks, it disembarks. More forms are filled. More vans, trucks, unloading docks. More paperwork. Finally, it arrives at its destination. A museum, occasionally with shadows of history and the odd ghost lurking in its basement, waits to receive how we make sense of the world.

Looking at numbers to get a sense, a realistic idea, of the proportion and place that “art” occupies in relation to the productive capacity of the world economy, we find that the global art market—which includes modern art, contemporary art, and antiquities—was worth as little as US\$64 billion in 2019, or 0.075% of the GWP. (Twitter, a single social media company, was recently auditioned for US\$44 billion.¹⁰) The galleries and dealers of just five countries dominate this market. The United States corners 47% of the trade, China—24%, United Kingdom—13%, France—6%, and South Korea—2%. The 191 other countries remain, together, with 8%. India’s share of the global art market is about US\$200 million, that is, approximately 0.33%. (For global art market sales figures, see Sholette 2017.)

Auctions make up a significant proportion of sales in the global art market. According to a survey of the Indian visual arts “industry” and the art market in India:

In the period of January to September, 2017, 183 works of Indian contemporary art were sold in auctions around the world fetching a total of INR 126.3 million (\$1 million, 683 thousand, and 749 USD). This was a sharp decline from the 333 artworks sold for INR 399 million (5 million, 178 thousand and 112 US Dollars) during the same period in 2013 (KPMG and FICCI 2018).

How many artists are actually mobilized in this process? According to the Art Basel and UBS report on the state of the global art market in 2017:

Close to half of the value of sales on the (global) auction market came from just 1% of the artists whose work sold in 2016. Only 15% of artists had works priced in excess of \$50,000, and a tiny fraction (just over 1%) had works that sold for more than \$1 million (Art Basel and UBS 2017, 16).

Private transactions in art form part of the sector named “treasure” in the global financial argot. Banks maintain lists of what are called “high net-worth individuals” (HNIs) who are capable of, and have the inclination for, spending their wealth on rare fine art commodities (mainly paintings and sculpture, very rarely works in other media). Globally, HNIs tend to spend just 8% of their personal wealth on fine arts. Most of this is devoted to modern painting, some to classical art and antiquities, and a small fraction to contemporary art. The largest number of HNIs who buy art are, in descending order, from the United States, China, United Kingdom, France, and South Korea. Indian HNIs (whose numbers are not small) spend only 0.02% of their wealth on art (see Sutton 2017; also see McAndrew c.2017, c.2020).

The share of work of artists from India in this global market is very small. And, within it, the share of contemporary art from India in the global value chain of contemporary art sales (through production, commission, collection, purchases, and auctions—which, by themselves, are a good indicator of the robustness of a sector in the market) does not exist even as a countable percentage. A very small fraction of a very small sector in a very large country makes up the reality of contemporary art in India. Economically speaking, contemporary art, globally, or in national market terms, is of almost no significance in the global financial matrix. Given such insignificance, it is worth asking why art students are attacked again and again on what they make (Misra 2022).

This brings us to a further question: If contemporary art is such a small fraction of the value that gets produced in the world, then why is there so much anxiety around it? To address this question, we need to look at another real-world antagonism.

In India, voluntary organizations or research institutions or universities active in the fields of education, health, human rights, long time-scale research, medicine, religion, ecology, or self-help have to submit details of their structure and their managerial personnel, financial audits, and proposed activities to get a clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs so as to access any funding support that may come from institutions based in another country. This is to comply with a 2010 amendment to the 1975 Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). This law, so suspicious of association, is, like the “people’s car,” a legacy of the internal Emergency of the mid-1970s. All subsequent regimes thought it fit and necessary to keep it, and to keep toughening it. The higher the clamor for a global investment climate favorable to India, the harsher the suspicion of volatility of not-for-profit associations that access funds across borders. No not-for-profit organization can access funding from any other source outside the border of India without a clearance, and monitoring, of intelligence agencies. In this way, denial of an FCRA clearance acts as a lever of control and can mean the difference between expansion and shrinkage of a cultural organization or arts initiative.

