

3 The Post-National— Transcending Identity

In the previous chapter, an analysis of some works by Chitra Ganesh (*Tales of Amnesia*), Tejal Shah (*What are you; Women Like Us*), and Nikhil Chopra (*Yog Raj Chitrakar*), demonstrated that the ‘queer’ performative masquerading body in differing medias engaged in a critique of the nation and its histories. This chapter delineates some key factors and developments that mark the shift away from the nation as artists imaginatively deterritorialise themselves through travel and mediatization. It begins with a brief conceptual overview of the conditions that define the contemporary condition—a deterritorialization of home and belonging, moving towards some of the art spaces that epitomize this phenomenon. A close reading of another subsequent set of works by the three artists follows, an overriding thematic accompanying each analyses further reinforces this shift that is visibilized via overriding concerns that connect with global discourses that include queer sexualities, queer utopias, queer ecologies and racial passing. The final section takes a quick look at some posts by the three artists on social networks such as Facebook to trace the synergies between their ideations and global discourses.

Even with increased travel and mobility, the opening out of art spaces and an increasingly growing use of online networks comprises a set of circumstances that contribute to this shift, but it is apparent that none or all of these phenomena can be attributed as sole markers for this shift and it encompasses an array of transnational entanglements and relationships, aided by a growing connectedness via intense mediatization²⁷² all of which have played an important role

272 The timeline of this intense mediatization in real terms can be traced chronologically, beginning with the establishment of the world wide web by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1982. The launching of Google (1997), Skype (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006) and Instagram in 2010 have all affected sea changes in the ways that people connect with each other.

in transcending national concerns—not only raising an awareness of shared precarities but also aiding the deterritorialisation of the artists' bodies themselves. As connectivities through social networks are increasingly being forged, the dialogues around change have transformed into global discourses in innumerable areas of the lived every day, including race, ethnicity, queerness, ecology and human rights that come directly into play within art practices as well.

There are differing opinions on the role played by the intense media connectedness in the current times, while it is believed that the internet has aided the fragmentation and breakdown of stable national identities leading to the liberation of national ties originating from ethnicity of place and culture—ties that had served as a binding glue in the past—at the same time there is evidence to support claims of this mediatic mode being actively employed to further nationalist agendas. This study engages with both views during the course of its analysis.

3.1 Global Connectivities—Deterritorialisation

The observation that “the contemporary artist has become the aspirational paradigm for the new worker, creative, unconventional, flexible, nomadic, creating value and endlessly travelling,”²⁷³ can hardly be contested. This statement can well apply to many artists today and to the artists that are the focus of this study to understand how an artist's body itself as well as the body of the works created by the artist have become nomadic subjects. Deleuze and Guattari use the term ‘de-territorialisation’ to describe the process by which a person (body) moves beyond or alters an aspect of their place within the social world. Everything and everyone has a ‘territory’ (though they use the term territory in a metaphorical sense) and through the relations between bodies, things and the world, these territories are continually being moved beyond (de-territorialised) and reinstated (re-territorialised). They claim that deterritorialisation is a process through which ‘one’ leaves the territory. It is the operation of the ‘line of flight,’²⁷⁴ a crack or rupture, perhaps borne out of resistance or just purely creative, “it's along this line of flight that things come to pass.” (Deleuze, 1995:45) If we were to engage with the idea of deterritorialisation as connected with the changing patterns

273 Simon Critchley, “Absolutely-Too-Much,” *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Arts, Politics and Culture*, Jul-August 2012. Accessed on May 29, 2018. <https://brooklynrail.org/2012/08/art/absolutely-too-much>.

274 Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 508.

of mobility due to globalization, it would logically entail a distancing of ties between culture and a specific territory. And following this trail of ideas, there are three concepts I would like to quote here that assume a direct relevance to understand the shift towards postnational perceptions that visibilizes itself in the artworks and artists themselves—the first being Appadurai’s understanding of deterritorialisation.

Arjun Appadurai connects the idea of deterritorialisation and cultural distancing from a locality following Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizomatic, he states that the world we live in seems rhizomatic, “calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups on one hand and fantasies of electronic propinquity on the other.” [...] Imagination, as a social practice, he argues, offers us new sites of agency and also globally defined fields of possibility in this new global cultural economy. Acknowledging the world’s increasingly deterritorialised landscape, a process on since the last many decades, he proposes a framework for exploring the existing disjunctures through the ideas of global flows or five different –scapes which he terms as imagined worlds in which most people live. Of particular interest to this study is Appadurai’s definition of media scapes which provide a “complete repertoire of images and narratives” to viewers throughout the world,²⁷⁵ and it is in the disjunctive blurring between reality and fiction as these images re-territorialise narratives that the art practices of these artists can be placed.

Homi Bhabha, acknowledging that the line between the home and the world are breaking down, also discusses the narrative inherent in mobility and movement. He states that there are distinct forms “of narrativity, choices and judgement,” that create a home around certain locations, life worlds, he says, “are made for specific reasons and they have many geographical and temporal locations.”²⁷⁶ Avtar Brah observes how current transnational migrations are creating displacements all around the world, and questions of home and belonging are acquiring critical importance. Her contention is that home is not a fixed node, rather what one moves towards, culturally, “it is a moving signifier constructed and transformed in and through social practices, cultural imaginaries, historical memories and our deepest intimacies.” Home is not necessarily a place of origin she says, rather, it is where one feels at home. Brah’s concept of diaspora space is one “in which historical and contemporary elements are understood in

275 Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the global cultural economy,” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 31–45.

276 Homi Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), 141. Accessed on July 21, 2018. <https://blog.degruyter.com/diaspora-and-home-interview-homi-k-bhabha/>.

their diasporic relationality.”²⁷⁷ Brah, therefore designates diaspora space as the framework for her analysis of the various contexts characterized by migration, awarding it a spatial dimension within a given society, Brah’s concept encompasses not only the experiences of mobile subjects but also the transcultural processes that occur within these societal contexts. With multiple transnational flows that mark contemporary art practice itself, the experience of ‘home’ is mediated by historically specific ‘local’ experiences that offer micro-insights into the transcultural processes at work in these ‘local’ spaces.

All of these viewpoints put forth—Appadurai’s ideas around imagination as a social practice, Bhabha’s ‘life worlds’ with many temporal and geographical locations and Brah’s contention that ‘home is a moving signifier’ transformed through cultural imaginaries—are of tremendous significance to engage with the shifting postnational perceptions in the work of these artists, as they deterritorialize and reconfigure familiar objects, reterritorializing them through their practices. Perhaps it could even be said that deterritorialisation is the lens that allows them to look at the nation from the margins, facilitating the decentering of the nation as a key signifier and allowing them to make an even more effective use of their creative imagination.

If I return once more to defining home as a physical space, I come closer to Brah’s definition of home as “the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells,” and attribute the creation of ‘locality’ with a phenomenological quality (with Appadurai), the ‘sense of place’ can be stretched to include virtual and actual lived realities.²⁷⁸ Home in that sense then becomes the space where one feels ‘local.’ Home for Chopra and Shah has been Goa since 2012, their decision to move almost in the same year to the same city were driven by somewhat overlapping concerns—a desire to move away from a busy metropolis and all it entails towards large open spaces, the possibility to mix with like-minded people, live closer to nature, and especially in the case of Shah, the shift towards a deeper relationship of interspecies, nature culture and queer ecologies.²⁷⁹ In their desire to foster connections between their art practice and spaces, both artists made a concerted effort to establish such studio spaces in Goa directly after their moves.

277 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 197.

278 Appadurai 1996, 204.

279 Ashiesh Sharma, “Art Goa: A Creative Migration,” *DNA* April 27, 2014. Accessed on August 20, 2017. <https://www.dnaindia.com/entertainment/column-art-go-a-creative-migration-1982399>.

Shah established *Balcao* in 2013, a transdisciplinary, experimental, shape-shifting project space in North Goa, aiming to explore the relationships between art, technology, nature, culture, healing and consciousness, in which they offered residencies to artists/practitioners including Anuj Vaidya, Jaret Vadera, Mona Gandhi and Shammi Nanda. Similarly, Chopra, along with his artist wife Madhavi Gore and French artist Romain Lousteau, established *HH Spaces*, an artist-run residency space in October 2014. As performance practitioners, they often invite artists working with live arts from various parts of India and other parts of the world, leading to further collaborations, workshops, performances and exhibitions, providing an active, energetic space for performance art practice in India. It was at one of their Open Studios that fellow artist from Germany Yuko Kaseki, with whom Chopra had also performed during his residency at Berlin in 2011²⁸⁰, also performed at *HH spaces* in July of 2016.

However, even before they relocated to Goa and established their art spaces, Shah and Chopra had been travelling to other parts of the globe to participate in art residencies.

Art residencies are spaces—as already seen with the discussion on Khoj—that offer artists the possibility to not only experiment with their genres but also provide transformative experiences for an artist’s ongoing practice, by providing time of reflection, research, presentation and production. International art residency programmes are often “designed to offer a pre-existing infrastructure a paved road into the art world for the newly arrived artists who could turn to their work at once.” They generally provide artists with the opportunity of interacting with international colleagues, gallerists, critics as well as curators.²⁸¹ Residencies allow artists time and space to reflect and develop new ideas, to experiment and create new artworks, and to make time for adequate research. They could be offered short term, in small experimental spaces, allowing artists time and resource to develop their own creative work or part of larger institutions, for longer periods of time, creating synergistic exchanges between artists and the host institutions. And often the resulting networks from these residencies can play a transformational role in an artist’s practice. As sites of art production they play a significant role in knowledge interlocution and also function as trans-cultural contact zones as can be seen with the following examples.

During a three-month artist residency with Point Éphémère in Paris in 2007, Shah came across the photographic archive of the Salpêtrière hospital featured in Georges Didi-Huberman’s *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the*

280 <http://www.nikhilchopra.net/home/?p=2259>.

281 Bydler, *Global Art Worlds*, 52.

Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière. Charcot's Salpêtrière—with its examination, interrogations and experiments, with its public presentations and its theatre of ritual crises carefully staged with the help of ether or amyl nitrate, was an enormous apparatus for observation—and this was performed by a hierarchy of personnel who watched and accumulated dossiers of information. The practice of deleting from the dossiers what had been said and demonstrated by the patients regarding sex plus what had been provoked by the doctors themselves—were almost entirely omitted from the published observations of the archives.²⁸² Shah responded to Charcot's photographs with a series of auto-portraits based on the account, in collaboration with Paris-based dancer and choreographer Marion Perrin. This was Shah's first direct engagement with a non-Indian archive.

This insertion of their subject-self into the image was not only an act of agency performed by the artist but also an act of resistance to the history implicit in the archive, in tandem with their practice of excavating more contemporary marginalized histories and personas. Much later in 2015, when Shah attended a month-long residency on *Queer Ecologies* organized by Røst Air at Skømvaer Lighthouse in Norway, they joined a group of artists & educators (including Maja Moesgard, Elin Vester, Cal Harben, Malin Arnell, Camilla Renate Nicolaisen and Jaya Ramchandani) to compose, choreograph and play with sustainable ideas and conscious presence in natureculture as a theme on all levels and this residency resonated with the direction their work had already taken with *Between the Waves* (2012), and *Some Kind of Nature* (2013). While for Shah the residency spaces offered them the possibility to experiment with archival material or engage directly with themes of their interest, with Chopra the long-term residency at Freie University in Berlin proved to be a transformative experience in veering his focus away from the nation and towards racial histories of color and passing.

In his yearlong residency at Freie University in Berlin in 2011–2012, Chopra participated as a Fellow in *Interweaving Performance Cultures* and this residency proved to be a turning point in his professional career. His interaction and collaboration with other international artists from the genre of performance, especially theatre, helped him to clarify his own ideas, and experiment with various concepts in a series of performances titled *Blackening* (*Blackening*, July 2011 Savvy Contemporary Berlin; *Blackening* II, March 2012 GlogouAIR Berlin; *Blackening* III, April 2012 Grüntaler 9 Berlin) and *Broken White* (*Broken White* III, June 2011 Grüntaler 9, Berlin; *Broken White* IV, Part I September 2011 ifa Stuttgart;

282 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Broken White IV, Part II October 2011 ifa Berlin). He also collaborated with Yuko Kaseki, a Japanese Butoh and performance choreographer, in *9: Encounters, Meetings and Passages*, Chopra and Kaseki worked on Berlin, Tokyo and Bombay as places of memory, trauma and longing over a 27-hour performance. Later in the same year Chopra became the inaugural recipient of the Asialink Roving Residency, an art initiative floated across three different locations where he ‘roved’ between Sydney, Melbourne and Western Australia, performing at Carriageworks and delivering two performance lectures at Melbourne and the Freemantle Arts Centre.²⁸³

Ganesh travels widely within the US and her list of residencies and teaching positions are diverse,²⁸⁴ some of these have led to the creation of transformative residency projects for example, Ganesh’s collaborative archival work with Mariam Ghani *Index of the Disappeared* (Ongoing) began after her residency with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in 2004. The work deals with the weeks and months after 9/11, when developments such as the *Patriot Act*, *Special Registration Act* and a rise in Islamophobia began to crystallize into disappearances of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians who were detained, profiled, interrogated and deported post 9/11, a narrative that had been absent from the official record. The *Index* project was driven by the need to make visible the missing data on the disappearances and deportations of South Asian Muslims as well as the cases of human rights abuse—interventions by Ganesh and Ghani included sketches of the missing persons, a warm online data base and various other iterations. *Index* was followed by works like *Guantanamo Effect* (2013), an interactive web project commissioned by Creative Time Reports, as Ganesh continues to engage with issues of human rights and resistance. *She the Question* (2012) was created following Ganesh’s participation in an artist residency at Guggenheim and it was the direction her work adopted during this residency that played a seminal role in the creation of this set of collages. Having established that artist mobility and their engagement with existing materials and archives during their residencies plays an important role in transforming or changing the direction of an artist’s practice, the artworks that have followed in the wake of such residencies for two of the artists in this study are being cited as examples.

283 Nikhil Chopra: *Roving Residency*, Asialink University of Melbourne. Accessed on August 21, 2016. <https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts/resources/past-exhibitions/exhibitions/nikhil-chopra-roving-residency>.

284 <http://www.chitraganesh.com/about/>.

3.1.2 The Shift

Thematically, Ganesh's *She the Question* (2012), continues her feminine-centered narrative but gestures towards apocalyptic changes occurring in the environment and towards queer utopias, while in *Between the Waves* (2012), Shah's narratives locate themselves at sites that foreground the unequal balance in a capital-based economy, where water bodies with rich eco-diversity such as mangroves, seas and oceans are drying up, where man-made landfills offer potentialities as new cities of the future and Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, the itinerant post-colonial traveler, genuflects towards genealogies of color and passing as *La Perle Noire*. As the three artists foreground shared issues and concerns in their works, the nation and its critique, so central to their earlier works ceases to be the central thematic and pre-occupation.

