

Silicon Plateau

The background of the image consists of several horizontal, wavy bands of varying shades of gray. The bands are layered, with the lightest gray at the top and the darkest gray at the bottom. The wavy edges of the bands create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a stylized landscape or a topographical map. The overall effect is a clean, modern, and minimalist aesthetic.

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SILICON PLATEAU is an art project and publishing series that explores the intersection of technology, culture and society in the Indian IT city of Bangalore. Each volume of Silicon Plateau is a themed repository for research, artworks, essays, interviews and stories that observe the ways technology permeates the urban environment and the lives of its inhabitants.

Bangalore, with its history and traditions that now mingle with start-up and tech culture, offers fertile terrain for artistic research. Once the Garden City of India, Bangalore has grown into the Silicon Valley of India in less than three decades to become a demographically diverse metropolis, with tech parks that function as micro-cities, and co-working spaces appearing on every corner.

The editors of Silicon Plateau are interested in how new technologies and their infrastructure shape our every day, while also being tools that morph according to the social spaces they inhabit. The project is an attempt at creating collaborative research into art and technology, beginning by inviting an interdisciplinary group of contributors

(from artists, to designers, researchers and lawyers) to participate in the making of each volume of Silicon Plateau.

—Marialaura Ghidini and Tara Kelton

INTRODUCTION

"And down under all those piles of stuff, the secret was written: we build our computers the way we build our cities—over time, without a plan, on top of ruins."

Ellen Ullman, Life in Code: A Personal History of Technology, 2017

This book collects stories: they are snippets of everyday life, of conversations that are sometimes spoken and sometimes typed; they are deliberations on how we behave, what we sense, and what we might think about, when we use the gamut of services offered to us on demand, through just a tap on our mobile screens.

We asked the sixteen contributors of the book a main question: what does it mean to be an app user today—as a worker, a client, or simply an observer? We invited them to think of when we, the 21st century app-dwellers, go from point A to point B across a city without having to bother with directions; of when the things we want come to us at a swipe without having to leave the comfort of our own spaces or handle currency; of what it is that lies behind the labour that some of us access so easily and remotely. We also asked the contributors where our trust in the capacity of technology to organise things for us and make them seemingly straightforward, systematic and effortless comes from—even though, in exchange, we relentlessly feed global corporations with our GPS data and online behaviours as we carry our phones around in our pockets.

In reading the contributors' stories, the dynamics of day-to-day life we often dismiss as obvious start to inhabit more layered situations. They become animated by the subtleties of the language of personal stories and cultural behaviours. They become integral to the way a city is lived and the way it grows. They turn into a window on the way we inhabit the present, and think and dream about the future.

Language is prominent in many of the contributors' works. It is the language of people, places and algorithms; it reveals itself in face-to-face conversations, in the act of observing, and within the syntactic limitations of chat messages, machine reading, and comment options of customer support services. At times it appears as an enabler of social bonding and understanding, while at others it disrupts them. The work *Wish We Were Here!* by artist Mariam Suhail decontextualises language while taking the reader through an unplaceable journey. Common-place tasks are punctuated by the unfamiliar, yet almost intimate, voices of mobile applications that never fail to remind us of their services' ever-present functionality. In *Amina*, writer Saudha Kasim looks at life from within the customer support department of a food delivery company. In a collage of jargon and situations, the protagonist's days unfold, almost silently and in estrangement: "I just type in chat messages 2 annoyed people. Who only use the chat app so they don't have 2 talk 2 any1." Work is also at the core of *Black Box* by artist Tara Kelton. It is rendered as a series of visions composed of mass-produced scenarios that seem in-built into our visual unconscious when we think about the entities behind the slick interfaces of

our service providers. It is with anthropologist Mathangi Krishnamurthy's *How to do things with Bits and Bytes* that the workplace is analysed as a social and cultural site—a site whose values mingle with those of the entertainment industry. Advertisements, TV programmes and commercial films, whose language and aesthetics we all inhabit (willingly or not), seem to fuel the new economy's dream: the promise of *something better*.

The city has a prominent role in the book; it is the backdrop of many stories—particularly Bangalore. Several works put an emphasis on exploring what it is that constitutes its essence, and what it is that diversifies its urban environment. Writer Deepa Bhashti's *On the Illegibility of a City* is an intimate account of wandering across Bangalore. Here the reader encounters the language of the city: a language of multiplicity and ambiguity (like spoken language), which is at odds with the straightforwardness of the service apps that infiltrate our urban experiences. *Thursday* by photographer Clay Kelton punctuates this meander by placing the reader into the vacuum that surrounds the device-and-I relationship. The newly-crafted needs to always be up-to-date and in touch turn into means of disconnection from that world full of fortuitous and accidental occurrences outside us. With *Terms of Service* by writer Sruthi Krishnan, the reader is back in the buzzing noise of daily life. Here, the encounters with the workforce that satisfies desires of mobility on demand reveal the essence of the time-bound social transactions of the sharing economy: a meeting of differences that disrupt our notions of remoteness and proximity. *Stories from the Gridlock: Ghosts in the Machine* by artist Vandana Menon offers another snippet of the dynamics of on-the-go workplaces and the social reality that imbues them. Migration-waves go hand in hand with the growth of urban spaces, and also fuel the rise of the e-economy. In *Reviews* by designer Furqan Jawed, the logic of rating services so intrinsic to the digital economy comes to the fore. It is the customisable comment (versus the standardised star-criteria) that certifies the value of our generic on-demand transactions through the lenses of the personal—the uniqueness of what we deem *worth it*.

Using mobile apps differently, not just as straightforward means to an end, is a possibility presented by many contributors. Some of them trace the changes in attitude towards these pocket-friendly technologies to our inherent desire to change for the *better*; others point at the necessity to make changes that are deliberate and beyond our immediate needs. *How Farmizen is helping people of Bengaluru reconnect with farming* by linguist Carla Duffet highlights how the products of the sharing economy are catering to the widespread desire to shrug off the constraints of the boxed-up urban life. Yet such desire seems to be deeply rooted in contradictions. The

interview with entrepreneur Vir Kashyap offers the reader the corporate side of the tales of renewal brought about by the e-economy. The social and economic realms are changing at full speed, in a remodelling that asks for questions and imagination. Artist Yashas Shetty's *Aadhaar Cards of Great Leaders* acts as a tangent, rooted in the springboard for the sharing economy—the globalised digital payment system. There is no productive interconnectedness, no swift remote transaction, without linking an individual to a unique digitised identity—a database system with plenty of limitations and short-circuits for its users. With anthropologist Nicole Rigillo's *Environmental Apptivism: WhatsApp and Digital Public Spheres in Bangalore*, a communication app becomes a service in the hands of its users. Morphed by citizen groups, it turns into a public space nurtured by the alternatives proposed by its inhabitants. *The Weight of Cloud Kitchens* by Aasavri Rai and social entrepreneur Sunil Abraham analyses our online behaviours in light of the footprint we leave in the actual world. The cloud, despite its symbolic immaterial nature, has indeed a hefty presence.

The works in the last section of the book provide moments for envisioning potential futures. They offer the reader spaces to imagine the mobile services of the sharing economy as something different, as something whose rules can be different. Designer Qusai Kathawala's *Let's talk about the future, baby! Let's talk about you and me!* is a toolkit in the making for thinking about the future, beyond the constraints of the present: "What do we really want to happen? And what do we need to make it happen?" As a counterpoint, *The Truth* by artist Yogesh Barve does not offer a strategy, but the open-endedness of a dichotomy, confronting the reader with the illusions and deceptions that characterise our relationship with emerging technology. Lucy Pawlak's *The People Who Share* is instead a tale of reimagination, in which the characters' beliefs, dreams, failures and encounters turn the expected into the unforeseen. Art comes to the foreground here, as a way for people to not only "get to know something with their minds but also to *feel* it emotionally and physically."

As a miscellaneous collection of essays, fictional stories, artworks, reports and conversations, this book does not give answers, but offers narratives to defeat easy conclusions. All together the contributors' works point to that fact that we are in the midst of grappling with the mediation that mobile service platforms and their economy operate in our lives. With its all-embracing transactions, the sharing economy is about us people and our social relationships, about the places we live in and the way we dwell in them; it is about the infrastructures that lie behind what we see on our screens, and about our desires, which are our own and yet at times, not actually so. The contributors' works demonstrate that

the services we are so drawn to—because of a notion of efficiency, a sense of accomplishment, a dream of being able to do things differently—are not just algorithms that intervene when we carry out the mundane activities of our life. They are instead human-machine systems in which being human, with foresight, empathy, and understanding, has a major role—one that comes with the potential to change, shape, morph and reinvent. We have agency, they seem to say; we can build from inside ruins, rather than over them, while still embracing productive randomness and stimulation.

—Marialaura Ghidini

WISH WE WERE HERE!
Mariam Suhail



WISH WE WERE HERE!

Where to?

Hello ma'am. Can you please tell me drop location?
Okay.

Hello, hello, where are you sir?

It's not clear what he's saying.
Can you talk to him please. See where he is.

He's saying something... airport something.
But he's coming. I think he is.

It's still saying 9 minutes away.
He's not moving.
Okay, 8 minutes.

Now it's 9 minutes again.

Okay now it's stuck on 5 minutes.
The car is in the same spot on the map.
Hey he's not moving.

This is what they do, they want you to cancel. They can't cancel,
they'll get into trouble if they cancel.

Okay, I'm going to cancel.
You want to wait a bit more?
He's not moving.
We have to leave, it's eleven thirty already.
Okay I'll cancel. What else can I do?
I'm doing it.
Wait!
I've done it.

Can you book from your phone instead?
Sure.

Got one. It's saying 1 minute away.
Wow.
Shit. So we'd better get downstairs.
That was fast.
Hey, isn't this the same driver?

Hey, no no. His name was something else.

There, he's waiting.

Hi, you got here so fast!

I was right here ma'am.

Okay.

Thanks.

Bye guys. Bye.

Bye.

Thank you.

Thank you sir.

Nice guy.

Yeah.

{Please rate your driver}

Star star star star star

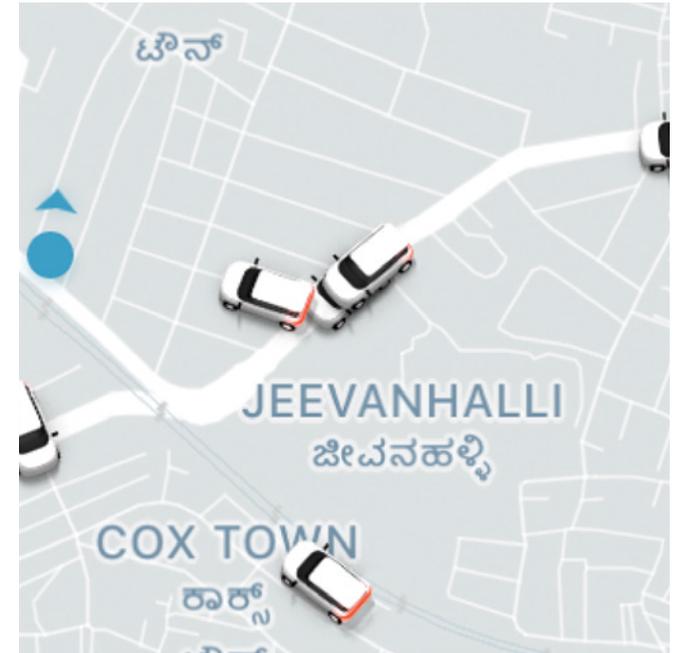
Five stars.

Hey I just checked, there's a way to see all the trips in this. This driver is the same guy who made us wait and cancel. That's why he was right there.

So weird.

Weird.

We're home. It's fine.





WISH WE WERE HERE!

We don't deliver here yet. Why don't you try a different location?

[EDIT LOCATION](#)

RATE YOUR FOOD



ETA6MINS

He kept glancing in my direction, his eyes rapidly moving between my face and phone. He was obviously hungry.

Finally he broke the ongoing conversation and asked me “Hey, you’ve ordered?”

Yeah. It’s done.

Really?

Yeah, it’s already on it’s way. See?

That’s our guy on his little orange bike.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.

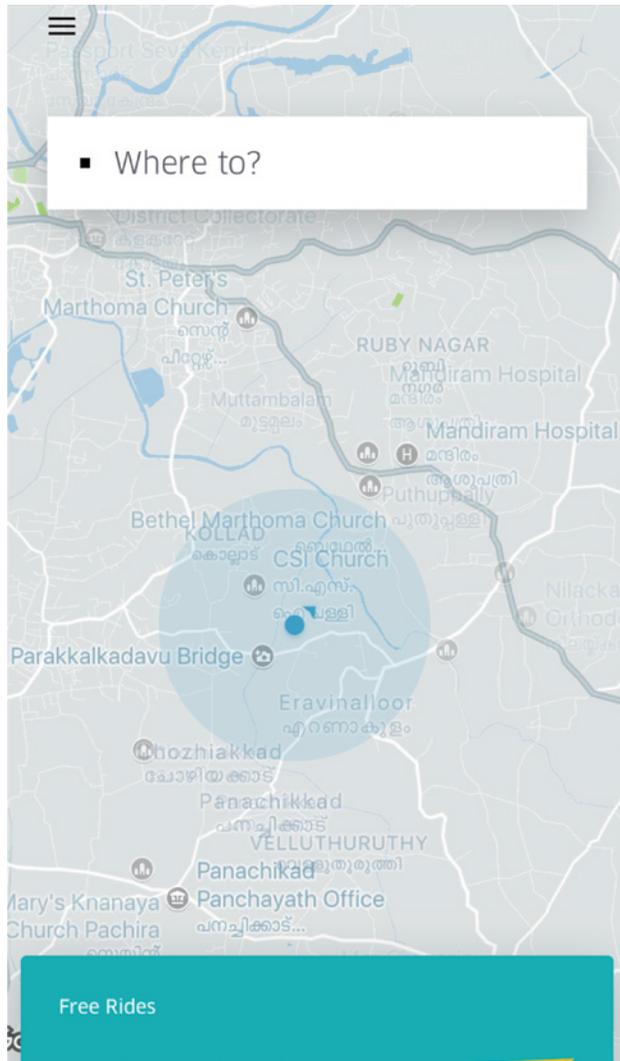
We ran a total of **125 km** to deliver your orders.



Haven't heard from you in a while.
Haven't heard from you in a while.

Haven't heard from you.
In a while.





Hold me.





We have missed you!

How many things did you order?

Why, what happened?

The bell's been ringing constantly for the last three days. And last three or four times it was the same guy. Young guy, a kid almost, with snazzy hair.

I open the door and he hands me a small, not so heavy box and leaves.

He's even stopped taking my signature. And he has this look of "Why are you making me do this again and again?".

Oho that's okay, that's okay.

It's a bit ridiculous.

They're piling up next to the shoe rack.

Open them.

No, I'll wait.

I'll wait till you get back.

No more waiting!
No more waiting!

NO more waiting!

OMG Mariam, it's here! 🤖

AMINA

Saudha Kasim

In her room in the Jewel House PG for Girls, there was a bed next to hers and two more were laid end to end at the foot of her own.

On each bed there was a sleeping girl. Hers was in the corner and when she slept she turned to the window, the curtain's bottom edge fluttering on her face, the cool Bangalore night air eddying around her. The other girls didn't want to keep the window open at night – they didn't fear intruders like those in the stories in the papers back home, stories in which girls were being attacked in their paying guest accommodation in BTM and Madiwala and the not-so-nice parts of Koramangala.

No, they objected to the cold. They switched off the fan and she'd push the window open ever so slightly so she wouldn't sweat through her clothes and feel rank each morning when she queued up for her turn to use the bathroom. There, after each girl had used it, she cracked open the window so all the smells of all these pretty girls and their not-so-pretty inside were let out.

She'd sit on the plastic stool that had been left for no discernible reason in the bathroom by the PG owner – a middle-aged man who'd worked as a temp machinist in a ball bearing factory a decade ago, then been let go by the management, then agitated for a permanent position, then agreed to a single settlement of 15 lakhs that allowed him and his wife to buy this plot and construct this tottering tower of rooms above rooms above rooms for working girls like her who didn't want to travel too far to their office. A couple of stops on a BMTC bus, a five minute walk down a two lane road, past the Iyengar Bakery that sold greasy egg puffs and crumbly Milkmaid cake, past a Chinese mobile store, through a brown gate, up the granite steps, past the rubber plants and vertical garden wall, and she was in her cubicle.

Her cubicle. With her name printed on a piece of card neatly stuck into a plastic holder. Easy to slip in and easy to slip out. Amina. In bold, black letters.

Here too her place was by the window. There was one workstation next to her, and behind her two more.

There had been a feeble attempt to make the office feel young. Just above her cubicle, on the wall, there were four caricatures of Elvis, Marilyn, Michael and Richard. Only their first names were scribbled in pen and ink. She and her colleagues recognized Elvis, Marilyn and Michael. But Richard stumped them when they first saw the picture.

"The boss likes Pretty Woman," the HR head told her and her group of freshly inducted employees on their first day in office. "He believes it shows that there's hope for everyone. We should never stop dreaming big." Someone at the back started laughing, a laugh that quickly transformed into a barely smothered cough. The HR head, a round face with a sparse moustache, had glared at each of them in turn and briskly dismissed them from his presence. Their HR partner had taken them around and shown them the food court, the pool table, the table tennis set-up and the beanbag-cluttered breakout rooms. "We're a fun workplace," she chirped. "F-U-N. Fun!"

F-U-C-K, whispered the boy who'd laughed at the Pretty Woman reference. Amina turned around to stare at him and he winked at her. She quickly turned back around and the girl next to her, Priyanka, rolled her eyes and said, "He'll be one of the first to leave. You can almost smell the restlessness on him."

She'd been right. He hadn't stuck around – a week after they'd completed their two weeks' training in operations and customer service, he'd come in and submitted his resignation, taken Priyanka out for a coffee and a movie and made out with her in the theater and left her and the office and changed his mobile number.

Cool, level-headed Priyanka had wept in frustration and sadness and a week later she was also on her way out and Amina was picked by the customer service department manager, Satish, as a possible replacement. He made her shadow Priyanka on her last day when she was weeping too much to take care of the customer calls. Someone called up complaining that his ice cream had not been delivered even an hour after the order had been placed and Priyanka had sobbed her responses. Amina could hear the man on the other end of the line getting more and more irate, losing control of how to pronounce expletives. Garima, Satish's deputy, had leapt over to where they sat and taken charge of the call.

Garima, sweet voiced and with excellent verbal English skills, had calmed the man down. After the call had ended

and Garima walked away, Priyanka had waspishly said, “She thinks she’s superwoman. You know how much she gets paid? Five times our salary. She tried to leave last year and they doubled her pay.”

Amina watched Garima get back to her cubicle, put on her headset and lean back in her chair. She walked like she knew she deserved every rupee she got, and more.

When the company said it would come for campus interviews, the placement cell had advised Amina to try out for the job. It’s customer service, Mukesh Bhatt, the wiry placement cell admin, had told her when she’d walked in to his office with her completed form with her loopy, round signature at the bottom.

“There’s not much out there, Amina,” he’d said clipping her form with another form and then slipping it into a file. “It’s a bad market for freshers. And it’s customer service, not front end because...” his voice had trailed off and he’d looked at the top of her head, at the vivid purple and black hijab that covered it. She knew what he was thinking – what they all thought when they first saw her in certain spaces in this city.

If it had been her older sister Waheeda in her place, she would have demanded the opportunity to try that front end, customer facing marketing job. She would have attended the interview and worn her most glittery hijab and stared back at them if they said or implied anything. Waheeda had got a job in a media house in Mumbai some years ago and was now in Dubai working at a bank. And married, with two children. The apple of her father’s eye.

Amina was lucky if her father listened to her. When she’d told him she was trying for the jobs coming through campus placement he’d talked over her and said these experiments were good for a year, she was not cut out for working. She was not Waheeda.

“I can be Waheeda-*ttha*,” she’d said softly on the call but her father had ridden over that, a mixture of ego and intimidation, bending her to his will.

“Do your little adventure, *kutty*, and then we’ll find you a nice, kind man and you can live a nice, comfortable life.” And he’d cut the call.

A nice, comfortable life. If her father had ever listened to her when she spoke he would have known she never wanted that. It would have shocked him to his core that his mouse of a middle child thought in such a way.

“Fine,” she told Mukesh Bhatt, “I will try out for the customer service job.” He gave her a little packet of information about the company, with its hot pink and green logo of a gamboling elephant and tagline: *Fighting to feed you*.

When Mugdha, the sociology MA who shared her hostel room saw the packet, she’d sniffed and said, “Of all the things to put as a tagline. In this country.”

“There isn’t much else out there,” Amina had said as she flipped through the leaflets.

“How big was your class?”

“Fifty five.”

“And your whole batch?”

“Three hundred or thereabouts.”

“And how many MBAs from other colleges and all over the country will be trying for jobs here? Tens of thousands?”

Amina looked at the leaflets again and wondered why she’d built a whole future on something so rickety, so unstable.

She moved from her cubicle to Priyanka’s and replaced Priyanka’s name with her own in the plastic holder. Garima, passing by Amina’s workstation just then, paused and said to no one in particular, “So she was here less than a month?” She hummed a tune and walked on.

They asked her to take over the evening shift duties a week later, the busiest time of the day for orders, all those techies going home, clicking on the app and ordering their burgers and biryanis, their *chaats* and mocktails. They would give her a cab to get back home at midnight. If she did well the first month, she would get a slight bump in salary.

All it took to send Amina back to the chat-based customer service role she was hired for was a missing portion of garlic bread. The man started screaming before she even got to calmly say her dialogue as instructed on the hot pink flow chart pinned to her cubicle wall. When the man finally stopped screaming to take a breath she’d said in a shaky voice that she understood his concerns and she’d try and talk to the delivery executive, Arif Zaman, whom she had dialed and conferenced into the call to figure out where the garlic bread had disappeared.

The man started laughing then and mimicked her. She heard her accent then: those heavy stresses on the consonants, the stretch of the vowels. The click of his tongue as he said “now.” Now, he said. Ow, ow, ow, he repeated. Why did the chicken cross the road, he asked. Tell me, bitch, he shouted, this man bereft of his sixty rupees’ portion of garlic bread (with taxes, seventy five

rupees). Zimplee, right, zimplee!

She heard Satish's voice on the line and then Garima had plucked the headset off her and took over so smoothly that she didn't, couldn't react.

"Your talents are maybe not in voice," Satish said to her gently as he guided her back the next morning to her previous workstation and she found her name card slipped back into the plastic holder. "You just oversee the chat support like you did before. You're so good at that."

She sat down in her chair beneath the combined gaze of Elvis, Marilyn, Michael and Richard. "This," said Satish, "is the future." He smiled at her.

This is the future, this chat messaging system, with its non-threatening interface for minimal human intervention. Where strangers needn't speak if they didn't want to speak and where they definitely didn't want to speak to girls like her.

It should have made her feel a bit put out, she supposed. Instead, she felt elated.

There were days when she didn't speak to anyone in the office in those first months on the job. When September came around, the whole company had been put into five buses and they'd headed out to a resort in the middle of fields of tomatoes.

They spent the day on the grounds, zorbing and walking on rope bridges and hanging off harnesses and jumping on trampolines.

After she'd spent the morning being as collegial as she could be, Amina walked up to the glossy black horse that stood by a railing and petted his nose and he nuzzled her neck and that was when Nalina tapped her on the shoulder and pointed to his limbs. Or rather, the extra limb that he'd grown in the time he'd been sniffing at her neck.

Amina backed away and looked at Nalina who winked at her. She burst out laughing, the noise she made rusty from not being used. Nalina watched her, smiling.

Amina had overheard other colleagues whispering about Nalina in awe in the pantry and breakout rooms, about her coding skills and her intelligence and her muteness. The CEO was always parading her in the business papers when the company was subject to rumours of

de-growth or he wanted to get some extra publicity in time for another round of VC funding.

Not long after the team outing, Amina wandered past Nalina's desk hoping she'd look up from her desk and acknowledge her, acknowledge the moment they'd had near the horse.

But she never looked up. Her eyes were glued to the screens of her dual monitors where Amina knew she tracked the tracking system, the routes of delivery boys and the customer orders. Nalina was one of a team of ten super brains, as the CEO had proudly called them during the team outing.

Amina, feeling deflated, had gone back to her corner and looked up at Elvis. His gaze seemed to be on the empty chair next to her. Another colleague had resigned recently, one of twenty in a single day and the CEO had been quoted in the papers as saying there was no attrition crisis in the company.

In October, around the Dusshera holidays, Amina was put on the late shift duty roster for a week. Late one evening her chat application blew up over the wrong order being delivered to a Koramangala address near her PG. She typed her usual phrases and said yes Ms. Lalitha sorry to hear your order has been wrongly delivered, I will check with the restaurant. When she spoke to the manager, an impatient man named Dilip Singh, he said that it was all the fault of the idiot delivery boy who'd picked up the wrong bag from the counter. Why do I pay you so much commission if you can't get semi-intelligent delivery fellows? Singh cut the call and Amina checked on the delivery boy's details and saw a familiar name: Arif Zaman. "Hello?"

"Hello," replied Arif, sounding light as a feather.

"You have to go back to the restaurant and get her the correct order."

"They gave me this bag."

"That's not what the manager said."

"That Punjabi doesn't like me."

"Could you please go back?" On the chat, she could see Lalitha was demanding her supervisor's number. *I AM A REGULAR CUSTOMER. YOU ARE A DISGRACE.*

"Fine, because you asked so nicely," Arif said and she could hear the smile in his voice.

Eventually Lalitha got the correct order and stopped typing in all caps.

At half past eleven, just as she was about to log off, a Skype message from Nalina popped up on screen.

Tough day?

Amina typed back: *Sort of
Lalitha always likes to complain on chat
U have seen her do this b4
Twice a month
Ok
You going home?
Yes, cab is here. Wat abt u?
Here for 1 more hour
C u tomorrow
A waving hand emoji. And nothing more.*

When she got back to the PG, her roommates were on the app scrolling through options to buy cheesecake. They had been doing this the past couple of months ever since all their cycles synced up.

“Amina wants strawberry right?” Mini shouted out at her as she picked up her towel and soap.

“Sure.”

“Arif Zaman will pick up our order soon,” announced Deepika.

Amina took her evening bath and on the way back she heard the doorbell ring. She saw him at the front door, tall and thin, handing over the bag of cake to Mini. He said something and Mini laughed. Amina went to the window over her bed and watched as he got on his scooter and disappeared into the night.

Here, strawberry girl, Mini sang.

Amina took the cheesecake and ate it in small bites. Her dreams that night were filled with pulsing blue lights and yellow, smiling faces.

The next afternoon when she reported to work for her shift, she found the empty space next to hers was filled. Two monitors, and on the wall, Nalina’s name board, an engraved steel rectangle.

Her teammate Mohit – dressed in a different Marvel superhero t-shirt each day – who was just leaving after his shift, said, “Looks like we’re getting powerful neighbours.” Just then Nalina entered; Mohit quickly said goodbye to both of them and left.

Amina looked at Nalina standing before her, smiling.

“Hello,” she finally said.

Nalina mouthed hello and waved her hand.

You’re not part of the office WhatsApp group, are you, Amina?

No

*You’re not missing much
What happens there?*

Good Mornings. Wife jokes. Mother-in-law jokes.

Ok

Praising the PM as God. Praising Godse as God. Denouncing Gandhi as the devil.

Amina wasn’t sure how to respond to the last message. She looked over to where Nalina sat. Nalina smiled at her and went back to the keyboard.

Like I said, you’re not missing much. Just a lot of WhatsApp warrior shit.

Amina responded with the smiley sticking its tongue out. *I like your scarves. They are very pretty. How do you think they would look on me?*

Amina looked at Nalina again. Nalina with her close-cropped hair, her pierced nose and earrings that clinked together along her lobes.

U luk gud the way u r

Nalina turned to her and stuck her tongue out.

Arif Zaman came back into her life after he delivered a masala dosa to a group of bachelors in a flat who had actually ordered several boxes of biryani.

“Please go back to the restaurant,” Amina told him over the call while the bachelors howled in the background.

“It’s the stupid Punjabi’s fault again,” Arif said and she heard the smirk in his voice. The bachelors were good-natured and had not abused her over the chat application and had called Arif their bro who’d been done wrong by the cunning Dilip Singh. *Get us justice! they had typed. Get us justice!*

“It’s so nice to hear your voice again,” Arif said and the bachelors started hooting and whistling. “What’s your name?”

“Tell him your name!” they started up a chant.

“Please just go back.”

“Only if you tell me your name.”

“Tell him your name!”

“Amina.”

“Amina.”

“Amina!” they chorused.

“It’s kismet that has brought us together Amina,” Arif said. “And since you’ve asked me to go get the correct order, here I go.” Whoops and hollers followed him out.

Nalina Skyped her:

Why are you smiling?

Amina stopped smiling.

I see you talked to Arif. Do you like him?

No. Ywd u think that? R u tracking calls also?

I see the whole world on my monitor. I can see who eats what, who calls whom, who sends back the most amount of food.

Amina didn’t reply.

If you want to know anything about him I can find out for you.

*I rly don't want anything 2 do wid him
Why not? He's cute. Here's his photo.*
Amina didn't open the file. She knew he was cute.
She also knew that her father had found a suitable match for her and she was to meet him the following Sunday at the McDonald's in Forum and say yes. She didn't imagine she could say no.

Shuhaib was solid and very present. He wasn't cute. When he asked her about her job he'd worked hard to suppress his contempt. He spoke of his own job as a delivery manager for an IT products and services company with a touch of superiority.
"There's not really much of a career to be had with start-ups, is there?" He said. "There's no stability and your company, what is it really doing besides building a database of information?"
What indeed. Making a whole generation dependent on takeaways? She felt he wouldn't appreciate the answer so she didn't reply.
They watched a movie together and afterwards he dropped her off at her PG. Before she climbed out of the car he told her she was a very peaceful presence. Her mother called and wanted to know how it had gone. Amina looked out the window by her bed and said it was okay. He likes you, her mother said. He's ready for the *nikah* as soon as you say yes. And your *uppa* is obviously over the moon. They are a good family. She didn't say yes then.

In December for a week there were scattered rains and Nalina would sit with her in the breakout room in companionable silence drinking hot tea. They had taken to talking through WhatsApp, Nalina deciding maybe they shouldn't have used Skype to chat. HR could look at the messages they'd been sending each other. You never knew when things could turn in places like this. Amina told Nalina about Shuhaib.
*But what about Arif?
Wt abt him?
You told me he liked your voice
Just flirting
And once you marry S?
Quit and stay at home
You studied so much
There r so many like me. Not every1 deserves a job
But you do your job well.
It's a nothing job. I just type in chat messages 2 annoyed people. Who only use the chat app so they don't have 2 talk 2 any1
I like that people who can talk choose not to talk. It comforts me*

*I didn't mean 2 offend u. I'm sorry
What do you have to be sorry for? You don't talk much yourself
So much noise in the world rt now I feel it's fine not 2 talk
Noise and food
Noise and food
And food and packaging. Imagine the landfills we are filling up
I never thought of it that way
All those hungry IT people sitting at home eating from containers
U still work here
I'm more concerned about my ego than the earth right now. I'm a hypocrite I know
I shd tell the girls to stop eating cheesecake
You guys just order once a month. Why is that?
Our cycles are in sync
Haha
Haha
So no chance with Arif?
Zero*

Two weeks later, when she reached home, Nalina messaged her:
*Arif is going to be at Ms Lalitha's place in 20 minutes. Isn't she near you?
Yes
Go over there
No I can't
Go. Now. Talk to him. You can talk to him
No Nalina
GO. Or you will regret this.*
It took her five minutes to decide. Five minutes during which Nalina sent her multiple GIFs of panting rabbits, galloping horses and Forrest Gump running. She walked out onto the street, still buzzing with activity as people returned from work and bought their vegetables and fruits from the carts parked at the junction.

She took two turns eastwards and then she was there, right in front of Ms Lalitha's neat little house. And in a minute, Arif was there too.

She stood between the cart selling tender coconuts and another selling pani puri and watched as Arif rang the bell and the door opened to show a woman in a short tunic and cropped pants and thick black hair. She had a nice smile and she wore it now, bright and long as she took the food from Arif who seemed reluctant to let it go.

Amina watched as the two talked and then he reached for the phone and pressed something on the screen

with his thumb and then he disappeared into the house.
Nalina was messaging her.
What's going on?
Amina replied: *He's gone into the house*
What?
He's gone in
What is he doing inside?
Amina didn't reply.
Oh
Oh
The bastard. He's gone offline
I'm going home, Nalina. I'm tired

She never asked Nalina if she had reported Arif to the operations team and if that was the reason he'd quit. All Nalina ever told her was that he was no longer working for them.

He must have found a similar job
Of course he did. They always do. He's got a bike and a license and he's happy to roam around
I will leave in a month
I will miss you
Will you come down to Thrissur for the wedding?
I will do anything for biryani

Shuhaib's little flat in Whitefield was clean and quiet and if she looked out the window she didn't see buildings upon buildings, but a small square garden and a swimming pool which didn't have any water in it.

The place has a water shortage, Shuhaib explained, and the association decided it wouldn't do to keep the swimming pool filled. They were thinking of closing it completely and putting another garden there. They would make a decision soon – some of the residents were throwing their garbage into the empty pool.

Life, Amina found, now that she was no longer going to work every day, had taken on a different rhythm. She looked up recipes on the web and cooked them for lunch and dinner and found she had a knack for baking. When she sent Deepika and Mini pictures of her experiments, they said she should start a cupcake business. And list it on her former employer's app.