The extent of the paranoia becomes clear when we scrutinize the amount of money that actually flows through FCRA-cleared channels into India. In a US\$2.5 trillion economy, and with a federal state budget of US\$500 billion, the average annual inflow of money under FCRA in the years 2016–2019 was a meager US\$200 million. In terms of percentage, that is about 0.004% of the total state budget. That is 0.004% resource, policed and rigorously audited, experienced as a mortal threat, projected as a moral threat to the life of the nation (see Mint 2020).

What does this signify? There is a cultural-discursive assemblage—also talked of as a mood, or a climate, or a sentiment—that expresses dispositions circulating within society and about that society. It is an extremely fragile imbalance, and its fluctuations introduce political risk in the minds of the ruling arrangements and alignments—whether of caste, gender, generation, race, sexuality, abilities, or class. The deep distrust of “external associative influences” and their capacity to offset “inside” narratives of the nation is shared by those of political persuasions of all hues, from the gentlest liberal to the most delirious avenger.

A similar suspicion attaches to contemporary art. The ease with which it circulates and communicates across borders, with the “external” world, produces suspicion and envy. It is considered suspect and is sidelined, ignored, and interrogated because it retains the possibility of saying something surprising, something that marks a disruptive and disobedient flow that can emerge from somewhere outside manageable and predictable frameworks.

There are two ways, then, to defang the tenuous presence of contemporary art. The first move is to endow an exaggerated and disproportionate importance to the “value equations” performed by the “benchmarking” of auction prices as indicators of worth in the actually insignificant market environment within which contemporary art circulates. This is the “meritocratic form” (a tenet widely espoused) that makes a small number of people the soothsayers of capital, and of art. Its success stands in as a kind of motivational therapy for the material dysfunction and granular experience of risk in everyday life.

The second is a move undertaken by well-intentioned activists and socially alert critics to eviscerate contemporary art by suggesting that, despite its economic insignificance, it is somehow a bulwark to, and complicit in, the operations of capital and its phantasmagoric hold over an enthralled population. The tacit understanding by which art is produced, relayed, and written about can sometimes miss the simple fact that 97% of artists lead difficult lives yet find engaging ways to continuously de-frame the world and engender new milieus and capacities for re-apprehending the world.

The legal and constitutional theorist Gautam Bhatia has argued that the Indian Supreme Court's recent deep suspicion of anything in the realm of ideas and forms of life that emanates from outside the nation state (as expressed in a judgment on a minor detail of the FCRA), is a foundational attack on the right to form associations. He argues that the right to "associate" (to undertake the formation of social ties) is meaningless if it is constrained within the limitations of nation state forms (Bhatia 2022). Indeed, if artists, or musicians, or computer programmers, or workers, or mathematicians, or doctors or sportspersons are not able to "associate" and create networks of conversation, research, mutual aid, and exchange of experimental results and affinities with their peers in the world in sustained and egalitarian ways, these worlds will be eviscerated. The right to the arbitrary drawing of lines to define from whom or from where support can be sourced for the making and functioning of such "associations" is exercised exclusively by the state. This system prompts cultural and intellectual practices to encrust within fixed and known exchanges. We would argue that, in fact, the attitude most pronounced around the arts is the phenomenon of the *fear of associative tendencies*. The fear exists because the tendency to associate is seen as contaminating, as disruptive of the country's endogamous rules of the game of cultural coherence (see Santhosh 2020).

An Associative Glimmer in Intermittent Margins

New life forms emerge in the undergrowth of informal exchange. Here, now, is the last international, a Babel reborn in Babylon (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

In a recent interview, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera contends:

[being an artist is] not a specialized practice. The artist is somebody who can bring together people from other spheres to work in a vision of a different reality. The artist is the one who has to push the others to get away from their disciplinary boundaries (Sollins 2014).