3.2 Ganesh's Queer Utopias

Ganesh created *She the Question* after her Guggenheim fellowship, during which she had studied and researched classical American science fiction authors such as Ray Bradbury and Philip K. Dick, and also done some archival research on early science fiction films such as Fritz Lang's 1929 epic *Metropolis*, silent cinema across cultures and continents, including Indo-German productions between Himanshu Rai and Franz Osten as well as on mainstream popular science fiction print publications popular in the 1970s and 1980s such as OMNI.²⁸⁵ Science fiction greats such as Ray Bradbury and Philip K. Dick were not new to Ganesh, who had been reading their work in her school years. She brought the residency research into her own work, experimenting with animation ideas, intercutting comics and silent film, psychedelic colors and reflecting with altered states of consciousness,²⁸⁶ bringing different kinds of visual languages together as she created images of futuristic landscapes and space travel, but without creating any intricate plots or character development. Ganesh's move towards science fiction was not an isolated one, it resonated across the board in contemporary art practice with artists such as Trevor Paglan and Pierre Hughie among others. In the series of collages, the focus is on addressing fundamental yet surreal questions that also

285 Vandana Kalra, "Myths and the Woman," *Indian Express*, September 22, 2013. Accessed on June 29, 2018. <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/myths-and-the-woman/1171486/2>.

286 Jaret Vadera, "Between, Beneath and Beyond: A Conversation with Jaret Vadera," April 4, 2017. SAADA *South Asian American Digital Archive*. Accessed on June 27, 2018. <https://www.saada.org/tides/interview/chitra-ganesh>.

resonate with the genre of science fiction, such as 'Who are we?' and 'Where are we headed in the future?' In the collages of *She the Question*, these questions continue to center upon the female figure—the defining trope of her work.

Comprising of twenty-four panels, *She the Question* was initially displayed (although partially), at Gothenburg, Sweden in 2012 and later at Gallery Wendi Norris in San Francisco at the end of the same year. The 'question' in the title was a significant counter to patriarchy and male-centered questions, introducing the feminine also as a question, but without offering any fixed conclusions, this was an open-ended investigation which is characteristic of Ganesh's artworks across medias. The works of Roy Lichtenstein, Martha Rosler's photomontages, Hannah Hoch's collages and contemporary graphic novels including *The Watchmen*, *The Sandman*, *Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*, the work of Alison Bechdel and Charlotte Perkins' *Herland*, all have proved inspirational resources for this collage series,²⁸⁷ the visual discourse in the series stems from utopian scenarios in flat colors replicating a 1970s psychedelic look. Some of the frames continue to be peopled by figures from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics, but the references draw from science fiction and the visual iconography draws in contemporary ecological concerns, the narrative and iconography move away from the national critique so visible in *Tales of Amnesia* and into a space of queer fantasy.

3.2.1 *She the Question*—Panels

The title image, *Head on Fire*, is half submerged in flames as the figure sits cross-legged in a classic yogic pose on the forest floor, the pose recalls the supernatural powers of meditation and *tapas* (Fig. 59). A turquoise ringed-planet dangles from an extra hand, a second head lies at the figure's feet, wearing psychedelic sunglasses with a third eye on the forehead, all reinforcing the supernatural powers of the feminine. This image almost foregrounds the narrative for the entire work, the body is distinctly colored—calm, meditative and almost in another space, indexical signifiers of a utopian existence are already visibilizing with the tertiary planets circling in the background.

Almost spilling out of the frame to merge with the adjoining panel, the hand in the next image verbalizes thought with its text "*Her head in flames at the bottom of our dreams...*" (Fig. 60), as it emerges from a morass surrounded by a walled fortress—the barbed fence and the javelin spear reinforce the violence that will continually recur in the subsequent panels in the series. The adjoining

287 Interview with artist Delhi, 2013.



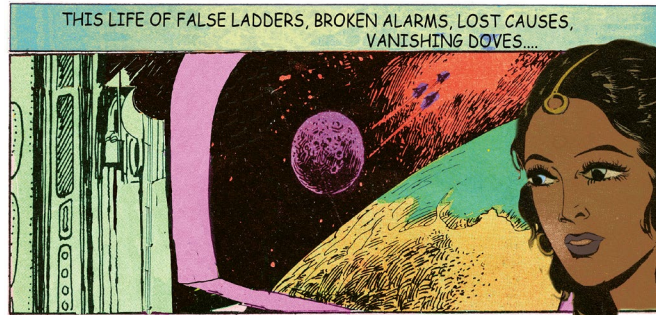
Fig. 59. Ganesh, *She the Question : Head on Fire*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.



60

Fig. 60. Ganesh, *She the Question : A Pulse too Slippery*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

Fig. 61. Ganesh, *She the Question : This Life*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.



61

panel focuses on the gaze, a faceless figure wearing an Indian sari, peers out of an open doorway, and a gigantic all-seeing eye suspended vertically looks back, as an ominous presence (Fig. 61). When we look out, we are also looked at. Often in her works Ganesh subverts the traditional male gaze that automatically invests a female body with pornographic content by creating numerous eyes all over the female body. But in this particular panel, it is an eye that is engaging with the complexities of life and power dynamics,²⁸⁸ with agency, and

288 Erica Cardwell, "Empathy, Fantasy and the Power of Protest: A Conversation with Chitra Ganesh," October 30, 2015. Accessed on June 25, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/249897/empathy-fantasy-and-the-power-of-protest-a-conversation>.

this tenor of facing violence and simultaneously taking control runs through this entire collage series. This is a gaze that is not invested with resistance to the male gaze, it just sees and calmly confronts. In *She the Question, This life*, a life of “*false ladders, broken alarms, lost causes, vanishing doves*” a contemporary female face is fashionably adorned with a *maang tika* and sports blue eyes, the face is framed within what appears to be a spaceship, everywhere are signs of destruction, nuclear warheads emerging from the earth and exploding in space. The iconography for this image is apocalyptic, the incremental loading of negative meaning through the accompanying textual phrases signal towards a violent and despairing portrayal of a queer life for a woman of color with textual references to vanishing doves and lost causes. We get further insight into the protagonist’s state of mind with the text in the series of images that follow which almost reads like a litany of unpreparedness—“*too harsh to walk the world without skin, too soon to remove the gun from your mouth.*” The textual narrative in the early panels appears to be despairing and focused on the violence but in contemporary settings.

With the next set of panels (Fig. 62) there is a subtle change of mood, two young girls furtively view a muscular arm holding a sword. The text hints at some sort of resolution—this becoming of “*a planet unto herself,*” through “*the meeting of violence and reason,*” seems to imply a self-sufficiency that gestures towards optimism. In the next panel optimistic and hopeful, the artist as a young girl sits and references books in a library (Fig. 63), and talks of dreaming and scheming with the “*logic of cities coursing through her blood,*” even as a signifier of violence reappears in the droplets of blood dripping from her finger. The ability to dream and to think has some direct connections with technology and growth, with a denial of equal educational opportunities for all races, actions that cohere with the marginalization of queers within an unjust society.

Resolution seems finally at hand as the lower torso of a woman’s body stands on a rock against snow-covered mountains in the distance (Fig. 64). The dark hairy torso, with its strangely large feet presents an anti-aesthetic²⁸⁹ the abdomen is now aflame, almost in continuity with the visual from the title image, some water drops have been added to douse the flames, the stance of the figure is firm and determined. The textual phrase serves as a reminder of how patience and amnesia work together towards a queer existence, how patience particularly has to be practiced in helpless situations when “*tied to a pole in a cellar,*” with “*fists*

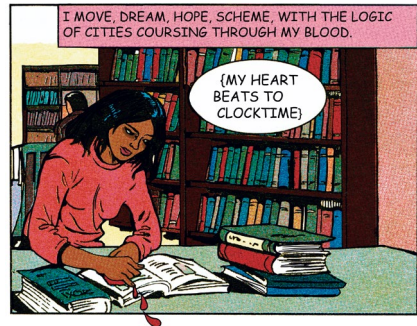
289 I draw the term from Hal Foster’s 1980 definition and the understanding of the anti-aesthetic as art created to interrogate gender and other forms of identity.



62

Fig. 62. Ganesh, *She the Question : Planets and Sword*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

Fig. 63. Ganesh, *She the Question : Clocktime*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.



63

clenched in prayer.” The figure is still not whole, perhaps implying that acceptance of queer identities is still in process and about ways to reconcile a queer identity with the reality of normative lives. However, the final panel in this series works to complete the narrative, it portrays the artist herself in the style of Mughal portraiture, the image is framed within ornate borders in the Mughal miniature style but contains no other signifiers of royalty. Rather than being dressed in diaphanous draperies, silks and satins as a Mughal Empress, the artist is dressed for war—her bow strapped to her shoulder and arrows strapped onto her back (Fig. 65). Instead of transporting the ideals of *nazaqat* (delicacy) and *tehzeeb*, (courtesy) where she should be holding a jewel or flower to draw attention to the

64

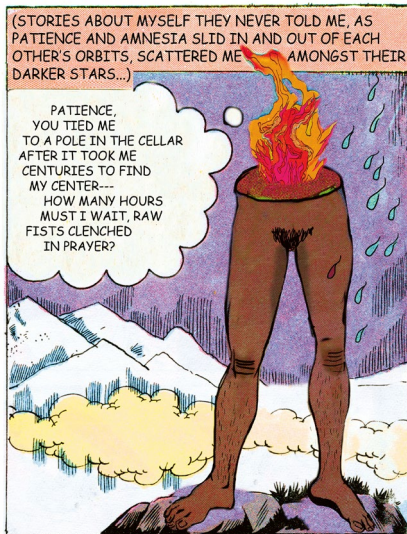


Fig. 64. Ganesh, *She the Question : Patience*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

65



Fig. 65. Ganesh, *She the Question : Stories about myself*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Wendi Norris.

hands as a measure of refinement,²⁹⁰ the artist herself looks at the viewer as she points her two index fingers against her head in a suicidal gesture. And it is with this final image in the series that the transformation is now complete.

The head in flames from the title image that could be likened to a burning candle has now burnt down to emerge as a whole new body. The calm face with the artist's self-portrait sends out a clear message—the queer body is not only whole and in control, but also metaphorically ready to confront death.

3.2.2 *She the Question*—Key Aspects

At the Konsthalle in Gothenberg, '*She the question*' was the first line of a poem that was scripted in braided hair at the exhibition entrance—Ganesh's intervention with *she* as the subject could not be more clear. In this particular set of

290 For greater detail please see, Juneja, "Translating the Body into Image," in *Images of the Body in India*, eds. Axel Michael and Christoph Wulff (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 243–266.



Fig. 66. Ganesh, *She the Question : Knowledge and the rose petal*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

collages, the sourcing of material and references through a complex plurality of genres and medias questions the narrative of ‘who’ the feminine is. Even though violence continues to be the key element, the world she creates in this set of collages is now openly dystopic and disturbing. The marginalization of women in general dominates the narrative textually with phrases such as “*Of the tights she walks – head in flames*” (Fig. 58); “*Life of false ladders, broken alarms, lost causes.*” (Fig. 60). The phrases convey multiple messages to multiple viewers and can be applied to many violent situations that queer women are confronted with, everywhere. The feminine figures peopling the apocalyptic psychedelic landscapes gesture towards a present/future that focuses on “*bodily transformations,*” the becoming of “*a planet unto herself.*” (Fig. 62). The bodies located in futuristic spaces now connect with the cyborg and mediated technologies.

References to an anxious search for identity surface with a wish to “*stories about myself, they never told me*” [...] “*how many hours must I wait, raw fists clenched in prayer?*” (Fig. 63) In some of the panels, silence emerges as a central concept as Ganesh refers to secrets and hidden encyclopedias (Fig. 66).

There are many silences that underlie discourses, Foucault states that silence is less the absolute limit of discourse than an element that functions alongside things said and in relation to them, as he says, “there is no binary division to be made between what one says or does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things,” and how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized.²⁹¹ Sedgwick also observes that “Closetedness” is by itself, “a performative initiated as such by the speech act of silence.”²⁹² Sedgwick’s argument is closely aligned to Foucault’s that while discourse also undermines and exposes power making it fragile and possible to thwart, in the same way silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions but also loosening its holds and providing for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.²⁹³ And even as queerness has a long and conflicted history of the silences embedded in same sex relationships of not daring to come out of the closet, in the case of India silence emerges “as a central concept in defining the violence faced by lesbian women,” who undergo “the socially inscribed absence of choice,” within the normative presumption of heterosexuality.²⁹⁴

3.2.3 The Narrative of Science Fiction and Utopic Imagination

With *She the Question* the overlays between myth and science fiction become stronger as it employs tropes regularly associated with science fiction such as alternate temporalities, extrapolation, speculation and a consciousness of mutability within different forms and contexts. Science fiction’s increasing relevance in our world today is perhaps linked to the current dystopic state of our world, as we deal with enormous climate change, with political conflict and huge global inequalities—all grim realities that point towards uncertain futures.

291 Foucault, 27.

292 Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, “Axiomatic,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 246–247.

293 Foucault, 101.

294 Bina Fernandez and Gomathy N.B, “Voicing the Invisible: Violence Faced by Lesbian Women in India,” *Because I Have a Voice*, 159.

Science fiction helps us to think about the continually changing present through employing the lens of extrapolation, it also helps us to think about alternate tomorrows.²⁹⁵ The notion of Time in this work itself connects with ideas of Futurism, in the artist's own words, "in order to have a robust, regenerative and replenishing futurism you have to reorient yourself to the past but look at the past differently to upend ideas of teleology and progress."²⁹⁶ Artists working with the tropes of science fiction offer visions of what those different futures could be.

Trevor Paglan says that,

Art can show you some of the mechanics through which the world is constructed and show some of the underlying political, economic, social, cultural relationships that are bearing down on our everyday lives, that have structured society in various ways, at the exclusion of other kinds of ways. It can also help denaturalize these things, help us realize that there is nothing natural about the world in the way that it exists now, and if there's nothing natural about the way it exists now, then we can imagine alternatives. That is something that artists have always done.²⁹⁷

And Ganesh's work closely aligns with the possibility of imagining alternatives with the understanding that science fiction is not about something happening in the distant future. Born and brought up in a country where women were creating utopian narratives on feminist themes way back in 1836, from Mary Griffith's *Three Hundred Years Hence* to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* in 1915—a man-less utopia that already marked race as a central feature,²⁹⁸ Ganesh herself is inspired by Octavia Butler's work, within which the critique of dominant social paradigms is visibly embedded through the foregrounding of a black female protagonist²⁹⁹ and Butler's work provides Ganesh with a strong reference point to engage with the rigid binaries between black and white so prevalent within American society. In Ganesh's female centered landscapes the ability to fantasize and imagine other worlds is a useful direction to take. What would it

295 Isiah Lavender III, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), 227.

296 Interview with artist Delhi, 2013.

297 Accessed on August 19, 2018. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/trevor-paglen-interview-1299836>.

298 Alexis Lothian, "Feminist and Queer Science Fiction in America," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, eds. Gerry Canavan and Eric Carl, Link 2015, 72. doi: <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781107280601.008>.

299 Lavender, 24.

mean to live in a world that is no longer pre-occupied with trivial matters such as social norms and playing out femininity? This stepping away from social role-play that was so central to the previous set of collages can be viewed as a decisive shift in this set of collage works.