Shuhaib shook his head when she mentioned this to him. "Why is every woman in this city opening her own baking business? Do something else, Ami." She imagined Nalina listening to him, rolling her eyes, and writing her an expletive filled message.
Why do you let him call you Ami? Tell him to shut the

fuck up

On a hot Sunday afternoon in October, they were at the ISRO signal on Old Airport Road when Shuhaib mentioned her old company. "They have gone and sold it to their competitor. Your old boss has made a lot of money"

She saw that of the ten or so bikers at the signal, at least five had the dancing elephant on their jackets. "Don't you want to know what the scene is over there?" "I should ask Nalina." "Ask her. And she's a really good coder, no? I would love to have someone like that on my team."

Try as she might she couldn't see Nalina working for Shuhaib. They'd both hate each other. Nalina hadn't turned up for the wedding – and though she had sent Amina congratulatory messages on WhatsApp and Facebook, she had not kept in touch.

"Have you decided what course you want to do?" Shuhaib was impatient, the signal was taking too long to change and the cop at the junction was making the traffic worse. Plus, more food delivery boys were crowding at the front. "These useless fellows," he suddenly barked. "They just make everything worse. Look at them. How many of them are causing a jam here. This is why I don't use their services. This is the state of things on a Sunday! When I first moved to this city..."

Amina didn't hear the rest of what he said. She was looking up at the soft clouds in the sky and was trying to remember the time she'd spent in that cubicle next to Nalina. Days and months when she'd had to address the tantrums of people demanding instant gratification right away, right now, without delay. She couldn't remember the words that had passed, the hurt and the anger. It had all disappeared – open wounds had closed and were now vanishing from memory.

The light turned green, Shuhaib was still complaining, but the other vehicles seemed to have disappeared and all she could see was the road stretching empty and free before them.

BLACK BOX
Tara Kelton



Tara Kelton interviewed Uber drivers in Bangalore, asking them to describe the company they work for – where they imagine Uber is, what Uber looks like, who runs Uber, etc. She then asked photo studios around Bangalore to visualize these descriptions using images from their existing photo libraries. Customers at these photo studios frequently request to be ‘placed’ in imaginary or far-off scenarios and locations, like Paris and New York. The studios have extensive digital libraries of foreign cities, fantastic environments and photographic studio props, along with Chinese DVDs containing photoshop image collections and stock images downloaded from the internet.





HOW TO DO THINGS WITH BITS AND BYTES

Mathangi Krishnamurthy

In the Beginning

The shamelessly inspired title of this essay is also a homage. In thinking about J.L. Austin's "How to do things with Words" (1962), I am interested in finding a way to talk about Information Technology/IT, IT-enabled services, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and other TLAs (Three-Letter Acronyms) as things that are not merely artifacts, objects out there, and sets of binary codes, but as sets of floating cultural codes. These are particularly important to the ways in which technology and its presence have become ubiquitous to the point where this essay would run the risk of embarrassment and pomposity if it were to point out the manifold ways in which urban citizens inhabit the city, their relationships, and their environs primarily through phones and phone applications. Therefore, I want to focus differently in this essay and bring together various forms of evidence, small and big, causal, concurrent, and conjectural, to investigate the *stickiness* of the Indian call center industry for the workers who were the primary interlocutors for my decade-long research on urban Indian call centres. This is not to suggest that app-users and call centre workers are analogous in their receptivity or orientation towards technology, but rather to illustrate how a site of 'Information Technology' can produce new ways of thinking about the information economy.

My use of stickiness is deliberate to indicate not only attraction but also repulsiveness yet helplessness against the ways in which technology produces habits, desires, images and aspirations that are difficult to shake off or refuse. In the process, I am also arguing for a set of desires, intentions, and aspirations that in no way feed into a singular narrative. And even more significantly for my larger research interests, they do not feed into a clear narrative of globalization, either as homogenizing eventuality or rapacious force. Through the juxtaposition of media narratives, and ethnographic anecdotes, I want to discombobulate the narrative of globalization. On a much less ambitious level, I want to ask the time-honored



anthropological question. What is the stuff of culture? What does it mean when people talk about information economies or call center culture? I am concerned here with the sensual nature of social life even on a site as seemingly blasé as the corporation and corporate life, and how we can read such a social life from its atmospheres.

Episode One: The Power of Information

“*Kar le kar le, tu ik sawaal,
kar le kar le, koi jawaab,
aisa sawaal jo zindagi badal de...*
[Ask a question,
Try and answer,
The kind of question that will change your life]
It’s just a question of a question.”
- Title track, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*

Thus begins the title track to the third season of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* In the opening scene, light bursts forth like rays from the sun. The Indian film star Shahrukh Khan prances across a set, made deliberately larger than life. It is glitzy, neon-inundated and immensely disproportionate. Women in some form of modernized traditional Indian clothing stand behind the so-called King Khan as he exhorts the audience to ask a question. The irony, of course, is that it is Khan who asks the questions.

As the 40-something-year-old swiftly changes clothes from scene to scene, a star in one moment, a suave sleazy conman of some sort in the other and an American teen hipster in yet another, his supporting cast range from close cropped capped rappers to women of unidentified nationality in golden and silver lamé. In another frame, Shahrukh in waistcoat and trousers dances with women in tartan mini-skirts and white shirts. As they dance, the refrain continues to remind us of the one question that could change our lives.

Slowly seducing the audience with song and dance, Shahrukh Khan coaxes them, claiming that the world of dreams is round and round and they must come out with their deepest desires since the opportunity might not arise again. Assuring them that they will win the game¹ he asks them to strengthen their hopes.

This music video was conceived for the pilot episode of the third season of *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, one of the most successful television serials of the recent past. It debuted with much fanfare and employed as its first host one of the longest reigning superstars of the Hindi film industry, Amitabh Bachchan. The serial not only offered

contestants a chance to win large sums of money but also live out the daylong fantasy of being intimate with a filmstar. Amitabh Bachchan is no ordinary hero. Born to distinguished parents in northern India, his father the poet and radical leftist Harivanshrai Bachchan, the “Big B” was rejected by the film fraternity in his first few years on account of being too lanky and not good looking enough. Finally making his fortune in the eighties through a string of films where he portrayed the angry young man who violently attacks a corrupt system, often at great personal cost and sometimes loss of life, he went on to make some of the highest grossing films in Bollywood. In his current films, he prefers to portray an ageing patriarch seeking to lead and morally supervise large families of upper middle-class men and strong yet traditional women that live in castles and travel in helicopters. Bachchan hosted two seasons before ending the contract which was subsequently offered to Shahrukh Khan, also one of the highest paid stars in Bollywood history, one known in earlier stages of his career for taking on a plethora of roles, including that of villains and anti-heroes. Either of them can count in this sense as a formidable force of influence and reach.

Danny Boyle’s film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, is set in Mumbai and chronicles the unexpected success of a contestant on the selfsame *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. In a rags-to-riches plot of a protagonist called Jamal Malik who wins the game show, Jamal is also what Prem, the character who portrays Shahrukh’s counterpart in this reel life version of reel life, refers to in derogatory fashion as a slumdog. By winning the game’s prize of one crore rupees, Jamal stands as testimony to what chance can offer even to the most underprivileged, should they only have the hunger to grab it. The main plot of the film revolves around Jamal’s love for his childhood companion, Latika, who was tragically lost to him when running from child trafficking slumlords in Mumbai. This plot is furthered through the game show that he accidentally gains access to, when working at a call center. Through the questions that he answers correctly, the audience is made privy to the details of Jamal’s life, during the course of which he absorbed the kind of information that one would not consider available to an underprivileged lower class citizen of India. So, for example, Jamal knows that Cambridge Circus is in London because he has overheard communication lessons taught in the call center as he serves *chai* to the “phone-wallahs.” Similarly, he knows that the Hindu god Rama holds a bow in his right hand, because of images flashing in his head of a young boy in costume standing by Hindu right-wing assailants, who had attacked Jamal Malik’s Muslim slum. He also

knows that the picture of Benjamin Franklin peeps out of a hundred dollar note because he was once guide to American tourists visiting Agra and the Taj Mahal.

I read *Kaun Banega Crorepati* and *Slumdog Millionaire* as being narratives about the power of information, a power that seeks to combat rapid and unceasing change. Information is hearsay. It is what we absorb as we make our way through life's unrelenting lessons. The body is a receiver and the mind a processor. The atmosphere and the body then replay the articulation between the computer and the data it is fed in. Information in both the film and the show are the solution to what Richard Sen-
nett (2006) has called the "the specter of uselessness."

My colleagues and respondents at various call centres spoke in different ways about this search for information. For some of them, this was what allowed their acculturation into urban India. The call center was a set of cues on how to be urban. For others, this was what gave them access to the world. Speaking to American customers, dealing with transnational business, locating themselves in the globe so to speak. For many others, the call center was a temporary way station to learn ways of being professional and middle-class. Learning English, for example. Knowing how to perform in an interview. How to seem professional, mature and reliable. How to be a service worker. All these were forms of information they sought to extract from being in the call center. It is not my intent to say that there is an uncritical absorption of cues from a cultural and media atmosphere. But I read the various habits, rituals, and compartments brought about by the call centre world to talk about the status of information technology and its discursive content in the knowledge economy of urban India.

Even as the search for professionalism or the call center as an incubator for future managers helps me to talk about one prime form of attachment in terms of work culture and what it takes to succeed in this economy, I am also interested in the talk about call center culture as frivolous, and as a simultaneous space of leisure, debauchery, and forms of information and knowledge that are corrupt and corrupting. Information gone wrong, technology as dystopia.

Episode Two: Where's the party jaar?

Abhay Tandon called early on a Thursday morning. I answered the phone groggily, only to find him a little disturbed. Abhay was my colleague at the call centre. He had called because he needed to find buyers for his

cousin's car. Abhay knew that I had been considering buying a cheap car to get around in Pune and had called to let me know that a cousin of his needed to sell his mid-sized sedan in a hurry. It was a Maruti Esteem and had had very little usage, he said, and was practically new. His cousin was willing to let it go for a lakh and a half rupees. I hesitated since I wanted a really cheap car and wasn't willing to spend more than fifty thousand rupees; I wondered as to the reason for his anxiety and asked him why his cousin was in such a hurry. After some hesitation, he said that his cousin was in trouble and in jail; he needed the money to post bail and hire a lawyer since his cousin had no savings. His cousin worked at a call center in the city.

It turned out that Abhay's cousin, out late the previous Saturday night at a rave, had been arrested by the Pune police come Sunday morning. In an orchestrated infiltration into the rave circuit in Pune, the police had gotten wind of this party to be held at a villa near the National Defence Academy (NDA) to the southwest of the city. This area is secluded from the rest of Pune, and, while largely occupied by army personnel and students at the NDA campus and government offices around the Khadakwasla dam next door, is also dotted with numerous villages, private farmhouses and villas. It is a beautiful landscape with a narrow road meandering between the outskirts of Pune city and the National Defence Academy and snaking toward Sinhagadh, a historically prominent fort and popular tourist destination dating back to the early 14th century. I have transgressive memories of lugging alcohol on 500 cc motorbikes to the Khadakwasla dam and drinking through the night before riding onto Sinhagadh. Khadakwasla and Sinhagadh, while spaces of leisure in the day, are also prominently identified as dangerous at night.

On the night of March 4, 2007, over 250 young men and women congregated at a villa in a village called Donje at the foothills of Sinhagadh. Messages announcing the party had been circulating in the city for over a month through text messages and websites. People had traveled from Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai to get to the event. The Pune rural police in plainclothes supposedly gained entry to the party by paying cover charges of Rs. 500 per person. They went on to arrest most of the revelers who were engaged in drug sales and consumption at the rave, an event that the police had anticipated.

The Times of India, Pune edition reports,
Police seized seven bottles of phenylephrine hydrochloride, two-and-half kg of marijuana (ganja),

100 gms of hashish (charas), beer cans, cigarettes, music systems, 45 cars, 29 two-wheelers and an unspecified number of mobile phones.

In other places, they report 40 cars and 42 two-wheelers. The chief of rural police, Vishwas Nangre-Patil spear-headed this raid that led to the arrest of 279 men and women. The numbers have been variously reported as 251, 279 and 280. A few bodies added, some let go. The rural police are reported as having been tipped off by a city police inspector about invitations for the party being sent out from www.isratrans.com, a central advertising repository for various trance related events across the world. At the same time, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) and Anti-Terrorist Squads in the city also received tip-offs and arrived at this not-so-secret party.

Related headlines in the Times of India, one of Pune's prominent national dailies, read "Pune rave bust: BPO execs among 280 held" (Times of India, 5 March, 2007) and "All 280 Pune revellers sent to custody" (Times of India, 6 March, 2007). The event is described at various places as "an international drug racket", "a boisterous Holi party" and "a rave party." The party included seven non-Indian nationals, two each from Germany and Iran, and three Palestinians. All newspaper reports state that 29 women had also been arrested. The arrested were held under the NDPS Act and Foreigners Act. The details of the party were posted on a website, www.isratrance.com, while the venue and time were communicated via text messages, emails and posts on Orkut, a popular networking website. The police reportedly considered booking party-goers under the IT Act of 2000, which primarily dealt with cases involving cybercrime and electronic commerce.

The Pune edition of the Indian Express, another prominent national daily, described the raid in marginally critical terms, drawing attention to the fact that this was part of Nangre-Patil's wider moral policing initiative around the Sinhagadh area of the city. The headline in this newspaper reads "Pune's morality police ranting over a rave" (Indian Express, March 6, 2007). The Sinhagadh area houses many small hotels or lodges, some of which are located along the Mumbai-Pune highway. On January 21, 2007, Nangre-Patil had raided 35 lodges there and arrested 102 couples, including eight "dance-bar" girls. Bar dancers are women employed as entertainers in, as the name suggests, bars frequented by men across classes, and have begun to come prominently under police vigil since July 21, 2005, when a bill to ban this form of work in Maharashtra was passed unanimously by the State Assembly². The Indian Express article

seemed to hint at this raid as part of the entire move towards moral policing in the state. The paper was to follow this up later in March of 2008 when Nangre-Patil raided a party in the city in anticipation of another drug bust only to find no such evidence. The paper titled the report, "Nangre-Patil leads another raid, returns red-faced" (Indian Express, March 22, 2008). What was clear was that call center workers and their alleged IT- and drug-related activities outside of work clearly fell under the radar of moral policing.

Within the next few weeks of the raid, alleged photographs of the party were all over the Internet. Various colleagues mailed them to me and many were posted on isratrance.com. They were also posted on desihot-masala.com, a website dedicated to "Pictures, Movies, Hot Women, News, Videos and Sports." The pictures show women and men in denims, jackets, navel baring shirts, hiphuggers, bright silks and strappy outfits dancing, making out, looking at the camera, gyrating and in general, in some pose of universal, urban, hip "revelry." These photographs, taken during the night of the party, are followed by pictures taken in the daytime, one of which shows an Indian policewoman with her hands on the head of a young girl on the ground. Her face is turned away from the camera. The other picture is blurred but also shows women covering their faces. The author of the posting includes a disclaimer,

I do not have ownership of these photos, nor have any proof of authenticity. Source for these photos, are random forums and blogs on the Internet. If you know someone from the Pune rave party that the cops caught, maybe you can show them these, ask for authenticity and comment on the blog regarding the same.

Looking through the photographs with me at the office, one of the call center agents noticed a guy featured in two pictures and commented, "I see this idiot at every party."

In every way this incident is a dramatic one, outside of the sphere of "normal" call center existence and I certainly do not want to propose this to be typical. Pune has a longer history of a rave culture that workers, among others, were tapping into. Call center workers that I knew did participate in the forms of leisure that they were often accused of: consumption of drugs and addictive substances, excess as a way of life, sleeplessness, abuse of the body in the process of work and partying and revelry to alleviate the stress of banal, exploitative, and dead-end work. But being arrested or featuring on a transnational circuit of crime did not feature within this spectrum. However, the specific mention of BPO executives in the

article or in stories about call center culture gone wrong is not incidental. The ways in which an information technology culture puts money and freedom in the hands of people who are far too young to handle it is a prominent and oft-quoted sentiment when referring to call center culture. In some ways, it is the tacit recognition of the dystopic possibility of a call center like world. Of what information technology cultures and their concurrent lifestyle addenda can unleash. It is an admission that call center culture must necessarily give rise to hyperactivity and ennui in equal measure. The cult of professionalism and the pursuit of a future in this narrative come along with the subscription to other cultural practices. And this, as we well know, must be curtailed. By the police. By society. By the corporation.

Episode Three: The Official Party

As I stepped back into the trainers' office space after a grueling session with a new batch of trainees, Ananya, my boss and the head of training, shooed me into the Human Resource office and announced to Neena D'Silva, the HR manager, "She isn't working today." I had apparently been roped into a public dance performance for *Oorja*, the bi-annual company festival.

Oorja was conceived in 2006 as one of a range of suggested remedies for high labor turnover. The corporation claimed that the idea behind a company-wide festival across office locations was to foster a sense of belonging among employees so they could feel like they were part of a larger vision and brand. Further, in a large organization consisting of teams performing different and discrete functions, it was very unlikely for agents from different work units to have opportunities to meet and interact with each other. *Oorja* was intended at providing this space of communication. The underlying aim was to strengthen a sense of connection to *Systematix* as a company and a brand. *Oorja*, which means energy, was formed to include a spate of mass employee activities from *Oorja Walks*, *Oorja Idol* to *Oorja Quiz*, all of which were to be funded out of the company's annual rewards and recognition (R&R) budget. In many ways, it mimicked the culture of annual college festivals in Pune that not only drew students from across the city, but also around the country.

In the hope of being able to skip repetitive administrative work, I gleefully agreed. Neena and I awaited the arrival of our other team members, Asha and Rukaiya, also from HR, even as Neena ruefully informed me that the training department wasn't adequately represented at *Oorja*. A senior trainer Niloufer was already participating in *Oorja*

3 Since the nineties, Hindi film plots have propagated a new formulaic element called the "item" number. Svelte Hindi film heroines, not integral to the plot, perform to raunchy, provocative numbers without necessarily being part of the rest of the movie. In the seventies and eighties, the vamp, often the villain's moll or a prostitute, served to highlight the virginal qualities of the defiled heroine. In current day films, the heroine's moral position is slightly more blurred; however the "item" number continues to serve as a tenuous limit to this differentiation between good and bad.

Idol (the company equivalent of American/ Indian *Idol*) and the fashion show. The group dance competition seemed to lack performers and those that were participating lacked motivation. So Neena and Ananya had decided to bring in a choreographer to coach our team and the department had drummed up funds to pay him for a week's worth of lessons. His transportation was also to be taken care of by Neena since the company premises were outside the city and it would demand that he give up his daily responsibilities to show up at the organization. We were already lagging behind the other teams who had begun practicing on each of the floors of the building that housed the training. I clambered up the steps, wondering at how fieldwork seemed to have given me a surprising avenue for performance, one I never indulged in through high school and college. Suddenly, my secret fantasies of being an 'item' dancer³ seemed to have found modest outlet. Even more so, the notion of being a performer and dancer in front of crowds of trainees, many of whom I have begun to think of as students, was an intriguing proposition.

As we stepped out of the elevator on the fourth floor, Asha and Rukaiya were already practicing the sequence. Srinath, our choreographer, had colonized the walkway and open reception area between two offices situated on either end of the floor. One of them served an insurance company and the other a credit card organization. The first bars of the song were playing aloud.

Dekha jo tujhe yaar
Dil mein bajee guitar
Chalka aankhon se pyar, Dil mein bajee sitar
[When I saw you, my beloved
A guitar played in my heart
Love spilled over in my eyes, a sitar played in my heart]

We all lined up facing the elevator. Slowly choreographing to mimic the steps of the song, Srinath made us fall into some sort of sequence. The song was from a movie called *Apna Sapna Money Money* (My dream is Money Money). The music was folksy and mimicked the rhythms and beat of a style indigenous to the *Kolis* or fisherfolk of the Konkan coast, who lived not far from where we were situated. Our choreography was similarly inspired by folk expressions routed through Hindi films, and so for forty five minutes everyday, for the next seven days, we thrust our hips and danced like Bollywood fisherwomen to a song professing the kind of love that makes the heart beat like a guitar. Sometimes, in the middle of a move, the elevators that we faced would open, and managers and trainees would walk out, some awkward, others giggling, as they walked to their respective offices throwing

backward glances at five women of various ages dancing to *Koli* music. Sometimes, my trainees would take the elevator up to our floor to heckle and perhaps even to check out the competition. They were young, full of energy and practiced their sequences endlessly. When I walked down a floor to see their acts, I noticed that they had also woven in acrobatics and headstands into their choreography. The songs they were dancing to were edgier and more interesting. Our song only reminded me of folk performances in school.

On the day of *Oorja*, the company grounds were drastically transformed. One section of the 5,80,000 square feet corporate campus has been cordoned off by red cloth walls. Colorful red and yellow mini *shamianas* (large tents) dotted one wall of this rectangular performance area. Caterers were setting up operations—staff carting bottles, lighting *tandoors* and chopping vegetables. Mountains of tomatoes were piled up at the *pav bhaji* counter and bags of fragile *puris* spilled over the tables of the *pani puri* stall. Music filtered in and out of hearing range and every now and then, one heard a high-pitched shriek as sound systems were mangled and re-adjusted. By late afternoon, many young men and women wafted in and out from their office cubicles in the building next door, trying to participate in the excitement. At seven in the evening, various committee members ran back and forth, trying to nip and tuck the last scraggly bits of singing competitions, choreographed dance sequences and as grand finale, a fashion show. Employees who were performing had been allowed to bring along a member of their family.

Most of the performers on stage were agents or first rung workers who had been hard at work for over a month now, surviving the preliminary elimination rounds held at the cafeteria, the company grounds and the gymnasium. Needless to add, they continued to work during this time, which meant that they spent most of the day and night at the corporate campus.

There were multi-colored streamers and varied food stalls lining the periphery of the festival space. The company's logo was prominently displayed at strategic locations— at the company gate, the stage, the podium.

This was the official party, active and intentional steps meant to not only acknowledge the unofficial account of call center culture but also to then manage it. Small forms of this were always prevalent in the call center—passes to discotheques, an active encouragement of

consumption, a clear validation of the kind of lifestyle that workers were supposed to guard against.

In some ways, this story of the company party is a familiar one. Because after all, the story of flexible capital is a familiar one. This form of capitalism, born at the end of the 1970s and characterized by a move towards greater flexibility in form of production, mode of hiring, and the nature of services offered, is also a form of productive power. It generates new forms of work and life. It adapts. When things go out of hand, it reacts to it and co-opts it. The story of flexible capital is that it is flexible. At some point, it appears I may have no choice but to name call center culture and call it late capitalism.

Even as parties do not form part of the official work of the call center, they are now official. There goes another space of transgression. Stallybrass and White's argument about the politics and poetics of transgression (1986), where they argue that spaces of subversion become co-opted by institutional power to the extent where they render themselves as mere outlets for dissatisfaction, seems eminently applicable to this analysis.

And yet, in the manner of a well-trained anthropologist I found this too neat. To me, measures such as these are reactive. Even as call center corporations attempt to manage both work and pleasure, both motivation and demotivation, even as they try to keep workers both productive, occupied and happy, and manufacture good cheer, I keep coming back to the words of the call center worker who sat next to me in a training session as the manager exhorted us to stay happy so customers would sense our good cheer across telephone lines. He muttered, "My jaws hurt from being too happy."

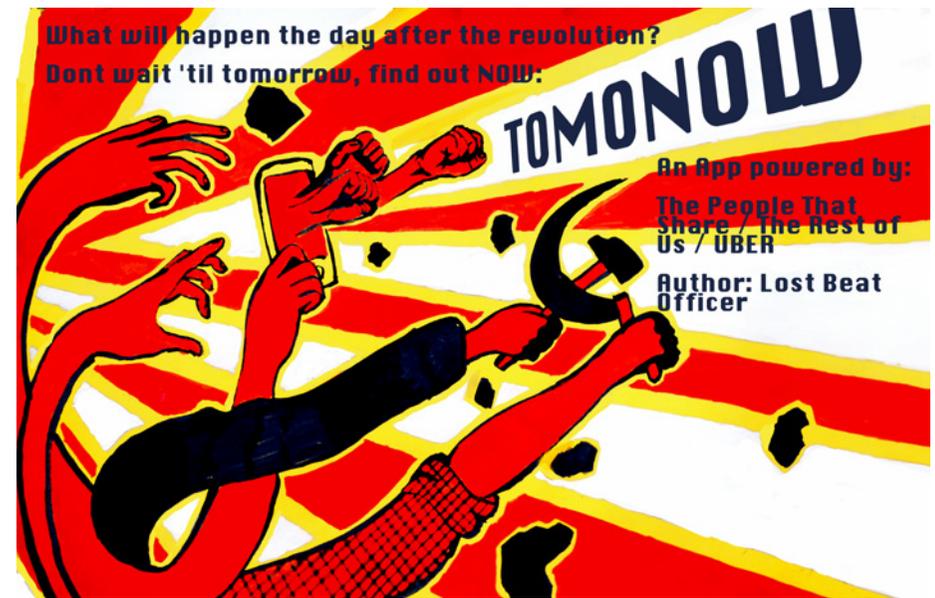
Curtain Call

Perhaps the end to this essay can hark back to the beginning to ask: what does it mean to be part of the information economy, either as a user of apps and smartphones, or as a call centre worker? What manner of analysis might allow us to acknowledge both rapid change, mediation, and newness, and some form of universal desire that brings to light our understanding of urban life? If we pause for a minute to examine the contradictory life of desire under hyper-capitalism, we might posit that all of us are united in the desire for a "better life," desire to be comfortable, desire to be independent, and desire to escape the very life that overwhelms us with the ways in which we have to keep acting and reacting in order to attain these desires. The French historian, literary critic and philosopher, Rene Girard famously theorized desire as mimetic and contagious. For Girard (1965), the funda-

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mental impasse of human desire is that it is the other's desire; desire for the other, desire to be desired by the other, and, especially, desire for what the other desires. In other words, Girard posited that the true nature of desire as a chimera because it functions only through an endless hall of mirrors. Perhaps, this might be a useful framework to understand the relationship between the proliferation of media images around the call center, urban life, app-users and such, and daily experiences of carnival and crime. If the urban economy is now a densely sedimented body of image, text, discourse and bodily experience, then what users and workers do with bits and bytes must also be understood in relation to this endlessly revolving set of floating, elusive desires.



ON THE ILLEGIBILITY OF A CITY

Deepa Bhasthi

After Mirtha Dermisache.

"I started writing and the result was something unreadable."

Five seconds. That is all that there is. All that there can be in this new normal. In a sphere that evolved over time that runs in multiples of millions, here we are, reduced to a pace that won't hold a full deep breath in and out. Five seconds can be a lot of time.

Breakfast needs to be made this morning. As do lunch and dinner. Maybe I can order in dinner, again. Easier than soaking the beans overnight and then boiling and then blitzing them with a couple of other things to make a humble hummus. There is that new place that has opened around the corner of the neighbourhood next to ours. Has four point something stars to its name.

It has been a long time since I walked Bangalore, this *karma bhoomi* of mine. It is like having designed a glorious balcony in the home that love built – a balcony that has a large tree of some flowering sort overhanging it, where the morning sun slants seductively past its leaves and pours upon your breakfast table to bleed into the amethyst geode that you found somewhere years ago before geodes became hipster and thus, expensive – that balcony. It is like having such a balcony and never ever drawing up a chair to it during the time for a late afternoon tea. There were only vague ambitions for such scenarios to occur when you conceived the balcony. So, the offshoot of similar ambitions regarding walking routes and the lazy arrogance that relentless accessibility to it brings, it has been a while, walking this city. I used to though, a lot lot lot, once upon a time. To prosaically channel that old thing, nostalgia, back then in the days that I used to walk this overgrown town, it used to still have weather – and a very good one at that – and it had more trees and less vehicles and much fewer people. I was around for the good ol' days. These days like some biblical miracle, water catching fire is a thing. These days, there is a dot one taps on and a chauffeur and car appear, and it is much like some New Age claptrap that has lost its potential to evoke much marvel and some wonder.

There are experiences of certain geographies and landscapes that will always escape articulation. So much we write and think and pontificate about cities, as if they are a mountain that is indefatigable in its sense of being. Yet, cities are hard places to be in, perhaps just like mountain spaces. They are cruel, mostly, and traumatic, and constantly in need of negotiations within selves and with each other. Cities are exhausting places and encouraging of non-sequiturs whereupon I think often of the linguistic trauma its citizens are put through. Including me.

Brutalism is vacant, perhaps because when it was in its heyday, this city was not yet a city. It was all green and still a town perching on a high-as-a-windowsill hill where people retired to, to garden, read, socialise with others with similar pursuits and die. Now for those that come here to build a life the coldness of a brutalist structure must not be enough, I suppose. It would need a lot of space and time to navigate its layers and more space and time to love its alchemy for the people that engage with it. Delivering a pizza to a worker – resident there in thirty minutes might not be possible at all. So, the service providers that really – just admit it already – run the 'evolved' section of the world must have met in the most productivity enhancing structure there could be and decided to make the whole world so. Starting easy, with the cities. Thus, there came the glass and concrete monoliths.

Down with the stone, brick and mud stuff – such *chiii* stuff, those – what with their earthiness. The glass might shatter in a decade or two but who is thinking beyond then? Collective legacy is such a non-moneymaking dud. Why bother? Old stuff leads to ruminations, inspiration, slowness, memory, conclusions, to the act of remembering, to slowness. The new normal demands, instead, structure, productivity, efficiency, the act of forgetting. Most of all, it demands speed. Fifty word summaries. Five seconds of loading. A wait of a minute.

There is plenty of room for the dancer, but scarcely any time for dancing.

Seasons are a farce here. But for the convenience of continuity and establishing timelines, I will say that it was a spring day. The flowering trees in the city were all in bloom and we could have walked on carpets of yellow, violet, pink and white. A wicker picnic basket within which are tiny cucumber sandwiches wrapped in thin tissue paper, with the crusts cut off, of course. Some cold beer that is newly made in the country and currently a favourite. Some chips, perhaps, because: bar food. And company. Or not, and a nice fluffy book

instead. Or the very weathered Midori traveller's notebook and a good pen to write stray things and draw drunken scrawls in. The day in spring would have been a perfectly picnic-friendly day.

Smelling the flowers, looking up at the sky. Breathing in - breathing out. One could have, if only. But then the extension to all our arms in similar shapes but variable sizes is right there. So much to look up, so many things to read and see and do. The sky will still always be blue.

Swipe, scroll, rate, feedback, ok, account, log in, like, share - were new meanings to old words always invented this quickly? Though of course it makes sense that it is being done. The relief of having all the bars full, the miniature waves of the wi-fi, the littlest numbers for the battery left are the symbols we leave. Also, the dreaded slowly turning circle of the buffering monster. Ugh, right? Yes, ugh. We do leave legacies then, mostly of the relief of having network and the dread of not having one. I do believe there are several places where the latter remains true.

Every city has a language. Not the one that is heard on the streets, cultivated in the attic or written in government circulars, of course, nor the varied ones that migrants, the Others, use. This language is, to be romantic about it, the soul, the vibe of the city. It is the pulse of its roads, the vibrations of its buildings, the hum or buzz - depending of the time of year and day - that the city emits. Oftentimes it is a siren call - how I ended up here. Other times, it is the first few hymns of a swan song to the times and stories that will be set here when they are being recollected and narrated in the future - how I intend to soon leave.

Now I must really call in dinner. I wonder what cuisine we shall want to have tonight. Or perhaps eat out? There is just so much choice!

Given all the choices that the tiny screen before me offers, given how many people I know that have bitten the dust and added and added to the icons (another new word!) on their screens, given how I still haven't, not as much at least, and am braving on like an anachronism past its relevance, I wonder if there will be soon the coming of the next big wave of the feminine mystique by a new Friedan. Masculine mystique too, since we are sometimes, while increasingly rarer and rarer, living in the century of more evolved equality rights. Or at least a deeper illusion of it. And all that politically correct stuff that will qualify me as smart and hard cookie enough to keep my rather non-existent social capital safe, albeit unengaged.

What all shall we do with all this time not spent stupidly negotiating the physical world? Where all shall we walk?

The dog, our dear J, is barking his head off. Do I call him in? Oh damn, I was to buy toothpaste for tonight - we have run out.

Must write down that recipe I made last week, the one with zaatar and pomegranate molasses.

Two pings (new word alert!) to reply to. Maybe tomorrow while lying in on a Sunday morning.

The city's language is ambiguous, vague and, well, twisted. I hate the city - rather the idea of a city - yet have lived in versions of one for long and have found versions of all that I love here. I hate what it does to people, but I do love my one-day delivery of stuff that isn't absolutely so urgent. The seamlessness of all the conveniences rescues us, city people, from the soft trauma of having to leave the coolness or warmth at home - as is appropriate to the season - find parking space, look for a particular shop on the other side of town, buy just that one thing, take out cash from a wallet and do this, repeatedly every time we need something.

We will use the same cab companies to get here, there, everywhere. We will use the same company to order dinner from. We will go to the exact same places as our peers because, FOMO (word! - itself a new word). We will all give ratings to each other. We will buy the same furniture from the same company because, free door delivery, free installation. We will buy the same clothes from either the high street shops or the indie names because the influencers (another new word, this) are all posting and tagging about them and again, FOMO (so many new words we have!). We will all read what is in vogue and watch what is trending and then we will apply those characters and their fictitious lives to our very real ones and everyone will get it. We will be in love, or love someone truly, only when we put such thoughts on all the social media that there are - only then will it mean anything at all. We will all look, think, see, be like each other, like dolls from the same mother company, though manufactured by its little subsidiaries with little distinguishable features, to indicate to the board of directors as to where you were made and who made you.