Unconventional thoughts and ideas find ways into social consciousness, often from within milieus considered marginal. This outsider status of sources for ideas and sensations seems uncomfortable to societies and cultures wherein—despite massive concentration and centralization of executive and legal control—those in power feel insecure about its hold. The variegations of capital flows and fluctuations in productivity—expressed solely through the category of the "national" as a unit of understanding—lead to increasing fears of insolvency, and there are mounting debts needed to sustain the apparatus; a weakening grip on assets makes power shaky and, many a time, makes it appear illegitimate.¹¹ Dislocation, discontent, and disruption are normalcy. The constructed edifice of consensus is progressively besieged by a filigree of cracks and fissures. Amidst this dynamic, non-specialized practices work to create visions of a different reality, inviting others to delve in by forming seductive associative engagements. No wonder they become a site of anxiety and discomfort.¹²

Art practices hold the capacity to act associatively, invite exacting scenarios, build spirited milieus that innovate on protocols and thresholds, unleash out-of-habit, not-yet-tested forms of presence and utterance. All these help to underline why an economically marginal

practice generates so much unease and scrutiny. *Associative glimmer* depends on the activation of an imaginary, an ethic, and a practice of life that occurs within intermittent, temporal, margins. These margins are not geographical because there is no geography external to capital anymore. There is no part of the world left that is outside the domain of capital. The margins are not formally political either. That is, they are not locatable within the most self-conscious of capitalism's current political critics because, often, even their antagonism stays locked in within the logic of productivity and progress that capitalism demands, or alternatively they simply reproduce a culture of lack and lamentation.¹³

Not so long ago, the technological practices of free and open-source software coding and the early HTML-based Internet emerged from within associative networks of producers and researchers, often acting in free-time, outside the hours of mandated labor and across national and regional borders, giving a flickering and tantalizing glimpse of what the world of things and ideas could be if production moved away from wage labor toward a multi-site self-organization of material life and time. This happened at the heart of a grand restructuring of capital in the 1990s.¹⁴ Not entirely subsumed under capital, such practices, more and more, arrive and detour many a hard barrier of encryption and paywall to knowledge, governmental information, and surveillance apparatus.¹⁵

An artist friend of ours once quipped that most of artistic life cannot ever enter the world of "artfacts:com"!¹⁶ Within a lifeworld that is open to transcontinental traffic, alert to many dialects, and nourished by an interlacing of thinking, praising, critiquing, riffing, jamming over meals and coffee, hanging out, having accidental arguments, preparing assemblies, and being part of collective digressions and serendipities, art happens. This vivid world can stay hidden in plain sight.

This is the reasoning that we argued in *Five Million Incidents* (2019–2020), where we proposed that an assembly of forms of working and gathering with a hundred artists be based on an evocation of the infectious idea of *incident*:

Think of an incident as a fold in time—the extension of a fungal tendril, a quickened heart-beat, an epiphany, a flash of insight, an outbreak of goose-bumps, a moment of excitement, an occurrence, an encounter, a sighting, a memory. An incident can be anything that transforms the way we live or think, a conversation that carries a surge in its wake, an event that makes us rethink everything. Millions of incidents can populate a duration, making it come alive as an embodiment of temporal plenitude. That plenitude is a ground for making things anew (Raqs Media Collective 2020).

In a recent online symposium, *Staging the Contemporary: The Next Generation*, organized by the India Art Fair (2022) in collaboration with Ishara Art Foundation and Shiv Nadar University, almost twenty artists, all under the age of thirty-five, shared their works and practices under the generic rubric of "future generation." The range of practices they presented was varied, including a forensic analysis of war sounds, writing poetry, putting the body in jeopardy in performance art, publishing artist books and making collaborative zines, working with an expanded collective group in the agrarian habitat, detailing the violence of the state in occupied territories, making personal archives. None of the artists spoke about the market or about being evaluated by the values of the market. There was an absence in their language of any terms indicating interest in valuation in terms of dominant protocols. Each protagonist, with their distinct experience of generating associative fields that move among many cities, regions, and continents, spoke of searching and making new durational relationships that would in fact be at odds with many other claims to community and identity.¹⁷