In the fictional world fantasy becomes an important genre to empathetically expose pain with a sense of agency and therefore tropes from science fiction abound in the panels amidst cosmic references to Mars and Venus to orbits, constellations and time travel paradoxes—“*millennial tales splayed in the valleys of the distant future... from her cradle to our graves*” (Fig. 67). The surreal text also directly references narratives from science fiction in another panel—“*The queen of Mars awaits us with telescopes and broken arms*” (Fig. 68). This image multiply references not only the legend of Mars and Queen Aelita but also Ray Bradbury’s *Martian Chronicles* that discuss the development of rocket technology followed by a black exodus to Mars to escape racism in America.³⁰⁰ Some connections can also be made with Bloch’s ideas on learning hope, Bloch states that “in order to penetrate the darkness” of the just lived moment, “we need the most powerful ‘telescope,’ that of polished utopian consciousness to penetrate precisely the nearest nearness,”³⁰¹ this darkness that Bloch foregrounds finds resonance with Ganesh’s articulations on the despairing state of queer lives and the utopian desire to transcend it.

Science fiction works are about potentiality, becoming meaningful precisely because of their distance from everyday experience and ‘Utopia’ literally meaning ‘nowhere’ or ‘no-place’ finds its strongest expression in science fiction. Despite debates around the term ‘utopia’ and a belief that it has outgrown its usefulness, utopia remains useful as a critical tool as an aesthetic strategy for modeling possible worlds or ‘what ifs.’³⁰² In *Queer Utopias*, Munoz argues that queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be used to imagine a future. “The future is queerness’s domain,” queerness needs to be seen as a horizon of potentiality, a not yet here, and as a possibility to break away from the constraints of a totalizing hetero-normative present that stifles our imagination. Munoz suggests that it is in the realm of the aesthetic that we can glimpse worlds proposed and promised [...] it is through cruising “the fields of the visual” that we can “see in the anticipatory illumination of the utopian.”³⁰³ In fact queer of color

300 Lavender, 96.

301 Ernst Bloch, “The Principle of Hope,” 1954–59 in *Utopias*, ed. Richard Noble (London: Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2009), 43.

302 Richard Noble *Utopias*, 14.

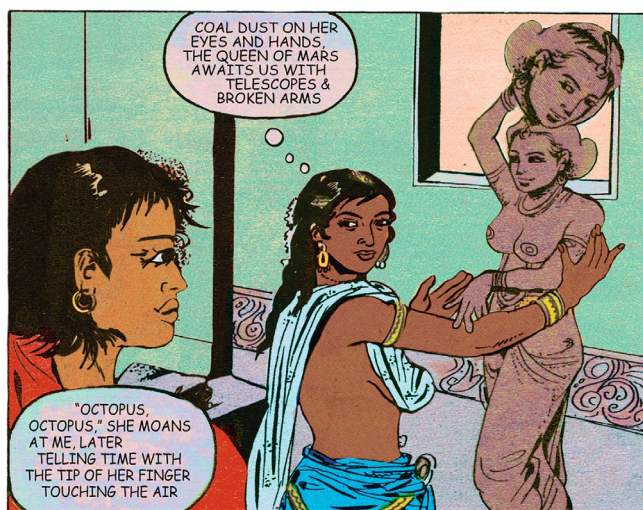
303 Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, Introduction (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1 & 18.



67

Fig. 67. Ganesh, *She the Question : Green leaf writing*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.

Fig. 68. Ganesh, *She the Question : Queen of Mars*, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris.



68

performances work to dis-identify with normative scripts of whiteness and hetero-normativity and produce visions of other worlds. Munoz further says, that, “disidentificatory performances require an active kernel of utopian possibility...and we need to hold onto or even *risk* utopianism if we are to engage in the labor of making a queerworld.”³⁰⁴ Ganesh’s set of collages work closely with Munoz’s argument moving beyond the negative and grim realities of today, pointing towards the potentiality of alternate futures. “Tomorrow” for Ganesh then becomes the place “to examine things that can’t be discussed directly, and

304 Jose Esteban Munoz, *Dis-identifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

where the body is a site of ongoing transformation and mutation,³⁰⁵ and utopia becomes the “place where the supernatural would live more freely alongside the everyday,”³⁰⁶ potential futures and utopic imagination easily come together in *She the Question*.

3.2.4 *She the Question/Tales of Amnesia*

Examining the two sets of collages, *Tales of Amnesia* and *She the Question* for resonances and differences, it becomes apparent that the general themes underlying the works pinpoint similar concerns—sexual and gendered codes for women that permeate all mythic and contemporary narratives, but the figures in *She the Question* no longer masquerade as re-configurations from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics and the references are more contemporary. Neither is there an originary culture-specific narrative with attached moral codes that these images and text recall—even though some of the images still connect stereotypically with the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics. The image for the Queen of Mars panel has been taken from the *Amrapali* and *Upagupta* comic for example, the original script features a basic question being asked of the sculptor of the image. The narratives in this set of collages are complex and multi-layered. The feminine figures are shapeshifters keeping to clock-time, more rooted within poetic surreal fantasy without referring to national mythologies or histories. The protagonist, clearly the artist herself, is in a contemporary reality and a mythical past is referred to only indirectly, even though innumerable references to time travel surface throughout the work. The open-ended narrative in *She the Question* follows no particular order. In *Tales of Amnesia* the closeness and familiarity of the image to its original myth created a dissonance with the text in some panels. But in *She the Question*, Ganesh worked on the text and image simultaneously and the final panels, with their unity of text and image, give this work a completeness of narrative that was missing in *Tales of Amnesia*. A significant shift with *She the Question* is that it does not ostensibly feature women performing queer sexual acts with each other—the figures are more meditative, engaging in furtive dialogue, as queerness is now part of discourse.

305 Jaret Vadera, “Between, Beneath and Beyond,” April 4, 2017. Accessed on July 10, 2018. <https://www.saada.org/tides/interview/chitra-ganesh>.

306 Rosalynn D’Mello, “Interview: Chitra Ganesh on her Upcoming Delhi Solo,” BLOUIN ARTINFO September 25, 2013.

3.2.5 Ganesh as Translator

Ganesh as an artist from the diaspora already occupies a position of alterity as she translates referential realities through a process of semantic deconstruction in her role as cultural translator. In *Task of the Translator* (1921) Walter Benjamin argues that translation should not seek to communicate the meaning of the original because the communication of its content is not in the least essential to our appreciation of it. However, what is essential, he says is the translatability of the original, "... the task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect (*Intention*) upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."³⁰⁷ This pronouncement by Benjamin if applied to Ganesh's collages, emphasizes this quality of translatability from the original's mode of signification. Her creation of another parallel contemporary mythology assumes a critical importance as she engages with the popular aesthetics of a mass medium through the act of translation to a readymade source material and producing in it a parodic version in an "echo of the original." Andre Lefevre's contention that translation can tell us a lot about the ways in which images are made, especially about the ways in which "authority manipulates images and employs experts to sanction that manipulation,"³⁰⁸ resonates closely with Ganesh's critique of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic as it is through her translation of the target source code that the 'sanctioned' manipulation of normative codes is revealed. The source message is always interpreted and reinvented in cultural forms open to interpretation and reconstructed according to a different set of values according to different languages and cultures,³⁰⁹ however, when translation is used surreally and in the contemporary context, source and target cultures cannot be so clearly demarcated, the new forms being created do not supposedly exist and then these assume a 'forward-looking' utopic dimension that can be attributed to Ganesh's second set of collages.

Often in more general terms, the located-ness of the viewer guides and determines a work's translatability, and as the work travels from one context to another, the audience brings in its own meanings. For a viewer in the US, or even in the West, the resonances and dissonances of *Tales of Amnesia* with the *Amar*

307 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," (1923) in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69–82.

308 Andre Lefevre, "Translation: Its Genealogy in the West," *Translation, History and Culture*, eds. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevre (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 27.

309 Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," *Translation Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 470.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

Chitra Katha would not elicit any resonance or nuanced reading of the work as completely as it would in India where viewers would be familiar with the original narrative. For the Indian viewer of *Tales of Amnesia*, the understanding of the *Amar Chitra Katha* narrative is embedded within a particular and specific Indian context and its intelligibility and translatability within an Indian audience would be much more effective and easily understood. As an artist from the diaspora, this moving between cultures necessitates the need for Ganesh to easily ‘code-switch’ or shape-shift through playing with familiar signifiers and historical narratives, but this is not a straightforward process. Ganesh’s exhibition history for *Tales of Amnesia* provides an understanding of how many layers of identity she connects with, and actively pursues. Living within mainstream New York, in the center of the art world has facilitated this layering and provided her with multiple opportunities to engage and dialogue with multiple cultures.

Tales of Amnesia has shown internationally in different spaces and contexts.³¹⁰ An example of how an artwork can be curatorially positioned, can be proffered in the display of the panels of *Tales of Amnesia* as part of a group show titled *Female Power* at Arnhem in Netherlands in 2013. The curatorial note situated Ganesh’s work within the Indian goddess tradition, but without highlighting the underlying nuances of the collages that foreground the plight of the Indian woman as a whole. The note described her work in the following words:

... Ganesh’s female protagonists challenge the boundaries between good and evil. In an endless variation on the Mother Goddess, their ever-changing bodies appear as the Hindu goddesses Devi, Kali and Durga who, with their ambiguous and equivocal identities, possess supernatural powers.

In the *Tales of Amnesia* collages, even as some of the frames have been sourced from mythological narratives, these are rarely empowered Goddess figures and this is precisely Ganesh’s critique and an active attempt at their empowerment. Anyone familiar with the societal structure in India would be aware of the huge dissonance between the marginalization of womens’ lives *vis-à-vis* their positioning as goddesses. Therefore, questions of inadequate translatability continue

310 Ganesh showed *Tales of Amnesia* for the first time internationally with Gallery Haas & Fischer in 2007 (August-October) in their Project Space 1+2: Loukia Alavanu. she went on to participate in FIAC Paris, with it in a solo presentation with the same gallery. She showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo show at Nature Morte in Berlin in 2011 and also at a solo at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh in the same year. In 2012 she showed *Tales of Amnesia* in another solo at Gotenburg Sweden, but added some more digital collages such as *Melancholia* and others. *The Tales of Amnesia* collages were part of another international show *Female Power* at Arnhem in 2013.

to remain central to culturally located works such as *Tales of Amnesia* and often it is the exoticness of the non-western Other that is on display.

The broader thematic visible particularly in *She the Question* on the other hand, allows the viewer to enter the work from multiple perspectives and relate to it. There are no familiar iconographic references to the fire of *sati*, to the *tapas* of *Parvati*, sacrifices of *Mira* or the legend of the creation of the Goddess *Durga*. Rather interstellar vistas and tropes associated with science fiction such as alternate temporalities and extrapolation indicate the 'hybrid space of a globalized world,' where queerness actively resists its abject status. The direction taken by *She the Question* therefore operates within a larger context, rather than being tied to a geographical space, nation or history, it inhabits a queer utopic space. Ganesh asserts, "I am queer and sometimes these themes are part of my work and sometimes not, it's one of the many, many layers in my work [...] and part of the narrative I am putting out there."³¹¹ Ganesh's own experience of living in the diaspora as an artist of color inspires her to focus on a multicultural living experience, building upon her early visual experiences that centered round immigrant and non-American communities. Browsing through the identitarian contexts of Ganesh's exhibition histories, one notices that she engages with a gamut of ethnicities, showing with American feminist artists with the Asian American community of artists, both with the South Asian Womens' Creative Collective and otherwise, with the African-American community of artists, including collaborative works especially with Simone Leigh (*Radical Presence* in 2014, *Divine Horsemen* in 2010), as well as with Renee Cox, Kara Walker among others, and with Indian contemporary artists, beginning with *AlieNation* at Toronto with Dhruvi Acharya in 2001. For Ganesh's work perhaps the hybrid spaces of a globalized world can be termed as transnational spaces of belonging. Her practice is primarily about the 'colored' female body anywhere, wherever the female body becomes the site of rupture. There is no role-play or 'womanliness' or social masquerade in this set of collages, this body is reasoning with the contemporary reality around her—situated and located within that reality. While the main themes in this set of collages specifically gesture towards the presence of science fiction and utopia, I would like to move further towards a discussion of one of the larger themes that guides her work, queer sexuality, and how it is evidenced in queer solidarities transnationally and post-nationally.

311 Neelam Raaj, "I don't believe in using LGBT themes for shock value: Chitra Ganesh," *Times of India*, October 13, 2013. Accessed on July 12, 2018. <https://timesofindia.india-times.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/i-dont-believe-in-using-lgbt-themes-for-shock-value-chitra-ganesh/articleshow/24070715.cms>.

3.2.6 Queerness is Global

Queerness it is claimed is not a category or a style but a lived experience—this lived experience is also a space of persistent violence, vulnerability and historical oppression³¹² and is closely linked to the nation-state. The role of the nation in promoting or creating a common culture for its citizens is closely linked to the regulation of sexual dissidence. Sexuality is seen as a threat to the nation state because it is something that is difficult to control.³¹³ (Yuval Davis 1997) Heterosexualities as discussed in the last chapter are shaped by the nation through explicit ideologies being put out to serve them. Therefore, an approach that is critical of the nation as a unit of analysis and attentive to the similarities that exist among cultural settings within and across nation states, offers a useful direction in understanding the presence of queer sexuality in global terms.

Altman (1996), one of the first sociologists to address internationalization of social and cultural identities based on homosexuality, emphasizes that with globalization members of particular groups have more in common across national and continental boundaries than they do with others in their own geographically defined societies.³¹⁴ Ashley Tellis and Sruti Bala critique Altman's configuration of globalization as a process bringing together tradition and modernity and argue that his imperialized approach by conflating "tradition" with the native following pre-modern same-sex practices, and "modernity," with the western subject possessing a distinct identity, runs through cultures as if "they were objects in the aisles of a global supermarket."³¹⁵ Dasgupta also adds to this critique saying that Altman's thesis does not recognize the "multiplicity of localized/regionalized identificatory categories that exist within Asian contexts," for example, *metis* in Nepal or *kothis* and *hijras* in India.³¹⁶ It has been variously and success-

312 Charlotte Prodger, "Queer Time and Place," *Frieze*, 23rd April 2014. Accessed on June 28, 2018. <https://frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place>.

313 Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage, 2004), 16. Here Binnie references George Moss's *Nationalism and Sexuality* that argues for middle class respectability in Germany being produced through promoting nationalism and regulation of sexual morals as an example.

314 Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 87.

315 Ashley Tellis & Sruti Bala, "Localized Trajectories of Queerness and Activism under global Governance," in *The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Rethinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South*, eds. Ashley Tellis & Sruti Bala (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 13–14.

316 Rohit Das Gupta, *Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politic, Intimacies and Belonging* (London: Routledge India, 2017), 109.

fully argued that early accounts of global queering have been explained primarily in terms of western, especially American sexual and gender cultures and this approach has been widely critiqued since its public emergence in the last decade of the twentieth century.³¹⁷ Notwithstanding these arguments, there has been a conscious mainstreaming of queerness in popular cultures, the phrase, “Queerness is now global,” points towards the increased visibility of queer sexualities—“whether in advertising, film, performance art, the internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies—images of queer sexualities and cultures now circulate around the globe.”³¹⁸ With events such as the IDAHO and Gay Games to promote notions of global LGBT solidarity and regular pride marches across the globe the situation is gradually transforming and transnational similarities amongst queer cultures are indeed emerging. In India, the success of South Asian queer, gay and lesbians organizing in the 1990s owed a lot to support from the west and included social and political groups gathering in clubs and conferences, the First Asian Lesbian Conference was held in 1990 in Bangkok. While the conditions vary for each country, there are commonalities including invisibility, a lack of community support, weakening family ties, economic dependence and so on³¹⁹ that occur across nations and territories.