Your life is neatly, completely organised now, no need to get a notebook or planner. You of course have all the freedom to choose from any of the wonderful array of choices before you.

(Don't tell them that they can choose only what we want them to choose. The paradox of forced choice is our little secret, just between you and I.)

(Social) Media is the message. We are all mimetic creatures.

"Is it a museum of beliefs, a medley of rites, or a mere map, a geographical expression?" ~ Dr S Radhakrishnan, Upton Lectures, 1926. Said of religion in these lectures, so true of the new normal we have no reason but to accept and embrace.

We all look, eat, go, think the same. If the language of a city becomes clear, straightforward, efficient, structured and streamlined, will the language continue to exist at all? Homogeneity results in erasure of a city or "city". An idea sans layers and depth, sans tensions, sans complicated fabric of neighbourhoods, sans the tragedy of the commons, is just a waylaid click farm. "City" is then just nothing but a sanitized way station, like a tasteless, generic candy you get instead of change at the toll booth.

What also happens to language where there is an erasure of the city?

As I walk the streets where I found love, heartbreak and adulthood, I wonder at the true violence there is in changing the basic structure of society. We are of course long past that violence. This is the Day After, the aftermath, when we are left to navigate the repercussions of all that transpired the evening before. Now, where we are, is the carnivalesque blurring of the lines. In the carnival and the carnivalesque, what is grotesque is really language, I've found myself thinking. The language uttered, spent, imbibed. The language of the body. The very unique language in the apps that we endlessly use, simply unwilling at first, and then unable to stop. The language that the algorithms use to control, lead and rule us. The language that pulls us away to think of toothpaste, dog, dinner and texting when we ought to think of just this one thing.

Language is a way in, as also a way out. It has the potentiality of being the complete representative of every call for it to be so. The mere potentiality, though, which it regularly falls short of. It is also planned like a city, of course not just in terms of its structure, what with its syntax, grammar and other rules. Much like a city, it is built from the ground up with interlacing structures that make sense only when alphabets become words become sentences become paragraphs become stories become histories. It is also meta-language.

Language is a city that I wander around in, get deliberately lost and then find myself found in. It isn't always easy but it is always fodder for a frequently evolving vocabulary. It does perform, sometimes, all those functions that you would expect language to do, complete with similar infinite potentialities. Walking helps, immensely. It helps to both remember and forget, to be slow and to be at speed. I cannot not acknowledge its enablers too now – the maps, the search results, the fear, the dependency, the utterly complete control.

While mimesis is inevitable, rather necessary as well, one should only hope one is able to..... 🍷

Damn this dinnertime entropy.

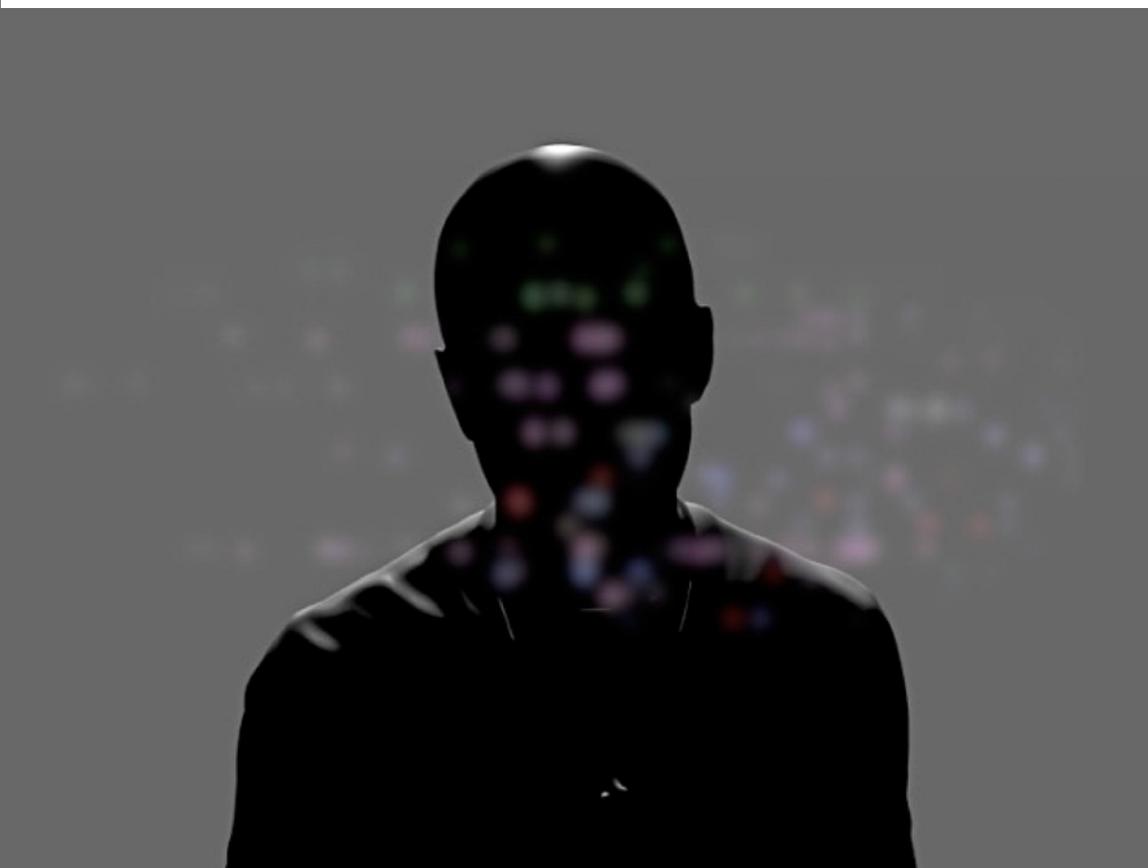
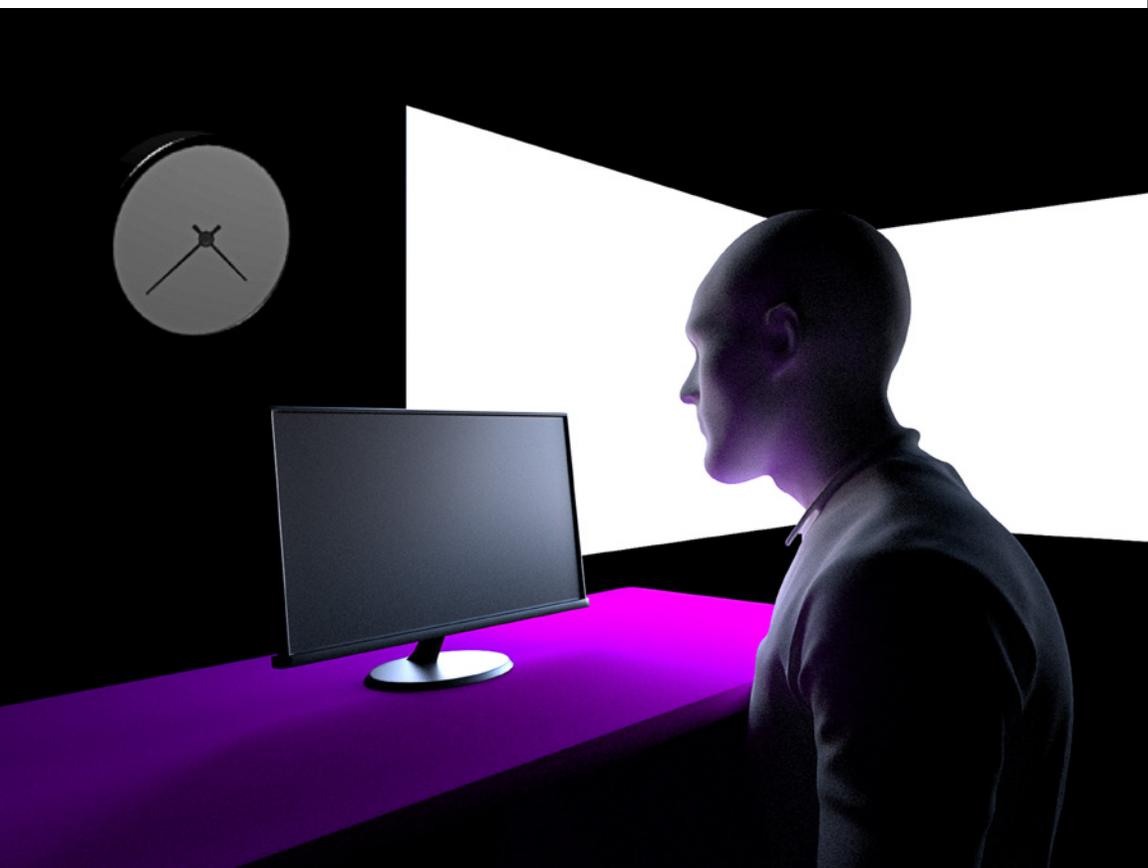
THURSDAY
Clay Kelton





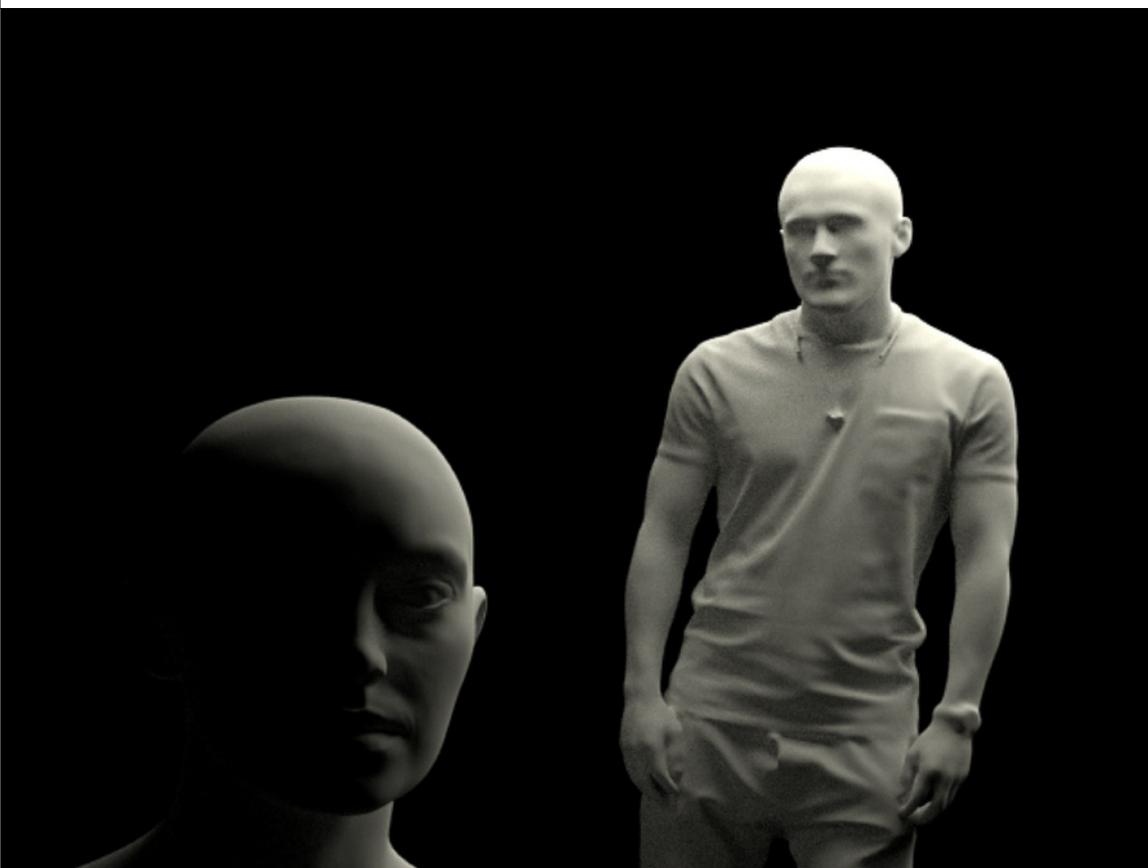
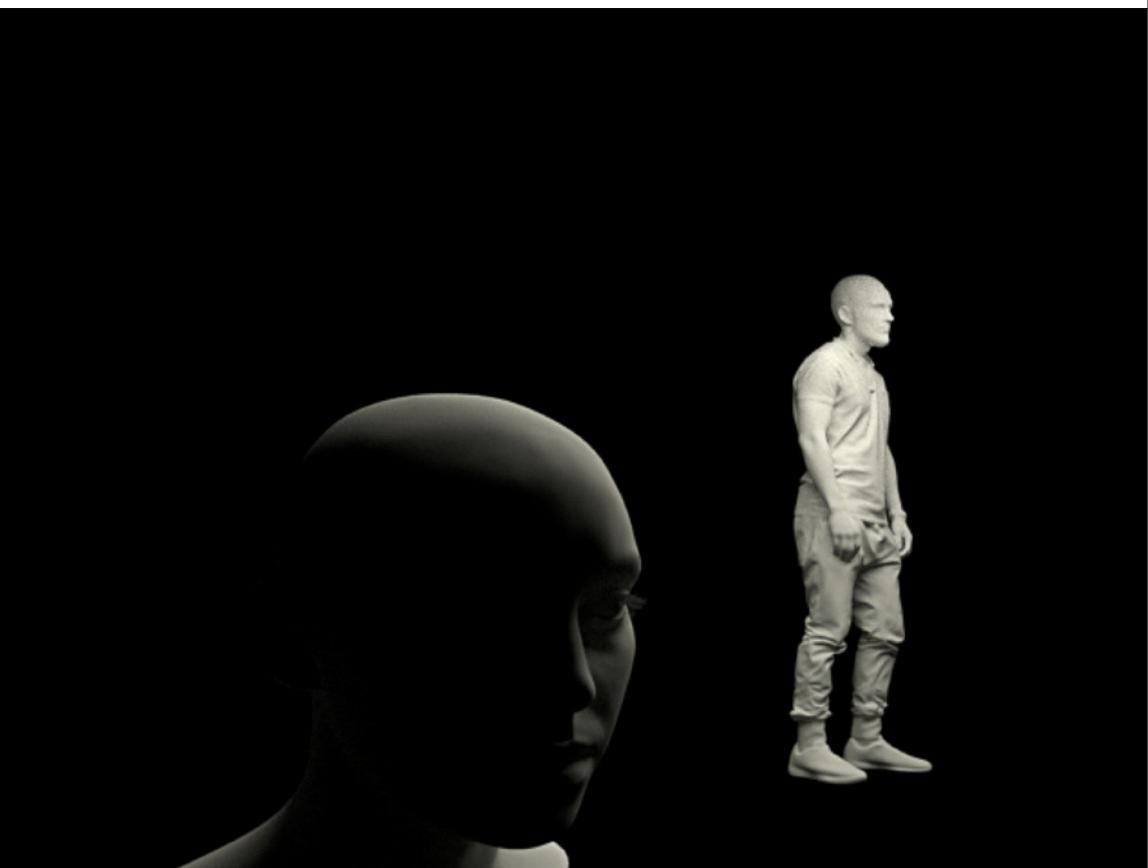
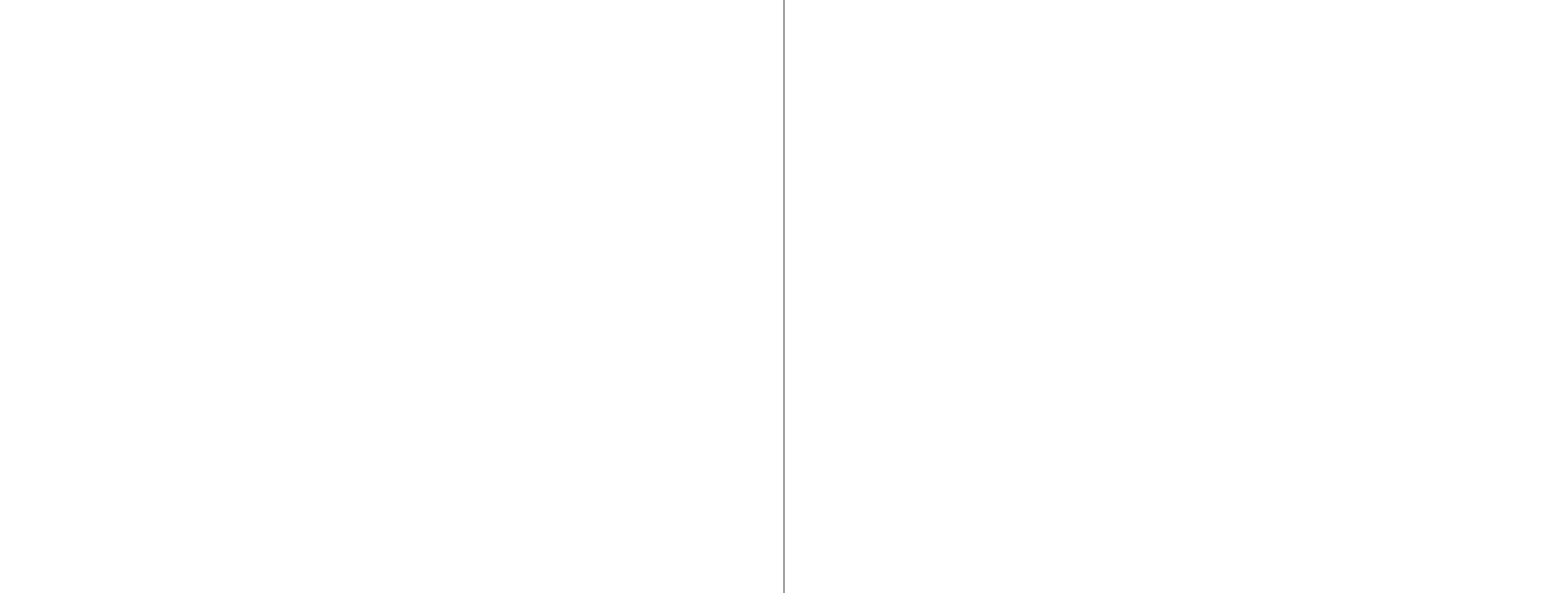


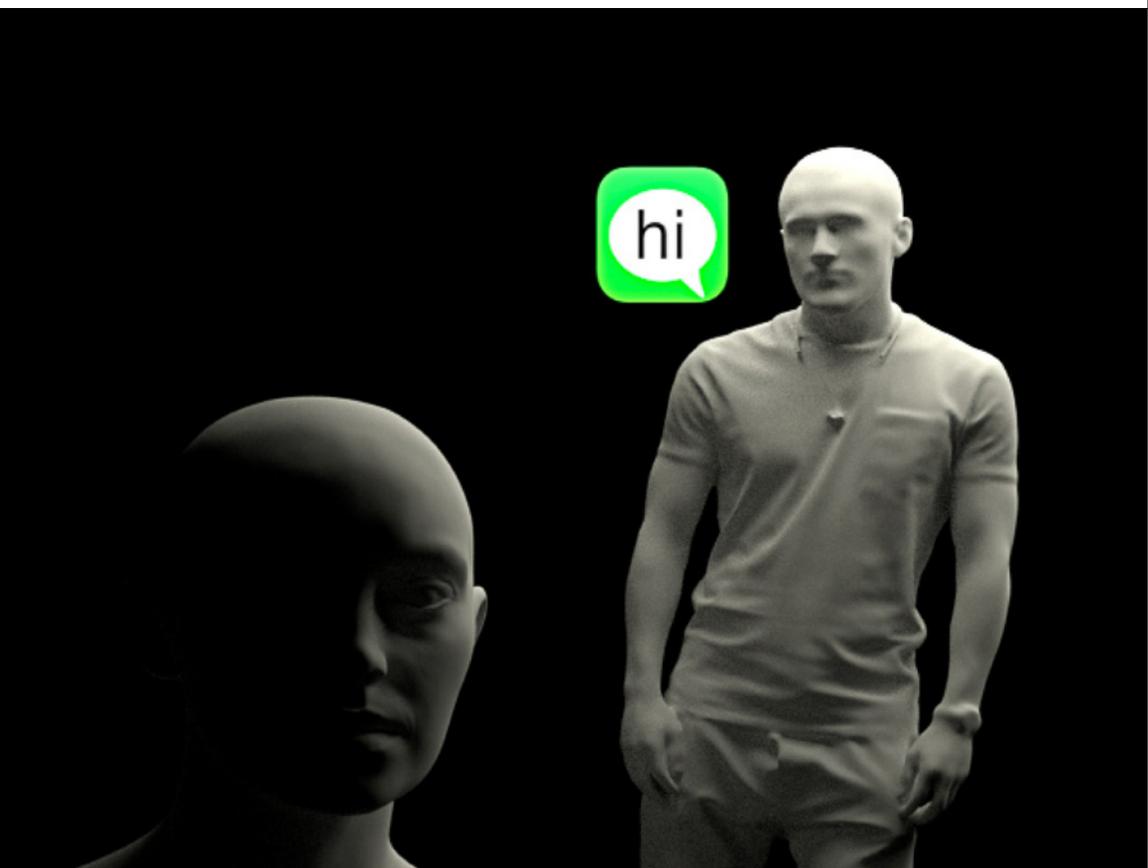
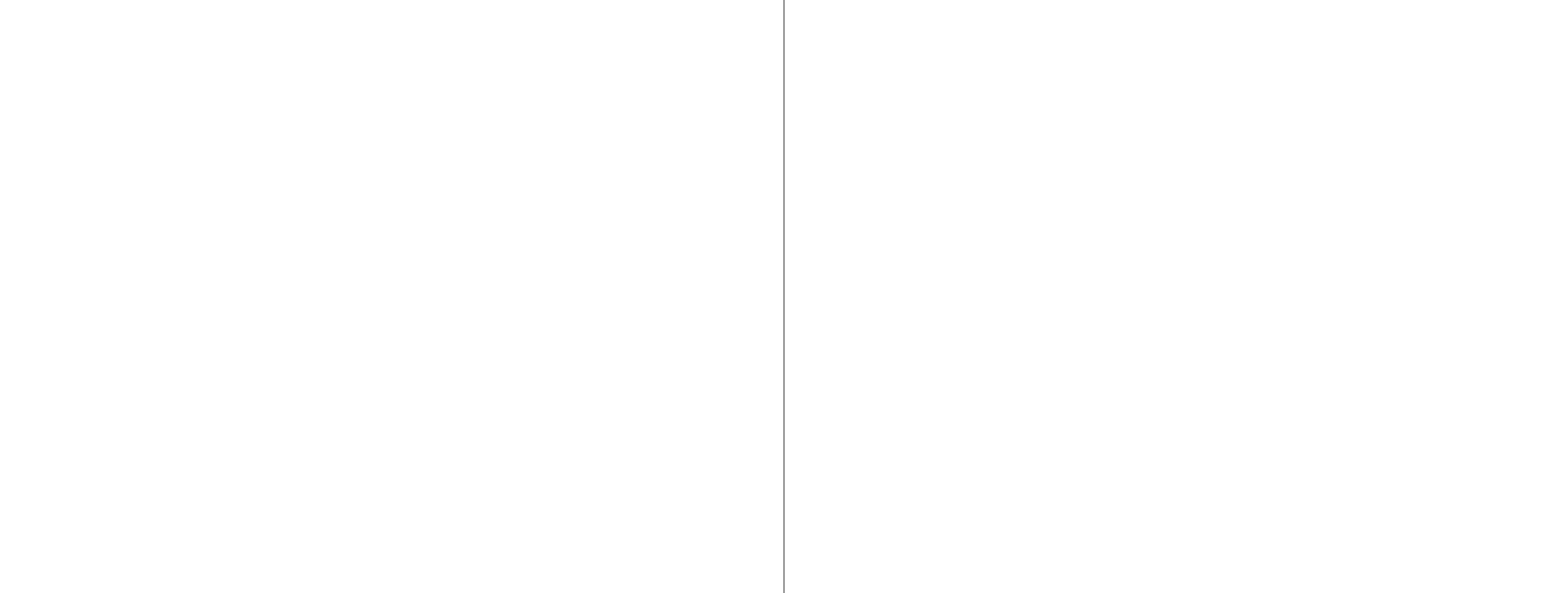


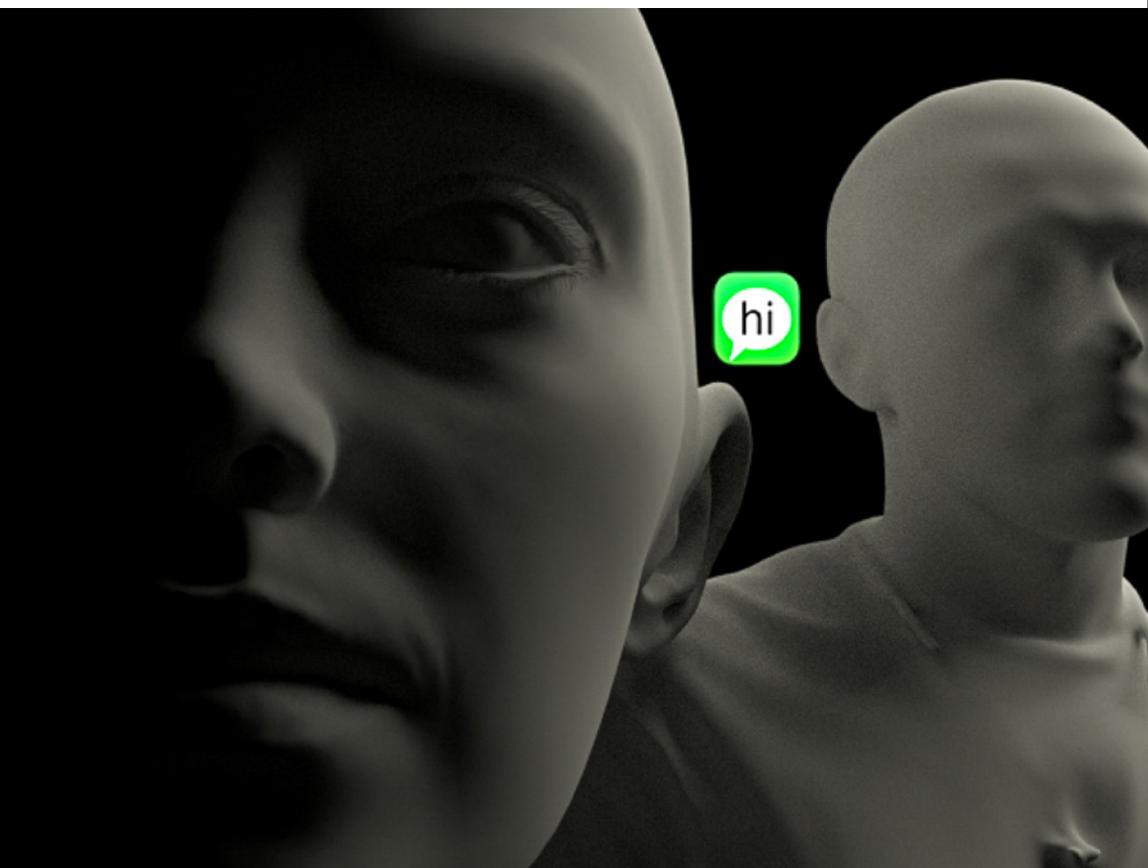


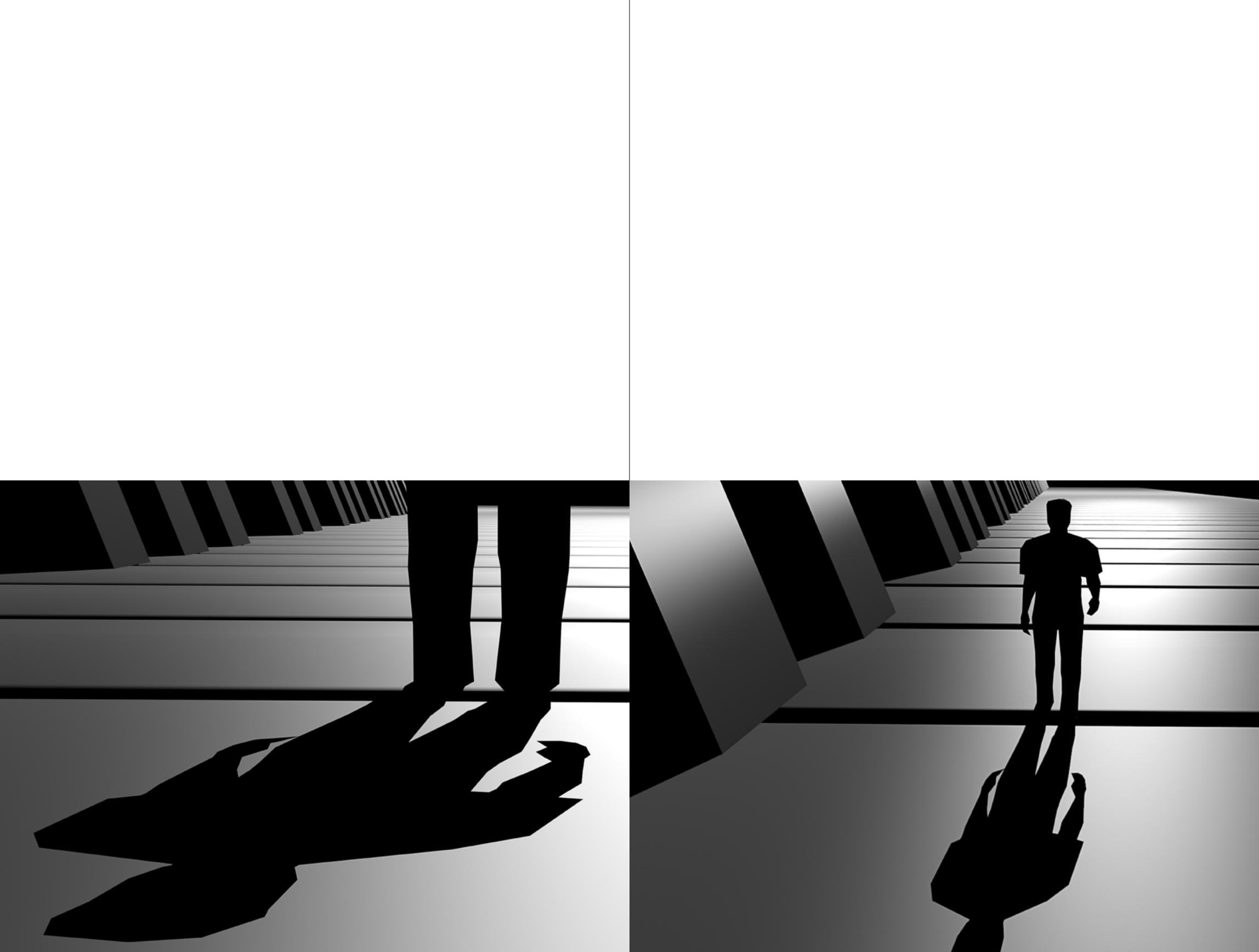


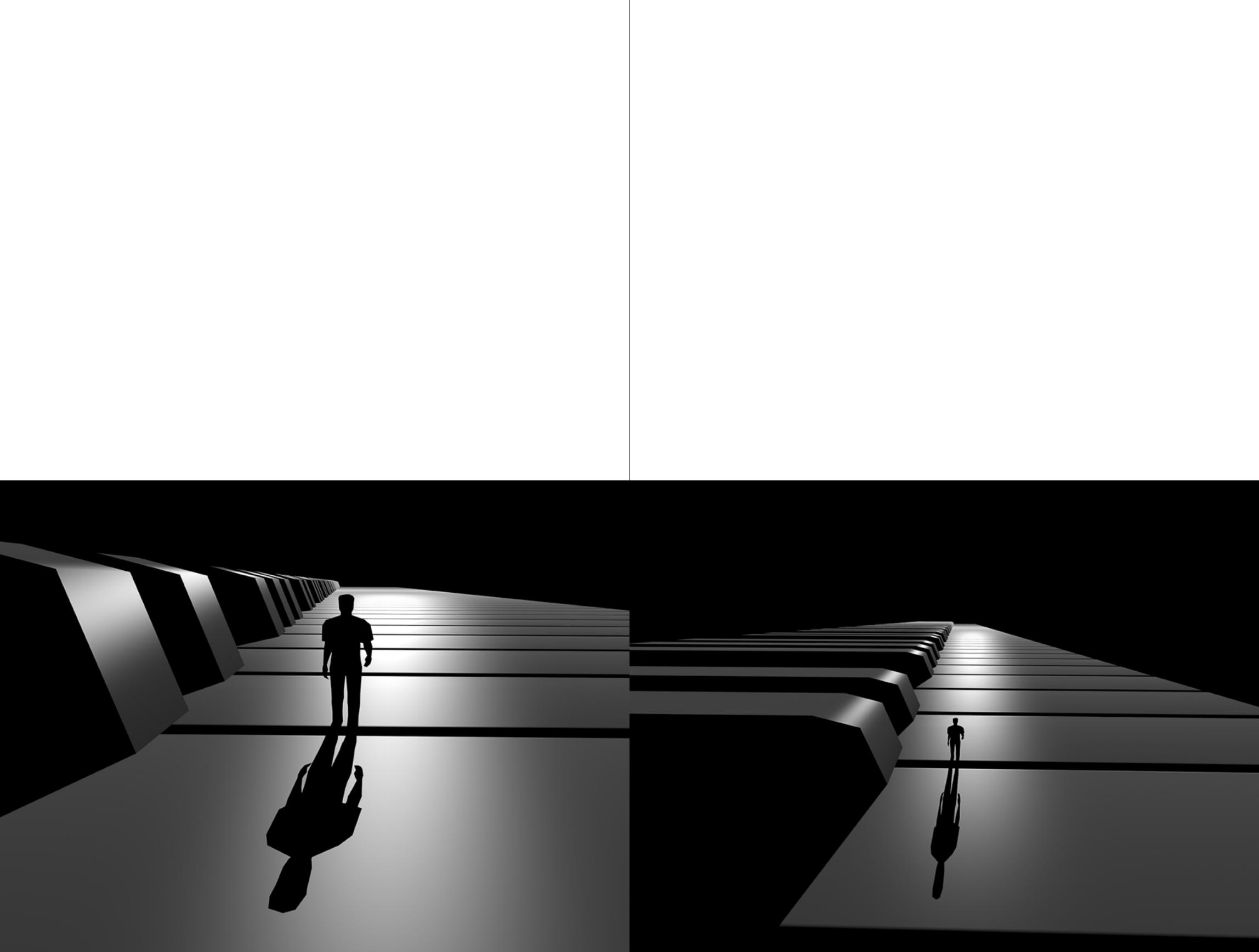
















TERMS OF SERVICE

Sruthi Krishnan

Prophets Of Self-Fulfillment

A few years ago.