The idea that everyone, regardless of birth, class, caste, or sex, has a right to an education was a notion that emerged from within the milieu of the "Artists Federation of the Paris Commune," a group of forty-seven artists and artisans in Paris who, in 1871, proposed, and

tried to practice, what they called a life of “communal luxury” and “future splendor” in the present (Ross 2015, 1, 4–5, 39, 45, 50, 58–61, 63–5, 70, 128, 137, 142; also see Reclus 2011, 81, 82, for a clear articulation of this idea). It was from within this milieu that Eugene Poitier, a fabric designer and textile artist (better known as the author of the lyrics of the *Internationale*) developed a proposal for “integral education” that would do away with what he considered to be the false hierarchy between “theoretical and practical knowledge” and “theory and practice” in general, to form a modus of discursive life that can be open and accessible to all. Poitier was in turn influenced by Joseph Jacotot, whom the philosopher Jacques Rancière brings to consideration in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* as the pioneer of a radical, egalitarian experiment in education that challenges cognitive hierarchies. Jacotot showed how everyone, erudite and analphabetic alike, can learn together through their equality of intelligences (Rancière 1991).

In Delhi not far from the campus of our alma mater Jamia Millia Islamia University, in the adjacent neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh, over a few months from December 2019 to February 2020, there was a highway blockade sit-in against the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act. The roads and walls next to the protest site, as well all over the university campus and its library, became a giant canvas. Drawings, paintings, sculpture, installations appeared and disappeared, as did an armada of paper boats with poems. Almost daily the authorities would remove or whitewash them; they would melt away, but would be redrawn and remade, again and again. Posters recited poetry and poetry was emboldened by posters. Anarchic murals were begun and grew. A fabric work of women as falcons appeared overnight.¹⁸ Poems were composed that burned their way into viral videos. Ad hoc libraries emerged with shared reading seats. People took selfies of themselves next to photographs depicting pitched battles with the police on campus. The bridge over the highway turned into a makeshift arcade for anonymous artists and poets, where slogans, jokes, puns, and messages of love and longing found company (Sengupta 2020).

This sensibility of togetherness as a means to unlearn and re-apprehend the world forms a latent, subterranean current that periodically emerges and shapes the world. It puts in motion an associative capacity that appears, like a luminous outline of a getaway car. This is the route, and the threat, that art sometimes marks on the map of this world.

Notes

- 1 *The Capital of Accumulation* narrates an oblique narrative of the relationship between metropolises and the world in homage but also as a counterpoint to Rosa Luxemburg’s (1913) exceptional critique of global political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*. It is a video diptych that trawls through haunting, dreamlike landscapes straddling Warsaw, Berlin, and Bombay/Mumbai to produce a riff on cities, capitalism, and the twentieth century’s turbulent history: it is part natural history, part detective journal, part forensic analysis, part cosmopolitan urban investigation, and part philosophical dialogue. The video is available at: <https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/index.php/2010/01/18/the-capital-of-accumulation/> Password: 2010_cofa.
- 2 *Strikes at Time*, two channel video, blue room, flooring, 20 minutes, 2011. *Strikes at Time* weaves together found text from a worker’s diary, transformed by a collective rewriting by a group of young proletarian writers with video annotations on *The Nights of Labor* (1981) by Jacques Rancière. The work is a short essay on history of capital, the refusal of time, twilight ferment, and mythic tremors. The video is available at: <https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/index.php/2011/04/05/strikes-at-time-2/> Password: aboutit_strikes.
- 3 Some 11 billion tons of goods are transported by more than 50,000 merchant ships each year. In 2019 they covered nearly 60 trillion ton-miles (a ton-mile refers to transporting one ton of goods over a nautical mile). This represents 1.5 tons per person based on the current global population. As of 2019, the total value of the annual world shipping trade had reached more than US\$14 trillion. See United Nations (2019); and John (2019).