3.2.7 Queer Discourse in India

The queer movement in India however, has in the last decades been greatly impacted with the growth of new media and online queer spaces such as the *Khush* list (1992), *SAGrrls* and *desidykes* that have created new ‘forms of queer geographies’ acting as points of resistance to patriarchal hegemonies pronouncing queer individuals as ‘Un-Indian.’³²⁰ However in the Indian class and caste-ridden

317 Peter A. Jackson, “An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Re-imagining Queer Theory,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. Vol. 2. No. 4 *Critical Regionalities: Gender and Sexual Diversity in South East & East Asia* (Oct–Dec 2000), 405–424. Also by Halperin 1996, Morton 1997 and Stivans 1999. Jackson’s research on the Thai *Kathoey* transgenders shows that cross-cultural borrowing is not the only predominant force producing broad scale transformations of global queering and that local processes remain powerful forces for cultural transformation.

318 Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan, *Queer Globalisations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1.

319 Ana Garcia-Aroyo, *Alternate Sexualities in India: The Construction of Queer Culture Part Two Contemporary Politics and Art*, (Kolkata: Booksway, 2010), 78.

320 Dasgupta, 34.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

society, queer sexuality is as much about a 'false consciousness' of class, status and gender as well as location, therefore the signs of change, however gradual, tend to be restricted to the urban metropolises and among the educated middle and upper classes whereas in the smaller urban centers and villages, the queer community continues to be stigmatized. It is widely believed that the conceptualization of queer lives is governed by the elite minority whose understand of sexuality is aped from the West.

Attempts towards the mainstreaming of queer discourse in India have had a chequered history, which began with the first recorded protest organized by the *AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan* or ABVA in 1992 in a rally organized by gay men against police harassment in Delhi. The social composition of the movement has since then enlarged to include *kothi* and *hijra* communities. A more visible presence was demonstrated during the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004 where Persons Living with HIV/AIDS and sexual minorities were present. Although Narrain emphasizes that an understanding of what it means to be queer in India is constituted within local discourses and reflects the reality in its socio-political contexts,³²¹ it has also been successfully argued that the LGBT mobilization in India is intimately linked to HIV/AIDS funding from western NGOs. In the strategy for AIDS prevention were included open discussions about sexuality and working with marginalized queers and sex workers, therefore queer film festivals, gay pride parades, queer chatrooms, queer networks and support groups were all instituted as part of capacity building.³²² The contention that queerness is squarely positioned outside the national Indian imaginary was demonstrated with the showing of the film '*Fire*' in 1996, an occurrence that is believed to mark the public emergence of lesbianism in India. The film was suspended, resubmitted to the Censor Board and considered incommensurable with 'the Indian culture.' Pramod Navalkar, the then Minister of Culture for Maharashtra, stated that 'lesbianism is a pseudo-feminist trend borrowed from the west and is no part of Indian womanhood.'³²³ It was through the *Fire* affair and the ensuing protests that the construct of India was engaged with in real terms and it became quite apparent that the presence of queer behavior, especially between women in India conflating gender and nation in unacceptable ways, possesses the ability to overturn moral narratives. Coining

321 Narrain, *Because I have a voice*, 9–16.

322 Subir K. Kole, "Globalizing queer? AIDS, homophobia and the politics of sexual identity in India," *Globalization and Health* 3, No. 8 (2007).

323 Naisargi Dave, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (Durham NC: Duke University, 2011), 137–166.

the term *xenophobic queerphobia* as a particular queerphobia that justifies itself by constructing the self-identified Indian queer and as originating outside the nation, Paola Bacchetta argues that homophobic nationalist discourses also assert that queers are the products of western imperialism and that queer genders and sexualities are constructed outside the Hindu nation through a misogynist conception of gender and heterosexist notion of sexual normativity.³²⁴ Notwithstanding these specific references, it cannot be denied that there has been a marked growth in the public visibility of LGBT communities in various public forums among the metro cities of India. Contemporary cultural interventions by media collectives such as *Nigah* in Delhi, *Larzish* in Mumbai, *Pedestrian Pictures/Swabhava* in Bangalore and *Sarani* in Kolkata use the queer film festival as a space for discussions around gender and sexuality. However, these initiatives are far from nation centered, some collectives like *Kashish*, established in 2010 in Mumbai, which became one of Asia's biggest LGBT Film festivals, have largely been underwritten by United Nations Development Project India and received support from the Alliance Francaise, the Arts Network Asia and the British Council.³²⁵ Therefore, support through western global networks has been a critical component for the outing of the queer community in India. Evidence of global solidarities and participations is also provided by events such as pride marches. The first such march was held in Kolkata in 1998, Shah filmed the Calcutta Pride March in 2004,³²⁶ by 2008 pride parades were being held at Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi and increasingly coopting greater international participation.

Despite the constraints of sometimes being located within a certain national frame, queer solidarity is a global phenomenon and this could be evidenced in 2013, when the Supreme Court overturned the 2009 High Court ruling that had de-criminalized queer sexuality, the day was celebrated as a day of protest in 35 countries from across the globe. It inspired the "Global Day of Rage" on December 15 with over 38 cities participating to demonstrate, protest, rally, conduct candlelight vigils, and more, to show solidarity against the decision as well as create a plan of action to get rid of Section 377 for good. It was endorsed by

324 Paola Bacchetta, "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers," *Social Text*, Winter 1999, 141–166.

325 Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, "Queer Cinema in the World 2016," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 70, No. 2 (2016).

326 Calcutta Pride March 2004. Video Clip by Tejal Shah. Accessed on November 8, 2018. <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/4719/Calcutta-Pride-March-2004>.

SALGA – NYC and SAWCC among many others.³²⁷ Transnational solidarities can also be evidenced in other instances when queer activists from Europe supported the campaign against Section 28 in the United Kingdom or when Indian activists signed a petition against President Musaveni in Uganda protesting against a passing of an anti-gay law. Despite, advances, collaborative protests and events, queer communities all over the globe face the same discriminations, fight the same battles of assertion as from the Stonewall days and face violent homophobic attacks as the one at Orlando in 2013. Gender and sexual non-conformists are attacked, killed, defamed and denied housing and employment world-wide and it may seem that the hatred and persecution of non-conformists does not mark a First World/Third World divide.³²⁸ And yet, sometimes within diasporic populations itself these attacks can acquire homophobic overtones, as Puar observes in the case of the India day parade at Fremont California in 1994, when members of *Trikone* marched in the parade and were booed at by Khalistani Sikhs protesting the march.³²⁹ This is hardly an isolated example indicating homophobic violence against the diasporic queer community. Within contemporary art practice itself on the other hand, the steadily growing presence of the mainstreaming of artworks created by artists identifying as queer can be signposted by citing a few examples.

In 2014 the Whitney Biennial signposted the shift towards Queer in a big way as a ‘hashtag, not a destination,’ where contemporary artists referenced and paid homage to the greats—A.L. Steiner on Ericka Huggins, Joseph Grigely on Gregory Battock, Julie Ault exhibited artifacts with a page from David Wojnerowicz.³³⁰ In 2016, the Tate Modern held a retrospective of Bhupen Khakhar, *You Can’t Please All*, and in 2017 it held a retrospective on *Queer British Art*, which included works by David Hockney, John Singer Sargent, Francis

327 Global Day of Rage NYC Press Release Excerpt. Endorsers: South Asian Solidarity Initiative (SASI), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Center for Women’s Global Leadership, Trans Women of Color Collective (TWCCC), CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Audre Lorde Project (ALP), New York City LGBT Community Center, Breakthrough, SHOLAY, All Out, Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM), GABRIELA, New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy (NYAGRA), Queens Pride House, NQAPIA. Accessed on August 20, 2016. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nACQYndi3drz_9ngcAP36hTK3kjHkiCQmiuL3P08v0w/pub.

328 Donald Hall, *Reading Sexualities: Hermeneutic Theory and the Future of Queer Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

329 Puar, 12.

330 Catherine Lord, “Queer Time and Place,” *Frieze* April 23, 2014. Accessed on June 28, 2018. <https://frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place>.

Bacon, Dora Carrington, Ethel Sands and Keith Vaughan.³³¹ In 2017, Documenta 14 at Kassel mainstreamed 'post-porn, modernist' artists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stevens through an exhibition of their work, the duo offered Ecosex walking tours and a Free Sidewalk Sex Clinic.³³² All of these serve as indicators that queer artists have arrived within mainstream contemporary art practice.

The final question I want to address in this section is, how effective is the frame of a queer identity for the two queer artists in this study as they connect with queer discourses and practices transnationally. For Ganesh, whose work is apprehended first and foremost as Indian and straitjacketed within a national frame, it is the queer framework that allows the experience of a greater freedom and a complexity of interpretation. The diasporic framework which identifies with population dispersions due to war, asylum, immigration, emigration etc. and feelings of nostalgia and belonging, often frozen in time, becomes a less useful frame for Ganesh.³³³ This view is also partially prompted by audience / viewer response to her diasporic identity. An artwork by Ganesh inspired by Pop artists such as Lichsteinstein would still invoke Asia's thousand years of pre-modern art works because of a pre-conceived notion of her South Asian identity. In this sense Ganesh's work as an artist from the diaspora is part of a framework that changes very slowly. She has often exhibited with queer artists of color in *Eyes of Time* 2014; *Body Utopia* 2015; *Tomorrow Never Happens* 2016; 'Read my Lips' Round Table on Queer abstraction 2016; *Fatal Love: Where are we now?* 2017, and experiences more freedom and complexity of interpretation within a queer or a queering framework. This sentiment is shared by Shah who thinks that the nation is a restrictive category to be grouped within and finds it more productive for their work to engage with other curatorial lenses such as queerness.³³⁴ Shah's own involvement with the global queer community was reinforced when they co-curated *Larzhish* with Natasha Mendonca in 2003–04 in Mumbai—a queer film festival dealing with queer issues from all over the world featuring filmmakers from queer networks across the globe.³³⁵ Shah often shows as part of

331 Mark Brown, "Queer British Art Show leads Tate 2017 Programme," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2016. Accessed on July 21, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/19/queer-british-art-show-leads-tate-2017-programme>.

332 Accessed on August 12, 2018. <https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13487/annie-sprinkle-and-beth-stephens>.

333 Interview with artist, 2014, Delhi.

334 Interview with artist, 2013, Goa.

335 It was supported by OLAVA and ICHRL and interspersed with performances and panel discussions on gender, sexuality and what it meant to be queer in India, with over

Queer festivals³³⁶ and participates in shows with other queer artists. Shah and Ganesh have shown together in 2006 at Thomas Erben Gallery New York and also at other group shows since. Identifying with the global queer community is a productive framework for both Ganesh and Shah and this statement can be further corroborated with some of the listed spaces where Shah's *Between the Waves* was exhibited, in the following discussion.

3.3 Shah and Queer Ecologies

Shah's *Between the Waves* (2012), a multimedia work was first exhibited at Documenta 13. A hugely collaborative exercise between performers, dancers, the camera people, sound designers, it marked a turn towards queer ecology in their practice. Created over a span of a year and a half with various funding supports including from an IFA grant, *Between the Waves* is a five-channel video installation with 12.1 layers of audio, in which Channel I spans across five chapters. Each chapter connects with corresponding poems in Channel V written by Minal Hajratwala who is also one of the main protagonists in the work. While these five chapters of Channel I play in a loop, there is also channel II playing continuously on loop, and it focuses on a dance performed by a group of figures³³⁷ at a landfill site, wearing customized outfits patterned with insects.

Right from the first chapter located at an Indus Valley site in Gujarat, landscape is pivotal to this work, the mangroves, the ocean and its fast-disappearing coral life, to man-made swimming pools and brimming landfills that populate the urban landscape, all converge to create an idiosyncratic story of creation and destruction within a parallel narrative of ecosexuality.

40 films shown from 17 countries including US and Australia, addressing themes including AIDS/HIV, queers and disability, queer and war/military/right wing/globalization, queer and religion, queer animations, queer experimental films/video, bisexuality and so on.

336 *Chingari Chumma* (In a Plain Brown Wrapper, Pornography, Art and Video. Gallery 2, SAIC, Chicago 2000; *Everywhere – LGBTQ Politics in Art*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Aliaga 2009; *Lesben Film Festival* Berlin; *Mix*, the 14th New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival New York 2001; *Queer* Zagreb Fm, Croatia 2004; *3rd I's Queer Eye*, SF International South Asian Film Festival, San Francisco 2010) *Sakhi Ri, What are you?* (BFI Flare: 28th LGBT Film Festival, London 2014) *There's a spider living between us* (Hetero Q.B. Museo Nacional de Arte Contemporanea, Museo do Chiado, Lisbon 2013; *Pink Screen Film Festival* Cinema Nova, Brussels 2009).

337 As clarified by the artist, parts of the work are slow-moving while others are not and the main features in this work are the jump cuts.

3.3.1 *Between the Waves*: The Fabular Narrative

The five fables are played in a sequence of a few minutes each, separated by images of unicorn seals from the Indus Valley. These pictographic seals are deemed to be the earliest known symbolic representations (5000–2000 BC) of this single horned animal and have been excavated from an Indus Valley archaeological site in Western India in 1967–68 (Fig. 69). Whether this designates a real or mythical animal remains unknown, just as the pictographic script of the civilization remains undeciphered. The first chapter in the fable is the lengthiest and the backbone of the circular fable, it features a daytime view of an Indus Valley site's barren landscape, two figures wearing the unicorn costume signal each other in morse code across an empty water reservoir (Fig. 70), a figure runs down steps going down to the water level at one end, suddenly the figures are standing next to each other, the next frames provide glimpses of them furtively touching, screened by boulders and rocks, sitting against the boulders, lying on the dry arid rocks and finally walking away—isolated figures merging into the rocky landscape sunset (Fig. 71).