It was an early winter morning in Delhi. Lazy sunbeams cuddled with treetops and the audience that included me sat around a makeshift podium under the open sky. We were at the inauguration of an event on design.

Sometime later, we found ourselves in a basement watching PowerPoint presentations by entrepreneurs (mostly young men) pitching their ideas. One of these young men in spectacles and a kurta (not the usual start-up couture), beamed up a high-definition photo of an astronaut. Then the astronaut's head morphed into the word 'Audacity' in a big bold font over what looked like craters of the moon. He looked around at all of us, smirked, and announced, again in big bold font, that we all lacked audacity. I was hooked. I sneaked a glance around - everyone else seemed to be hooked too and wondering, like me, what has he made?
"Here is an app for democracy," he began.

I first heard the phrase 'Uber for X' at this event. It sounded like an ode to our urbanized, globalized times. The economy from which 'Uber for X' was born promised riches for its inhabitants, unlocked with a few lines of code. It swaddled you as the anonymous 'user', and reimagined the whole world as a bespoke service, every whim's delivery guaranteed. Its interface was persuasion, its ethos convenience, its network ubiquitous. Your life could be a chauffeured ride to better, smoother, faster, quicker.

A little while after the Delhi event, some colleagues and I were on the long road to Kadubeesanahalli in Bangalore, in a cab. I let my breath leave my body as we finally emerged from a tunnel. The driver asked me something but I wasn't

paying attention. I was distracted by the thought of having to spend an entire lifetime over or under a concrete slab, air segmented and punctured by metal compartments and pale lights. He repeated his question, "Why don't you drive? There is a lot of money in it."

Sitting next to him, I saw his smooth fingers curled slightly over the steering wheel, the little one circled with gold. He had worked at airports as a cargo driver. But when cab companies like Ola and Uber came to Bangalore, he bought his own cab, a sedan ("More comfortable," he said, "especially when you have to drive for long hours."). He was happy with how much money he made.

"How much do you make?" he asked.

I mumbled, not wanting to tell him about my modest salary.

"Why don't you drive?" he went on.

"I haven't learned yet," I said.

"Learn! It pays a lot."

As I got out, he gave me his card, just in case I decided to follow his advice.

Everyone was happy those days. People with smart phones opened tiny boxes that gifted them free cab rides. Some of the people who did not have a smart-phone already, got one, took a loan and bought a car to become the drivers of this new and shiny economy. All of us started speaking a new language and we learned new terms:

'intermediary platform',

'cashless economy',

'surge pricing',

and 'follow GPS'.

Intermediary Platform

Two years ago.

When I got into the cab he was on the phone. He finished, and kept glancing at me in the rearview mirror and so I practiced my newly learnt pleasantry, "Coffee *aitha?*" (*Have you had your coffee?*). He interpreted it correctly as an invitation to chat. He began to tell me his story, about how he had started driving three months ago, and before that he was a private detective. "Really?" I blurted out.

To prove that he was versed in the dark arts of that profession, he said that he could look at a person and tell who they were. In fact, he could tell me who I was. Obviously, it was too much to resist.

"Tell me," I said.

"I will, but you should not get angry," he said, and I assured him that his answer will not bother me.

"You are," he paused for effect, something which he seemed to enjoy doing, "love failure."

I tried to see myself as he did, un-ironed faded cotton salwar kameez, dark arcs cupping my eyes, weighed down.

He was laughing now. "Correct?" he asked. "I told you, right? You should not get angry," he added. I saw a tiny almost-there frown on his face now, a signpost—I knew he was wondering whether it was a mistake to be so candid. I sighed inwardly, my ridiculous need to rub it away bubbling up.

He drove swaying, his entire body moving left and right, as though instead of navigating the start-stop bumps of Konankunte Cross we were driving to a dance-y tune.

"Tell me more about this private detective business," I asked, to continue the conversation. I shall call him Mr. M.

Doubt seemed to pay his bills because he only had two kinds of clients as a detective—suspicious spouses and suspicious to-be spouses. Most of Mr. M's detective life was to follow the objects of someone else's love.

"How do you follow someone in this traffic?" I asked him. "We used both a car and a bike for the more important clients. For other clients, just a bike," he said. "You never followed someone alone, always with a partner. One person in a car, the other on a bike. One person on a bike, the other on foot." Mostly he stalked women.

"I would find where she went, whom she spoke to, what she did," he said, "everything," and paused. "People have a regular route. Within a week or so, we knew everything. We knew if the girl's character was good or not."

"How?" I asked.

"Whether she spoke to boys, went drinking, who dropped her at home, where he dropped her, at what time she got back," he replied.

"There were good girls too," he added. "Ones who just went to work, college, and went back home. Went out with their friends to coffee shops or shopping. Then there were these *other* girls. They went to MG Road, Brigade Road, and you can see them. Low-cut, short-skirt. You know they are loose," he said.

"I have a lot of friends who wear low-cut, short-skirt," I replied, annoyed. At the same time, I thought, how my salwar kameez seemed to be an armor against me being considered 'loose' – something I found I was not too happy with.

He smiled. "Now I have upset you, but you don't understand. In my profession, I had to learn to assess people quickly. Just by seeing someone, I can tell a lot about them."

When I told him that judging people like this seemed

wrong, he replied that that was the job, and someone had to do it. The soon-to-be spouses wanted to know who they were going to get married with, and he just gave them that information as a service. I wanted to continue and tell him that his service substituted them getting to know each other, spending time, learning about ice cream favorites, past loves, and being OK with the other person preferring *idlis* with tomato sauce rather than *sambar*.

But I could not articulate this to him, and fell silent. The sun began to leach out of the sky. There were trees around, and the air cooled. He drove as though he was connected more to the road than to the steering wheel. Every time the road turned, his torso swiveled.

I saw him watching me in the rear-view mirror with something soft in his expression. "What's the biggest case you have had?" I asked. And he told me a story about a business magnate suspicious of his wife.

"We followed the woman around. He was a high-profile client who paid a bomb for every hour. For around two weeks, we followed her going to the gym, out with friends, shopping. It was all normal, above board. We were getting frustrated, but the businessman was paying a bomb per day, and our boss didn't want us to stop. And then one day we followed her as she drove somewhere else, a flat, another man's home."

"It could have been that she was visiting a friend," I countered. He smiled and continued, "We went up the drainpipe and took photographs."

Somehow, I didn't want to know any more but he went on. "She must have been around forty, but she was so gorgeous." He rubbed his hands together, saying "*Appadiye, kaiyya kaluvittu thodanam pola irundaanga (She made you want to scrub your hands clean before touching her).*" I looked away.

Mr. M. and his colleague were elated at the discovery. They called the woman's husband and told him that if he wanted proof, now was the right time. The husband went with his son, a young man, and knocked at the door. He entered on his own and saw them both, and lost it. Later, they were all crying, husband, woman, and son.

"After that, I couldn't sleep for more than a week. I kept seeing them cry. So many families, so many relationships broken," Mr. M said. "I used to ask my mother whether I was the one who broke them all up."

"And what did she say?" I asked.

He never said. The traffic consumed us.

Cashless Economy
About a year ago

As I sat down in the cab I noticed that the photo of the driver in the app was different from the person driving. "Are you the same person as the one in the photo?" I asked. He laughed, and added, "Who do you think looks better?" It was a photo of when he was younger.

I smiled.
"Tell me, who you think looks better?" he asked again.
"Both of you look good." I said, smiling again.

People were standing in a queue next to the *darshini* the driver picked me up from, and he asked me why there was a line. I explained there was a bank on the first floor and, because of the sudden demonetization announcement by the government, there was a queue to withdraw new notes every day because of the shortage of cash. "*Olledu (Then, it is all good),*" he said.

We started the ride and I asked him to avoid the toll road because I didn't have smaller denominations given the cash crunch.
"It will all be fine soon," he said, "the government has taken the right step. *Olledu.*"

We drove through a narrow road laced on one side with discarded plastic.

"*Eshtu makkalu? (How many children do you have?)*" he asked.

"None."
"Ohhh," he said, drawing the word out in amazement. It was a reaction I encountered often.

"This is so sad. What happened?" he asked.

"It's not sad. I just don't want any," I replied.

He said he was surprised and I shrugged.

"This is so strange," he continued, "Aren't your parents saying anything?"

"Yes, of course they are," I said.

"This is so strange," he repeated.

"Well, yes, perhaps," I concluded.

He was silent for a while.

"Are you going to work?" he asked.

I said yes.

"Why are you earning? There are only two of you. Why do you need money? Why don't you give it to me?"

I smiled.

"Will you give it to me?"

I laughed, and said, "Why not?"

"How much will you give me?"

"I don't earn that much."

"How much is in your purse right now?" I was so confused at the question that I blurted out that I had a two thousand rupee note, just that note—the newly printed one that was issued with the announcement of demonetization. "Will you give that to me?" he asked.

I laughed.

I could not form a reply in my head. I started to wonder to myself if I would really give my money to this man. He had two children, after all. One studied in third standard and the other was a three-year-old. Then I thought that maybe he did not really want my money, but was just challenging me by asserting that I, being childless, did not seem to have much use for the money I earned.

It was not the first time someone had made such an assertion. A relative, a woman, had said to my mother who was showing off some remodeling she had done of her house, "What is the use – all this is going to go to an orphanage anyway!" And my mother had called me crying, distressed. While I calmed her down on the phone saying, "Why not, it is as good a cause as any," I felt like I wanted to hit the woman who had said that to her.

"If you give me all the money in your purse," he continued, "What will you do for the day?"

"I don't know. Maybe someone will help me," I replied.

When we passed by the Adyar Ananda Bhavan restaurant, the driver said he hadn't had his *thindi (breakfast)*. I asked him if he wanted to stop and have some, and he said no. He reasoned that the breakfast would only cost me Rs. 100/150, whereas in a bigger restaurant that served non-veg, I could spend more on him.

I did not want to continue the conversation, and I looked at my phone, pretending to read something.

We waited for the traffic light to change near a billboard advertising a phone. He pointed at it and said, "Forget the meal, buy me a phone. An *Oppo* phone, like that one."

He kept turning back to look at me as he spoke and I kept staring at my phone.

"Come sit here," he said, all of a sudden, pointing to the seat next to him.

I replied that I had work to do—I kept looking at the phone screen.

"Will you give me money only once, or twice, or again and again?" he went on again.

I didn't reply.

"What? You told me you will give me."

"I think I made a mistake. I'm sorry," I replied, now feeling uncomfortable.

He was quiet for some time and as we passed by the actor Ambarish's house he started to talk again. "Do you know this is Ambarish's house?"

I nodded.

"Do you know who Ambarish is?"

I nodded again.

"You should go into films," he continued, "You could be a heroine."

I did not smile.

As we turned onto the street near my workplace he asked, "If I call you will you pick up my call?"

I didn't nod. I didn't speak.

"Would your husband mind?" Then he went on about how spouses get suspicious if other men called up.

I ignored him.

As we reached my destination, the phone beeped to acknowledge the money for the ride had been deducted from my account.

"So, you aren't going to give me anything?" he asked as I walked away.

Surge Pricing

A few years ago

My three colleagues and I were in a cab after a meeting we had, in Chennai. I sat next to the driver. The temperature was arctic.

"Can we reduce the A/C?" I asked.

"The setting is high because a foreigner took a ride before you," the driver explained while adjusting the knob.

"I get a headache with this hot and cold business," I said.

"I got used to it," he replied, then asked "Cash?"

"No, online payment," I told him, and asked whether it was a problem.

"No," he said, "just checking."

We came to a standstill near Adyar Bridge. There was a row of flower shops to our right that gleamed under electric lights, and I told the driver I didn't know this road had ever had so much traffic.

"It has been like this for many years," he said.

"I moved from Chennai to Bangalore some years ago," I told him, by way of an explanation.

He had been driving a cab for over a decade. When Ola and Uber came to Chennai, he had decided to join in, and when he started out, they money was great. However,

things had changed.

"Over the years," he told us, "the commissions the companies take from the driver's rides have slowly increased, from five per cent to almost twenty-five per cent," he said. "Is it the same in Bangalore?"

We tried to describe to him what we knew from talking to the drivers in Bangalore. I told him that the first question one was often asked when getting in a cab was whether you would be paying by cash or the online payment system. Then one of my colleagues explained that drivers did not want online payments because it took longer for companies like Ola and Uber to process the payment. Also, the drivers who did not own the cars they drove would get paid only after a week or more because the companies paid only the car owners, who would then transfer the amount earned to the account of the actual driver. And this was difficult because the drivers needed to pay for petrol or diesel and other expenses in the meantime. Another colleague joined the conversation and mentioned that, a year before, drivers had gone on strike to protest for their rights in Bangalore—and a driver attempted to commit suicide near the office of one of the cab companies in Bangalore.

Our car inched forward, flanked to the left by a bus and to the right by an SUV with a small screen attached to the dashboard showing Rahul Gandhi's image.

"Who do you vote for?" I asked.

"No one," he replied "I choose NOTA (the *None Of The Above* option). Nothing really changes."

"What do you people do?" he asked. I explained we were working on a project looking at how Chennai could cope with water-related issues in the future, especially given what happened after the recent floods. When we mentioned the floods, he started talking about what had happened to him then.

He used to live in Manali New Town.

"Have you ever been there?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"It is an industrial area. The air itself smells different, and the water too tastes different. It is not like here," he said, gesturing around.

The road traffic had come to a standstill again.

"During the floods, the water had come up to the first floor where I lived," he said. "My house was flooded. My car was completely damaged."

He paused.

"We all took shelter in the church and mosque," he added.

Those buildings were high.

No one helped them for two days. Then someone gave them a boat and they used it to get food from a truck that managed to reach them from Bangalore.

“When the media came, we went at them with sticks,” he said.

“Why?” I asked.

“No one had helped us. But when everything was done, they all came,” he said.

“One family died. *Oru iyer (One iyer)*,” he added referring to the caste of the family—they had refused to take food prepared by other people because of their caste-related beliefs.

“We even offered to cook separately for them,” he said, “But they refused it, and locked themselves up inside their house. And another person, who needed a doctor that did not arrive in time, also died.”

The driver explained that the government gave compensation to the families eventually. But one person he knew refused it because he considered it to be too little, too late. He took the compensation, and accepted the help of a philanthropist who gave some money to cover repair, replacement of things, and relocation.

“It helped a lot,” he said.

He did not live in Manali New Town anymore.

Follow GPS *Recently*

I had my earphones on, and he was speaking on his bluetooth headset. We were on Kanakpura Road. “*Ilili left hogi, Sir (Please take a left here, Sir)*,” I said to the driver. The GPS navigation showed that we needed to go straight, but I knew there was some maintenance work ahead and vehicles were being diverted by the traffic police. He asked me some questions about it, and we got onto Technology Road. I had taken my earphones off.

The sun had disappeared and the leftover beams kissed the tops of distant trees.

Our conversation about routes and traffic was winding down. We spoke in Kannada, and by now I could manage to have a conversation on routes and traffic.

“Can I say something?” he asked. I was a bit guarded, and wasn’t sure what to say. But as the expiry date on a polite response ran out, I blurted out, “OK...”

He began to tell me how the previous afternoon he had gotten a booking request from somewhere in North Bangalore. As soon as he accepted the booking, he

received a call from the client. The woman asked him to go to her pick up point, her house, soon.

“She said it was urgent and asked me to follow the GPS,” he said.

The location was not too far from him and when he reached he called her again. She told him to enter the gate, take the stairs and go into her house.

“I was confused about whether to enter her house or not,” he said, “But she did not sound OK.”

So, he went in.

He said the house was one of those independent homes that have been modified to allow the owner of the building to have tenants (while the owner lives downstairs, there is usually a staircase on the side of the building to allow a direct entrance to the other floors—a regular Bangalore phenomenon).

“No one was downstairs,” he said. So he took the stairs and went up. The door was open. He called out from the doorstep and could hear the woman. She sounded like she was in pain.

“There was so much blood,” he said. She was on the floor. He gestured to indicate where the blood was, but I could not see him clearly as I was sitting in the back seat.

She had been pregnant.

“*Miscarriage aithu. Elu tingalu,*” he said. “*Paapa.*” (*Miscarriage. Seven months. Poor thing.*)

She had tried to call her husband, and realized he had left his phone at home.

“What about the neighbors, the downstairs people?” I asked. Apparently, they were not in town.

She asked him to call the hospital – the number was in a book on a table. He dialed the phone number and asked for the emergency services. They said they would send an ambulance and after he gave them the address, someone came to the phone to instruct him to heat a pot of water and use a cloth to clean her. He was told to give her some pillows too to make her more comfortable, and keep a bag ready with some clothes.

“I went to the kitchen,” he said. He had never done anything in the kitchen because his mother did all the work at home.

“I looked around for a big pan,” he continued, “and figured out where the drinking water was.” He filled the pan and waited for the water to boil to take it to the living room. He helped her head onto a pillow. He was not supposed to move her.

“I had to untie her pajamas to clean her,” he explained. It

was soaked in blood, and it was difficult for him to do so. "My hands were covered in blood," he added. "*Paapa*." In Kannada *paapa* is used to say that someone is a poor thing, naïve, helpless and undeserving of their fate. In Tamil, *paapa* means baby.

The ambulance arrived and he went to the hospital with the woman. After she was admitted, he managed to find her husband's office number and called to inform him. He waited until the husband came and then he left. He changed his clothes because they were covered in her blood and then he continued with the day's rides. While I had my earphones on, he had been speaking to the woman's father, who wanted to meet him and thank him.

I remained silent after he told me the story. I did not know what to say.
"I didn't tell anyone, my family or anyone else about this," he said after a long silence.
"Why?" I asked.
"People think otherwise..." he replied.
"What do you mean?" I asked.
"She is a woman and I a man..." he trailed off.
"No one would! That's ..." I sputtered unable to find the words in Kannada. "Nonsense!" I concluded in English. I am not sure he agreed, but he didn't argue.

We stayed quiet for a while.

"*Paapa*," he murmured, shaking his head.

STORIES FROM THE GRIDLOCK: GHOSTS
IN THE MACHINE
Vandana Menon



1 He shares a room with five others from his village. Some of them are migrant construction labourers.

He finished his undergraduate in a Tamil medium college and after that took up a correspondence course to be an engineer. In the meantime he drives people to make sure he can pay for his classes.

He finds Bangalore crowded and lonely at the same time.







2 He tells me that he has Afghan ancestry and his family had lived in the same city for centuries before it came under the Nizam of Hyderabad during the pre-Independence era.

His mother and brother have a small plot of land that they farm. He moved to Bangalore ten years ago, and lives in Shivaji Nagar. He has a wife and three children.

He likes Bangalore and the hustle and bustle of everyday life. He likes the parks and the greenery, and he takes his children to Cubbon Park as a treat when he has time. However, he thinks the city has changed drastically in the past ten years and is slowly falling apart. He says there are no water, electricity or proper roads in most places. He thinks the city is soon going to run out of water.



3 His father and brother own land in the village he comes from and they are farmers by profession. He tells me that drought and bad crop prices mean that the family cannot sustain itself with farming alone, so he came to Bangalore to become a driver.

Back in his village his wife is about to deliver a baby and he is anxious about her. Our conversation is interjected by calls from his wife whom he speaks to in Telugu. He wants suggestions for baby names that only have a couple of syllables because he thinks that this would make it a 'global name.' He has high hopes for his child. At my stop he takes out his phone and shows me a picture of himself and his wife against a photo studio backdrop on their wedding day.







4 He left the industrial town where he comes from because the pollution from the smoke means that a lot of people fall ill quite often. He left to make a better life for himself.

He tells me Abida Parveen is his favourite singer.

He drives an Uber part-time, and works as a driver for his 'Madam' full-time. He proudly tells me that he taught her how to drive. But given how bad the traffic in Bangalore is he is afraid she might have an accident so he still insists on driving her around.

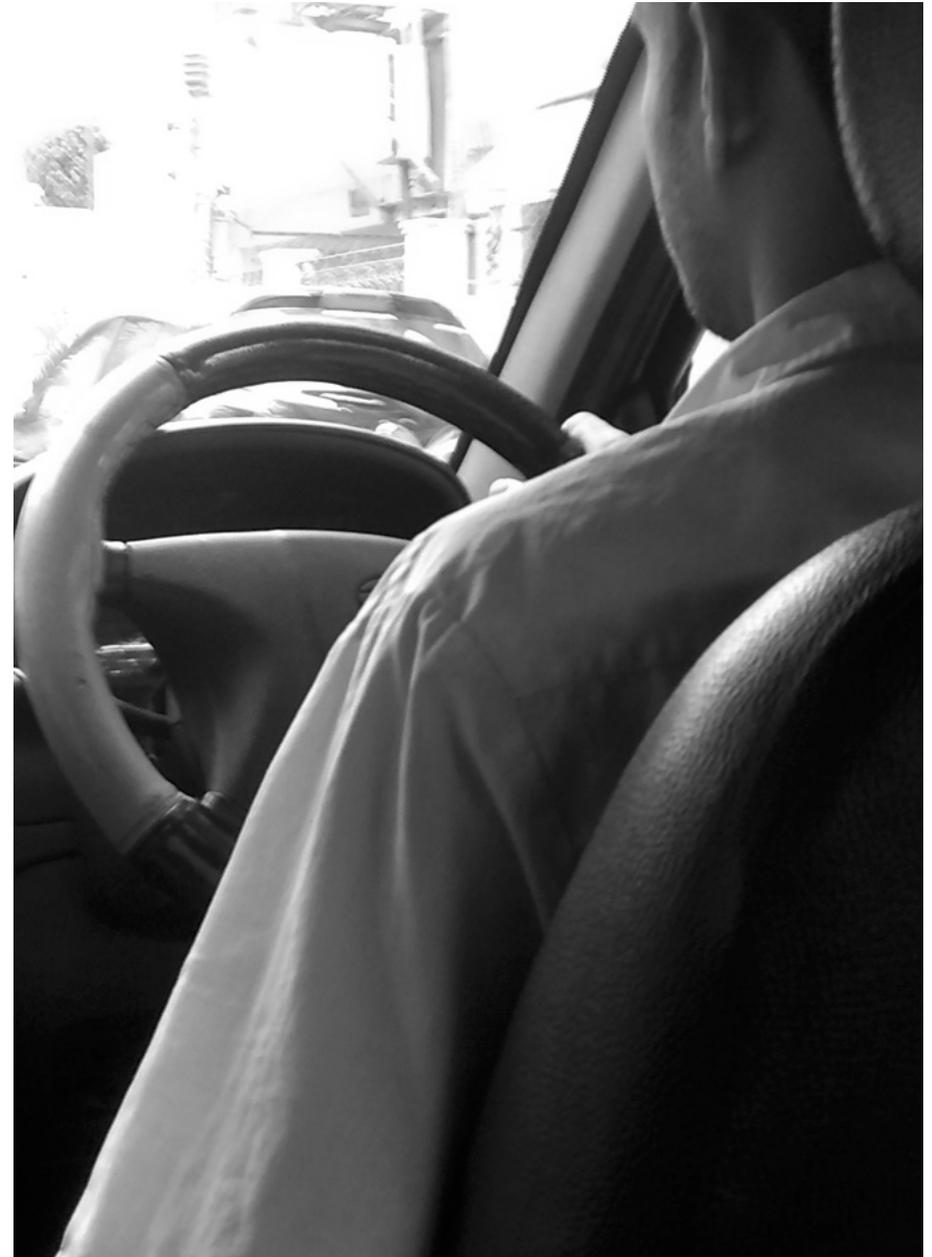
He asks me if I know a good mechanic in town because his Madam's car needs some repairs work. I tell him about my mechanic and he pins it on his Google Maps.





5 He asks me if it's okay if he doesn't switch on the air conditioner since he suffers from asthma. We drive through small village lanes that have been absorbed by the urban sprawl, and hit Bellandur lake. Immediately we can smell it and he starts talking about how urbanisation has destroyed the lake.

He tells me that in his neighbourhood they have started a campaign to plant more trees. They make it fun for the kids by holding a competition – the winner who plants the most number of saplings gets a gift hamper of chocolates. He says that the only way to combat climate change and global warming in cities is to clean up lakes and have more greenery.





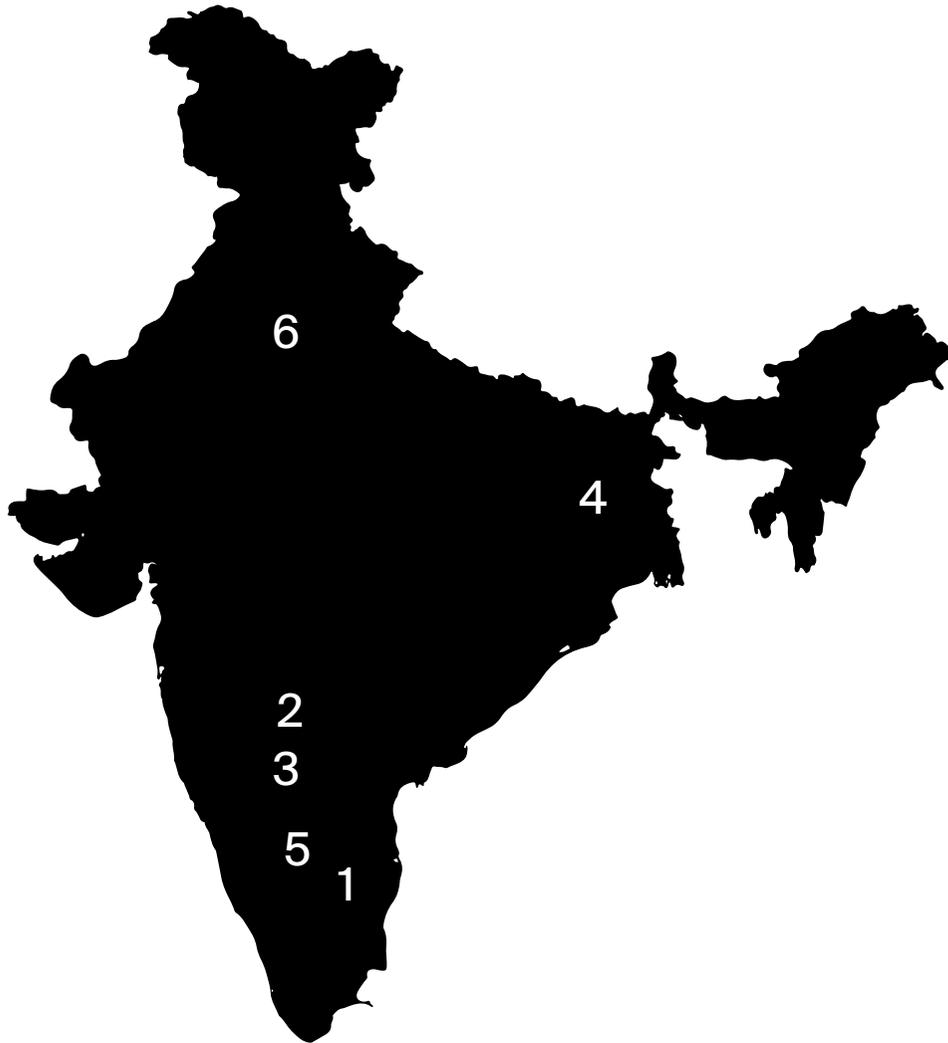
6 He used to be a journalist at Zee News in New Delhi. Then he quit his job and moved to Bangalore. He now owns a fleet of cars and often drives passengers himself because he thinks it is better way to find out what people are actually like in this country.

We had a lively discussion about the failure of the state, corruption and the need for social and political change.

As I was getting out of the car, he said that the answers to the complex questions he had were not black-and-white, and that is why he quit being a journalist.







- 1 Raja is from Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu.
- 2 Mujahid is from Bidar, Karnataka.
- 3 Gajendra is from a village near Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh.
- 4 Ali is from Dhanbad, Jharkhand.
- 5 Sumanth is from Jayanagar in Bangalore.
- 6 Sunil is from New Delhi.

REVIEWS
Furqan Jawed

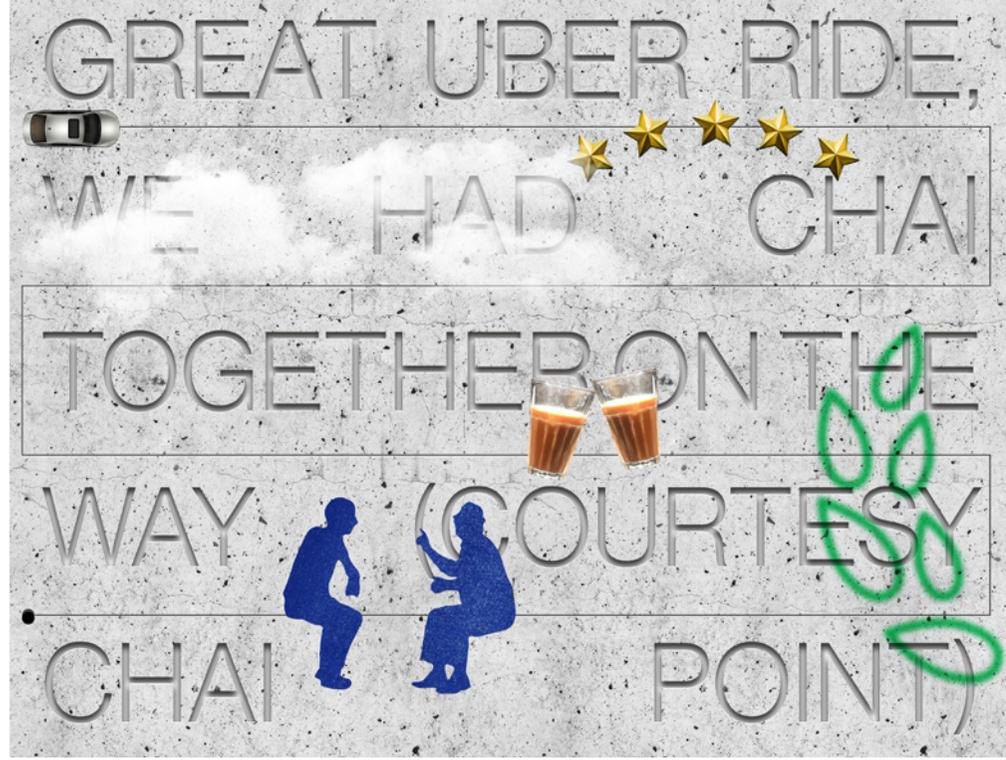




3 EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO
UBER TO KEEP MY PRESTIGE AT
THE SAME LEVEL BY SENDING
DZIRE CAR. 3 WAS WITH A
MINISTER & 111 OTHER MLAS WHO
CAME TO SEE ME OFF, MINISTER
OPENED THE DOOR AND
REQUESTED ME TO ENTER IN CAR.
THE DRIVER WAS EXCELLENT
WHO STOOD BY & CLOSED THE
DOOR AFTER I HAD SEATED IN THE
CAR. 3 DON'T HAVE WORDS TO
EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO UBER.

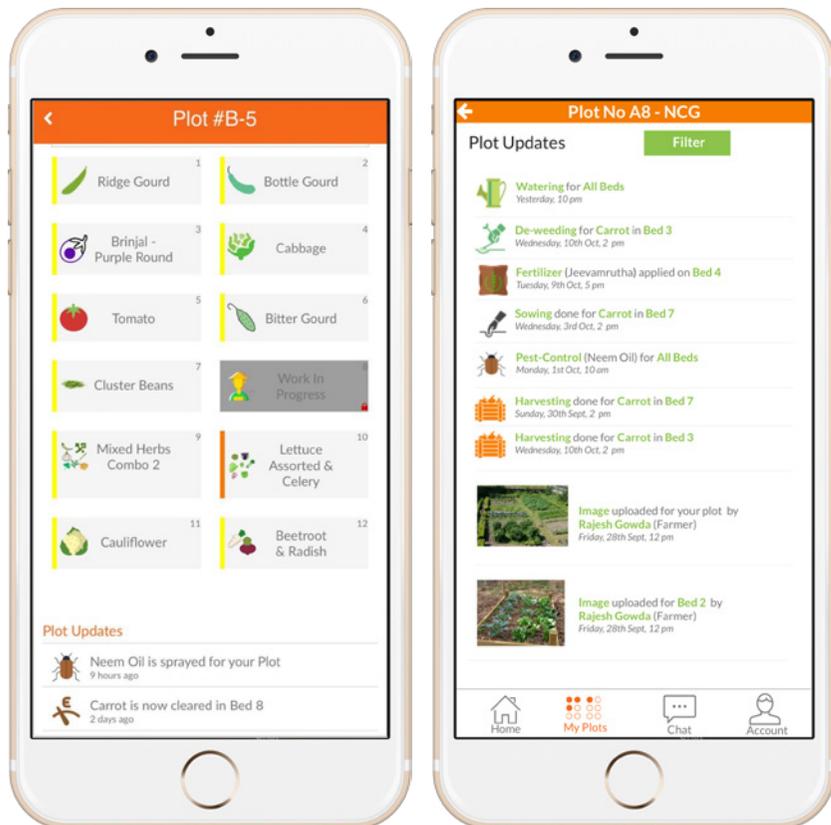


GREAT UBER RIDE,
WE HAD CHAI
TOGETHER ON THE
WAY (COURTESY
CHAI POINT)



HOW FARMIZEN IS HELPING PEOPLE OF BENGALURU RECONNECT WITH FARMING¹

Carla Duffett



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“Even if you live in a big house and you have a farm, you don’t have the time to take care of the farm. That’s what got me thinking about a new business model that could solve both issues.”