4 The internal Emergency declared by the Indira Gandhi government in India lasted for roughly one year and nine months, from June 25, 1975 till March 21, 1977. Ostensibly, the reason given by the regime for the proclamation of emergency was a surge of subversive political actions. Immediately, it had been preceded by a serious legal challenge to Mrs. Gandhi, the then Indian prime minister, whose election due to supposed electoral malpractices, which is usually given as an explanation for what instigated her to declare the emergency. Effectively, her government initiated a severe crackdown and repression of the rising climate of political dissent during this period. Fundamental rights were suspended, and 110,806 people, mainly political dissidents and opposition activists, were arrested under extraordinary laws during this period; see Shah Commission Of Inquiry (appointed by the government of India under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to look into the Excesses of the Internal Emergency, 1975–77), 3rd and Final Report (August 6, 1978), 134; Appointed by the Government of India under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to look into the Excesses of the Internal Emergency (1975–77); the report is online at <https://archive.org/details/ShahCommissionOfInquiry3rdFinalReport>.

The period also saw a program of punitive house demolitions and coercive sterilization drives (around 6.2 million people were sterilized in 1975) under the cover of a state-led “family planning programme.” This period, one of the darkest in modern Indian history, also led to the rise to power of Mrs. Gandhi’s younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, whose dream was the “Maruti” car. Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash while piloting his own aircraft in 1980, and he is remembered up to this day for his enthusiastic association with some of the worst excesses of the emergency—especially the punitive demolitions and sterilization campaigns. For more on the Emergency, see Jaffrelot and Pratinav (2021). For more on the Sterilization program during the emergency, see Hvistendahl (2012). For more on Sanjay Gandhi and the Maruti car, see Tripathi (2015). For a company history of Maruti Suzuki, see *Business Standard* (n.d.).

5 This was definitely true for the “middle class” everyman. Stevens (1983) is a fascinating report that, quoting social scientists at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, indexes the rise of consumer expenditure amongst “middle class Indians” through the 1970s and early 1980s. Here is what it says: “Between 1970 and 1980, annual sales of scooters, motorcycles and mopeds nearly quadrupled, to more than 400,000. Sales of cars and jeeps nearly doubled, to 60,000 annually, from 1975 to 1981. Television sets have tripled, to more than 2 million, since 1977... And in a new buying craze, Indians are purchasing 20,000 video cassette recorders a month. Hundreds of video libraries have sprung up in the big cities. Self-Made Entrepreneurs Between 1978 and last year, production of cookies, a luxury food, increased nearly 50 %; wrist-watches, 20 %, to 5.3 million, and toothpaste 23 %. Soft drink sales doubled to 1.7 billion bottles. Cosmetics and beauty aids have become a \$100-million-a-year business.”

6 The appellation “left” or “mainstream left” in Indian politics is given to a coalition of social democratic parties, some of whom name themselves as “Communist Parties.” The economic policies of these parties, which span the spectrum from a state-capitalist “populist welfarism” to a “neoliberal” commitment to new capital, is leavened by a political nostalgia for the former Soviet Union, and often, unreconstructed Stalinism. These parties were politically significant from the 1970s through the early 2000s. For different periods, they governed three provinces (Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura). In West Bengal, which is where the Nandigram TATA car factory was to be located, they were elected to power consistently across thirty-five years.

7 The “Commando” unit was of 200 commandoes of the Rapid Action Force—a special paramilitary arm of the Central Reserve Police Force under the central ministry of home affairs. See Dutta (2012).

8 Even a decade after the dispute, the issues of unsympathetic media coverage of the workers point of view, which exacerbated the conflict, continue to remain unaddressed; see Ullah (2022).

9 This refers to Maqbool Fida Hussain (1915–2011), one of the most prominent modernist painters of post-independent India. He was persistently harassed, especially through court cases, by Hindu extremists for many years, and ultimately left India and took the citizenship of Qatar in 2010, months before he died in 2011.