The frames in the fable are interspersed with images of the white saltmarshes. The location of this first narrative at a site almost lost to humanity hems the subsequent chapters in the fable chronologically, and with this first site itself, Shah brings in ecology through history. Indus Valley excavations were found to be sites of exquisite planning and aesthetic architecture, with a unique water management system of fresh water reservoirs especially in areas where the average rainfall was scant and where some seasons sometimes would go without rain. The first part of this queer narrative, therefore, draws attention not only to forgotten and unexcavated histories but also to the precarities of nature that caused man to adapt his needs to the environment. It is precisely man's desire to control his environment that has led to so much environmental destruction as the subsequent narrative demonstrates. The next narrative features a muddy sea, a few unicorn costumed figures including the artist alternately lie against and entangle with each other on a debris filled sea beach (Fig. 72). It is a common fact that tons of waste and trash are dumped into the oceans on a daily basis along with oil, dirt, chemicals, effluents etc. and that these wash up on beaches and coastal areas. Of these, plastic debris forms about 60–90 percent and these plastics are further eaten by many forms of marine life ranging from bacterias to tortoises and whales. In this video—the debris surrounding the unicorn figures is typically that on a Mumbai beach—coconut shells, weeds, palm leaves, plastic waste—all of which serve as disturbing reminders of both the common man's neglect of his environment and of that by the civic/municipal authorities in an overburdened city. As the figures alternately splash in the water, their costumes are now partially composed of techno-trash. An image of turtles going into the water flashes



69



70



71

Fig. 69. Unicorn Seal Dholavira.
Fig. 70 & 71. Shah, Video Still, *Between the Waves*. Multi-channel Video Installation, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

past—another intervention by the artist—sea turtle populations have been drastically reduced worldwide through a number of human influences, including through the consumption of plastic trash. In India the Olive Ridley turtles visit the east coast every year between January and April to lay their eggs and the clip is reminiscent of that visit. In another clip, the unicorn-costumed figures walk, lie on the beach, then re-enter the water, brushing debris off each other, the sounds of the crashing waves combine with the views of the debris and the immersive sonic environment echoes within a disturbingly familiar landscape, drawing attention towards the growing vulnerability of our water resources. The next setting in a mangrove, gestures strongly towards eco-sexuality as roots grow out of a sparkling water-submerged earth and gloved hands lovingly paint twigs and create fresh dildonic headpieces. Elsewhere a few children play with white toy like creations, representing new life and regeneration as the costumed artist along with their companions, trawls the mangrove area in concentrated silence (Fig. 73), removing used plastic bags from the wet earth into a trash bag with a scythe like instrument.



72

Fig. 72 & 73.
Shah, Video
Still, *Between the
Waves*. Multi-
channel Video
Installation, 2012.
Courtesy the
artist, Project 88
Mumbai and
Barbara Gross
Galerie Munich.



73

Plastic is one of the most resource-depleting and ecologically devastating objects on the planet, it maintains its identity in all conditions. There is nowhere on earth that is plastic free. Apart from the effect of plasticizers on bodies and ecologies that cause enormous damage, plastics gathers in the environment and accumulate what surrounds them particularly absorbing organic pollutants, which add to their toxicity.³³⁸ Within this fable, the dark undergrowth echoes with birdlike noises and the overall impression is of darkness and growth and regeneration—a contradictory juxtaposing between resource depletion and nature’s regeneration.

Mangroves in tropical and sub-tropical regions serve as an interface between terrestrial fresh-water and marine eco systems and are a vital component to fight climate change. Sequestering up to 25.5 million tonnes of carbon per year

338 Heather Davis, “Life and Death in the Anthropocene,” *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 351.

mangroves provide essential organic carbon to the global oceans. It is estimated that 26 percent of mangrove forests have been degraded due to over-exploitation for fuel wood and timber production. In India 40 percent and over of mangrove areas on the west coast have been converted to agriculture and urban development. Given their rate of disappearance at approximately 1% a year it is estimated that these biologically rich resources may perhaps functionally disappear in another 100 years.³³⁹ Shah's filming transforms the mangrove space into one depicting growth and regeneration, perhaps a purely utopian exercise in the circumstances. The queer ecological overtones, the toxic plastic bags, the spontaneous play of children all come together in a narrative of synchronicity between the natural and the artificial. The environmental focus in this work now shifts to yet another extremely rich planetary resource, an extremely productive and biodiverse system, that of the "rainforests of the sea," or the coral reefs. These occupy less than one percent of the ocean floor, but harbor more than a quarter of all existing marine species from crustaceans, reptiles, seaweeds, bacteria, fungi, and more than 4000 species of fish. But tragically, coral reefs are endangered by various factors including by natural phenomena such as hurricanes as well as by local threats such as overfishing, destructive fishing techniques, coastal development, pollution, and careless tourism as well as the continuing global effects of climate change which include the rising temperatures of the seas and growing levels of CO₂ in the water.³⁴⁰ In the next chapter in this work the unicorn figures swimming in a pool carry an artificial coral look-alike object that resonates closely with Margaret and Christine Wertheim's *Crochet Coral Reef Toxic Seas Project*. The project was begun in 2005 in response to the devastation of the Great Barrier Reef and it simulates living reefs using the technique of crochet to mimic the curling crenelated forms of the reef organisms in yarn. Their artificial reef constructions are based on the fact that 'corals, kelps and other sea creatures are biological incarnations of *hyperbolic* geometry, an alternative to the usual *Euclidean* variety.'³⁴¹ In the pool, arms and legs entangle and break away in imitations of fish swarms, the figures' costumes are once again composed of electronic trash and one even has a computer mouse dangling from one of them. Movements in the water show an arm, a leg, a pubic area, spheric sounds mix

339 Beth A. Polidoro et al. "The Loss of Species: Mangrove Extinction Risk and Geographic Areas of Concern," *PLOS ONE* April 8, 2010.

340 Renee Cho, "Losing our Coral Reefs," *State of the Planet*, Earth Institute, Columbia University, June 13, 2011. Accessed on June 15, 2018. <http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2011/06/13/losing-our-coral-reefs/>.

341 Margeret Wertheim Science+Art Project, *Crochet Coral Reef*. Accessed on April 10, 2017. <https://www.margaretwertheim.com/crochet-coral-reef>.



74

Fig. 74 & 75.
Shah, Video
Still, *Between the
Waves*. Multi-
channel Video
Installation, 2012.
Courtesy the
artist, Project 88
Mumbai and
Barbara Gross
Galerie Munich.



75

with bubbles and gurgles. The juxtaposing of a coral reef look-alike in a man-made pool emphasizes the relationship between the natural and the artificial. In this particular clip, the anti-aesthetic once again surfaces in the glimpses of overweight and unwieldy hairy nude bodies and pendulous breasts (Fig. 74), and this uncaring nudity juxtaposes the complex relationship between the natural self and the highly idolized and aesthetically proportionate female figure that has been so idealized in art practices across the centuries. The final part of the fable is enacted on a high-rise apartment balcony with a view of the monsoon filled landscape in the city of Mumbai (Fig. 75). One of the two unicorn figures now wears a scuba mask—a grim reminder of the times to come when the air in the cities will be too polluted to be breathed freely. The artist and their companion indulge in forms of sexual foreplay with pomegranates and pomegranate seeds. The pomegranates reference the medieval tapestries called the Hunt of the Unicorn as mentioned in the caption for the work itself.

In another clip the headpiece becomes a prosthetic dildo imitating practices of lesbian cultures, close ups of labia, a tongue licking an eye almost in a sucking motion, connect with the primacy of labial touch and pleasure, tying in closely with

Irigaray's work, positioning women as sexual subjects with agency rather than sexual objects of male desire³⁴² there is no structure to the narrative, the whole is a jumble of sensations and touch, with the body as receptor and actor to internalize an affective experience. The play with the aesthetic is once again strong—with the nonchalant close-up of a hairy leg, of pendulous breasts, a dark pubic area. The kind of bodies on display here are not the normative thin body type associated with pornography, but abundant flesh that 'dares to differ,' with an uncaring nakedness that makes it even more challenging for the viewer through its difference.³⁴³

While these five chapters play in a loop, there is also second looped channel playing continuously, and it focuses on a very slow-moving dance performed by a group of figures wearing customized outfits patterned with cockroaches at a landfill site (Fig. 76), the costumes worn by the performers were created from up-cycled materials in collaboration with Eatell Gelebart and include all sorts of trash from the neighborhood, from video tapes to beer cans, figure tiptoes along a parapet, a pubescent insect rears its body out of the debris, signaling the existence of the many creatures that populate the landfill, this move of art from studio to landfill transforms the role of art into a more exploratory-partisan and political one. The landfill itself is one kind of archeological site of the future with its accumulation of refuse, landfills sometimes have structures built on top of them, and according to the artist, there were plans to build an amusement park on the top of this one.³⁴⁴ The largest landfill site in India is located at Deonar (Mumbai) many slum dwellings border this site and face innumerable health issues and some of its inhabitants also work with the segregation of trash, but even to access this trash they have to pay the municipal authorities. The looped second channel functions as an epilogue to the installation—the connections they make offers an interesting analogy to the significance of trash in human lives and its toxic ecology. Situating some nonsensical contemporary dance movements within the setting of the landfill is also a campy way to think about the futility of gestures, of sensemaking and recuperation in the age of the man-made climate change and the age of the anthropocene.

There are two other channels playing simultaneously, one displays a slowly burning crescent moon that has fallen to the earth, another, almost invisible

342 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

343 Nanna Heidenrich, "Tejal Shah: Between the Waves," in *Pink Labor on Golden Streets. Queer Art Practices*, eds. Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwätzler, Ruby Sircar et al. (New York/Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 56–67.

344 Facebook post. Accessed on April 21, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/TejalShahArtist/>.



Fig. 76. Shah, Video Still, *Between the Waves*. Multi-channel Video Installation, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

device types out a code with an unmistakable clicking sound which is a rip-off of an iPhone Morse code app. The Morse code signal (already decoded since the English characters appear simultaneously) is framed within the outline of a Rosetta stone alluding to translation, communication and decipherability. With these simultaneous multiple screens claiming attention the perceptual focus of the viewer widens to include the multiple screens and expand the field of information, drawing our attention towards multiple concerns, the contemporary environment, the problems of disappearing mangroves, the disposing of technological waste, ever-growing urban landfills and rapid urban expansions, language and its undecipherability; but most of all the collapsing distances between man and nature occurring through the cyclical nature of time. The complexities of the layers within this work create connections that emerge for further contemplation. As the narrative builds up with each fable, it draws the viewer up close and closer in its final narrative and the build up of sexual tension is palpable. Clearly and at least on the surface, some parts of this work veer towards post-pornography, a term made popular by Annie Sprinkle as part of her Post Porn Modernist Project,³⁴⁵ challenging certain feminist positions that were /are anti-pornography and going beyond a narrow view of feminism largely based on oppression and subordination of women as argued by Adrienne Rich for example, who states that,

345 For further details please see the artist's website. <http://anniesprinkle.org/projects/archived-projects/post-porn-modernist/>.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

... the most pernicious message relayed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to women and love it [...] But along with this message comes another, not always recognised; that enforced submission and the use of cruelty, if played out in heterosexual pairing is sexually 'normal' while sensuality between women, including erotic mutuality and respect is 'queer,' 'sick.'³⁴⁶

Shah admits that “porn is political... that anything we do is political, from the way we place the camera, the bodies we choose to show, the spaces, the ethics of communication and affects etc.”³⁴⁷ However, this layered and complex multiply work cannot be reduced merely to a discourse about gender and sexuality, the immersive quality of video takes away the symbolic dimension, making the bodies fully sensory and beyond words. The multi-layered complexity in each narrative goes far beyond corporeality towards Affect.

3.3.2 *Between the Waves* and Affect

The creative inspiration for the work stems from the understanding of the body as immersed in the world, always in process moving beyond nudity, sexual organs, fluids, penetrations and the like, towards a critical subversion of the norms of sexuality, the explication of an idea through Affect.

Segworth and Greg argue that Affect is

integral to a body's perceptual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.³⁴⁸

Affect places as much importance on emotions, feelings and intuition in the construction of subjectivity and experience. And among the Affective feelings of sensation in the materiality of the body is the sensation of Touch that plays a significant role in this work in the beating, pulsating bodies that connect with each other through its corporeality. Luce Irigaray claims that touch is part of all our

346 Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women, Sex and Sexuality (Summer 1980), 631–660.

347 Interview with artist 2014, Goa.

348 Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “Introduction,” *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–6.

sensory perceptions even though our culture has been so dominated by looking at.³⁴⁹ Barbara Becker states that,

touch indicates our bodily contact with the world, through which we are able to perceive an implicit sense of our world, a world which cannot be fully deciphered by language or consciousness but experienced through our senses and our body [...] as a responsiveness and resonance, touch is an open dialogue with the world which can never be made fully explicit or captured by reflection.³⁵⁰

And in *Between the Waves*, the bodily contact with the world overcomes the barrier of language towards the materiality of the body between dry marshy landscapes and sun-drenched bodies, damp bodies lying on debris couched beaches through affective touch.

3.3.3 Inspirations and Themes in *Between the Waves*

For Shah, literary references and quotations are an essential inspiration for their work, and the ideas and discourse around this entire work stem from multiple sources and theories: beginning with the writings of Beatrice Preciado and the *Countersexual Manifesto*, Preciado's *Contrasexual Manifesto* positions queer sexual practices against the hetero-normative order that rejected and excluded them. Following Haraway, Preciado argues that the key lies in understanding the body as crossed by technologies that shape corporeality and sexuality. The dildo then becomes the sexual cyborg from which we can read off our bodies and their possibilities of pleasure.³⁵¹ Haraway argues that any notion of identity based on a natural or essentialist category like race, class, ethnicity, gender is doomed to failure since all these categories are also human creations. She argues that the development of twentieth century information technology had made all of us cyborgs, and dichotomies between mind and body, animal-human, organism and machine, public-private, nature-culture, man-woman, primitive-civilized are

349 Luce Irigaray, "Perhaps cultivating touch can still save us," *SubStance* Vol. 40, No. 3, Issue 126, 2011, 138.

350 Barbara Becker, "Cyborgs, Agents and Transhumanists: Crossing Traditional borders of Body and identity in the Context of New Technology," *Leonardo* Vol. 33, No. 5 Eighth New York Digital Salon 2000, 364.

351 Julius Gavroche, "The Rebellion of Bodies: Beatriz Preciado," in *Autonomies*, November 6, 2012. Accessed on July 26, 2018. <http://autonomies.org/2012/11/the-rebellion-of-bodies-beatriz-preciado/>.

all in question ideologically.³⁵² “The idea of the cyborg is intended to engage in a form of politics that is more appropriate to an information society, while providing a critical analysis of webs of power that simultaneously delights in the ironies and complexities of transgression.” In this sense, there is a need to engage with the complexities of interrelated organisms that are biologically, technologically and culturally constituted,³⁵³ Shah’s engagement with this notion visibilizes itself even more strongly in the work that follows.

Shah also draws upon Trinh T. Min-ha’s definition of “the inappropriate/d other” and from the writings and practices of Alejandro Jodorowsky, Thich Nhat Han, Tim Stutgen, Bhanu Kapil among others.³⁵⁴ The ‘inappropriated other’ implies both someone whom you cannot appropriate and someone who is inappropriate, this inappropriatedness does not refer to a fixed location but one that is constantly changing with the specific circumstances of each person. The ‘inappropriat/ed other’ in specific contexts of the West’s Other or Man’s Other also takes into consideration, for example, the struggle of sexuality and is especially useful as a tool for gays and lesbians that society’s standards of normalcy have marginalized.³⁵⁵

It is not surprising that for this work Shah draws maximum inspiration from Rebecca Horn’s ideas and iconography. Horn, like other female artists of the 1970s, presented her body as an expressive force, layering it with sculptural extensions, restraints and enhancements. She embodied a noble woman mired in mythology and gender constraints in *Einhorn* which was exhibited at Documenta in 1972. The bondage aspect of the horn contraption and the restrictions on her movement speak to the limitations placed on women in general, whether in terms of clothing or of femininity.³⁵⁶ Horn likes her audience to collide with her work, she wants to unseat us and this is something Shah’s work does as well. Horn’s *Einhorn* figure communing with nature in a utopian space of clean air and open fields has now transformed into colored bodies queering endangered landscapes, conveying a message of global precarity, mutations and transformations linked to environmental change.