—Shameek Chakravarty, co-founder of Farmizen, The Hindu, 17 January 2018

experience

noun

- 1 [mass noun] Practical contact with and observation of facts or events.
 - 1.1 The knowledge or skill acquired by a period of practical experience of something, especially that gained in a particular profession.
- 2 An event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone.

—Oxford English Dictionary

¹ Title of the article written by Harshini Vakkalanka, published in The Hindu on 17 January 2018.

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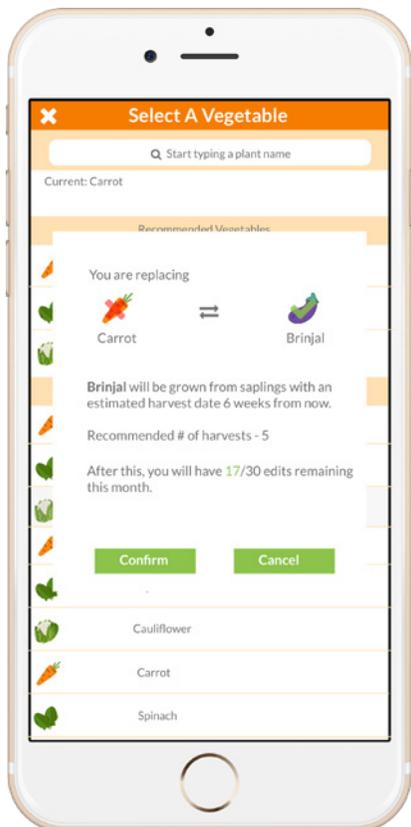


Image credits: Farmizen website and Facebook page

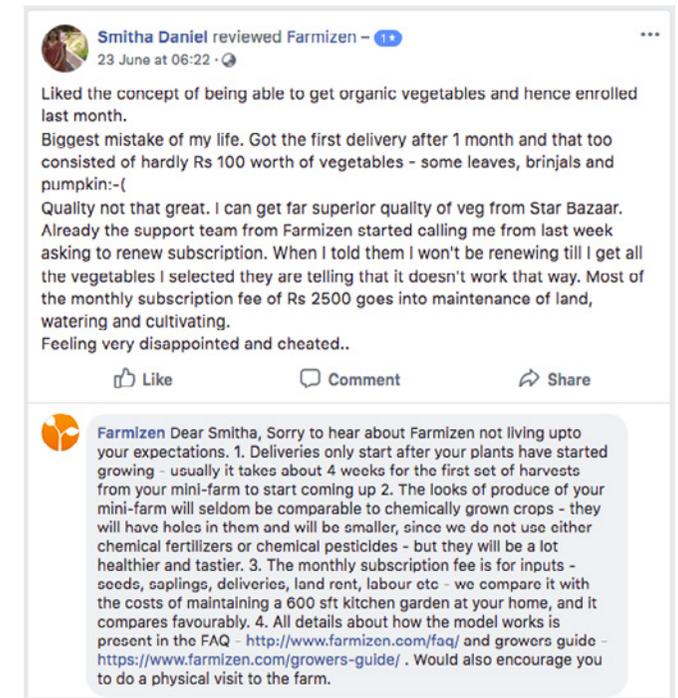
share
verb [with object]

- 1 Have a portion of (something) with another or others.
 - 1.1 [with object and adverbial] Give a portion of (something) to another or others.
 - 1.2 Use, occupy, or enjoy (something) jointly with another or others.
 - 1.3 Possess (a view or quality) in common with others.
 - 1.4 (share in) [no object] (of a number of people or organizations) have a part in (something, especially an activity)
 - 1.5 Tell someone about (something, especially something personal)
 - 1.6 Post or repost (something) on a social media website or application.

—Oxford English Dictionary



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Labour, also spelled labor, in economics, the general body of wage earners. It is in this sense, for example, that one speaks of “organized labour.” In a more special and technical sense, however, labour means any valuable service rendered by a human agent in the production of wealth, other than accumulating and providing capital or assuming the risks that are a normal part of business undertakings. It includes the services of manual labourers, but it covers many other kinds of services as well. It is not synonymous with toil or exertion, and it has only a remote relation to “work done” in the physical or physiological senses. The application of the physical energies of people to the work of production is, of course, an element in labour, but skill and self-direction, within a larger or smaller sphere, are also elements. A characteristic of all labour is that it uses time, in the specific sense that it consumes some part of the short days and years of human life. Another common characteristic is that, unlike play, it is not generally a sufficient end in itself but is performed for the sake of its product or, in modern economic life, for the sake of a claim to a share of the aggregate product of the community’s industry. Even the labourer who finds his chief pleasure in his work commonly tries to sell services or products for the best price that he can get.

[...]

Different uses of the available supply of labour, whatever its composition, can be compared with reference to the quantity and the value of the product that they yield. Such comparisons are made continuously in the planning and management of competitive business undertakings. By means of economic analysis, it is often possible to know whether a proposed change in the organization of the community’s labour or in the uses to which it is put (as, for example, by encouraging certain types of industries at the expense of others) would be more likely to increase or to decrease the annual production of wealth.

For the individual worker, as well as for the community as a whole, the practicable way of measuring the “labour costs” of production is by reference to the other products that might have been secured by means of the same labour or by reference to alternative uses of the time given to labour.

—Encyclopedia Britannica



INTERVIEW WITH VIR KASHYAP Marialaura Ghidini

MG I would like to talk about the workers of the sharing economy and their relationship with the companies they work for (and their platforms), like Swiggy, Uber, etc. Do you think these companies offer any form of professional and personal empowerment for the workers?

VK I was with UrbanClap¹ yesterday at their office in Delhi. UrbanClap believe they are empowering the workers to have more choices compared to what they had before. And they gave me some good examples. Now, let’s say you are doing washing machine repairs—what are your job opportunities? You could join Samsung or LG and probably make a salary between twenty to twenty-five thousand rupees a month. They would tell you that you have to go to Marialaura’s house, Tara’s house, to do all these tasks of the day for a fixed salary. Or you could join UrbanClap. They are guaranteeing, in certain professions and in certain areas, fifty thousand rupees a month for repair jobs. It is guaranteed in the contract and you have to do something like three jobs a day. I think it is pretty beneficial for the workers over the previous alternatives. An entry-level software engineer job at Infosys starts at around twenty-five thousand rupees a month I believe. And what level of investment in education does this take, versus becoming a repairman?

MG This model is very different than that of car ride aggregators... especially in terms of guarantees. I am thinking of when the driver subsidies were drastically reduced in India, leaving the drivers to deal with a sudden decrease in their earnings... How do you think this new employment model is changing our relationship with work?

VK It gives the workers a lot of flexibility in some ways. But obviously if you have to make a certain amount of money, you need to put in a certain amount of time, so how much flexibility do you read in that? In the case of Uber or Ola drivers, who have taken a loan to buy a vehicle, and have a certain amount of monthly payment they have to make to repay that car, and certain expenses for

¹ See App Index, pg. 234

maintenance—they have gas, they have a lot of different expenses they have to pay, right?—sometimes it's not a choice anymore. You need to make a certain amount to pay the financing cost of that large capital good you purchased to do the job. And I think there is a fair amount of difference for platforms like Uber, which require you to have a big capital asset in order to be on the platform, versus platforms that do not require you to make that investment in a capital good.

This is also what differs between the platform economy and a traditional business model. In a factory all the machines are there. With these platforms it's almost like saying, "You have to buy your own sewing machine, you have to make this cloth, you have to find some place to work, and good luck!" Now, the roles between the capital good owner—the person who has a business—and worker are very different. It is the worker who has to provide the asset, the sewing machine. And in India buying a vehicle to drive on an on-demand platform is a major investment and financial decision. Are we equipping people with the right skills to make this major decision?

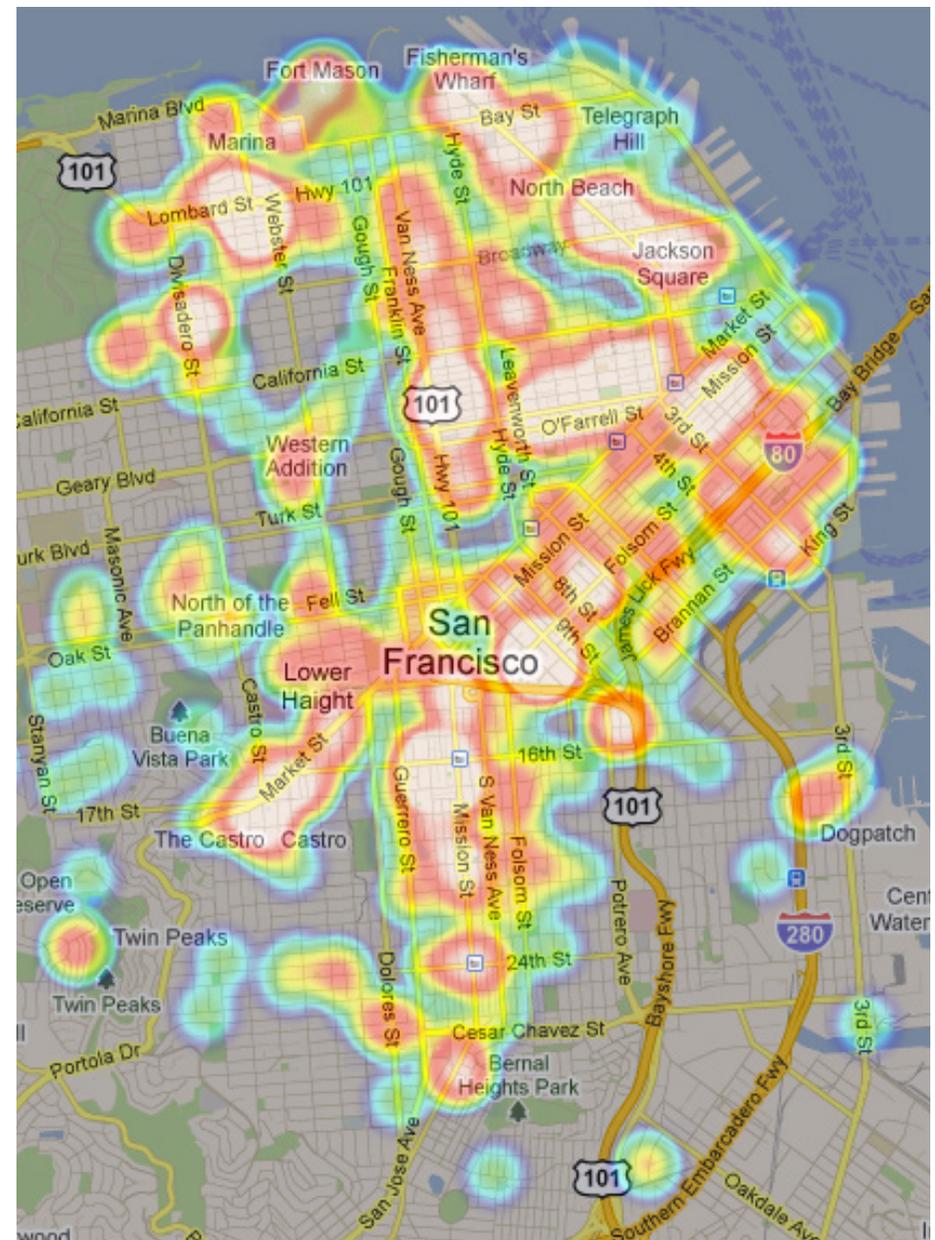
MG Also, as a worker in a more traditional business you have a place you associate with work, where you work with other people, but as an on-demand worker you are constantly on the go with a company / management at the top that you have not even seen...

VK In the old model, before Uber, most taxi operators in most cities were also kind of self-entrepreneurs. They never had an office. Maybe they had a place they would check in once in a while... The same thing if you were a delivery person for any company in the past, you also were going to be on the road most of the time. So from a lifestyle perspective the models are not different. I think one thing that is different is the utilisation of free time. You are working more, all the time. In the past there was the taxi stand, and that was the office, and that's where the drivers would hang out, where they had their tea/coffee and chatted. And that, in a sense, is less now because the taxi stand is in the cloud, there is no physical taxi stand.

MG In Bangalore there are meeting points created by the workers, like Swiggy and Uber workers meet in certain parts of the city. But it is very self-organised, with no real given infrastructure...

VK Have you seen the heat map? It is a map that says where drivers should go and wait. After the ride, they typically see which area they should go to to get the most money, where the surge is happening, where the demand is high. It directs them. This is one of the benefits of the algorithm.

It tells you that at 6 o'clock at the IT park there is high demand. Before Uber, you would go there because you knew where demand was, like at the train station or at that particular night club that closes at 2am in the night. It was more based on your intuition. And if there was no business in an area, you would just be waiting. Today it is about optimising time, but also your downtime is less because utilisation rate is high in most cases because of the technology. Now you always know when to go to another area to work...



MG Now it is like having this god-like awareness of what is best...

VK Yeah, that's what they call it at Uber, "the God view"...

MG Really?

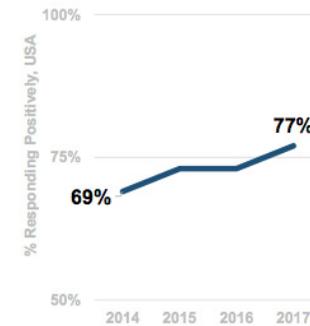
VK Yeah, in the Uber headquarters that's what they call the map where you can see everything. [laugh]

MG This also creates lot of performance pressure because there is always a better spot, the better thing, and the fastest thing to do... So, as a worker of such a service app, on the one side your life is dictated by an algorithm written by a bunch of people that tells you what to do; on the other side you don't have an actual boss, or person to report to, and your relationship with a workplace is different. How do you see this changing the landscape in India work-wise?

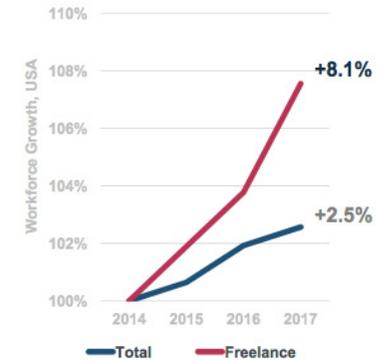
VK Most of these platforms call their "workforce" *partners*, like Uber Partners, Dunzo Partners. Of course these platforms are changing the landscape. Several million people are employed by them—what am I saying?—earn money from them. People are contractors in this economy. And in this model it is the worker that is taking the risk of finding "new" jobs, but like everything in life there is more risk but a higher reward as well.

Technology = Makes Freelance Work Easier to Find... Freelance Workforce = 3x Faster Growth vs. Total Workforce

Has Technology Has Made It Easier To Find Freelance Work?



Workforce Growth – Freelance vs. Total



KLEINER PERKINS
2018
INTERNET TRENDS

Source: "Freelancing in America 2017" survey conducted by Edelman Research, co-commissioned by Upwork and Freelancers Union. Note: Survey conducted 7/17-8/17, n = 2,173 Freelance Employees who have received payment for supplemental temporary, or project-oriented work in the past 12 months.

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MG Talking about risks, what about the 'rumours' about Uber not being viable? It is a company with an enormous financial value, but with no assets and many legal battles...

VK No, it makes money. In some markets they don't make money, like India. But in the US, in many cities, it is massively profitable. In India, because it is so cheap here, the value of all the rides in the whole country is less in revenue terms than San Francisco—and that is a city which does not even have a million people but has a very high per capita income. The number of rides in India is quite large, but it is not a profitable market for them, yet.

MG And what would make Uber viable in India?

VK Increase prices.

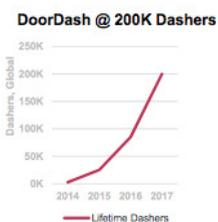
MG But then only a certain kind of people would be able to use it...

VK Possibly. You [Uber] wait, you ride the income growth in India. There is GDP growth happening, income growth happening. It is going to take some time, but it is happening. And when that happens you will be able to increase prices.

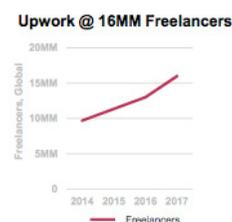
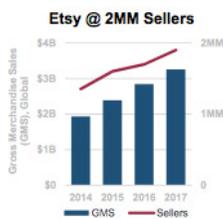
MG So you enter the market, you make sure you are there, and wait for things to slowly change...

On-Demand Jobs = Big Numbers + High Growth

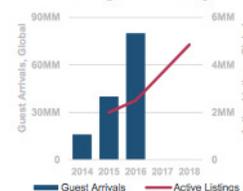
Real-Time Platforms



Internet-Enabled Marketplaces



Airbnb @ 5MM Listings



KLEINER PERKINS
2018
INTERNET TRENDS

Uber Source: Uber Note: ~900K USA Uber Driver-Partners. As of 1/15, based on historical growth rates, it is estimated that ~90% of USA Uber driver-partners drive for UberX. DoorDash Source: DoorDash. Note: Lifetime Dashers defined as the total number of people that have dashed on the platform, most of which are still active. Etsy Source: Etsy. Note: In 2017, 60% of Etsy Sellers were USA-based (2.2MM). Upwork Source: Upwork. Airbnb Source: Airbnb. Note: Airbnb disclosed in 2017 that ~60% of their listings were in USA. A 2017 CBRE study of ~250K USA Airbnb listings + ~1.7M Airbnb hosts in Austin, Boston, Chicago, LA, Miami, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Oahu, Portland, San Francisco, Seattle, & Washington D.C. found 83% of hosts are single-listing hosts / non-Airbnb home hosts. This implies ~500K USA hosts.

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VK Yes. As a company you can promote your business, you can do lot of marketing for instance, which they now also started on TV. Or, one other way to do it is by subsidising the cost of your service, and this also reaches more people and enables you to grow.

MG Or maybe, option X, you could be hired by the government to run urban transportation for them! Which seems a likely scenario in a city like Bangalore... [laugh]

VK In a place like Bangalore, where the public transportation and its infrastructure are not yet developed, certainly it is an option. In many places, governments have basically outsourced the public transportation to Ola Share and Uber Pool. They have outsourced their responsibility to a technology platform, right? [laugh] In the West those systems were already in place when Uber came...

MG What a dystopian future scenario... public services on demand. In a larger sense, how has the advent of the companies of this new economy changed the city? I am thinking of one of the Western counterparts of Bangalore, Silicon Valley, and the fact that an article in Wired has likened it to "the 'sharecropping' of yesteryear, with the serfs responding to a smartphone prompt rather than an overseer's command."² What's happening in Bangalore?

VK That is an example of income inequality created by the fact that someone has X amount of income and someone else has much less. It is the equity ownership in the technology space in the US that has created a place like San Francisco because tech companies tend to have employee stock ownership programmes that create money for their workers. I think you already have income inequality here in India to a high degree. Most people here have maids, cooks and house help living in their house who make a very different income than the owners of the house. I think this income inequality appears starker in San Francisco because it has become more exposed. Also there has been such an increase in the property prices in Bangalore in the past 20 years, and only a few ways of making big money—let's say, like if you were at Infosys 20 years ago and you had some equity in the company—that how can a common person afford to buy here, unless you had property in the past? There were, in the past, fewer ways to break the cycle and move between economic classes in India, but that is changing. I think equity ownership is still a new concept here. But it could be an interesting way for these platforms to actually make it more appealing, and interesting and fair for their partners if they allowed a pool, a share of some of the value accretion in the creation of a platform, to flow back to these partners.

MG Such as?

VK Let's say Uber is worth 50 billion dollars now; if in the beginning they had set aside some percentage of the equity for the driver partners, how would that look now? They could have a far more loyal base of driver partners. But the problem here is that you cross the line of independent contractor and employee because if you give out stocks it makes it legally more challenging for you to defend that these people are not employees, and you would have to give them some benefits by whatever the law stipulates. Yesterday Uber crossed 10 billion global rides on the Uber platform...

MG Billions?!

VK [laugh] It is a crazy number...it's remarkable. They probably will get to 20 billion in the next year or so... Think about the massive impact they have made.

MG Talking about opportunities for change, we always talk about service apps in the context of cities, and rarely outside them. Do you think service apps are changing the relationship between urban and rural communities?

VK Rural communities are mostly left out from the platform economy. It is not benefiting them or affecting them much directly. There could be better ways of including farmers with things to sell. For example, by directly connecting them with urban consumers. Now there are distributors who act as middlemen, and because of this farmers are very disconnected from the buyer and seller.

MG Some apps directly outsource labour and resources in rural areas, like apps related to farming...

VK Yes, there are many apps coming up related to farming. In a different way chat apps like Whatsapp have helped to bridge this disconnect. For example, we have a Whatsapp group where I live for people who want products directly from farms, and I get my vegetables from a farm in Ooty, with no middlemen.

MG Talking about skipping middlemen, Babajob, which you co-founded, offered blue- and grey-collar workers from the informal sector access to job opportunities beyond the word-of-mouth system they previously relied on. Can you tell me more about how the service worked?

VK Babajob was founded on the premise—why should information about jobs be limited to people who speak English and have a computer? Why can only they have

the benefits of a digital marketplace?

In a digital marketplace you can see all the available jobs, you can filter them, you can search them and you can make your own criteria, whereas a non-digital system is very ad hoc. You are subject to “Oh, I saw that sign,” or, “my friend told me,” etc. The options available to you are limited to your network, to your given geography, to what you happen to see in the newspaper, for example. The digital gives the benefit of filtering according to what is relevant to you, and obviously the real-time nature of it, and the fact that it is fast, it is up to date. Those are the benefits.

MG It was basically a tool to make something more accessible...

VK Babajob aggregated all the job opportunities in a particular region and put them on our website, and people would come to the website and search for jobs. Then they would apply for a job and connect with an employer. The transaction would typically move offline then—they would meet someone, would discuss salaries, terms of employment, etc. We did not have much control over that.

MG In this sense Babajob is different from the mobile aggregator companies of the gig economy, right?

VK In the technology world, Babajob is called a marketplace because you are just connecting the buyer and seller and saying “OK, you guys figure everything out.” For us, it is the employer that sets a range of prices on the site and we don’t have any say in that, whereas a managed marketplace like Uber takes care of the whole transaction. They set the price, they control the payments and the terms, they are the intermediaries in the transaction. You are never dealing directly with a driver. He can’t set the price, it is set by the platform. Managed marketplaces have been the most successful digital companies in the recent era, like Airbnb and Uber.

MG Was it easy to get people who were not used to digital systems to start using Babajob?

VK It was difficult. It just started to get more adoption when the business was acquired. Also, around the world, over 30% of companies use referral hiring, which is when positions get filled by referrals from existing employees. To this day, a lot of white-collar jobs are filled because you know someone who tells you about a job opportunity. Many companies richly incentivise it. They give you a bonus if you refer a friend, or someone you know, to work in the company.

MG Was the Babajob platform ever misused by a user?

VK Babajob was pre-Dunzo [a chat-based personal management app that allows users to create and manage daily tasks], so there were people doing Dunzo-esque things. One user wanted a ticket to the cricket match so he basically hired a guy to sleep in the line outside the cricket stadium to get it.

Another time we used Babajob to organise a sting operation. An employer hired someone on Babajob to be his driver/assistant. One day he gave him money to deposit in the bank, and the guy stole the money and disappeared. I mean, you give a new guy who you’ve known for 4 days 1 lakh rupees to deposit! It’s like meeting a random person, and you should run some checks before, which we encouraged all employers to do. But obviously we wanted to help our customer and avoid anyone else getting cheated. Then we noticed the guy on Babajob applying for other jobs. So we posted a fake job, he applied for it and we gave him our office address. Then we told our customer, “This guy is coming to the office,” and he called the police.

MG This is a detective story...!

VK Yes. The police came and waited on the roof of our office. They asked, “What’s his mobile number?” and they called up the station to track his location. They had no warrant, nothing. And they told us, “Don’t worry, he is on his way.” What an access to information the police has!

MG Amazing...

VK When the guy came and was caught, he apologised and said, “Sorry, I used the money to buy a bike.” So he gave the scooter to the employer he stole the money from. The employer did not press charges because he got the bike. There was a lot of abuse on the platform too...

MG In what sense?

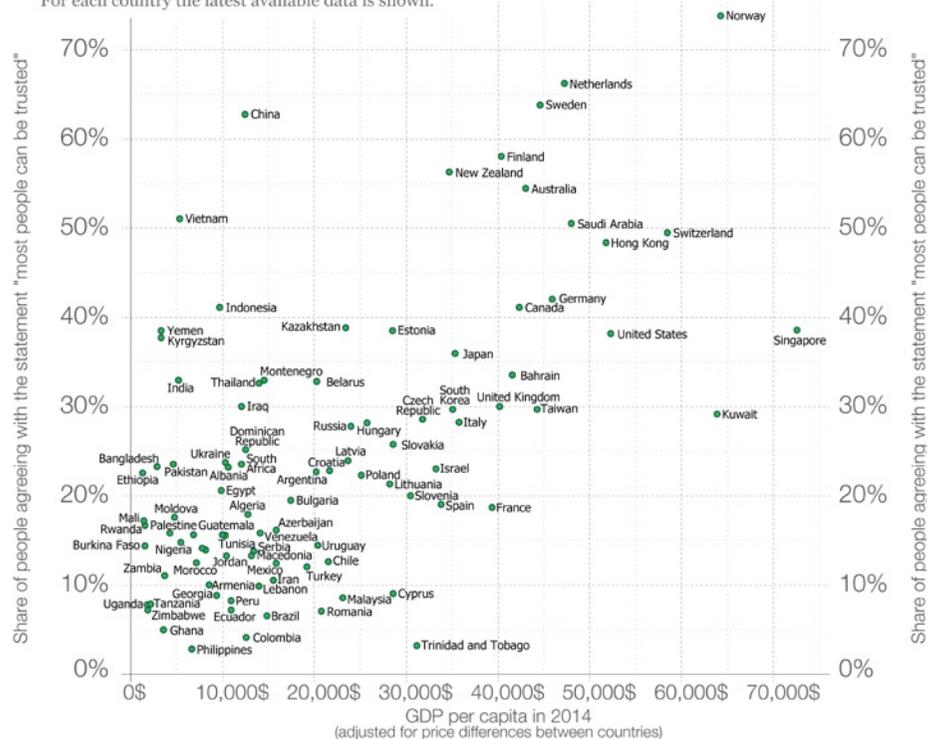
VK Some workers got into situations where they were not paid properly. There were people who pretended they were from Babajob who took money from employers saying, “Oh, yeah, we will find you a maid, give me five thousand rupees,” and then they would disappear. But we never charged people for being on the platform. I think these stories also bring up the high degree of trust that people in India generally have with each other. Interestingly, it’s higher than most other countries of similar income levels.

MG This is interesting also in relation to the fact that the platforms of sharing economy, like Swiggy, Uber, etc.,

Country by country: Trust vs. GDP per capita

Shown is the share of people agreeing with the statement "most people can be trusted".
For each country the latest available data is shown.

Our World
in Data



Data source: World Value Survey for data on trust and Penn World Table for data on GDP per capita
This visualization is available at OurWorldinData.org. There you find the raw data and more visualizations on this topic.
Licensed under CC-BY-SA by the author Max Roser

mediate trust between users, between the person who provides the job and the person who executes it. What do you think this higher trust is related to?

VK I think the higher degree of trust in India could be due to the historically tight community groups formed across language, religion, caste lines, etc. I think this would vary a lot depending on the part of the country (north vs south, etc.), and during certain times when tension flares up, for example, the tensions between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu during the water crises.

MG To close the interview, do you have any ideas for new apps we can steal?

VK Making an app to help Bangalore drivers to find a place to go to pee—there is an app in the US that tells you in which places you can go to the bathroom in your city. But I guess it does not matter here because you can pee everywhere here. [laugh] (If you are a man). Another good app would be to make a social network for platform economy workers and allow them to have space, a gathering place. You could organise meetups every week, and have happy hours.

MG You could also have a lawyer coming in and doing sessions about contracts...

VK Are you creating unions or are you creating social spaces for people to hang out. [laugh] What is the objective?

MG I love unions.

VK Have you seen what happened two days ago in New York? The court decided that Uber drivers should get certain benefits as employees...

MG Yes. And talking about workers' rights, the Kerala government has announced that all female shop workers are allowed to sit, have breaks and work 8-hour shifts. It was ruled a couple of weeks ago...

VK Yeah, what if there was an app that said "Every 3 hours you get a 15-minute break?" The other point here is, why can't platform workers do that themselves? Because they have to be aware that they can, and have to push the platforms to allow it.

MG Maybe an app that helps workers assemble and organise for their rights...

VK I think this is a good way to end our conversation!

AADHAAR CARDS OF GREAT LEADERS

Yashas Shetty

The following pages are a database of 'fictional' Aadhaar cards of famous Indian people. To view the work, download "Aadhaar Card QR Scanner" for Android or "AllinoneScanner" for OSX.

Credits: Arun Kumar and Gavati Wad



AADHAAR CARDS OF GREAT LEADERS

Chart
No.420



In 2011, the Central Government under Dr. Manmohan Singh, initiated a new identity document known as the Aadhaar card,¹ which was to be issued by a new agency, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). This card would be the basic identity card in India and would be available to every resident of the country free of cost. However, to get this unique identity number, every resident would submit their biometric data which includes a scan of their fingerprints and retinas. This information would then be housed in a governmental database.

The Government progressively made the Aadhaar Card mandatory for numerous welfare schemes. These include subsidised food under the Public Distribution System, labour for wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme provided to school children.

The Aadhaar Scheme has been challenged before the Supreme Court by Justice K.S. Puttaswamy, a retired judge of the Karnataka High Court alleging several infringements of fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.² These objections are, broadly:

That there is no adequate safeguard for the privacy of an individual. Any private entity may request authentication by Aadhaar for any reason subject to regulations by the UIDAI, and there are no checks on the power of the government to use the biometric data collected.

That the entitlements given to the people by the government under social sector schemes are themselves a fundamental right and cannot be limited for any reason including non-production of an Aadhaar card/number.

The government had argued that India has no fundamental right to privacy at all and that the Government is well within its powers to make the Aadhaar card mandatory for any reason. It has also argued that such a measure is necessary to prevent corruption and leakages in welfare schemes across India, and its absence has cost the State an untold amount of money.

Aadhaar is the world's largest biometric ID system.

1 Aadhaar (Foundation) is a 12-digit unique identity number generated after collecting biometric and demographic data of an Indian resident. The government of India launched this biometric authentication programme in 2009. The data is collected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar Act, 2016 on 12 July 2016 by the Government of India.

2 Constitutionality of Aadhaar Act, Justice K. S. Puttaswamy v Union of India, Case Number Writ Petition (Civil) No. 494 of 2012, in the Supreme Court Observer (Centre for Law and Policy Research).

ENVIRONMENTAL APPTIVISM: WHATSAPP AND DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERES IN BANGALORE

Nicole Rigillo

The idea of spending several months on a research project on the use of WhatsApp first came to me after I saw the WhatsApp logo on the back of a police car in Jayanagar, the sleepy south Bangalore neighbourhood where I've lived now for two years. I asked my partner Ravi, a long-time Bangalorean, what WhatsApp had to do with the police. "You didn't know? The Bangalore police have a WhatsApp number," he told me. "You can report crimes and even send photo and video evidence through the app." After that I began to see WhatsApp everywhere, used in ways that its Silicon Valley developers had likely never envisioned.

There was the grocery store at the end of my street that was leveraging WhatsApp as a free platform through which it could take local delivery orders. There were the large family groups that nearly everyone I knew was part of, which were providing a new virtual space for extended families to share photo collages, or e-invitations to weddings and housewarming parties. Others were using the app to dissolve connections rather than maintain them – despite the Supreme Court's 2017 ruling against the Muslim practice of divorce by triple *talaq*, news reports continued to cover stories of husbands who had tapped out the word thrice over WhatsApp in an attempt to put a digital end to their marriages.¹

Iterations of the WhatsApp logo can be seen frequently in real life in India, emblazoned on t-shirts and knockoff *chappals* (sandals), and usually slightly altered to avoid copyright infringement. Photos of men selling snacks out of WhatsApp food carts and a woman wearing a "social media sari" have even gone self-referentially viral, forwarded innumerable times through the app itself. Who is the woman, and why is she wearing it? Googling "WhatsApp print sari" brings not an answer to this question, but rather pages of invitation links to WhatsApp groups dedicated to selling floral, *ikkat*, and *kalamkari* printed saris – WhatsApp is also the preferred low-cost platform for all manner of informal digital hawk-

ing today.² In India, education too now happens over WhatsApp – the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) paralleled by a smaller wave of WhatsApp Open Online Courses (WOOCs), where groups of people are learning Indian languages such as Kannada, or how to meditate.³ According to a 2018 Google study⁴, the app is used so frequently that one in three mobile phone users in India run out of phone space daily – the culprit apparently the millions of "good morning" messages received daily over WhatsApp, often accompanied by an image of a baby's giggling face, or a digital *darshan* (blessing) from the gods.



1 Social media sari
 2 For some WhatsApp users, good morning messages are a way of ensuring that loved ones awake to an auspicious symbol, such as the face of a god.
 3 Social media iconography also finds its way into India's informal sector.
 4 Representatives from the Bangalore-based paid service Kannada Gotilla (which translates to "I don't know Kannada") report having taught 9,200 students the South Indian language over WhatsApp.