- 10 The choice of the word “auditioned” is deliberate as we seek to give a sense of the intricate dance of “sizing each other up” that is still going on, at the time of writing, among Elon Musk, Twitter’s managing board, and the company’s shareholders. It’s as if all parties involved are assessing each other’s claims, and their abilities to perform faithfully to live up to the claims that they are making. Musk keeps moving the goalposts of what he wants Twitter to do to be “deserving” of his takeover bid. And the company, its board, and shareholders, seem to be ambivalent on some days, and enthusiastic on others. The situation, as of now, is interestingly unclear. Performances (and auditions) continue. See Associated Press (2022).
- 11 Over the last three decades many state apparatuses went insolvent and crashed, then were resuscitated by global sales of assets and by dispossessing the population of its savings. The recent case unfolding rapidly is Sri Lanka; see *Al Jazeera* (2022).
- 12 As social and economic distress steadily magnifies, populist regimes across the world (egged on by the social forces they represent) tend to fall back on the strategy of increasing cultural insularity and a cult of the “local” as the true hallmark of authenticity. We can see this happening everywhere, in the United Kingdom and the United States, and in parts of Western Europe, as much as in India. The shadow of this phenomenon is discernible in the changing rhetorics and priorities of cultural institutions across the world. In this milieu, suspicion against contemporary art and culture—as the bearer of cosmopolitan “contamination” and idioms of vernacular translocality—increases. Sometimes this suspicion is even voiced from within contemporary art, as if against itself, in a bid to return to, and restore, some fictive “authenticity.”
- 13 This follows the necessity of “state capitalist” antagonists of capitalism, which tend to fall back on models of cultural autarky and the suspicion of anything marked “alien,” as well as critics of capitalism who work with pre-capitalist and often imagined “pre-modern” currents—seized more by an imagined nostalgia for “what might never have been,” than by a criticism of what is, of what exists.
- 14 The Internet ramped up the globalization of capital by making real-time synchronization of productive processes possible across the globe and across time zones. This was most visible in the phenomenon of “call centers” and back-office outsourcing, but also applies to the streamlining of demand and supply chains, inventory management, and even in the “just in time” management of the production of components in complex manufacturing processes. Just as an example, it became possible to coordinate the dispersed production of different parts of a single automobile in vastly different locations, and to have them brought together through discrete supply chains to assemble a single car, as and when “demand” required. The globalization of capital had effectively given rise to the globalization of production processes. The increasing contact between labor in different parts of the world (of which labor in the software industry is an example) was, and remains, an inevitable corollary of this process.
- 15 A critical, ongoing case in the Delhi High Court on the stranglehold of intellectual property regimes over the circulation of research. See Internet Freedom Foundation (c. 2021); Kumari and Chaturvedi (c. 2020); Thapliyal (2022). See a sustained critique of information secrecy and blockades by various actors at *WikiLeaks*, online at: <https://www.wikileaks.org>. On the cruelty and mishap that the open culture encounters and lives with, see the case of Aaron Swartz, a summation of which is available at “Aaron Swartz,” *Wikipedia*, online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Swartz. All accessed June 6, 2022.
- 16 Artfacts is an online artist ranking website that claims to assess the market worth of artists based on what it considers to be objective criteria, i.e. exhibitions and records of sales.
- 17 The online event organized by India Art Fair with artists presentation and discussions can be accessed in multiple videos available online at: <https://www.ishara.org/program-events/staging-the-contemporary-the-next-generation/>.
- 18 The idea of “women as falcons” riffs off the name of the neighborhood—Shaheen Bagh—which translates as “Garden of Falcons.” The image of the falcon’s flight as symbolic of the urge for liberty is commonly understood amongst Urdu speakers in India and Pakistan. It comes, especially, from a line in a poem by the celebrated twentieth century Urdu poet

Muhammad Iqbal—"tu shaheen hai, kam hai parwaaz tera" ("you are a falcon, your task is to fly"). The neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi was self-consciously named after this line in the Iqbal poem. And hence, the women of Shaheen Bagh were seen, and came to see themselves, as "falcons." On the naming of Shaheen Bagh, see Roychowdhury (2021), 171–172.

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