352 Donna Haraway, *The Cyborg Manifesto* first published in 1985 and also in many writings since, including *The Body Reader* eds. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, 2005, 82.

353 Nick Stevenson, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions* (Maidenhead England: Open University Press, 2003), 88.

354 Interview with Artist 2014, Goa.

355 Trinh T Minha, “Inappropriate/d Artificiality,” Talk with Maria Griznic June 2, 1998. Accessed on July 5, 2018. <http://trinhminh-ha.squarespace.com/inappropriated-artificiality/>.

356 Alex Kittle, “The Body Extensions of Rebecca Horn in Art, Film and Over-Enthusiasm,” February 11, 2014. Accessed on July 21, 2018. <http://alexkittle.com/2014/02/11/art-the-body-extensions-of-rebecca-horn/>.

3.3.4 Queer Ecologies

Reviewing *Between the Waves*, Tim Stuttgen writes:

The exoticist stereotype of India as a pure and natural world is troubled by the reality of both the artifice of what looks like computer waste and the actual problem of pollution. Shah *reconnects Indian bodies to a rural and mythical world*, these imaginaries of queer sexuality are located outside of the western/first world experience, non-white and non-metropolitan.³⁵⁷

What is this vision of India that Stuttgen is referring to as a pure and natural world? The exoticist stereotype references a ‘pure and natural’ India—the irony of that phrase is clear. It would be useful to remember here the contemporary climate crises affecting so many parts of the world, including India, and how capitalism and intense consumerism has played a key role in interfering with many other pure and natural worlds. This is exactly the critique that a work like this is making. The work transcends the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture in multiple ways, since the landfill is as much a natural habitat as is the sun-drenched hot dry excavation site, or the mangrove swamp or the monsoon filled high rise apartment balcony. In this era of the anthropocene, nature and man-made sometimes merge and fuse so closely together that the binary loses its meaning and Shah’s work highlights this. In their works, this understanding becomes a visceral viewing experience as they “denaturalize[s] nature and turn[s] wastelands into habitable environments.”³⁵⁸ Shah is creating multiple narratives in layers: the narrative featuring post-pornographic visuals at various junctures jars in its formal presentation, and the affective images convey a sense of discomfort to the viewer squarely located within the force field of heterosexual dynamics that this aesthetic completely transgresses. However, underlying these layers is a narrative of ecological precarity, an infinitely more disturbing narrative as signs of human intervention reveal the fragile nature of the earth’s eco-systems, its oceans, mangroves, coral reefs and endangered species. In the world created by Shah we see corals composed of trash, costumes created out of techno-trash, landfills becoming new sites of habitation. Through their work, Shah draws attention to the presence of hetero-normativity in the discourses of nature. The queering of areas like ecology implies that not only is gender

357 Tim Stuttgen, *Post-exotic Pornography or What’s Colour Got to Do with it? On the Problematics of Representation in Ethnic Pornography and a Few Interventions by Queer Feminists of Colour*, 2012.

358 Nanna Heidenrich, 56–67.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

a construct but nature too, is becoming an artificial construct as it intersects with technology. While sexuality and gender—so rooted within the body—still remain within Shah’s work, broader ideas from ecology, dichotomies between nature / culture also come into play.

A broad overview of this particular work’s travel and exhibition trajectory, not only demonstrates its immense and varied mobility in exhibitions, screenings and festivals, but also the contexts of its engagement and showings that range across an array of institutions and spaces.³⁵⁹ While it is fairly common for contemporary artworks to travel in this fashion, my recounting of this particular work’s travel is directly relevant to the work’s context itself and to point out how invisible it has been in India—the nation where it originated.³⁶⁰ This in itself is irrefutable evidence of the postnational space certain thematics practiced by the artists maybe located within.

359 After exhibiting at Documenta 13, *Between the Waves* had a stream of showings internationally. A spate of showings in 2013 began with their first solo in Germany with *Barbara Gross Galerie* in Munich in April 2013. Their representative gallery in Mumbai, *Project 88* displayed a poster from the same work during Frieze Art Fair in May the same year. The month of June saw *Between the Waves* screened at *Haus der Kulturen Welt* during the *Rencontres Internationales Festival of New Cinema and Contemporary Art* Berlin and at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve in July. In August the same year, the work was exhibited during ‘Landings’ *Sensing Grounds, Mangroves, Unauthentic Belonging, Extra-territoriality* at the Witte de Witte Centre for Contemporary Art Rotterdam and travelled overseas to New York for its US premier at Another Experiment by Women Film Festival (AXWFF) and it was screened during *Circuito Off* International Short Film Festival as part of *FII Rouge* at Venice where Shah was a jury member. The *Landfill* dance from the work was part of a group exhibition—which included other artists from India, Neha Choksi, Sonia Khurana and Sahej Rahel—in Chelsea New York next while the entire work showed at Belgrade at the 54th *October Salon* in the month of October. Censorship 2013 in *Move on Asia* exhibited the *Landfill* dance within Alternate Space Loop in Seoul. Once again in 2014, *Between the Waves* was on its way to Moscow in *The Color of Pomegranate* exhibition the Solyanka State Gallery in February and to Johannesburg and Tokyo in May 2014, in July it showed at the *Stockholm Pride Queer film Festival* and in October at *Havremagasinet* at Boden also in Sweden. It was part of their first European institutional solo at Cologne in September. In 2016, the work screened as part of *Unsuspending Disbelief* at the Logan Centre for the Arts Chicago and as part of *Tomorrow never happens* at the Samek Art Museum Bucknell University.

360 Notwithstanding this invisibility, it received a favorable review when it showed briefly. http://project88.in/press/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Deepika-Sorabjee-review_TAKE-Photography-Issue-12.pdf.

3.3.5 *Some Kind of Nature*

I will conclude the discussion on Shah's work with a quick look at a work that followed *Between the Waves* that moves even closer towards the interdependent relationships that exist between human beings and its natural surroundings. With *Some Kind of Nature*, a dual channel video installation created in 2013, Shah builds upon the focus on queer ecologies. In this work, an almost-mythical bird-like creature holds up crescent-shaped and round-disc mirrors that gleam in its hands and uses its proboscis as a means to gain sentience of the world around it. Shot in Goa at a petroglyph site that is 20,000–30,000 years old, the video installation speaks to the interspecies anxiety we are experiencing in the anthropocene age.³⁶¹ The lyrical quality of this work states these anxieties in an almost hauntingly poetical form. This is fiction of another kind—the fabular narrative of *Between the Waves* has receded even further in time. This cyborgian half-creature is trying to find out its own origins, visiting these rock drawings (Fig. 77), the petroglyphs, almost bringing back some message from the past.³⁶² The work is filmed almost entirely in black and white, with earth sounds, the slow-moving viscous slush (Fig. 78), and swaying cornfields in which a white clad figure signals with its crescent shaped mirror, in another clip the monstrous crocodile rock face drips with a milky substance. Bathed in a half light of uncanny shadows the monstrous creature invokes Greek myths of moon goddesses, inspiring a mysterious *unheimlich*-ness. With this work, Shah is exploring affective engagements and relationalities with the interspecies and interdependencies with the rocks, hills, trees, plants, the moon, valleys, lakes, rivers and streams that flow all around us. This profound and thoughtful engagement with the environment can be likened to an awakening of human consciousness towards the changing order of the physical world around us and the interconnectedness of nature and culture merge human and animal, earth and rock in a meditative way almost as an allegory to the era of the anthropocene. I am reminded of Donna Haraway who states that we live in the great age of carbon, everything that lives and crawls, dies, everything is in the rocks and under the rocks.³⁶³ Perhaps contemplative artworks such as these can serve as guides towards a spiritually

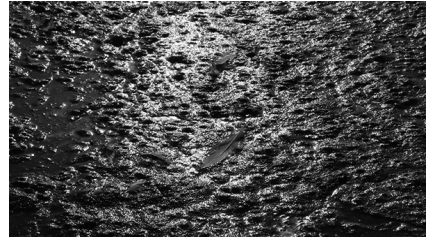
361 Artist website. Accessed on July 12, 2017. <http://tejalshah.in/project/some-kind-of-nature/>.

362 Interview with Artist 2014, Goa.

363 Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulhocene," *Art in the Anthropocene*, 259.



77



78

Fig. 77 & 78. Shah, Video Still, *Some Kind of Nature*, Multi-channel Video Installation, 2013. Courtesy the artist, Project 88 Mumbai and Barbara Gross Galerie Munich.

beneficial co-existence with nature that is being mercilessly exploited in this human-dominated geological era of the Anthropocene.

3.3.6 Ecology and the Anthropocene

Humanity it seems is heading towards a self-destruct mode and evidently sabotaging itself. Our era is increasingly being defined as the era of the Anthropocene—one in which human impact on the earth has become so forceful that we see shifting seas, changes in climate and the disappearance of innumerable species—placing humanity itself at the brink of extinction.³⁶⁴ The term Anthropocene was first popularized by Paul Crutzen in 2002, then taken up by the humanities—referencing an epoch in which humans are the dominant drivers of geologic change on the globe today. Swedish scholars Andreas Malm and Alf Hornberg highlight the manner in which the contemporary framing of the Anthropocene blunts the distinction between people and nations and collectives who drive the fossil fuel and those who do not. And these complex and diverse experiences can be lost when narrative is collapsed into a universalizing species paradigm.³⁶⁵ This is an important critique taking into account the trajectory of our world’s uneven development, the negative impact on the environment is strongly felt by the abused/developing countries and is further exacerbated by the question of national regulations dominated by capitalist aspirations. Anthropocene is a term that beckons environmental justice, asking what worlds we are intentionally and inadvertently creating and what worlds we are pre-closing while living within an increasingly diminished present—guided

364 Irmgaard Emmelheine, “Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene,” *Art in the Anthropocene*, 131.

365 Zoe Todd, “Indigenizing the Anthropocene,” *Art in the Anthropocene*, 242.

not only by climate change but also interconnections with the logics of politics and economies.³⁶⁶

The decade of the 1990s saw the emergence of ecology as a global concern with major conventions and treaties being signed to reverse the impact of industrialization.

The industrial waste generated by increased production has been loaded on ships and dumped in the oceans, killing many underwater organisms, depositing many harmful chemicals in the ocean, damaging the ecosystem. The use of plastic is a major concern by itself, it is being used for packaging, preserving goods to be exported—and it is one of the major toxic pollutants and a non-degradable product.³⁶⁷ While the impact of these ecological questions may differ from nation to nation, the concerns belong to all.

However, instead of a shared responsibility to safeguard humanity's ecological inheritance, the environment has seemed valuable largely from the perspective of economic needs and the cleaning up of the European and North American environments has come at the cost of transferring polluting industries and environmental responsibility to the global South which faces the largest negative future impacts of global warming—a highly unequal scenario.

In India itself, the ecological crises being faced range from corporate interests in mining over tribal lands and mega-dam projects to rivers polluted by chemical effluents and endangered mangroves among others. Rapid industrialization processes have led to a huge pressure on the environment with a massive demand on its energy, air and water resources. The capital-led growth in the country has created many big problems, from granting mining permits in protected forests and permits to build ports in protected coastal areas, the changes in conservation laws, and corporatization of agriculture has marginalized small farmers, bringing them to subsistence level and leading to farmer suicides, the groundwater crises in urban clusters like Delhi, the pressure on river systems through interlinking rivers that destroy natural flows are all part of the ecological crises that confronts India.³⁶⁸

In the last decades, artists in India have been closely engaging with local ecological concerns, through some thought-provoking responses and these

366 Heather Davis & Etienne Turpin, "Art and Death: Lives between the Fifth Assessment & the Sixth Extinction," *Art in the Anthropocene*, 7.

367 T.J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction," *Third Text* Vol. 27, Issue 1, 2013, 6.

368 Ravi Agarwal talking with T.J. Demos "The Art and Politics of Ecology in India: A roundtable with Ravi Agarwal and Sanjay Kak," *Third Text* Vol. 27, Issue 1, (January 2013), 151–161.

include Vivan Sundaram's *Trash* series (2009), Nalini Malani's *Mutants* (1996), Sheba Chachhi *Neelkanth Poison/Nectar* (2000–02), Atul Bhalla's *Alaap to the river* (2012), Ravi Agarwal's *The Sewage Pond's Memoir* (2011), and Neha Choksi's *Leaf Fall* among others.

Ravi Agarwal's works such as *After the Flood* (2011) and *Extinct* (2008), highlight serious issues such as decreasing groundwater. The extinction of an endangered species and ecological sustainability are discussed in works by Agarwal such as *Have you seen the flowers in the river?* (2007). Amar Kanwar's *Sovereign Forest* (2012), depicts specific territories that are in the process of being acquired by both government and corporations as proposed industrial sites in the mineral rich state of Orissa.³⁶⁹ Shah's attention to the age of the anthropocene in these two works joins that of many other artists working with environmental issues and the impact of climate change globally both in India and internationally, including Olafur Eliasson, Thomas Saraceno, Mary Mattingly, Agnes Denes, John Akomfrah, Mel Chin and Nur Tijan Firdaus.

Shah first exhibited *Some Kind Of Nature* at Sunaparanta Gallery at Goa in 2013—this was also the space where Chopra performed *Rouge* after returning from his residency at Berlin—the first time he used the lipstick as his drawing tool, which he would now increasingly employ in place of charcoal.

3.4 Chopra and Racial Histories

The post-colonial critique was at its peak with Chopra's performances as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, working at the interface between the postcolonial and global histories as he walked in spaces all over the world, Brussels, Oslo, Tokyo, Chicago, New York, and Venice, creating graphic landscapes almost as a green screen. In this concentrated silent activity, he was performing as an Indian explorer, traveler, reversing the exotic oriental myth of the colonial out to explore cultures far from his own. During his residency at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2011–12, Chopra moved towards more expressionistic, shorter performances that he termed as "exercises in transformation." Color became a direct marker of identity as he moved away from direct associations and allowed himself to snap out of his deeply personal relationship with his grandfather.³⁷⁰ Wanting to exist in a more

369 In the notebook created for Documenta 13, *100 notes, 100 Thoughts. No.012 Vandana Shiva* brings out the undemocratic use of land and discusses how multinational corporations are granted mining rights without any attention being paid to the plight of the tribal people living in these areas.