Troublingly, WhatsApp has also become a platform for fear-mongering and “fake news”, a growing danger in a country where only 35% of people have access to the internet, and the user base is rising fast.⁵ False media content shared by personal contacts over WhatsApp can be particularly believable for those who are new to the Web, and viral WhatsApp forwards have had consequences from the inconvenient to the alarming. The effects of a 2016 forwarded WhatsApp message claiming that the Reserve Bank of India did not consider 10-rupee coins legal tender remain felt in Bangalore, where many autorickshaw drivers still refuse to accept them towards payment for a ride.⁶ In early 2018, innocent people started to be lynched by mobs across India, the violence caused by fears about child kidnappers. The fears were ignited by viral WhatsApp forwards portraying images of boxes purportedly containing the body parts of children, and a video of two men on a motorcycle abducting a child. The video was in fact taken from an educational film on urban kidnapping from Karachi.⁷ WhatsApp has also proven a useful tool for extremist groups across India, many of which use the app to share information to forward various agendas, from the prevention of so-called “love jihad”, to cow protection, to terrorist plots.^{8 9 10}



5

According to the company’s website, WhatsApp was launched in 2009 as “an alternative to SMS”, a new and cheaper way to while away the hours tapping out messages to family, friends and lovers. But in India, it is also much more than that. Its “groups” function makes WhatsApp more akin to a form of social media than a one-to-one messaging platform, but unlike social media, end-to-end encryption means that WhatsApp messages cannot be intercepted or viewed by anyone but the communicating parties. While encryption ensures user privacy, it also casts a veil of secrecy over group communications made on the platform, enabling its use towards ends both terrifying and benevolent.

App-based Politics and Citizenship

One of the most active domains for the uptake of WhatsApp in India has been in politics, where parties across the ideological spectrum now find it essential to woo voters over WhatsApp to secure electoral wins.¹² By the time of the Gujarat elections in December 2017, India’s ruling BJP (the Bharatiya Janata Party, India’s right-wing party) had formed an estimated 45,000 WhatsApp groups, compared to just 1,000 such groups on Facebook.¹³ Citizens who use the app for political critique, however, have risked prosecution. In 2017, a youth was booked in Bangalore under the now repealed Section 66A of India’s IT Act for forwarding a satirical photo depicting Narendra Modi’s funeral. Admins of groups whose members circulate “offensive” messages can likewise be prosecuted.¹⁴

But WhatsApp is also being used politically in more quotidian and constructive ways – by engaged citizens. The latter have formed what are likely hundreds of WhatsApp groups across Bangalore – I have been a member of eleven, so far – that seek to bring together those committed to addressing the municipal governance issues that plague the Garden City. In 2018 citizens organization Janaagraha ranked Bangalore last on a national municipal governance survey¹⁵, while activists continue to struggle against a lack of political will in addressing issues such as inadequate public infrastructure, the city’s loss of green cover, mounting waste management issues, and its polluted and encroached-upon lakes. WhatsApp groups devoted to such issues – comprising anywhere from 20 to the maximum upper limit of 256 members of any given group – often include not only citizens, but also political leaders such as MPs and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), officials at Bangalore’s municipal corporation, the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), members of the police, and journalists. Participation is not limited to debate over the platform only – participants routinely meet in groups large and small to engage actively on the ground, raising awareness about environmental issues, monitoring waste management in their localities, pushing for the preservation and revitalization of the city’s lakes, and even gathering at local businesses to enforce Karnataka’s 2016 Plastic Ban. In several cases, the groups appear to be serving as an informal, app-based alternative to the city’s still often non-operational ward committees, mandated under the 74th Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992 to ensure citizen participation in and oversight of local governance. Citizens WhatsApp groups are often a highly effective tool for active citizen participation. I accompanied one such group in their effort to “liberate” 43 trees on the sidewalks in front of the homes of other

local residents. The latter had hemmed the trees in with concrete to keep their properties looking neat – a common practice, but one damaging to trees. The group hired a day labourer with a jackhammer to remove the concrete and asked a Forest Department official to accompany them to provide official sanction as they cleaned up the concrete and replaced it with compost, taking on forms of responsibility that elsewhere would be planned and undertaken by the government.

I would argue that the activities of groups like these ones – for the most part unknown, unless one is a member – are contributing to a provocative blurring of the lines between citizenship and governance in India today. They are also creating a new public sphere – what philosopher Jurgen Habermas defined as “a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space”¹⁶, one made up of “private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society within a state.”¹⁷

While for much of the twentieth century in most contexts, the formal news media was central to the development of the ideas and debates that circulated in the public sphere, today the internet offers multiple – and often competing – sources of informally-generated content and information. For Bangalore’s many IT-savvy middle-class citizens, WhatsApp has emerged as a powerful site for the production of a parallel virtual public sphere – one they use not only to circulate data and information, but also to actively plan and execute actions for better urban governance. While many are hopeful about this apparent surge in citizen participation in the public sphere, the choice of WhatsApp as its preferred organizational platform is also troubling – mostly because the platform is not entirely “public” at all. How did a mobile instant messaging app come to occupy this important role?

The What and Why of WhatsApp in India

In August 2013, WhatsApp’s monthly active user base in India amounted to 20 million people.¹⁸ Less than four years later, in February 2017, it had multiplied tenfold to 200 million.¹⁹ An estimated half of the 400 million Indians who are mobile internet users are also WhatsApp users²⁰, though these numbers seem conservative. In Bangalore at least, it is almost impossible to find a person with a smartphone who does not use WhatsApp.

WhatsApp was initially released as a free service in November 2009. A too-rapid growth in its user base overshot the company’s technical infrastructure; to reduce further growth the company made WhatsApp a paid service costing a US dollar per year. By 2014, WhatsApp

was acquired by Facebook, and in 2016 it was rolled out as a free service again.²¹ The app quickly captured the mobile messaging market in India, where sending SMSs was costly. SMS was made even costlier by the Telecom Regulatory Association of India’s (TRAI) “Black Out Days” policy, which mandated that telecom providers charge above market rates for SMSs sent on festivals and holidays to prevent cellular network overloading – a policy still in force among some providers.^{22 23}

Unlike with SMS, progressive upgrades to WhatsApp have made it possible to share photos, video, location, audio recordings, and to make audio and video calls. End-to-end encryption was added as a security feature to the app in April 2016, making it impossible for third parties – “not even WhatsApp”, claims the company[24] – to intercept or read messages exchanged among users. The rapid migration of users from SMS to WhatsApp in India has effectively rendered the former obsolete for personal communications; SMS is today little more than a digital dumping ground for an endless stream of third party ads and numeric “one-time passwords” required to make mobile financial transactions.

Studies suggest that the shift from SMS to WhatsApp for mobile textual communications have in turn changed the way that people communicate. A 2014 Microsoft Labs study of WhatsApp use in the UK found that study participants reported using WhatsApp mostly for “entertainment”. Instead of sending to-the-point communications, as was the case with chargeable SMS messages that were limited to 160 characters, WhatsApp could be used to spend hours talking about “nothing” with friends. Unmoored from per message charges and amped up with media attachment functions, WhatsApp conversations meander freely within a virtual space where friends meet to hang out, much like they would at a local café. According to the study’s authors, then, WhatsApp should be understood not just as an app, but also as a virtual space of “dwelling.”²⁵ While in Western contexts this dwelling largely happens within one-to-one chats, in India much of it happens within WhatsApp groups. I have met members of groups for religious pilgrimages, for college students taking a class together, for kitty parties (where women circulate a collectively raised sum of money amongst themselves), and residents of apartment complexes. Real-life groupings of any import in India today for the most part have a virtual parallel in a WhatsApp group.

The scale of messages exchanged in these groups can be astounding. I spoke to the president of a Residents Welfare Association about her use of WhatsApp; while she

was showing me the multiple groups she was a member of, a notification popped up to inform her that she had 1,460 unread messages from 46 chats. Key individuals within an activist network may be members of hundreds of groups. Hema²⁶ is the co-founder of a sustainability enterprise and an admin of one of Bangalore's largest environmental WhatsApp groups. She reports being a member of "at least 300 WhatsApp groups." In most of these groups, Hema has been added by admins of citizen-led waste management groups across India seeking her expert guidance on the topic. "At one point in time I would have 1000 to 1500 new messages a day. The way I look at it, it is like I keep having these babies. But a baby only needs nurturing in the initial phase. When I am added to a group, I am an active member initially, but later other group members take up the actual work themselves" – things like making sure that neighbours are segregating their wet and dry waste or ensuring garbage contractors are not dumping waste illegally.

Private Messaging or Social Media?

In India, then, WhatsApp is best seen not only as a private messaging app, but also an important social media platform. Social media of course forms part of the public sphere, and has long been a tool of social activism – we can think of the use of Facebook to organize anti-Trump women's marches across the USA, or the use of Twitter across the Middle East to strategize over the uprisings that came together to form the Arab Spring.

But certain of WhatsApp's features make it difficult to categorize within existing definitions of social media. User generated content (UGC) refers to the "sum of all ways that people use social media", such as posting comments or making updates to Wikipedia. One of the defining characteristics of UGC is its apparently "publicly available" nature²⁷ – in theory, anyone with an internet connection in a country that does not block these sites can join Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the rest, the content visible to a combination of friends and the public. Returning to Habermas, then, "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs."²⁸ According to this definition, WhatsApp groups are effectively private groupings – one must be added by an admin to participate, unless a public invitation link is made available. The encrypted nature of WhatsApp communications means there is no way to mine the platform for insights into public opinion, no way to know what might be "trending" that day, or how many views a particular video may have received. End-to-end encryption also poses problems for policing and national security in the digital era. In Pune, where communal violence broke out in 2014 over

incendiary images forwarded over WhatsApp, the city's Cyber Crime Cell took the innovative step of creating its own WhatsApp groups to monitor forwards, adding local citizens, social workers, members of housing societies, and local police, who worked together to track and report the circulation of digital content likely to incite violence.²⁹ Elsewhere in India, police have deployed mobile teams with loudspeakers and pamphlets to drive through cities and villages to dispel WhatsApp-circulated rumours. [30] In Bangalore, an inspector at the Cyber Crime Cell reported that the police sometimes resort to getting information about forwards "manually" – that is, tracing a forward by finding out who sent it, and following upwards along the chain. "We cannot trace the origins of forwards this way, only understand their circulation better," explained the inspector, "and further, WhatsApp only provides the minimal information required for an investigation, like IP logs – but not message content."

While public comments sections on social and news media feeds around the world are often inflammatory and troll-ridden, they are still easily seen, and because of that, can be responded to. By contrast, knowledge

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BENGALURU CITY POLICE

FALSE RUMORS ON CHILD KIDNAPPERS.

Bengaluru City Police brings to the notice of the Public that the rumor on Child Kidnappers which are floating on Whatsapp and Facebook etc., are false. People are requested not to be annoyed or be panicked regarding this.

1. First, the news that child kidnappers have entered the city and they are kidnapping the children is completely false rumor. Hence, people need not be worried or get panicked.
2. If you find any such suspicious persons in your locality, you are requested to inform nearest **Police Stations** or **Dial Namma 100** for immediate assistance. Police will take necessary action.
3. Public are instructed not to cause any physical harm either by manhandling or assaulting the suspicious person in any unlawful manner. Stringent measures will be taken against such people, who take law into their hands.
4. Criminal cases will be booked against those who create or spreads any such unauthenticated messages or false rumors on the Social Media.
5. Bengaluru City Police are always at your service for your safety. Hence people are requested not to listen, believe or feel restless on such false rumors.

"DO NOT ENTERTAIN FALSE RUMORS"

"We Serve - We Protect"

BENGALURU CITY POLICE

DIAL 100

BlrCityPolice BlrCityPolice BlrCityPolice 94808 01000

of how groups of people communicate over WhatsApp is like an iceberg, visible only within the groups where one is included as a member. Even WhatsApp's developers know no more about the information shared over WhatsApp than does the general public. Despite growing questions about the company's access to user messages³¹, WhatsApp claims that it "generally" does not have access to message content, requesting users to take screenshots of problematic content when reporting messages to the company or law enforcement agencies.³²

Environmental Apptivism

By contrast, diving into the world of environmentalist WhatsApp groups offers insights into how such groups are being used for activism and the public good. As a member, one is witness to a rolling, ephemeral archive of photo and video messages shared by middle-class environmental "apptivists" engaged in everyday efforts to make Bangalore a cleaner, healthier, and better-governed city to live in.

Certain features specific to the WhatsApp platform make it a useful tool for environmental activism. The live location sharing function, for example, can be used to quickly orient group members to a meeting location, or a composting awareness drive. The ability to share documents, posters, and informational materials helps civic activists to more easily disseminate their messages. Manjula works in the sustainability space with Hema and has trained as a graphic designer. She is behind many of the logos, posters, and graphics that are circulated within the environmental movement in Bangalore, though she doesn't sign her name to any of the work. She has made her posters freely available through various online platforms to citizens groups – and even government departments – working to improve waste management across the country. "This way, they don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are certain standard elements: a loudspeaker announcement for the garbage collection trucks to broadcast, standard templates and posters, and different translations of those posters. There is a space for groups to put their logos, so they can 'own' the initiative – they can put photos of themselves or their political leaders. It is essentially open-source." As Hema added, this approach was part of a conscious effort to disseminate best practices in waste management to interested citizens as widely as possible: "At some point in time we realized if we hung on to ownership and to keeping our logo on things, it wouldn't go further, whereas if we said it was our collective idea, it would just move."

While most civic groups in Bangalore also have Facebook pages and Telegram groups, which permit up to 100,000

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7. Open-source waste management posters available on the 2bin1bag website.

members, the WhatsApp groups tend to host much more active conversations. In some groups, the bifurcation is strategic, a way to redirect forwards and debates about news media articles to Facebook and reserve WhatsApp for time-sensitive planning. Deepak is an active volunteer in various Bangalore movements, and is currently involved in a court battle to save one of Bangalore's lakes from an illegal encroachment. According to Deepak, the shift to WhatsApp use by civic groups gained steam after progressive changes to the Facebook algorithm. In 2012, Facebook began to monetize groups, requiring admins to pay to "boost" their posts. Studies suggest that the changes have radically reduced the extent of what is known as "organic reach", or the likelihood that an unpaid post will be seen by those in an individual's social media network.³³ Deepak estimates that the visibility of an un-boosted Facebook posts hovers at about 5%. "Because of this, Facebook has lost its ability to be a tactical tool for activists, though earlier it used to be," reported Deepak. "Now people typically use Facebook as a platform to organize large groups – to share information, keep people informed, and update things that are not time-critical. We use WhatsApp for small tactical groups and immediate communications – like planning a meeting, or a small campaign – because the message is received in real-time."

Citizens also report preferring WhatsApp to the nearly dozen official apps developed by the government and

other organizations to encourage citizens to report on municipal issues in their localities such as flooding, illegal tree cutting, and garbage dumping.³⁴ Google Play reviews for the apps are generally poor, containing numerous complaints from users citing issues with bugs and poor resolution rates. Santosh, a volunteer with several Bangalore-based civic groups reported being a frequent user of such apps. He noted that while the apps were useful in allowing people to access the contact information of BBMP officials and direct complaints to the appropriate person, better results were seen when citizens involved themselves beyond just registering an anonymous complaint: “You can log a complaint on the apps. But what we have seen is that the complaints get closed without being resolved. BBMP engineers have told me they will open their complaint list, and there will be so many issues. Some people take random photos – so they just close it. They say that ‘those who are really concerned, they will call us. They have our number in the app.’ So that’s when I understood when you call, they take it seriously.”

In a neighbourhood preferred by many of the city’s IT workers due to its proximity to several tech companies, residents use WhatsApp and Telegram groups to organize local citizen-led initiatives and to report civic issues to government officials, some of whom are also members of the groups. Initiatives have included sapling planting drives, workshops on sustainable menstruation, and the launch of a community garden in 2017 – all initiatives that have their own separate WhatsApp groups as well. Members of a group can report waste management issues to the locality’s chief garbage supervisor, who is quick to respond with photos of areas cleaned up by his team. Similarly, the layout’s Senior Health Inspector (SHI) frequently shares photos of his busts of local shops for distributing single-use disposable plastic bags, illegal under Karnataka’s 2016 Plastic Ban. He also posts the results of his investigations of the contents of illegal garbage dumps to find proof of the culprits, which has earned him the admiration of residents. When I meet the SHI he reports being a member of nearly 20 WhatsApp groups. Residents frequently join him on late night raids to catch illegal dumpers, and he encourages people to contact him directly to resolve any issues.

Many civic activists report that a key advantage offered by organizing over WhatsApp was the ability to mobilize large groups – applying the power of the crowd in the service of the environment. Santosh is an active participant in environmentalist initiatives across Bangalore; he is a frequent participant in city-wide raids against illegal dumpers and distributors of plastic bags, of-

8 One locality’s garbage supervisor notified residents of his team’s cleanup of an area formerly filled with illegal construction debris by posting a before and after photo in local WhatsApp groups.



ten accompanying local government workers. Santosh reports that this kind of citizen participation helps to ensure that government workers do not have their work undermined by threats or intimidation from lawbreakers. He sees citizen participation as a must in Bangalore, where “there is often a lack of official support for the law, a lack of awareness of the law...and people also try to use their spheres of influence, political or otherwise, to dodge the law. If there are citizen volunteers involved, the numbers do count.”

One Bangalore-area Residents Welfare Association also made use of informal crowds during the third phase of a plastic ban enforcement drive in their neighbourhood, planned for June 5th 2018 in commemoration of World Environment Day. A group of citizens, including the RWA’s president, came out in support of their health inspector’s efforts to confiscate plastic bags being illegally distributed by local shop owners. According to Mary, an RWA member, “It helps to have citizens support the health inspector because that way the shop owners do not feel that they are being targeted unfairly. They can see that the law is supported by the citizens. There is more legitimacy – it becomes a joint effort.” Mary reported that the RWA plans to conduct monthly inspections to ensure that shopkeepers adhere to the ban.

In many cases then, WhatsApp is much more than a platform to make complaints to government – it offers

a way for citizens to get directly involved in governance itself. Initiatives are often entirely designed and funded by citizens, who tend to forego formal affiliations with specific political parties. In April 2018, small business owner Sanjay founded a civic WhatsApp group to coordinate a new on-the-ground environmental action every weekend. The group has financed some of these civic activities by offering for-fee trainings over WhatsApp in topics such as energy conservation and composting. Sanjay has already purchased a set of tools, the beginnings of a “Lakes and Gardens Cleaning Tools Bank” that will be available for borrowing by volunteers. Large numbers of police officers have volunteered on their initiatives, clearing some of the city’s polluted lakes of garbage. According to Sanjay, these kinds of initiatives are best led by nonpartisan citizens groups: “Rather than complaining, the public has to feel like they are the owners of public space. Government officials do want to work – but they need unbiased participation from the public – meaning participation not necessarily affiliated with any political party.”

How might the use of WhatsApp for urban governance be changing what it means to be a citizen and a government in the digital era? While the apptivists’ work is commendable, their activities also raise questions about democratic legitimacy, given that citizens are not elected officials. There are concerns about access, given that participation requires both a smartphone and fluency in English, the preferred language of communication in the groups. Poorer sections of Indian society are therefore largely excluded from WhatsApp’s digital public sphere – but in some cases, so are government workers. According to an activist in a neighbourhood where WhatsApp groups are not functioning, “Some of our local BBMP officials do not have smartphones – we could not add them to such groups if we wanted to.”

Environmental apptivists are nonetheless concerned with efforts that are oriented to protecting the public good. They assume responsibility for urban spaces that risk being illegally transformed into real estate developments by the wealthy and influential, or left to decay into public dumping grounds. Apptivists also advocate on behalf of the poor; one recent WhatsApp-organized protest at the BBMP headquarters asked politicians to pay *pourakarmikas* (city waste workers) the months of unpaid salaries due to them. Apptivists sink their hands into garbage to conduct waste audits, collecting physical evidence that can be used to target the large corporations that profit from products packaged in unrecyclable materials. They face threats from individuals more powerful than they, who stand to lose from the enforcement of

the law. The most active have left lucrative professional positions, devoting full-time hours to civic activism without expectation of remuneration. While apptivists often assume informal responsibility for the day-to-day operation of municipal governance, most refuse to run for political office for a complex of reasons, including a loss of credibility in the eyes of their supporters, and the widespread belief that political systems are corrupt.

Despite this, apptivists continue to use WhatsApp – not only as a place of “dwelling” to talk about nothing and pass the time – but to strategically intervene to improve urban governance. The use of mobile apps among this demographic bears little in common with the widespread use of commercial service apps such as Uber or Swiggy. Users of such apps are limited to the role of consumers, even though they are able to demand an ever-broadening range of goods and services to their door (often with a heavy environmental cost, as many apptivists argue). The relational connections forged by service apps are often brief, and for the most part transactional, dictated by the use of algorithms intended to generate the most efficient forms of exchange between people. Cost efficiencies for consumers are often earned on the backs of service providers, who are subjected to precarious working conditions and often not considered full employees by their companies. By contrast, there is no master algorithm guiding Bangalore’s apptivists, and no transactions – only virtual spaces where people can come together to assume the duties of citizenship in a city where municipal governance doesn’t perform as many wish it would. Still, while the apptivists are using the platform to govern, they don’t govern the platform – WhatsApp could change its terms and conditions to become a paid service again, or the government of India could restrict the app, as it is considering doing in response to the increasing threat to public order posed by WhatsApp forwards. Would citizen activism falter if WhatsApp disappeared, or would apptivists simply jump ship to another platform? I’ll keep my eyes peeled for the next app logo painted on the back of a police car to find out.

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THE WEIGHT OF CLOUD KITCHENS

Sunil Abraham and Aasavri Rai

In the state of Karnataka, a Plastic Ban issued in 2016 notified a complete and total ban on all plastic and thermocol products in the state. The notification stated that “no shopkeeper, vendor, wholesale dealer, retailer, trader, hawker or salesman would use plastic carry bags, plastic banners, plastic buntings, flex, plastic flags, plastic plates, plastic cups, plastic spoons, cling films and plastic sheets for spreading on dining table irrespective of thickness including the above items made of thermocol and plastic which use plastic micro beads.” The notification also bars manufacturers from producing, storing, supplying or transporting plastic products. Despite the many fines collected and the seizure of great amounts of plastic being illegally used, the ban has not operated uniformly.

Cloud kitchens, a recently growing phenomenon in the food and beverage industry in Bengaluru, pose a particularly pernicious problem in not being locatable, since they don't operate a storefront. Cloud kitchens are delivery-only restaurants with a full production infrastructure and their own chefs and menus. These outlets solely produce food, ordered either through an app or a website, without offering dine-in facilities, making it harder for government authorities to monitor the plastic packaging and utensils delivered to the customer with each meal.

We decided to investigate the quantity of plastic waste generated when ordering a meal from 15 cloud kitchens in the city. We were unpleasantly surprised that these 'online' establishments with easy to navigate web interfaces and swift services are heavy users of plastic despite the government's ban.

Our examination showed an average of 67.072 grams of waste generated for each order of a meal for one person in the price range of Rs. 200 to Rs. 300. Typically, 46.89 grams of non-biodegradable waste and 33.62 grams of biodegradable waste were generated across all orders.

What is terrifying is that this investigation (since it looked at only 15 platforms) forms only a microcosm of the scale

1 Circular - Ban of Plastics & Penalty impose in Bruhath Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike

Rank	Cloud Kitchen	Date	Biodegradable Waste Generated (in grams)	Non-biodegradable Waste Generated (in grams)	Total Waste Generated (in grams)
1	Puh se pizza	18.06.17	118.27	65.43	183.7
2	Inner Chef	15.06.17	65.62	35.26	100.88
3	Baba da Dhaba	19.06.17	23.03	68.46	91.49
4	Bowl Company	05.07.17	36.14	47.85	83.99
5	Fresh Menu	14.06.17	11.55	70.16	81.71
6	High n Hungry	20.06.17	4.03	66.26	70.29
7	Box8	29.06.17	12.12	52.78	64.9
8	Hunger Hitman	21.06.17		53.62	53.62
9	Nite Out	21.06.17		46.33	46.33
10	48 East	16.06.17	3.56	41.4	44.96
11	Faasos	28.06.17	28.32	14.6	42.88
12	Chefkraft	22.06.17		39.25	39.25
13	Kick Out the Jams	17.06.17		37.62	37.62
14	InBento	23.06.17		35.32	35.32
15	Birinz	20.06.17		29.14	29.14

that we might estimate. With a reduction in dine-in customers and corresponding increase in home delivery across the city, the growth of waste production by this new generation of companies in the food and beverage industry gets magnified. In fact, foodpreneurs find operating an online kitchen a more economically viable business model than running a restaurant because they can skip high rental costs, and people who love to dine out often find cloud kitchens a way of eating restaurant food in the comfort of their home with the plus of being able to skip the city traffic.

Without better implementation of the ban, widely available sustainable alternatives to plastic, and the rise of community and customer awareness to significantly drop its usage, the barrier toward a cleaner and 'greener' tomorrow seems insurmountable.



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE, BABY/ LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU AND ME/ Qusai Kathawala

A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

To make it easy for others to try this experiment, this report is formatted in sections like a classic scientific report—Aim, Methods, Observation, Inference. Since this is a speculative rather than scientific experiment, each of the sections is akin to a whiteboard with text, maps and scraps.

COLOR KEY

TITLES

Body Text:
Instructions for and
output from the
exercise

Notes/Comments/
Marginalia

HYPERLINKS

Additional Info

Workshop participants:

Varun Rajiv
Badri Seetharaman
Tara Kelton
Annirudh Kanisetti
Padmini Ray Murray
Anchana Kota
Qusai Kathawala

This report was made
using Scapple, mind
mapping software
published by
literatureandlatte

INTRO

Soothsayers these days come in a few different flavours: Big tech sells us versions of the future that dovetail with whatever they're selling; state sanctioned futures create narratives designed to maintain power and control; academia churns out futures that are often in disciplinary silos inaccessible to most people; and entertainment (books/TV/cinema) tends to favor drama over realism.

I want us to collectively engage with and reimagine what the future can be. Something that we can relate to and work with, a bottom's-up peoples' perspective. Grappling with how to best do this, I cobbled together a set of tools that a group can use to collaboratively generate seeds for future narratives. These narratives can give us the opportunity to engage with the tensions of an imagined future from diverse and personal points of view. Even though the future may be shaped by meta forces operating beyond any single person's control, a key requirement when designing these tools is that they foreground our agency as individuals and as a community. As technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, virtual reality and synthetic biology evolve in a petri-dish side-by-side with globalisation, fundamentalism, ecological degradation and rising income inequality, how does our culture change? What happens to you and me? What do we really want to happen? What actions will we need to perform and what resources will we need to gather to make it happen?

Gathr, a lab for experiments in human interaction, put together a day-long workshop that explored these questions. A sort of speculative ethnography of the future, the workshop took place in Bangalore in June 2018 with 7 participants. Here, I'm sharing what we did and what we learned. My hope is that it will evolve into a toolbox of techniques to spark creative conversation, understand the second and third order implications of the choices that we are making, and give us a better sense of our own roles in this unfolding.

AIM

Prototype possible future narratives that are place-specific, multi-authored, interdisciplinary and fueled by the collaborations, clashes and negotiations between multiple stakeholders.

the pace of change is accelerating and the best way we can understand and respond to these "shocks of the new" is through stories

why?

we are embedded in—and are ourselves—complex systems flirting daily with chaos

our vision for the future is a feedback loop: what we collectively believe the future will/should be will drive the actions/decisions we make today

co-opt tools from a spectrum of sources ranging from (more predictably) ethnography, design and literature to (more surprisingly) corporate and military strategy playbooks — anything that works in empowering the individual in understanding themselves and navigating the uncertain waters of the future

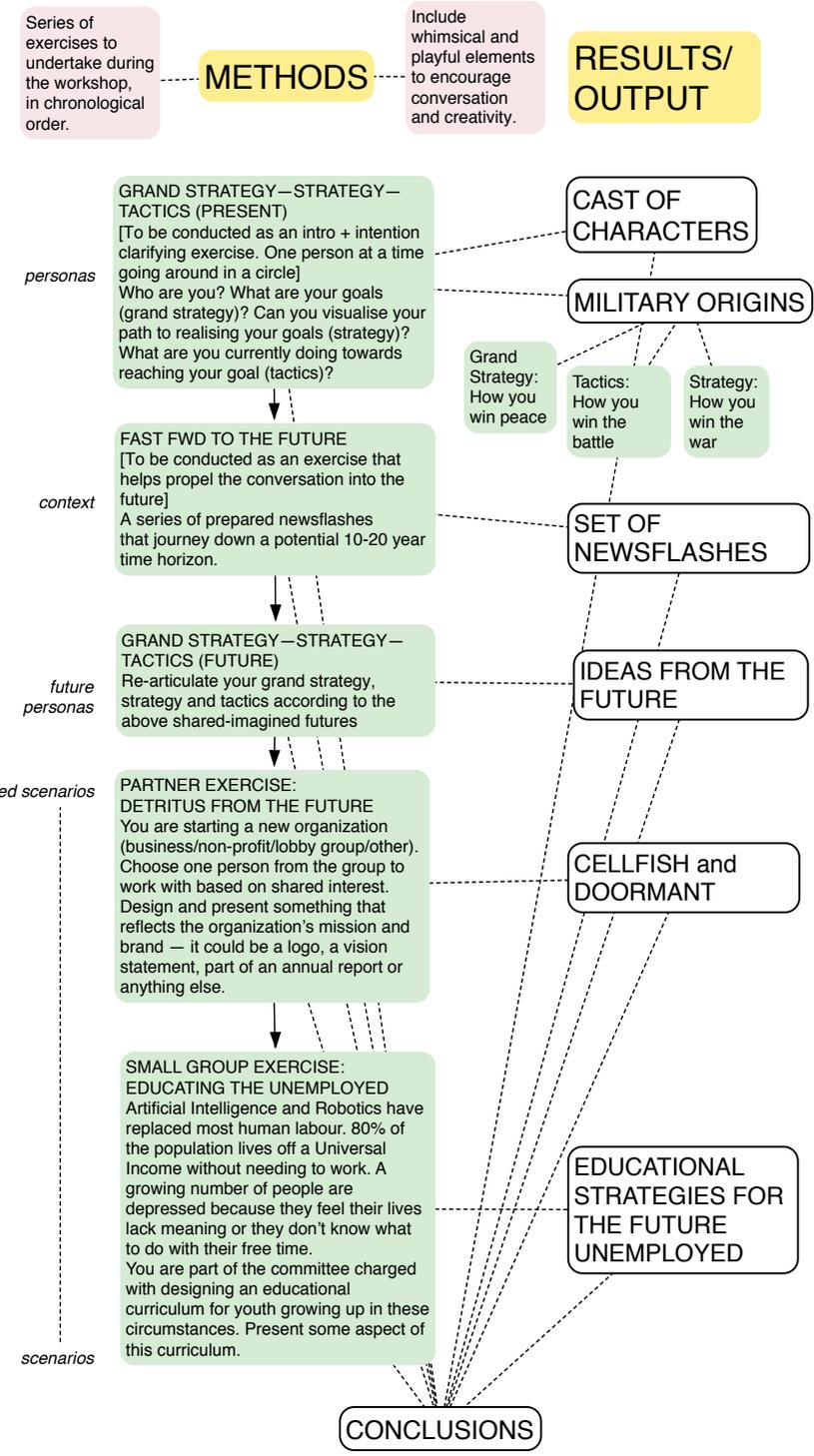
this exercise was inspired by Shell (the oil company) Style Scenario Planning

not about predicting the future—complete accuracy is not the goal

for companies to create alternative narratives of the future and not be unconsciously locked into one version of the future

empowers organisations to visualise the potential domino-effect of new developments and gives them the ability to respond proactively to new situations

Scenario planning alerted Shell's managing directors (its committee of CEO equivalents) in advance about some of the most confounding events of their times: the 1973 energy crisis, the more severe price shock of 1979, the collapse of the oil market in 1986, the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of Muslim radicalism, and the increasing pressure on companies to address environmental and social problems. The method has since become widely popular outside Shell, not just in corporations but in some governments. In South Africa, for example, scenario planning played a major role in the peaceful transition from a system of apartheid to a stable multiracial government.



GRAND STRATEGY—STRATEGY—TACTICS (PRESENT)
 Who are you? What are your goals (grand strategy)? Can you visualise your path to realising your goals (strategy)? What are you currently doing towards reaching your goal (tactics)?

The rest of the group asks questions to ensure internally consistent and believable characters.