370 Interview with Artist 2013, Goa.

ambiguous space, thinking of the color white or black he experimented with shorter performances in two series titled *Broken White* and *Blackening*. These performances were sometimes collaborative as he shared conversations about lives and interactions with Dolanbay (ACT//ING, 2011), and Yingmei Duan (1+1, 2011). For his last performance at his studio space at Grüntaler, a predominantly Turkish neighborhood, he was costumed in suit and fez with kohl rimmed eyes (Fig. 79) as he erased all previous drawings in the studio and created a drawing of the Istanbul cityscape as viewed at night from the European side (Fig. 80), a merging of the Orient with the West. Chopra, placing himself squarely within the location (Berlin) and its histories almost erased any signs of ‘Indian-ness,’ focusing on color exclusively and yet, *blanc casse* or off-white was not only a ‘broken white,’ which he used to title the series, but could be translated in different ways, including an erasure of white-ness. It also referenced the Indian obsession with the fairness of the skin and a predilection with whiteness which can be evidenced by the size of the fairness creams industry.³⁷¹ In the series of performances titled *Blackening*, working with charcoal, he not only connected with racial passing but also with the Indian adage of infamy, the bringing of dishonor to one’s name and identity or ‘*munh kala karna*.’³⁷² Conceptualizing his performances around color allowed him to move away from his identity as *Yog Raj Chitrakar* which had partially been an ethnographic construct. The body was now a blank canvas itself, to inscribe upon, with limestone, charcoal and anonymous bodysuits. With his deliberate painting of himself as white or black (Fig. 81 & 82), he was drawing attention to the construction of colour and skin now became the marker to convey notions of alterity and passing.

With this shift towards color, some personas seemed to have been consigned to the past, the Victorian queen had been buried, (though at a later date, at the Singapore Biennale in 2014, ‘*Give me your blood and I will give you freedom*,’ Chopra did transform into an Indian queen, Jhansi—who shed her skin and spilled ‘blood’ seeking her freedom, the colonial gentleman would also surface in other avatars but only occasionally (*Coal on Cotton, Space Oddity*, 2013). At the end of his one-year Berlin residency, it was an anonymous persona that went to San Gimignano

371 The fairness creams industry continues to grow in India, according to a WHO report, skin lightening products occupy half of the country’s skin care market. Skin color is a key factor since birth, the desirability of fairness for Indian women as a stereotype can be evidenced in the matrimonial advertisements in newspapers. Coupled with caste, class and gender, color plays a significant role in reinforcing existing inequalities in India.

372 Artist interview Goa, 2013. The expression can be directly translated as ‘blackening of the face,’ the connection of the face being the marker of identity resonates with Chopra’s own performances in this phase that focused on color as a marker of identity.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity



79



80

Fig. 79 & 80. Chopra, *Blackening III*, Berlin 2012. Courtesy the artist.



81



82

Fig. 81 & 82. Chopra, *Blackening*, Berlin, 2012. Courtesy the artist.

and re-created himself into an Italian traveler/explorer, using early Renaissance artist Benozzo Gozzoli's archive as reference to plan this 99 hour performance.

Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1421–1497), an Italian Renaissance painter from Florence is well known for a series of murals in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi and collaborations with Lorenzo and Vittorio Ghiberti on the third bronze door of the Baptistery, Florence (1444), as well as his various collaborations with Fra Angelico. In 1464, Gozzoli received a commission from Fra Domenico Strambi to paint a cycle of frescoes for the main chapel of the Church of St. Augustine in San Gimignano. Escaping the plague in Florence, he moved to the hilltop town to carry out this considerable work, where he remained until 1467. Benozzo's personal style comprised of some specific qualities, namely his meticulousness in the painting of precious fabrics, focusing on the textile topologies and motifs, making them appear almost real.³⁷³ When Chopra created a view of the Tuscan landscape from atop a hill in the countryside (Fig. 83), and fashioned it into a cloak he was referencing not only the painter's autobiographical history but also his exceptional skill as he walked the streets of San Gimignano (Fig. 84),

373 "The Textiles by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Cavalcade of the Magi," Institute and Museum of the History of Science, Museo Galileo, Florence 2008. Accessed on July 20, 2018. <http://www.imss.fi.it/news/etessuti.html>.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity



83



84

Fig. 83 & 84. Chopra, *inside out*, San Gimignano, 2012. Courtesy the artist.

wearing the painted cloak as whiteface,³⁷⁴ referencing histories of racial passing. After the residency in Berlin, Chopra moved on to create his first performance as *La Perle Noire*.

3.4.1 *La Perle Noire*: La Marais

In this first performance in the persona of *La Perle Noire: La Marais Paris*, in April 2014, Chopra partially reinstated *Sir Raja*, the first persona he had created in 2007. The elite Raja whose death had been staged in 2007 was resurrected and transformed into an empowered persona as he absorbedly recreated his priceless Parisian treasure.

The site of the performance at a private gallery neighbored Le Marais, now home to many fashionable galleries, Le Marais had been a center for jewelry trade between the 16th and 18th centuries, where rich Parisians built their town houses. The drawing tool was now the red lipstick, tacky, fleshy—portraying associations between the masculine and the feminine, and the artificiality of the portrayal of femininity as a persona. He had introduced the lipstick as a drawing tool a month ago for the first time in his performance at *Rouge* in Goa in 2013 after returning from Berlin. In *Rouge* he had used almost a hundred lipsticks to draw on the walls of a small white room in the Sonaparanta Gallery in a 6-hour performance at the end of which the tiny room and Chopra himself was colored a bright red by the lipstick, suffused by the nearly nauseating, sweet and persistent odor of the lipstick in that tiny space. At Marais, the drawing tool resonated with the fashionable location. *Sir Raja IV* began by whitening himself (Fig. 85). He then began his performance, dressed in a white Indian style silk *kurta* and trousers with a white turban, he was not only dressed in pristine white, but also deliberately whiteface, recalling his experimental performances in Berlin. One of the tasks he had set himself during this performance was a tacky recreation of the famous Patiala Necklace, the original of which had gone missing from the Patiala royal treasury in 1948. After the diamond resurfaced at a Sotheby's auction and some remnants of the necklace

374 The term whiteface was first used in 1870, it has been coopted into performance to denote when a persona wears theatrical makeup to appear white but in comedic form. Marvin Macallister in *Whiting Up* (2011), defines whiteface as an extra-theatrical social performance in which people of African descent transfer supposed markers of whiteness to black bodies, including the appropriation of white-identified gestures, vocabulary, dialects, dress or social entitlements, and through it interrogating privileged representations of whiteness. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in Chopra's physical manifestations of whiteness relying on visual identifiers such as white face paint and blonde wigs.

were found at an antique shop in London, Cartier recreated the necklace with replicas, and it was displayed as part of various exhibitions, including *Maharajah: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* (Victoria & Albert Museum) in Chicago and San Francisco in 2011–2012 and later at the “Cartier: Le Style et L’Histoire” exhibition at the Grand Palais in 2013. The necklace has a fascinating history worth a recap, in 1925, Bhupinder Singh, then Maharaja of the State of Patiala, came to Paris with a collection of gems and asked the jeweler Cartier to create an exceptional necklace, combining traditional forms and Art Deco design. The result was the “Patiala Necklace,” created with a staggering 2,930 diamonds weighing over a thousand carats, enhanced by Burmese rubies, this commission played an important role in enhancing Cartier’s image worldwide. This gesture of a reverse form of colonialism resonated with the Maharaja’s own history as an Indian prince and rebel.³⁷⁵ Chopra as *Sir Raja* impersonated the persona of the Maharaja as a defiant aristocrat celebrating his pomp and wealth as he transformed into a demonic being, a monster transgressing the role of the colonized. As he alternately worked on his version of the necklace (Fig. 86 & 87) and painted on the gallery walls—the whorled drawings in red lipstick created a ‘fantasy of a sea of blood.’

Absorbedly embellishing his white *kurta*/long shirt with fake pearls and sequins, he was a spectacle of deep concentration and the audience trickling into the performance space watched raptly, inspired by his deep sense of engagement with his activity. Chopra went on studiously with this routine, never slackening even when alone, eating when hungry, taking smoking breaks framed against the gallery windows, occasionally donning a blonde wig. The cleaning routine occurred on the second day when *Sir Raja* donned his newly embellished *kurta*, but this was only an interlude. *Sir Raja* continued with his painting activity, once again the ‘sea of red’ overtook the royal persona. *Sir Raja* posing at the end of his 55-hour performance, was now himself bathed in red (Fig. 88). This ‘sea of red’ Chopra created could have many connotations, the most obvious one being that of the violent history of British power and colonialism in India and the role played by the Indian royals as collaborators to help sustain and extend that power or in some cases, thwart it. The creation of the ‘sea of red’ through employing an object of feminine use could also linked to the effeminate character of Indian royalty in cases where they believed in and were convinced of their own empty empowerment against British rule. In this performance, Chopra also introduced an element of kitsch—those plastic beads and sequins that he employed to embellish his *kurta* were the sort of mass-produced objects that

375 Among his various rebellious acts had been the creation of the township of Chail, the Maharajah, barred from entering British Clubs in Simla, had established his own summer resort at Chail, a town 45 km from Simla and imposed a similar ban on the British.



85



86



87



88

Fig. 85–88. Chopra, *La Perle Noire : Le Marais*, Paris, 2014. Courtesy the artist.

flood the Indian bazaar and are used to create cheap artificial jewelry and in craftwork. Their use further emphasized the artificiality of the royal persona as a construct, as a reminder that Sir Raja had always been a full-blown caricature of an Indian royal, pretending to be something he was not.

From referencing the history of Le Marais and its connections with Indian royalty, Chopra moved away from postcolonial identities and became Other himself, as *La Perla Negra* in his next performance in 2016 in Cuba. The references now enlarged to include not only Cuban history but also histories of gender and racial passing.

3.4.2 La Bienel de la Habana: *La Perle Negra*

The title of this 60-hour performance during the *La Bienel de la Habana* in 2015, was a tribute to exceptionally talented people of color like Pele and Josephine Baker as well as Captain Jack Black's ship, the *Black Pearl*. An important shift had begun to occur in Chopra's performances post his Berlin residency, the postcolonial masquerade of stereotypes had been replaced, the persona now assumed drag costume at the beginning of the performance itself and was no

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity

89



90

91



92

Fig. 89–92. Chopra, *La Perle Negra* : Plaza de Armas, Havana, 2015. Courtesy the artist.

longer merely costumed in drag. The persona here for the entire duration of the performance was that of a woman dressed in a white dress, lace and pearls in the throat and the ears, patterned lace stockings and gloves (Fig. 89). This historically embedded performance referenced the island's history directly as he closed himself off in a cage for the entire duration of the performance, calling attention to other contemporary viewing practices associated with putting non-whites on display for their colonizers in the style of the Amerindians performance by Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco first performed in 1996. Carrying forward the history of the colonization of Cuba, Chopra remained imprisoned in the cage at the center of Plaza de Armas for 60 hours, making drawings of the vista through the bars of the cage (Fig. 90). The drawing tool was once again a signifier of violence, but this time it was red ink rather than lipstick. Often during this performance, Chopra would remove the wig and highlight the campy impersonation (Fig. 91). On the third day of his performance he filed open the bars of his cage and exited as whiteface in a sailor's attire with a melancholy air (Fig. 92). His performance at the Havana Biennial in Cuba not only reflected on Cuba's role as a gateway for the Spanish people to the rest of the American colonies, but also on its status akin to a bird in a cage where embargos both isolated and protected it from the rest of the world from a geographical, cultural and political perspective. As reiterated earlier, Chopra's persona of *La Perle Noire* had emerged after a successive series of experimental performances

related to color and identity, whereas as *Yog Raj Chitrakar*, with his emphasis on costuming, dressing, and undressing, Chopra had foregrounded its performative aspect, its deliberate construction of identity. Now there was a perceptible shift post 2012. He had retained the post-colonial construct at Marais but with Havana and the next performance at Montreal in 2015, the construction of identity moved away from the post-colonial masquerading body itself. He was no longer distancing himself from the personas he was enacting through the masquerade of costuming, rather immersing and totally transforming himself in each performance and playing with the discourse of otherness itself as he invoked the persona of the foreigner, the Other.

3.4.3 Transgender Performativity and *La Perle Noire*

As *La Perle Noire Jarry Park* in Montreal in 2015, Chopra went beyond ambiguity and adopted the persona of an anonymous Other—histories, national histories were in the past. The entire 52-hour performance was enacted with him dressed as a woman in a red dress wearing a short boyish wig. Chopra cycled with his bicycle caravan (Fig. 93) to the octagonal gazebo in Jarry Park, unloaded and displayed the blank canvases and began to execute his landscape drawing, inhabiting and overnighting within the same space. Chopra occasionally removed his wig, mixing sex role referents within the more visibly sanatorial system—‘camping’ with his masculine self—making an oppositional play between ‘appearance’ which was female, and ‘reality’ or ‘essence’ which was male, blurring the gender distinction further³⁷⁶ (Fig. 94). On the last day of his performance, he removed the drawings and carried the folded canvas bags to the gallery in his bike caravan. His final costume change into a stylish hipster male was enacted in full view, emphasizing the slippage, the in-betweenness of stereotypes, facing the busy street through the glass windows of the gallery he donned a tight dark trouser with a white shirt, matching blazer and a wig with curls following Bob Dylan’s iconic style (Fig. 95). Posing against the completed drawings he made exaggerated swaggering movements as he exited the gallery. This performance marked some major shifts as he not only reversed the ritual dress sequence but also completed the process of becoming ‘Other.’ There were no references to located histories or historical personas, the woman in the red dress was an anonymous persona who could be living anywhere on the globe.

376 Esther Newton, “Role Models,” *CampGrounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 42.

3 The Post-National—Transcending Identity



93



94



95

Fig. 93-95.
Chopra, *La Perle Noir* : Jarry Park,
Montreal 2015.
Courtesy the
artist.

No history or any form of identification tied her to the specific site, clearly the critiques in the performance now gestured towards more generalized global histories.

3.4.4 Hospitality towards the Stranger

What is clearly post-national about Chopra's work is his easy acceptance of the history of the sites that he inhabits across the globe, and his inclusion of aspects of those histories without the need to connect them with his own point of origin. Rather, Chopra not only formulates his individual performances around local histories but also transforms his own self to become part of those histories. When he dons the persona of a Turkish gentleman with kohl-lined eyes and fez cap for example, he is making the exotic-ness visible. Chopra is an artist who is against the discourse of other-ness—as he performs in sites around the world, he assumes the right to talk about histories of specific local sites and connects with the idea of hospitality towards the stranger. Chopra, with his ability to become totally site-specific is not interested in history as something that is linear but something that is more ambiguous and amoebic in shape—open to interpretation—as opposed to something that is dogmatic.³⁷⁷ Chopra's work in a certain sense, disrupts the continuous history of a place even as it locates the body in a place and time, while simultaneously dealing with the larger issues that the developments of a global economy and geopolitical readjustments have made increasingly urgent, like migration and mobility.