Tease out and articulate a clear intention for each of the characters. The clearer the intentions, the easier it is to drive the story forward.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

qualities

values

- opportunistic
- narcissistic
- decisive
- smart
- monopolistic

muskian capitalist

the self-proclaimed hero: saving the world (at least the parts he believes are worth saving) and making money at the same time

- survival of the fittest
- anti-regulation, anti-unions
- embracing technology is evolution
- people don't know what's good for them
- the environment is more important than people

beyond profit?
 "altruism" ROI
 "make the world a better place - but at a price - that will be paid to me"

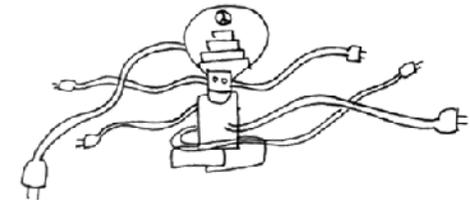


- idealistic
- dreamer
- on the fringe

techno-shaman

wants to use technology to improve how connected people feel to themselves (psychologically) and to others (socially)

- empathy
- technology as a way to augment feeling
- self-reflexivity
- the subconscious mind



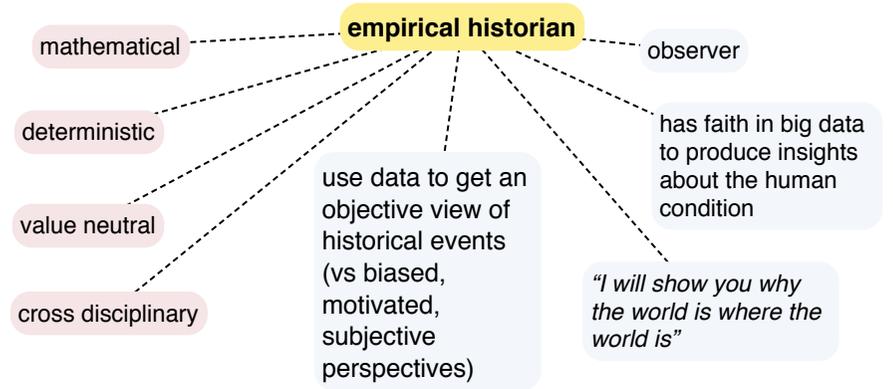
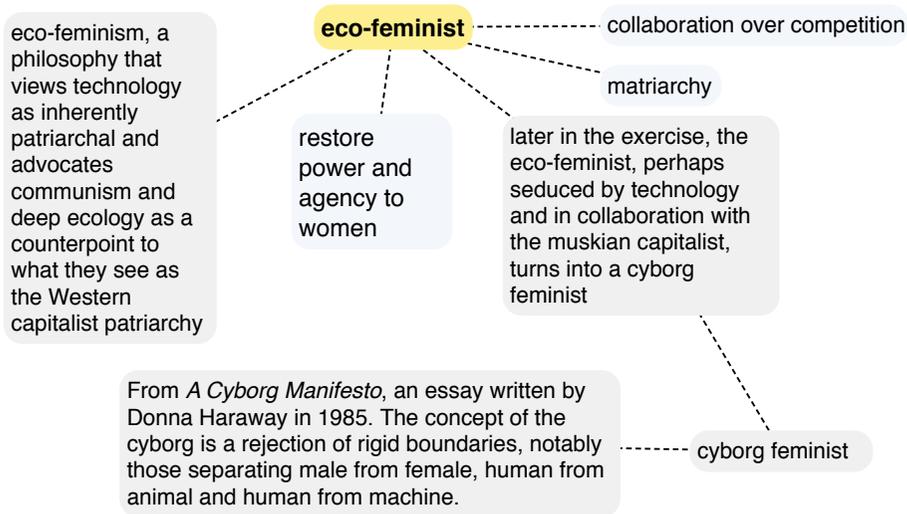
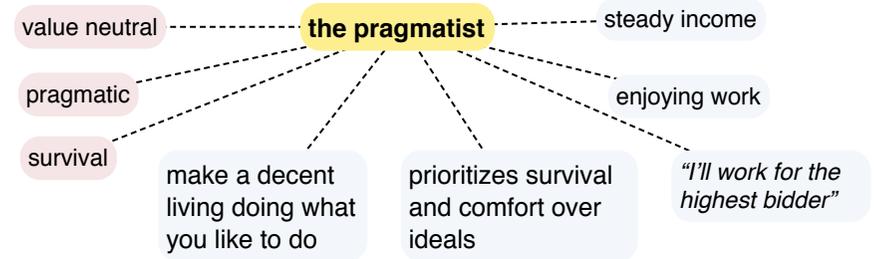
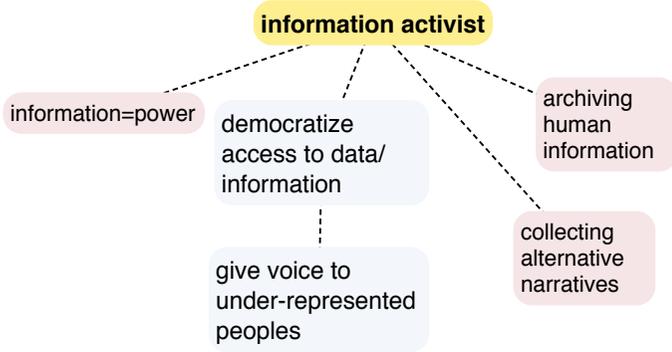
- suspicious about tech utopianism
- against standardization

localist teacher

creating space for individual and collective self exploration

wants consumers to understand what went into making the things they consume so they may re-evaluate their choices

- empathy
- preserving local culture



FAST FWD TO THE FUTURE
Series of newflashes used during the workshop provided here as an example of ways to propel the conversation into the future.

SET OF NEWSFLASHES

Newsflashes are imagined inflection points that evoke a potential future. Participants are able to connect the dots to get a big picture understanding that is shared yet personal.

Mix of local and global developments driven by technology but with broad implications in ecology, culture, economy and geopolitics

INDIA IN THE NET!
100% internet penetration in India

THE "US" IN OCULUS
Simultaneous virtual hangouts hits 500 million mark. Most popular destinations? Sinatra's Vegas, Saddam's Iraq, Shelley's London

THE SUN ALSO RISES
Price drop means solar energy now cheapest source of energy

HINDI CHINI BHAU BAHU?
Third Indian-Chinese billionaire wedding alliance this year.

TURN OFF THE LIGHTS
BESCOM shuts electricity plant; to focus solely on distribution logistics

AAYA RAM, GAIA RAM
Gaia-ism now 4th largest religion in the world; catching on fast in India

DRONE-ACHARYA
Jeff Bezos world's first trillionaire after brave bet on drone delivery

TOWN AND COUNTRY
Population migration to urban areas declines for first time in history

ASSASS-AI-NATION?
Software glitch or something more? Autonomous drone crash kills opposition leader and two others.

CRISIS POINT
50 million climate refugees in the US this year

A FREE LUNCH?
Opposition moots universal basic salary as unemployment reaches record highs

in these shared-imagined futures, re-articulate your grand strategy, strategy and tactics.

IDEAS FROM THE FUTURE

Rampant surveillance—drones help create an objective, empirical view of what happened
#empiricalhistorian

wikis in different languages
#informationactivist #empiricalhistorian

wondering about people's diminishing capacity to experience wonder in everyday life
#technoshaman #localistteacher

the rise of the hikikomori (japanese for people who withdraw from social contact, using only technology and seeking complete isolation from other people)
#technoshaman #localistteacher #muskiancapitalist

revival of cottage industries
#localistteacher #ecofeminist

Crises like climate challenge give opportunities to understand the back story
#empiricalhistorian

fantasies for every occasion; outlets for base desires
#muskiancapitalist

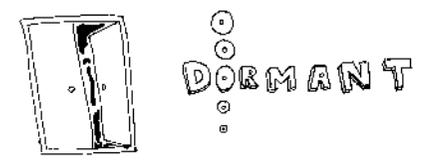
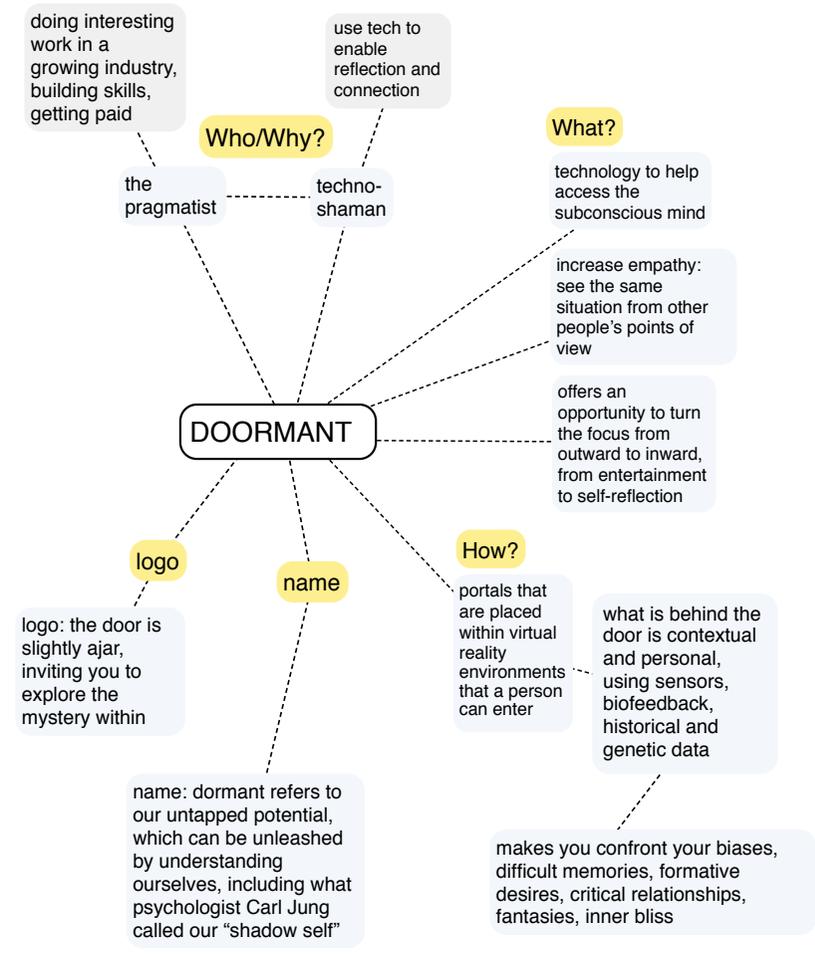
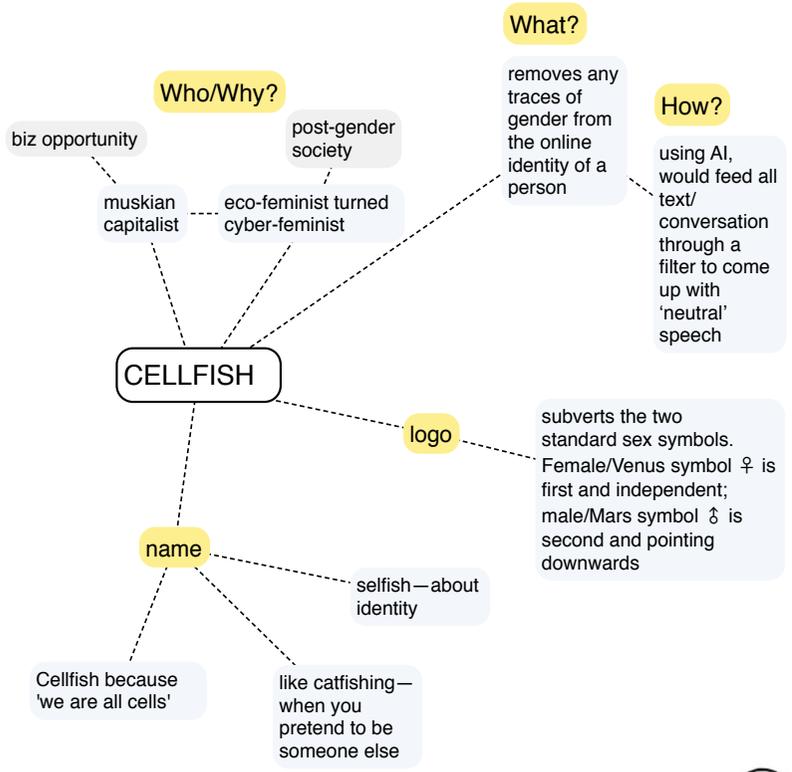
historical fantasies as "uncontrolled sandboxes". Games as a way to understand historical dynamics—acting out is better than analysis
#empiricalhistorian

matching climate refugees with lonely first world people
#muskiancapitalist #technoshaman

robot-built affordable homes for refugees
#muskiancapitalist

NEW COMPANIES AND LOGOS

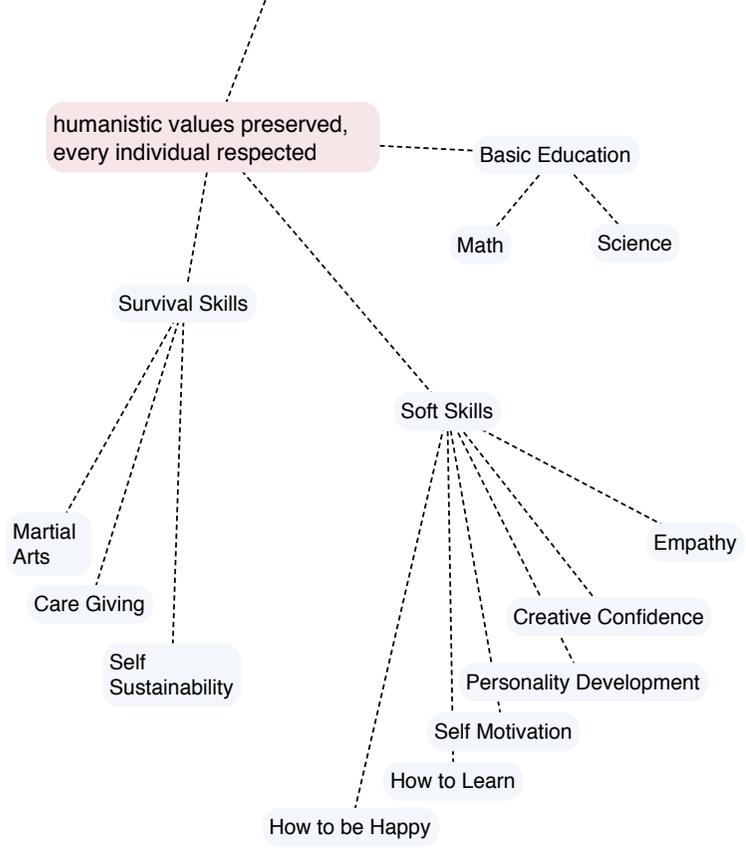
PARTNER EXERCISE:
DETRITUS FROM THE FUTURE
 You are starting a new organisation (business/non-profit/lobby group/other). Choose one person from the group to work with based on shared interest. Design and present something that reflects the organisation's mission and brand—could be a logo, a vision statement, part of an annual report or anything else.



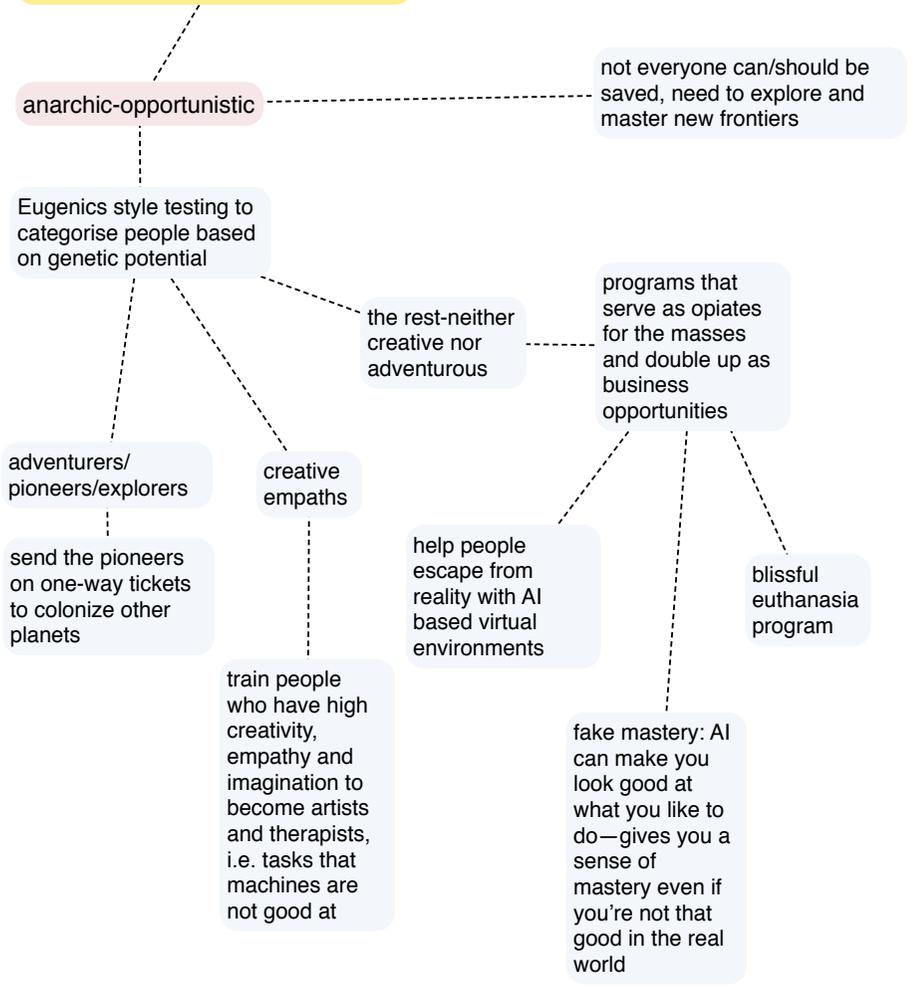
SMALL GROUP EXERCISE: EDUCATING THE FUTURE UNEMPLOYED
 Artificial Intelligence and Robotics have replaced most human labour. 80% of the population lives off a Universal Income without needing to work. A growing number of people are depressed because they feel their lives lack meaning or they don't know what to do with their free time. You are part of the committee charged with designing an educational curriculum for youth growing up in these circumstances. Present some aspect of your strategy.

EDUCATING THE FUTURE UNEMPLOYED

group 1: save the world

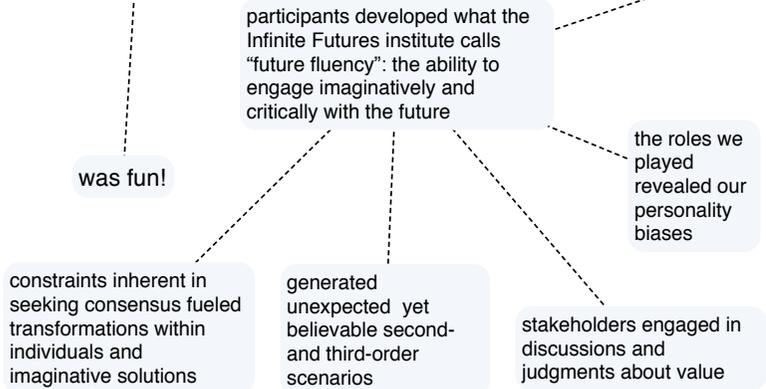


group 2: leave the world

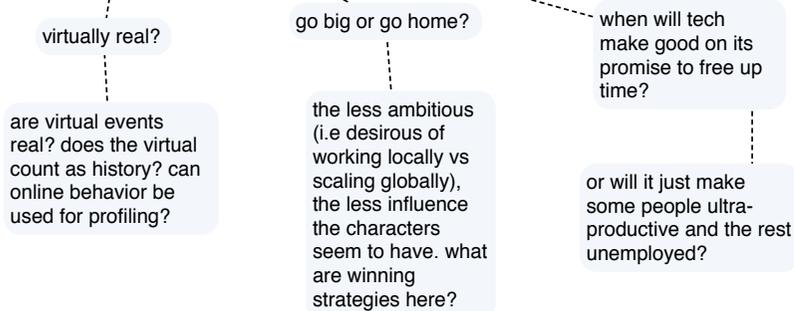


CONCLUSIONS/ REFLECTIONS

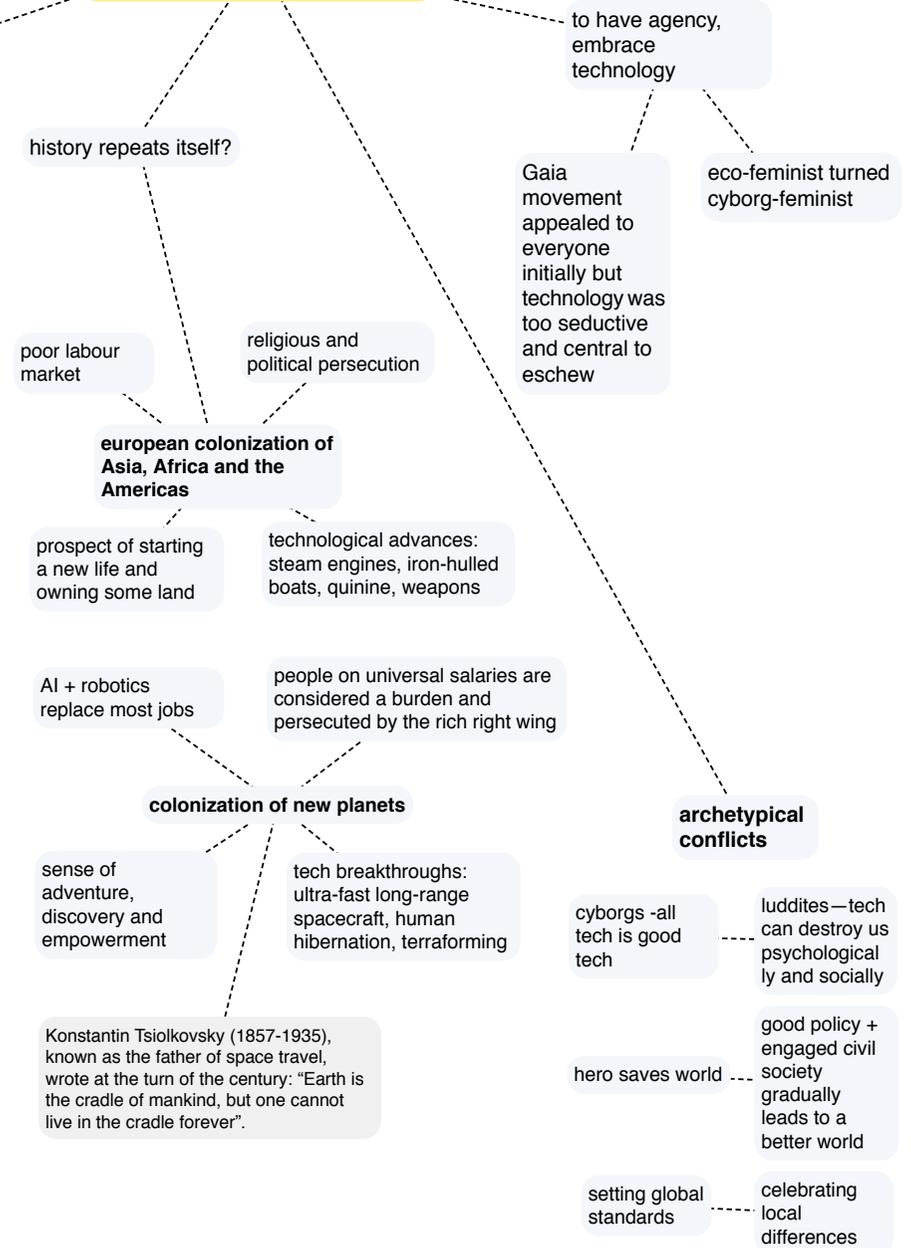
What worked well



Open Questions



examples/insights that came out of the exercise



What would we do differently?

Option 1

Add homework:

Questions to kickstart:
When do you feel most alive?
What matters to you most?
What are you good at?

Potential to evolve/shift into a future-proof "personal visioning" workshop

Option 2

Design a 2-day workshop:

Day 1: Future-Proof Visioning—a tactical visioning exercise that does not assume that the future will be the same as the present.

- i. Articulate present Tactics/ Strategy/ Grand Strategy. Work with someone who can help with personal visioning
- ii. Fast Fwd via newflashes
- iii. New vision

Day 2: Scenarios: Creating and collaborating in this new world. Led by a designer/ design researcher/ ethnographer

THE TRUTH
Yogesh Barve

x

x

x

x

x

false



false

/fo:ls, fɒls/

adjectiveadjective: false; comparative adjective: **false**; superlative adjective: **falsest****1. not according with truth or fact; incorrect.**

"he was feeding false information to his customers"

synonyms: incorrect, untrue, wrong, erroneous, fallacious, faulty, flawed, distorted, inaccurate, inexact, imprecise, invalid, unfounded, untruthful, fictitious, concocted, fabricated, invented, made up, trumped up, unreal, counterfeit, forged, fraudulent, spurious, misleading, deceptive

"he gave a false account of his movements"

antonyms: correct, truthful• **not according with rules or law.**

"false imprisonment"

2. made to imitate something in order to deceive.

"the trunk had a false bottom"

• **artificial.**

"false eyelashes"

synonyms: fake, artificial, imitation, synthetic, simulated, reproduction, replica, ersatz, faux, plastic, man-made, dummy, mock, sham, bogus, so-called; **More****antonyms:** genuine• **not sincere.**

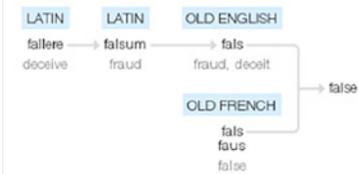
"a horribly false smile"

3. illusory; not actually so.

"sunscreens give users a false sense of security"

• **used in names of plants, animals, and gems that superficially resemble the thing properly so called, e.g. *false oat*.****4. disloyal; unfaithful.**

"a false lover"

synonyms: faithless, unfaithful, disloyal, untrue, inconstant, false-hearted, treacherous, traitorous, perfidious, two-faced, Janus-faced, double-dealing, double-crossing, deceitful, deceiving, deceptive, dishonourable, dishonest, duplicitous, hypocritical, untrustworthy, unreliable; **More****antonyms:** faithful**Origin**Old English *fals* 'fraud, deceit', from Latin *falsum* 'fraud', neuter past participle of *fallere* 'deceive'; reinforced or re-formed in Middle English from Old French *fals*, *faus* 'false'.Translate false to **adjective**

1. झूठा
2. गलत
3. कृत्रिम
4. अवास्तविक
5. निराधार
6. खोटा
7. नकली
8. निश्चिनीन

noun

1. झूठ
2. कूट

Use over time for: false

THE PEOPLE WHO SHARE Lucy Pawlak

1.

This isn't about the future or the past.
From now on we'll be in the present all the time.
Right here, right now.
I clear my throat.
I shrug my shoulders.
I tug at my t-shirt pulling it up like I'm looking for something under there.

2.

OK, so, in the present I mind my own business. I push on, eyes on the pavement. But I can't help seeing the cracks, and there's evidence of a plague of chewing gum having recently rained down.
I shake my head: 'no', I shrug my shoulders: *'whatever'*.
I clear my throat. I clear my throat. Tug at my t-shirt, lifting it a little.
Sure, I use up time and space on hating the seasons, the city and the parasites populating it, but I try not to cause any harm. I do my best not to show up on anyone's radar. The real trick is to disappear. I quietly take advantage where I can. Or at least that's what I was *trying* to do, until this Tuesday, a thousand years ago tomorrow, on a cemented grey March morning, when the world shifted and re-formed around an event.

3.

Right, so it starts when I find someone's made an intervention and peppered my journey to work with 3 tagged words: *WE US OUR*. On my flat, the pavement, the road, down escalators, onto the train, up escalators, onwards into the lift, right up to my studio door: *WE US OUR*. Over the next days the tags intensify forming dense messy scrawls of words upon words, *WE US OUR WE US OUR*. I feel a tension, a need to run; I jerk my head like a chicken trying to glimpse something just out of view. Something I can't see, on the other side of a wall casting a shadow, pressing in on me. The surfaces upon which the words are scrawled seem ready to fissure and crack open.

4.

Then, a week later and all at once, the writing's stripped off and perfectly painted over. What army could have performed this colossal operation, making it all sparkly new, magically erased? You don't get anything clean without getting something else dirty...

Now there's only one instruction on one white wall remaining: "LOOK UP" and when I do there's a bi-plane trailing a message: "Listen, just pull out the top right drawer of your desk and reach inside OK?"

I tap my nose many times, brush my lip, blink, shrug, hum, and then I'm shrugging, blinking and humming all at once.

5.

I say to myself: "OK... you're a curious guy, you like to solve things, like to put things right, like to help, you have a strong sense of duty, that's why you trained to be a policeman..."

6.

Now I'm talking to *You*, the reader: "Look here, listen, I'd better fill you in with a bit of backstory. My name's Lost, but what people call me is something else again, I'm Beat Officer or maybe just Beat, because these days I'm an artist not a cop."



And I'm *still* talking to *You*; I'm sharing more, in spite of being quite a private guy:

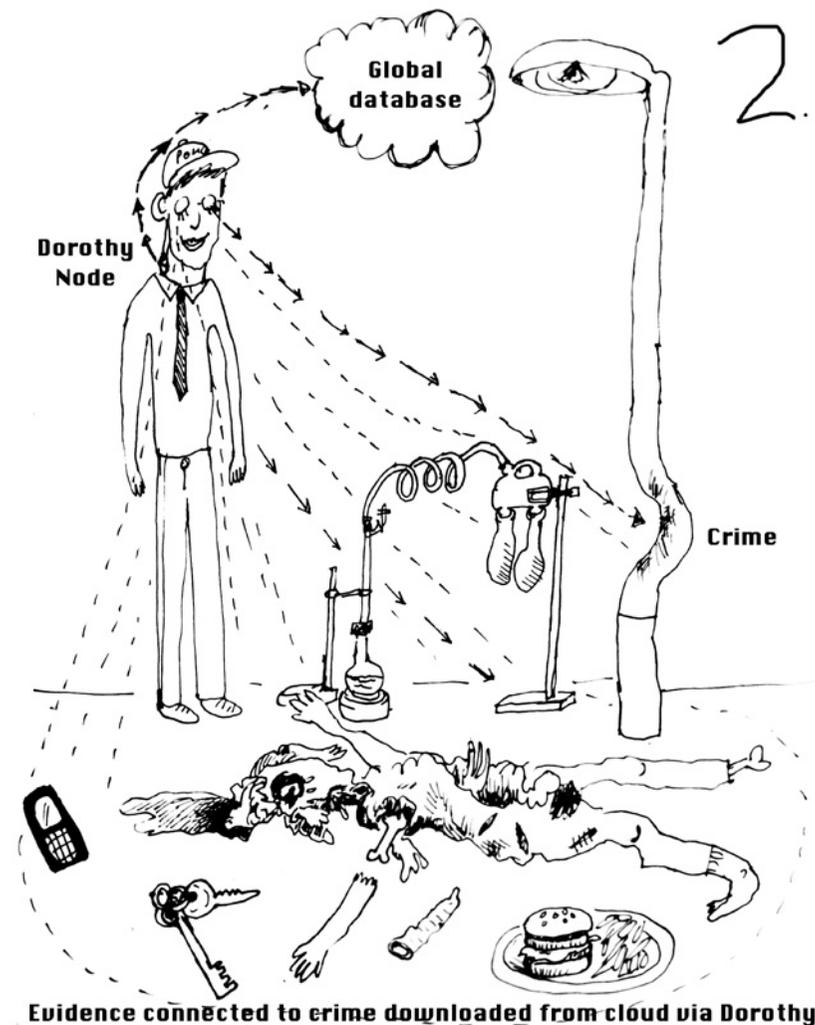
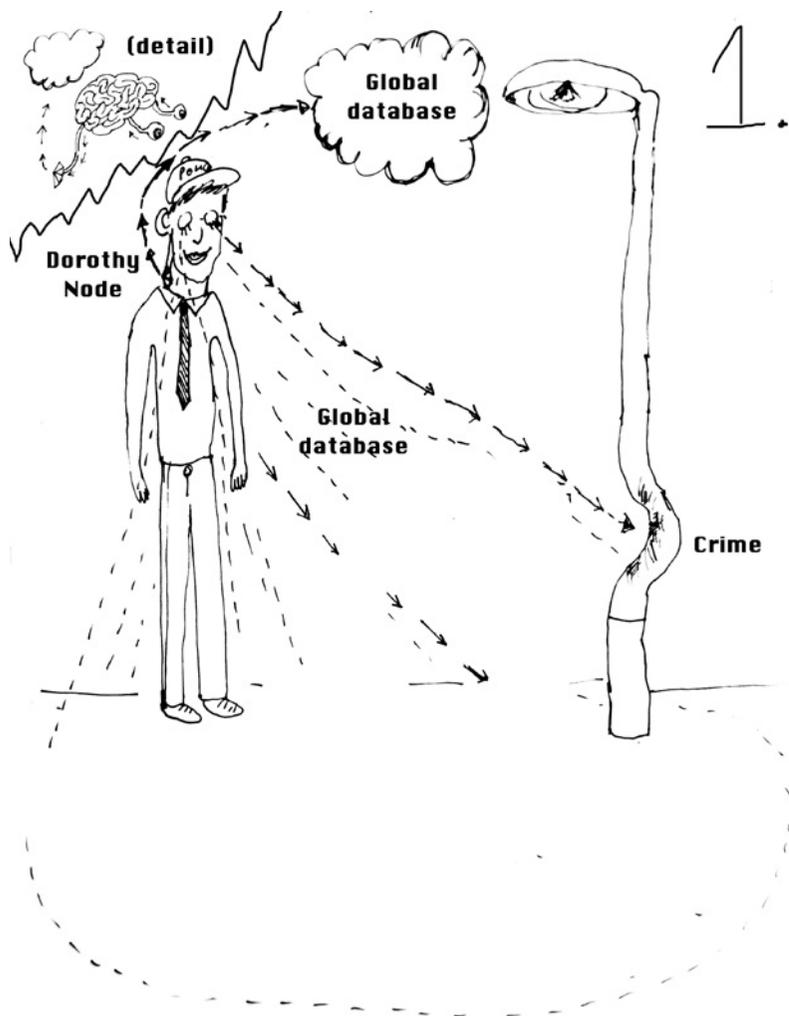
"You remember when the Dorothy Interface was first launched, right? 2019... A global mass-surveillance policing tool set in motion... The dream of a world without crime made real...? OK, so because I can't hear your answer, here's a refresher broken down to 4 points which you might need to read twice on account of it being quite complicated:

1. Dorothy Officers are hybrid agents cerebrally connected

to a global mass surveillance archive of big data, a cloud.
 2. When a Dorothy Officer arrives on a crime scene, the cloud begins a conversation with the officer's thoughts, generating relevant forensic information that's fed from the global database into the officer's mind. We're talking: DNA samples, fingerprints, weaponry, telecommunications, shopping lists and so on.

3. So, the basic idea is that Dorothy collaborates with her agents at the scene of a crime to visualise a chain of activity or a backstory, if you like, relating to a specific incident.

4. This backstory, this history of objects and their traces, actually, physically and materially appears in the Dorothy Officer's field of vision while they're standing right in front of the criminal act that's been committed. Of course, an officer can't actually pick anything up; the things they see are ghost-objects, accomplices haunting the conclusion of a criminal act.



It was a little traumatic actually.
 I clear my throat. Touch my nose. Shrug.
 I tell you that I'll always be proud of having been one of the first officers in the flagship trials of this interface linking brain to cloud... But I also admit there were teething problems, they hadn't done enough tests...

I say: "The thing about *my* collaboration with Dorothy, or what made it "*special*", if you like, was that somehow when she and I worked together we got very drawn to the unsolved crime section in the database... Internationally that was a very conflicted area, bursting with the kind of messy traces that governments preferred to forget, or else delete: ruptures in official versions, discrepancies in cases that had been "tied up"; and *most* officers, well, they tended not to go there.

It doesn't matter where I am while I'm telling you all

this. You don't need to know. I won't describe it or even mention if I'm sitting or standing, I say: "So... on our daily beat Dorothy and I began to pull up the ghosts of this trash heap of inconvenient truths, and pretty soon walking through town was like wading through waste, a landfill site of international injustices: the traces of actions: fingerprints, blood splatters, torn tights and broken glasses, locked suitcases and piles of money all over unmade matrimonial beds, the incense of burnt tires and forlorn flip flops snaking up from damp trash pyres. Dead crow, dead cat, squashed rat, cow in the road, dog in the road, hole in the road, dead dirty baby in 16 bits in the road. And patterns were mapping onto everything, and it was all connected like some network of flight paths. We were learning to see the invisible things, the secrets, the silenced. Initially I thought... well... I wanted to tell the world, blow the story wide open, only I didn't want to get it wrong... Sometimes I wonder, maybe I should have..."

I clear my throat.

I shrug my shoulders.

I tug at my t-shirt pulling it up like I'm looking for something.

"But, ultimately whistle-blowing didn't feel like the right choice you know? So, instead, I elected to reflect upon the traumatic scenes of injustice and impunity I'd witnessed through making art and holding public workshops."

Throat.

Shoulders.

T-shirt.

7.

And now I'm in a different location, standing up, waving my hands and explaining to you that I believe, I know, I *feel* that one of the major responsibilities of artists – and the idea that artists have responsibilities may come as a surprise to some – is to help people not only get to know something with their minds but also to *feel* it emotionally and physically. By doing this, art can mitigate the numbing effect created by the glut of information we are faced with today, and motivate people to turn thinking into doing.

8.

Speaking very fast now, I say: "So, like I told you, I'm no longer employed by the Police. If the current protocols for Dorothy Officers had been operating back then, I'd never have been accepted onto the program... Like I said, I'm an artist now... like I said. Of course, as you might imagine, my art's inspired by the malfunction in my Dorothy node: the unsolved crime section of the database..."

The sculptures I make act as a double agents, attacking from the inside, seeping into the consciousness of those

greedy murderous fuckers, the 1%, the elite, the impune, the people above the law. I create clay models of miss-



ing evidence and then sell them on the art market with the intention of contaminating the homes of the rich. I donate a generous percentage of the proceeds to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

9.

On a park bench looking out at the sea I lean in towards you conspiratorially: "I'm telling you all this because I want to be transparent about who I am... And who I am, the fact that I'm an insider *and* an outsider at once, I think that sheds light on why I was contacted by these people, whoever they are, via the graffiti, the bi-plane. Being an artist combined with the whole independent-vigilante-ex-cop thing makes me the perfect choice. The training gives you a certain discipline. A lot of things were drummed into me at the academy. I perform technical surveillance counter measures on a regular basis. I stay in a lot of motels. I'll always spend a good half hour checking the room: windows, behind doors and under beds, tapping walls, feeling for wires and bugs, you can never be too careful. I'm permanently on lockdown; I'm not about to get DOXED.

10.

So, after the plane dragging the message telling me to look in my desk and then the various chats with you, I arrive at my studio, I close the blinds and stand there in the middle of the room giving the top right drawer a long hard stare, the ceiling fan spinning above me.

I love my studio, it's mine, I treasure my time there, I love the way the light comes in, the way it fills the room, the way it changes through the day, I think everyone should have a studio. While I'm there, I might work the clay, go over ideas, write lists, make plans, and occasionally I might even invite people over for studio visits and art crits...

I blink.

I shrug.

I cough.

I'm inhaling and exhaling quite hard, standing in *my* space, which I now know has been invaded.

I clear my throat:

"Huh? Huh? Faster than you, you fuckin' son of a... I saw you comin'. I'm standin' here. You make the move. You make the move. It's your move. Huh? Don't try it, you fuck. You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? Well, then who the Hell else are you talking- You talking to me? Well, I'm the only one here. Who the fuck do you think you're talking to? Oh yeah? Huh?"

I stand for a long time, just thinking about the intrusion. I inspect the drawer from every angle, I dust for prints, take photos and finally, holding my breath I quickly pull it out.

I step back, step forward, peer in, and there, stuffed to the back is an embossed piece of card: "The Rest of Us are delighted to INVITE you to..." but the last part's scratched out. Someone wants me but they're playing hard to get.

11.

There in the street a female passerby (broken nose, floral dress, poppies or tulips maybe) taps me on the arm: "excuse me, you dropped this," she says pressing a fountain pen into my hands. Before I have a chance to explain that she's mistaken, she's gone. When I try it later the ink's clear.

What follows is a trail of clues and puzzles, I won't bore you with the details, suffice to say there's invisible ink, Morse code, mirrors, encrypted archives, secret servers and a mysterious individual or collective called The Rest of Us. The final stages consume almost all my time and involve tuning into long wave frequencies at specific hours to receive strings of numbers requiring decoding.

12.

Now I've got a key, which I'm turning in the door of a lock-up storage space.

Blink, blink, cough, swallow, open door, blink.

Inside there's just this tiny perfect model of a tower block of flats with one apartment lit up. It's pretty clear that I've reached the end of the trail, that I'll find The Rest of Us there in that room.

13.

I go home to 'walk' the streets of the city via the medium of Pegman, the yellow Google maps street view avatar. It takes a few days to track down the block, but finally I've got it.

14.

So, I'm jogging through Tarkovsky-esque ganglands of burning-floating trash islands in pools of stagnant oily water, fringed by moss-eaten creeper-clad car wrecks, illuminated by blinking semi shot out street-lights. And then finally I've found it and I see that who ever built the model in the lock-up was obsessional: same cracks, same stains, same light in the same window.

I ascend, I rap hard and confidently upon what I know must be the corresponding door. Cough, shrug, shrug, tug clothes.

I clear my throat.

I clear my throat.

15.

The door opens and I'm looking down upon a woman with a wizened walnutty head, she looks up at me gravely.

Smells of hairspray, stewed onion and turmeric hang in the air around us, behind her I glimpse soft furnishings in pink and mauve, lace curtains, doilies. I clear my throat, tug my t-shirt and look at the floor where a Persian cat is making figures of 8 around the little lady's legs.

I'm thinking about her slippers, two fluffy white rabbits... "You must be Lost" she says. I draw back, assuming the address is wrong, I'm sprung so tight I've forgotten my own name. She frowns, suddenly cautious, asking: "You do call yourself Lost don't you?" I'm nodding, "Good, right, so I'm Precious." She inclines her head towards the pink interior, inviting me in.

Even as I'm entering I'm starting to form questions but Precious holds up her hand. "I'll get you some tea first," she says and motions for me to sit on the dirty-peach velverette sofa.

As she pads into the kitchen, as she decants an ochre liquid from a giant stainless steel urn into a tiny stainless steel cup, I hunt for traces of evidence of her involvement in the graffiti action...

I break off.

She re-enters the room to set the cup on a crocheted coaster; I sink into the sofa, she sits opposite me. Silence. I focus on the brocaded roses twining over her organza sari, I sip the scalding hot, horribly sweet, salty and dense liquid, I imagine the tea has been stewing and refining for many days.

Precious speaks:

"I have information for you. You wonder why I picked you, but I didn't, you did. I'm asking you to communicate what I've done because of what you've done, because you're an artist, because you're very aware of the threat that state surveillance systems pose for democracy; because you've worked at the front line, and I believe you want to put things right.

I'm part of a group. You're part of it too, you just don't know it yet. We're The Rest of Us, the part of no part, the dissatisfied and disenfranchised."

I'm playing with the tassel on the corner of a cushion. It's nice and silky; I imagine it as a faceless head with long braided hair. I arrange the hair in different styles as she continues.

"Contemporary capitalism is bent on purely financial and commercial practices that benefit the 1%. Some of The Rest of Us are employed by this elite, as accountants, consultants, culture, food and health providers and so on. More of The Rest of Us are unemployed or under-employed, we offer services; we're required to

smile, care, communicate and be friendly. We don't get paid much, we hope for a tip. Meanwhile every time we go online we produce for someone else, creating data that others claim to own. Our collective actions create the elite, the 1%."

16.

She's standing, asking me how communicative capitalism's formulation of the technologies of the Internet and the sharing economy might be repurposed for socialist ends. She wonders if the same might be done to wealth, which is the force that most readily influences all interests and consequently is far more real and more likely to be obeyed than anything else.

I shift nervously, not quite sure if I'm expected to respond, not knowing the answer. I'm relieved when she reveals these are rhetorical questions, questions that caused two strands of thought to twine together in her head and led her to initiate a plan to use sharing economy apps to pay the people, The Rest of Us, to revolt.

She tells me: "So, I started to play around with a project that responded to this concept, and... this is the part that you may at first find hard to accept... it's called UBER."

17.

OK another small aside - of course you know about UBER, I mean, it *is* the service industry, it has a total monopoly. What you might not know is its origin: launched in 2009 as a peer to peer transportation service with the motto: "Get a ride with a push of a button"... Now UBER doesn't only provide rides - it caters for every need, offers every service, wherever you are in the world, if something is being done for you, you can be sure it is being done by robots or else humans working under the umbrella of UBER.

18.

I can't help it, I snort, I laugh: "*You* founded UBER? But everyone knows it was the brain-child of two North American start-up guys trying to hail a cab in the snow in Paris." She's smiling patiently, she speaks with a twinge of what might be condescension: "Travis and Garrett work for me, it's important my identity as founder remains secret if this project's going to be accomplished."

I raise an eyebrow.

I knit my brow.

I clear my throat.

She continues: "There's almost nothing to connect me to UBER, only a few private jokes, for example, that "*reliable as running water*" slogan, it's an ironic wink to my origins: I'm from Bengaluru, one of the first cities to dry up and fall victim to the water mafias..."

I'm shrugging, clearing my throat and frowning, screwing up my mouth like a cat's ass to demonstrate I'm trying hard to understand.

She's telling me that she understands that a white English middle aged, male small-towner may have trouble with the idea of someone like her founding and developing a multi-national-multi-trillion dollar company. I'm watching the Persian cat.

She says: "But, please, we don't have much time, if you could just try to trust me."

I'm extending my arm towards the cat, rubbing index finger and thumb together. She frowns a quick little frown. "Right..." she says, "Actually, the best proof of my identity can be found in our first point of contact: the graffiti phase, because, how could I, at my age, achieve that kind of density of tagging over a few days? Let alone the clean-up operation - explain to me how it could have been done without an army of... let's say... UBER employees?"

She blinks plainly, simply and frankly. I see an innocent woodland animal holding a nut in a dewy green glade. "OK fine, I believe you." I say, "Please, go on, tell me what you want from me."

She exchanges a smile with the Persian cat. She closes her eyes, inhales, exhales, opens her eyes and accepts with a nod. "Okey-doke." She says, "Okey-doke, here goes: Our press release mentions UBER was founded on a *grand vision of bringing people together* and that's actually a neat summary of everything. I'm concerned with inequality. I believe neoliberalism is an architecture that derives its strength from fracturing society, eliminating the potential of The People as a collective force. Basic human relations have been compromised; all that remains is the pursuit of self-interest, the desire to be king of one's own skin, we're a useless army of little anarcho-entrepreneurs, active only as individuals. I believe the Internet, the technologies of communicative capitalism have tapped into and groomed these vile vain tendencies in ourselves and voila, we've landed in the wrong future. We're caught in a conspiracy of distraction, suspended narratives stuck on repeat, self-reflexive cycles of drive that give us just the right measure to keep on chasing our tails, and meanwhile cash rules everything around us."

Mental note: update website, CV, personal statement, social media profiles.

"In light of the times we live in, that is, times in which some crackpot half-baked conception of "individual freedom" has trampled all over any last trace of communal sense;

in light of these times, I began to imagine new strategies for bringing the communist horizon into the foreground. These strategies wouldn't require old-school collective action - people are too self-absorbed to get involved in anything like that now. In light of all that I founded UBER, with the intention of paying oblivious individuals to partake in an unconscious collective action that would lead to a global communist revolution."

I'm struggling: "Think! Think! Pay attention!" But I don't understand, don't get it, nope... I'm nodding: "Mmmm, yes, quite, I see"

She scrutinizes me perhaps wondering if she has made a mistake picking me:

"OK, I'll start again." She speaks slower: "*Mer-cen-ary* is the old word for private military contractor, at their most euphemistic these organisations are called Security Services. They have names like Black Rock, Triple Canopy and GK Sierra."

I clear my throat. She speeds up, sensing an interruption.

"I founded UBER with the ultimate aim of hiring an army of mercenaries to perform a global communist revolution. The important difference is that each individual contractor that UBER hires is a truly miniscule cog in a gigantic network of contractors, UBER is a global corporation with billions of human employees as well as thousands of robot employees in every city in the world... which means that no individual has to do anything that actually seems violent."

She pauses and smiles self consciously before delivering her punch line in a small, calm voice:

"So, it's been possible for each employee to remain ignorant of their role in the overthrow of capitalism... but obviously they'll love it when they find out - because who doesn't hate capitalism?"

Now I'm looking out of the window because Precious has used the past tense when talking about her employees' actions. I spy a plume of smoke rising up over there in the city centre.

Precious spies me spying the plume and says:

"Yes, the revolution *has* started. Right now, all around the world, oblivious individuals are performing an interconnected web of small tasks: dropping things off, connecting wires, parking vehicles. Self-driving cars, smart home devices and gadgets are powering up. There's a button in the kitchen that I pressed while I was getting your tea."

I'm stroking the velveteen sofa. The cat watches, possibly jealously. Precious speaks:
"When you decide to do something always do what will cost you the most, said Simone Weil... Well, it was certainly expensive." She titters.

I'm glancing out of the window, now there are 2 plumes of smoke...

I clear my throat.

I clear my throat.

I shrug my shoulders.

I tug at my t-shirt pulling it up like I'm looking for something.

I shrug my shoulders.

There is a long silence into which I shrug, cough and tug.

She says: "No questions? Aren't you wondering what UBER and I have actually done?"

I'm nodding my head: oh, yes.

"There has to be a fundamentally terroristic element in any attempt to embody the idea of communism. We're in the process of an attack from the inside, a massacre of the 1% and their relations - that means their familial, business and governmental associates. All dead."

"And what about the day after the revolution?" I ask, remembering that question from some podcast I'd heard in my studio. She looks relieved, a good question then, finally.

"The day after the revolution we will see the resolution of contradictions amongst the people! We will see the political construction of new collective configurations! We will see the redistribution of wealth! And instead of relying on humans it will all be driven and directed by the infallible, self-less machine-learning algorithms we've been refining over the past decade. All technologies similar to those contributing to judicial process will enforce and maintain an incorruptible communistic structure of governance."

Her eyes are glittering; she's pleased. The Persian cat is upon her lap kneading and purring.

"But another 1% will just take over." I say, suddenly wanting to deflate her.

"Ha, you don't think I thought of that? It's simple: if things regress back, the same UBER facilitated revolution will be set in motion. And every time a 1% starts to rise up the revolution will restart again and again."

She laughs for a while and then looks serious:

"I've been worrying a little though, I mean there's a chance that a 1% could keep on popping up until there couldn't

be a 1%, like if only 99 people were left on the planet or something..."

"Wow," I'm saying, eyebrow raised, lips pursed, head nodding. I'm thinking: this lady means business.

Precious suddenly looks fidgety and restless, she's peering out of the window where there are now 5 plumes of smoke, "Look," she says "I've got to get going... I'm sure you can imagine I've got quite a lot on my plate now..." I'm agreeing, "Yes, of course, quite!" I'm feeling dizzy, I want to tell her that I like her, admire her. "I'll get out of your hair" I say stupidly "Thank you, sorry."

"Right, but first aren't you curious why I've chosen to tell you all this?"

She's frowning critically again.

I clear my throat.

I shrug my shoulders.

I tug at my t-shirt pulling it up like I'm looking for something.

"Gosh, yes, well of course, I just thought... You had to get going?"

I shrug my shoulders.

"I'm commissioning you to make an artwork - about the revolution and The People Who Share, The Rest of Us, the service industry, the sharing economy, the end of capitalism... it could be like a kind of Bayeux tapestry or a workshop or some land art or whatever really, you're the artist, OK?"

19.

So, I'm back in the studio, the revolution has happened. I'm making cups of tea and starting to get inspired, starting to get ideas.

1.

This isn't about the future,
that has an extra cost.
I've created an App*.
Offering access to tomorrow.
For a small fee.
Just search for The People That Share.

*see page 65

APP INDEX

AIRBNB, an online community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book accommodations around the world.

Airbnb Inc., which does business as Airbnb, was founded by Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia and Nathan Blecharczyk in 2008. Headquartered in San Francisco, the company has 3,000+ employees and operates in 65,000 cities across 191 countries. Airbnb has 150 million users and 640,000 hosts. In May 2017 Airbnb was valued at US\$31 billion.

Airbnb launched as Air Bed & Breakfast, referring to the founders' initial idea of placing air mattresses on living room floors as an alternative to hotel rooms. After investor funding the company started to grow quickly but cities began to reject Airbnb rentals. In 2014, New York threatened to ban Airbnb and many citizen-led ballot initiatives aimed to limit Airbnb rentals.

In 2012 the company acquired Nabe-Wise, a city guide that aggregates information about specified locations, and Localmind, a location-based question-and-answer platform that allows users to post questions about specific locations online. This shifted the focus of the company toward offering hyperlocal recommendations to travelers.

"Belong everywhere"

DUNZO, a chat-based personal management app that allows users to create and manage daily tasks, such as picking up groceries or carrying out repair services.

Dunzo Digital Private Limited, which does business as Dunzo, was founded by Ankur Aggarwal, Dalvir Suri, Kabeer Biswas and Mukund Jha in Bangalore in 2015. Headquartered in Bangalore, it currently has 50+ employees and 1300+ active riders, with 3,500–4,000 orders a day. Dunzo raised Rs 80.8 crore (US\$12.3 million) funding from Google under Google's Next Billion Users (NBU) scheme in 2017.

Dunzo charges the customer on the kilometres run – Rs. 40 for 4 km, Rs. 80 for 8 km, and Rs. 120 beyond that – and the runner makes Rs. 80+ per hour.

"Hi, meet dunzo. We get things done for you. Everything that just takes up time at your end can be dunzo-ed."

FARMIZEN, a mobile app that enables an individual to grow chemical-free organic food in a mini-farm.

Farmizen Solutions Private Limited, which does business as Farmizen, was founded by Balasubrahmanian,

Sudaakeran, Gitanjali Rajamani and Shameek Chakravarty in Bangalore in December 2016. Headquartered in Bangalore, Farmizen has 8 employees, 14+ partner farms and also operates in Hyderabad and Surat.

Farmizen rents out farms near cities, divides them into mini-plots of 600 square feet, and leases them out to consumers to grow their own supply of organic greens and vegetables at a subscription of Rs. 2500/month. The monthly rental is inclusive of everything, from the farmers' labour, to seeds, saplings, and other set-up costs.

"Farmizen - The Real Life Farmville"

OLA, on-demand ridesharing app that connects drivers and riders.

ANI Technologies Pvt. Ltd, which does business as Ola, was founded by Bhavish Aggarwal and Ankit Bhati, in Mumbai in December 2010. Headquartered in Bangalore, it has 6,000+ employees, and operates in Delhi, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mysore, Chandigarh, Indore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Guwahati, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam in India, and in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne in Australia since 2018. Ola is valued at Rs. 758 crore (US\$110 million).

In 2014, Ola incorporated autorickshaws to its services. In 2016 and 2017, a series of strikes and flash protests were held by the drivers across Bangalore to complain about the increase of Ola's commissions charges and the introduction of flat rates to the airport.

"Take the first step towards decongesting our roads. Take an Ola Share."

UBER, on-demand ridesharing app that connects drivers and riders.

Uber Technologies Inc., which does business as Uber, was founded by Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp, and launched in San Francisco in March 2009. Headquartered in San Francisco, it has 12,000+ employees, operates in 672+ cities in 77 countries, and is valued at roughly US\$70 billion.

Uber has transformed from a black-car service into a logistics company that aggregates service providers and their clients. In 2012, it launched the low-cost Uber X project, a service less expensive than the original black cars. In 2013, Uber moved into India and Africa, and launched the Uber-POOL service, which allows a user to split the ride and cost with another person who is riding a similar route. In 2014, the company began its Uber-RUSH service, which brought bicycle delivery to Manhattan (the service was officially launched in 2015). The same year, Uber launched UberCARGO, which includes all moving and delivery needs, in Hong Kong, and UberEATS, an on-demand food-delivery service that brings meals to the location of the app users, worldwide.

In 2015, the California Labor Commission ruled that an Uber driver is an employee, not a contractor, calling into question Uber's business model of the "partners." In 2016, Kalanick proclaimed that Uber was profitable in hundreds of cities globally, but that that money was being reinvested in its war against Chinese rival Didi. Uber continues to grapple with regulatory hurdles and legal battles but it remains the highest-valued startup in the world.

"A location-based app that makes hiring an on-demand private driver... easy."

URBANCLAP, on-demand concierge service that connects clients with service professionals.

UrbanClap Technologies India Pvt. Ltd, which does business as UrbanClap, was founded by Abhiraj Bhal, Raghav Chandra and Varun Khaitan in October 2014. Headquartered in Delhi, UrbanClap also operates in Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Noida, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Ghaziabad and Secunderabad in India, and Dubai in UAE.

In 2016, the company claimed to have around 35,000 people who provided over 80 different kinds of services, ranging from electrical or plumbing work, guitar teaching, and yoga training, to wedding photography. In April 2018, the company claimed to have received 450,000 orders with for a gross transaction value of services sold at about Rs. 50 crore (US\$ 7 million).

For International Men's Day 2016, UrbanClap released a series of online films to discuss gender equality that received mixed reviews from the press. From then the company started to produce more online campaigns and, in 2017, it started to run TV advertisements. In 2018, the company became the furniture assembly partner for the Swedish home furnishing brand IKEA in Hyderabad.

"Our hand-picked service experts care, just like family."

SWIGGY, a mobile app for food ordering and delivery.

Bundl Technologies Private Limited, which does business as Swiggy, was founded by Nandan Reddy, Rahul Jaimini and Sriharsha Majety in August 2014. Headquarted in Bangalore, Swiggy operates in 15 cities across India, including Kochi, Coimbatore, Nagpur and Lucknow. It lists 35,000+ restaurants, and has 40,000+ delivery partners across India. In 2018 the company was valued at US\$1.3 billion. The company recently launched Swiggy Scheduled, a service that allows users to pre-order their meals up to 48 hours in advance at zero delivery charges, and Swiggy POP, through which it offers a curated menu of

single-serve meals in the range of Rs. 99–200 from neighbourhood restaurants.

"From the neighborhood restaurants to the urban foodie"

ZOMATO, mobile app for restaurant search and food delivery.

Zomato Media Private Limited, which does business as Zomato was founded by Deepinder Goyal and Pankaj Chaddah in July 2008. Headquartered in Gurgaon, Zomato operates in 10,000+ cities across 24 countries, including India, UAE, US and South Africa, with 2,000+ employees.

In 2017, Zomato declared that it hit profitability in all the countries it currently operates in. In the same year, its key statistics in India were as follows: Average Order Value: Rs. 430; Share of Restaurant Delivered Orders: 90%; Average Delivery Time: 38 Mins; Net Margins On Orders: 55%. In March 2018 the company said it hit nearly 5.5 million monthly food orders.

In 2017, Zomato had to publicly apologise because its billboard campaign in Delhi was considered offensive.

"Our mission is to ensure nobody has a bad meal"

WHATSAPP, mobile and desktop app for communication and Voice over Internet Protocol Service (VoIP).

Founded by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in California in 2009, the company was acquired by Facebook for US\$19 billion in February 2014.

In 2013 WhatsApp had 200 million active users and a staff of 50 people. By 2018 the company reached 1.5 billion users, with 450 million daily users. The number of users estimated in India is 200 million, and in China 2 million. In February 2013, WhatsApp went free with an annual subscription fee of \$1 after the first year, and in January 2016 the app went completely free. In 2017, WhatsApp confirmed it was working on digital P2P payments specifically for India, and launched the beta service in 2018.

In May 2017 the European Commission fined Facebook €110 million for "misleading" it during the 2014 takeover of WhatsApp, saying that when Facebook acquired the messaging app, it "falsely claimed it was technically impossible to automatically combine user information from Facebook and WhatsApp."

"Together we can fight false information."

The writing of this Index, especially with regards to financial and economic data, is based on information gathered from online sources, predominantly "Bloomberg", "CrunchBase", "The Economic Times", "TechCrunch" and the "Financial Times."

SUNIL ABRAHAM is the Executive Director of CIS. He is also a social entrepreneur and free software advocate. He founded Mahiti in 1998, which aims to reduce the cost and complexity of information and communication technology for the voluntary sector by using free software. Today, Mahiti employs more than 50 engineers, and Sunil continues to serve on the board as a board member. Sunil was elected an Ashoka Fellow in 1999 to 'explore the democratic potential of the Internet' and was granted a Sarai FLOSS fellowship in 2003. Between June 2004 and June 2007, he managed the International Open Source Network, a project of the UNDP's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme serving 42 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Between September 2007 and June 2008, he also managed ENRAP, an electronic network of International Fund for Agricultural Development projects in the Asia-Pacific facilitated and co-funded by International Development Research Centre, Canada.

YOGESH BARVE lives and works in Mumbai, India. He studied Leather Technology at the Polytechnic College, Mumbai (2005-08), and Fine Arts at Rachana Sansad AFAC, Mumbai (2009-14). His artistic practice ranges from painting and printing to sculpture, film, multimedia installations and site-specific works. He is currently working on a Dalit Poetry and Literature channel on YouTube. A common thread through his stylistically varied work is a critique of cultural frameworks of thinking. He uses the idea of the backslash in the form of un/learning, de/constructing and non/conformism as thinking and working methods. Utilising a range of materials including found objects and participatory technologies such as his mobile phone camera and game engines, he opens up new aesthetic views that deal with social phenomena such as inequality, irrationality, the unseen, or the in/outsider.

DEEPA BHASTHI is a writer working and living between Bangalore and Kodagu.

CARLA DUFFETT is a linguist who lives between Delhi and Hanoi, Vietnam.

MARIALAURA GHIDINI is a researcher, curator and educator. She was the founder-director of the online curatorial platform or-bits.com (2009-2015), and organised projects ranging from online and gallery exhibitions to site-specific interventions in public spaces, radio broadcasts and residency programmes. With a background in the humanities and a practice-based PhD in Curating and New Media, her expertise lies in curatorial studies and contemporary art reflecting on the role of the technological. She is interested in exploring different forms of artistic and curatorial production and formats of display, by working with contexts of engagement beyond the gallery and the museum.

FURQAN JAWED is a graphic designer based in New Delhi. His work has been exhibited at the Regis Centre for Art: Quarter Gallery, Graphic Design Festival Scotland, Design Fabric, Macau Design Biennial, St+art Mumbai, Bienal Internacional del Cartel en México and Captcha Festival.

VIR KASHYAP co-founded Babajob.com, India's largest job platform for blue- and grey-collar job seekers (acquired by Quikr in 2017). His prior experience includes serving as a partner at Indavest, an early-stage venture capital firm, and at Vega Asset Management, one of the world's largest global macro hedge funds. He began his career as an analyst at Morgan Stanley in New York. His experience also includes a stint in Silicon Valley at Epinions.com (acquired by eBay), where he helped launch the enterprise-computing vertical. Vir is an avid tennis player and has been known to throw down a few tracks on the dance floor.

SAUDHA KASIM is a writer based in Bangalore where her day job as a corporate communications professional helps pay the rent and bills. At other times she's writing short stories and working on completing a novel. Her work has been published in Cha, Out of Print, Eclectica, Elle India, and other publications. She was one of the writers in residence during the 2017-18 season at Sangam House.

QUSAI KATHAWALA is a designer, researcher and entrepreneur. He is a co-founder of Gathr, a lab for experiments in human interaction based in Bangalore/Mumbai. Previously Qusai worked at Intel labs in Oregon, working with other designers, ethnographers and technologists on the future of Health and Wellness. He earned his MFA in Media Design from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA and his Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering/IEOR from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

CLAY KELTON is a filmmaker, photographer and sound engineer in Bangalore, India.

TARA KELTON is an artist and graphic designer based in Bangalore, India. Tara's work has been exhibited at the ZKM, Vox Populi, or-bits.com, Queens Museum of Art, Franklin Street Works, Clark House Initiative, Centre for Internet and Society, GallerySKE, ICA Singapore, and in the Kochi Muziris Biennale and New Digital Art Biennale. Tara co-founded and ran T-A-J Residency Bangalore, an interdisciplinary residency program, which ran from 2013 to 2016.

MATHANGI KRISHNAMURTHY is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras. Her areas of interest include the anthropology of work and gender, medical anthropology, urban studies, globalization, and affective labour. Her new book "1-800-Worlds: The Making

of the Indian Call Centre Economy” published by OUP chronicles the labour practices, life-worlds, and media atmospheres of Indian call centre workers, and locates them within the socio-political context of the new Indian middle classes. For this work, Krishnamurthy conducted fieldwork in Pune, India, and also worked in a call centre for a few months to understand its effects on body, aspirations, and work. She is currently pursuing a project on bodily imaginations in relation to genetic diagnostics.

SRUTHI KRISHNAN is a writer and co-founder of Fields of View, a not-for-profit research organisation that designs games and simulations to help make better public policy.

VANDANA MENON is an interdisciplinary visual artist, filmmaker and dramaturge based in Bangalore. Her work ranges from short fiction narratives, documentaries, and photography, to live visual performances in the fields of contemporary dance, music and theatre. She works with video, sound, animations and interactive technology. Her work as a visual artist pushes structural and technological boundaries creating multiple, even interactive, narratives with sound and image. Across the subcontinent, and in London, Istanbul, Germany and South Africa, she has worked on several multidisciplinary collaborations with filmmakers, musicians and dancers, architects, and software engineers.

LUCY PAWLAK'S body of work aims to make room for improvisation and play within structure. The various mediums Pawlak uses (time-based media, performance, writing, drawing, chat) act as frameworks for considering how and why we adhere to systems and what possibilities breaking with patterns might offer. Pawlak is exploring boxing as a medium to think through experiences of falling in and out of time. Performances and screenings include: The Jumex Museum (Mexico City), Whitstable Biennale (UK), Videonale (Bonn, Germany), The Showroom, Hollybush Gardens, ICA and National Film Theatre (London). Screen writing collaboration: Maquinaria Panamericana with Joaquin del Paso. Premier: Berlin Film Festival, awarded Best Script at the Mexican Ariel Academy Awards 2017 and at Raindance Film Festival, London.

AASAVRI RAI is a final year student at National Law University, Delhi. She has a passion for public international law and human rights. She loves reading, sketching and swimming.

NICOLE RIGILLO holds a PhD from McGill University's Department of Anthropology. She is currently a joint Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Public Policy at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. She also holds the position of Digital Scholarship Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh.

YASHAS SHETTY is an artist and composer based in Bangalore. His work is at the intersection of pedagogy and art/science, including installation, sound, software and biotechnology, creating spaces of discourse and dialogue between artists, scientists and the wider public. Shetty runs (Art)scienceBLR, the public laboratory at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore and is a founding member of I.S.R.O., the Indian Sonic Research Organisation, a collective of instrument builders and artists dedicated to the proliferation of experimental music and sound art. Since 2007, Shetty has organized workshops together with Hackteria Collective, including at the Taipei National University of Arts and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His works have been exhibited in India and abroad, including at Ars Electronica in Linz, Science Gallery in Dublin (2014), and Haus Der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (2017).

MARIAM SUHAIL is a visual artist who works with the language of everyday occurrences, objects, texts, images, and experiences, trying to represent what she finds in the in-between spaces as well as the intersections of all of the above. She is currently working on a book and also looking at the idea of inevitable pauses in artistic production. Her work is represented by GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore/Delhi, and Grey Noise, UAE. Mariam's work has been part of All the World's Futures at Venice Biennale (2015), Berlin Biennale-8 (2014), The Missing One at Dhaka Art Summit (2016), and Office of Contemporary Art, Oslo (2016/17). Publications include Shifter 21: Other Spaces, Protocollum 2016/17, Paessaggio 2016 by Blauer Hase, Excursus for BB-8, and Take on Art - Sculpture issue, 2013. Mariam currently lives and works in Bangalore.

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