As a stranger in multiple sites and locations, Chopra is the “foreigner” that demands unconditional hospitality, following Derrida, who discusses the logic inherent in the ethics of hospitality in direct terms linked to the hostility towards immigrant populations in Europe, he states that hospitality can be viewed as a double imperative. On the one hand there “is the law of unlimited hospitality that ordains the unconditional reception of the other,” without conditions and restrictions and on the other hand there are conditional laws which establish a right and duty of that hospitality through which these rights can function. The foreigner therefore has rights with certain obligations and hospitality remains conditional. In the act of hospitality, the guest and the host are mutually entangled [...] The foreigner occupies an integral space in the city and is an essential part because he or she provides that to which citizens could compare

377 Nikhil Chopra, talk at Kochi Muziris. Accessed on July 29, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZm1nIqSktg>.

themselves.³⁷⁸ In order to understand Chopra's acceptance into spaces, often public spaces, the latter phrase can provide some productive insights. The site or spaces for Chopra as the foreigner are often not a matter of choice, as he usually gets invited and his productions are partially choreographed for those spaces and yet when Chopra walks through cities and spaces oftentimes as a *flâneur* or trickster, a clown-like persona walking the streets of San Gimignano or an anonymous, androgynous persona bearing no mark of local histories in Jarry Park, he occupies that integral space in the city within a relationship of reciprocity often providing residents a peek into a collective public memory that is their own. Performing in a museum space requires a different framework as opposed to a city or theatre space and the terms of engagement with the audience maybe limited with the institutions initiating the performance guidelines in keeping with the performance site itself. Whichever the format or forum, Chopra's performances embed him within the sites and histories he inhabits and it is through his performances that he responds to those histories and initiates or contributes to the ongoing dialogue (*Inside Out* San Gimignano on Benozzo Gozzoli, whose work has been garnering a fair amount of interest in recent exhibitions) or in some cases, dialogues (*La Perla Negra* Havana), that need to be brought into discourse. With Chopra, the act of being in the world is also being 'of' the world as he engages with the notions of identity through his variously marked bodies and personas.

Commenting on the immediate gratification that the genre of performance art expresses, Chopra clarifies that he is not interested in the Indian, European or American experience, rather in human experience and the threads that bind humanity together—hunger, thirst, beauty, pain, passion, love, hatred, fatigue or vulnerability—threads that connect across nationality, religion and without the division that the world is divided into,³⁷⁹ blurring lines and boundaries to find a place we all have in common. Whereas all political discourse is about maintaining identity, invoking historical claims, Chopra through his focus on nomadic site-specific work, claims instead that the world is made of migrations, mobility and conviviality.

378 Anne Dufuormantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond in *Of Hospitality* eds. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries trans. Richard Bowlby (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1–30.

379 Aasheesh Sharma, "Nikhil Chopra: The Chameleon-like Performance Artist," in *The Hindustan Times*, June 26, 2016. Accessed on July 28, 2018. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/nikhil-chopra-the-chameleon-like-performance-artist/story-1lrFf2ee12ThRarYDW7L0K.html>.

How do ideas of being in the world engage the cosmopolitan artist with race as an important signifier of identity?

3.4.5 The Cosmopolitan Artist and Racial Homogeneity

Hall argues that race works like a language, as a floating signifier of making meaning, there is always a constitutive outside on whose existence the identity of race depends.³⁸⁰ Racism exists within the unconscious structure of our relationship with others and manifests itself in our resistance to difference, and Stuart Hall, observes that “Racism is a structure of discourse and representation that tries to expel the Other symbolically,” and that it is only through the Other that one can identify oneself,³⁸¹ he is gesturing towards this resistance to difference.

Discussing the importance of possessing a cosmopolitan imagination as a way to deal with alterity Meskimmon (2010) suggests that art is one of the most important sites where we can develop our understanding and relationship with others, actualize cosmopolitan imagination that can enable us to open to change, transform and lead us to develop alterity. She defines a cosmopolitan artist as one “embedded in the world, able to imagine people and things beyond their immediate experience and [have] having...the ability to respond to very different spaces, meanings and others.”³⁸² This commitment to diversity and mobility beyond fixed geo-political borders resonates with Papastergiadis’s engagement with cosmopolitanism through his study of the artist collective Stalker and their exploration of the shifting form of conviviality in differing contexts and interactions. Papastergiadis observes that their practice is based simply on the art of mediation and is to a certain extent, an invitation for different people to come together and is “driven by a desire to gain a glimpse in a cosmopolitan community that is always in the process of becoming.”³⁸³

With the coming together of different people, dealing with alterity, a question to consider would be whether we have been able to transcend notions of

380 Stuart Hall, “Race: The Floating Signifier,” Transcript, Media Education Foundation 1997.

381 Stuart Hall, “Ethnicity, Identity and Difference,” *Radical America*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1991), 16.

382 Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2010), 8.

383 Papastergiadis, “Glimpses of Cosmopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2007, 149.

color in certain ways. Race has always been one of the major concepts to organize the classificatory systems of difference. While artists such as Kara Walker, Fred Wilson, Chris Ofili, Robert Mapplethorpe, Glenn Ligon, Steve McQueen, Gomez-Pena, Adrien Piper and Lyle Ashton Harris for example, have engaged directly with the complexities of black cultural identity, in India, ideas around ethnic stereotyping during the colonial period formed the base for a photo-documentary series created by Pushpamala N. (*The Ethnography Series: Native Women of South India, Manners & Customs 2002–2004*).

In their works, all the three artists in this study deeply engage with the notion of color. Ganesh, growing up as a person of color in the United States, where there is no neutral ground to stand on when it comes to identity, creates fictional narratives of fantasy empowering her characters empathetically with some form of agency in order to critique the racist underpinnings and anthropological bias that continues to dog contemporary visual cultures in mass media representations in the west.³⁸⁴ Chopra ironically mocks the legibility of identity through notions of blackness and white-ness to critique racial stereotypes.

In fact, for all three artists, color has been an important marker, for Ganesh and Shah it further resonates with the arguments of Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldua and Adrienne Rich who suggest that possibilities for communication and solidarity among women across the globe should be addressed and forged with respect to understanding the differences between them. The construction of gender, they state, is marked by differences *between* cultures and differences *within* cultures and Shah's centering of queer ecologies on colored cyborgian creatures aggressively engaging with post-pornographic acts, highlights this difference. Here I would like to cite Munoz's intervention and regarding race, Munoz observes that when reading the work of an artist of color, queer white theorists hardly factor in questions of race, the field of queer theory he says, is where a scholar of color can be frozen by an avalanche of snow, and the works of queer feminists, theorists/activists such as Lorde, Barbara Smith, Anzaldua and Moraga, is hardly engaged with critically, rather "adored from a distance," and he adds that a majority of publications on queer theory continue "to treat race as an addendum."³⁸⁵

Considering the pace at which change is being affected, is it even possible to think of a post-Black world? The notion that art produced by white artists

384 Erica Cardwell, "Empathy, Fantasy and the Power of Protest: A Conversation with Chitra Ganesh," October 30, 2015. Accessed on June 25, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/249897/empathy-fantasy-and-the-power-of-protest-a-conversation-with-chitra-ganesh>.

385 Jose Esteban Munoz, *Performing Disidentifications*, 1999, 11.

(regardless of medium or conceptual intent) is somehow *not* inherently political or concerned with whiteness is more than a bit absurd. Art is always political and there is no neutral ground on which to stand when it comes to identity. The challenge is to envision the world as we experience it and resist the urge to always create fantasies of racial homogeneity.³⁸⁶

One space that does allow some form of democracy is the virtual and this space has become closely aligned with postnational perceptions of identity. It has often been emphasized in writings on globalization that the one phenomenon that is central to this de-territorialisation is our increasing routine dependence on electronic media and communication technologies.³⁸⁷ With this dependence and ease of sharing the everyday, often the virtual seems to overtake the real—mass medias, online newspapers, social networking sites, blogs, chats and message boards—all of these have aided a more democratic participation within groups and communities. The digital space is also considered as a space of great equality, a ‘seamless space where we can all coexist and be treated equally, one that nevertheless respects and even protects cultural and historical differences.’³⁸⁸ And this is the next area of focus in the move away from the nation, these social networking sites are composed of friends, colleagues, art audiences for these artists, but these do not include online networks and communities that would imply a different set of affiliations between strangers.

3.5 Social Medias and Networks

While ongoing art events like the India Art Fair (previously known as the India Art Summit founded in 2008), the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (founded in 2012) and an increased number of gallery exhibitions on international art, have played a significant role in integrating Indian art and artists with the global art world—it is the virtual social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram (and Vimeo) that have now come to being regarded as essential spaces for both emerging and established artists to share ideas and information about their work with the larger community of artists and other actors in the artworld. Within these technologically generated spaces, communities are being created without

386 Alicia Eler, “The Queer Art that helped to Define Post-Blackness,” *Hyperallergic*, March 1, 2017. Accessed on May 30, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/361646/the-queer-art-that-helped-define-post-blackness/>.

387 Jon Tomlinson, “Cultural Globalisation,” in *Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. George Ritzer (MA/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 360–371.

388 Catherine Barnard, “Bodies and Digital Utopia,” in *Utopias*, 211.

any geographical proximities of their members and these virtual communities have surpassed the traditional forms of community and identity.

As platforms of sharing, social media play a role in shaping the ways contemporary art is shared. The ease of instant visuals made available through the immediacy of their posting adds a radical cutting edge to the sharing process and the integration of disparate locations into common platforms and formats makes nations and geographical national locations quite insignificant, allowing a continuous articulation and participation in global/local discourses around issues. Just as online networks become spaces to disseminate ideas stemming from and feeding into artists' works, their own facebook posts often provide an overview of the circulation histories of artworks and also the contexts within which the works are shown.

In September of 2014, Shah changed the personal pronouns they use reflected in their revised bio which was released on their Facebook page and website, officially making a shift from she/her to they/them "as an experiment and expression of retirement from gender conformity." They have come out as ecosexual, thinking of themselves "as some kind of artist working on some kind of nature." Sometimes the posting of an interview with the artist on their social network facilitates a deeper understanding of the discourse surrounding the artwork: for example, Shah's bookmarking of the *Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries* (one of the inspirations guiding the engagement with the unicorn figure for *Between the Waves*), or their post of an interview about the *Landfill Dance* (Channel II—*Between the Waves*, 2012), where they discuss its connections with the Anthropocene. Through their posts Shah not only informs their networks but also communicates their views on larger issues in a global context, such as the post in August 2015, bookmarking the 'Letter for Palestine' campaign on the academic and cultural boycott of Israel at the Venice Biennale.³⁸⁹ But perhaps more than anything else, these posts obliterate the distance between an artist and his/her/their publics virtually—art is no longer just an artistic imaginary available to the museum or festival goer, but it enters the domain of the real world and real people—revisiting ideas of audience participation in the erstwhile haloed domains of a virtually accessible art world.

The posts of Ganesh, on the other hand, as a South Asian-American artist living in a multi-cultural America, follow a different trajectory and are committed to resisting racial injustice with her African-American peers, as she navigates the worlds of art and activism. Some of the posts provide information about posters in the Metro created for the #ONEBrooklynCommunity services,

389 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/TejalShahArtist>.

of supporting Black activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism. In a post in 2016, she critiques the presence of Islamophobic feminism at Creative Time, a public arts organization based out of New York committed to presenting contemporary art in an open letter, sweepingly saying that,

This problem will not be solved by inviting Muslim feminist groups to speak next year, or by bringing on board a series of ‘native informants,’ as outside consultants [...] rather what is required is the decolonization of the entire staffing system of Creative Time and all such arts organisations based in Europe and north America...³⁹⁰

In yet another post she comments on the deliberate absences of othered voices in a hegemonic white centered art world,

What remains to be seen is whether those in the contemporary art world(s) with privilege, visibility, and decision-making power will be able to connect their shock and critique of the current state of affairs, of the prominence of proto-fascist, Islamophobic, and racist ideologies, with an ongoing series of absences and erasures—both discursive and representational—of brown, black, immigrant, disabled, dissenting, and other othered voices—from museum shows, anthologies, symposia, executive staff, boards, and trustees.

For example, next time you encounter an opening/gala/meeting/propaganda-making party/birthday/exhibition/group critique/feminist event, count the number of brown people in the room. Is everyone able-bodied? What about the queers? How did this come to be and why? Were you the only person of color in the room? Or one of three? What could be done to change this?³⁹¹

Speaking up for the courage, resistance and activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism, she says,

ALL immigrant communities/of color have gained in countless ways from the courage, resistance and activism within African American communities to challenge anti-black violence and racism... the Immigration Act of 1965 took down racial quotas and allowed a new generation of Asians to enter the US – including my own parents. In effect, Black activists had endured hoses, beating and torture for our right to be legal as well.³⁹²

390 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=chitra%20ganesh%20creative%20time>.

391 Facebook posts. Accessed on October 12, 2018. <https://www.artforum/slant/chitra-ganesh-on-the-election.658259>.

392 Facebook post.

Clearly hers is an embedded and located voice that engages with the American nation's politics. But not only with the nation, her concerns also extend to the impact this has globally, South Asian disappearances after 9/11 (*Index of the Disappeared*) are as much a concern as the CIA black sites in Afghanistan (*Black Sites 1 The Seen Unseen* 2016), that have been obliterated from satellite views. And those concerns also expanded to resonate with the larger virtual networks that voiced resistance to Modi's visit to the US in 2014.³⁹³

For both Shah and Ganesh as activist artists engaging with global political issues, critiquing racial injustice (Ganesh *Index of the Disappeared Ongoing*), and secular democracy (Shah *I love my India* 2010), these networking platforms serve to initiate conversations.

Chopra's posts, in contrast to those of Shah and Ganesh, offer comprehensive information about the HH art space in Goa with its ongoing residencies and performances.³⁹⁴ Chopra's Facebook site operates primarily as a social networking site, dialoguing with his connections and expanding his networks and participations within the art community, a lot of the posts are related to art related events happening in Goa itself, such as the Serendipity Art Festival in 2016, in which HH Art Spaces curated a section titled *Lucid Sleep* with Italian performance artist Virginia Zanetti. This post simultaneously draws on the convergences between the performance itself (new age music) and its contemporary contexts (mass industrial production).

TOMORROW! 16/10/16 12–10 pm. I am performing at Galleria Continua, Le Moulin.

DRUM SOLO AT THE MILL

Confined to a gallery space at Le Moulin, in a building that was once a paper mill, Nikhil will play the drums and make large drawings in a persona resembling a Punk/New Wave drummer. The presence of this persona will seek to evoke the pitfalls of industrialization and mass production, while struggling to find beauty and harmony in expression.

These sites for Ganesh become via medias to build some forms of coalitions with the progressive forces in society and engaging in awareness-raising, to spread an alternative message of solidarities world-wide. The dialogic relationship that all

393 Accessed on September 5, 2018. <https://diasporasaysnotomodi.tumblr.com/?fbclid=IwAR29so9IffPON8uMo7iyaDLHMQd5lDwWL1PZwmdAxYjKwf-jJDpwhREtSiM>.

394 Facebook post. Accessed on March 5, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/nikhil.chopra.798>.

three artists maintain reinforce their global presence. Clearly, with social medias the experience of being in a specific place and responding to common concerns have changed so much that the idea of representing a local place or reacting to local issues can now no longer be isolated from global concerns.

Transnational dialogues and global debates have assumed relevance to local practices and are organically felt. Concerns from across the globe, such as democracy, human and queer rights, ecology and the experience of living in an increasingly diminished and toxic world are increasingly becoming common to all. Yet these concerns flow directly through the body that continues to be the index of our experience, it lies between material things and immaterial consciousness. While on the one hand, in communicating with the world via technology and media, the body's concrete material presence is resisted, on the other, the body's material and corporeal presence continues to remain central to all experience. And this dialectical relationship has been at work in the set of works that have been discussed in this chapter.

3.5.1 A Space in Common

Papastergiadis comments on how the fragmentation of social structures and norms and complex processes for re-aligning the self with the world have created new conceptions of solidarity and transnational forms of social consciousness, noting that cosmopolitanism is not only pushed forward by the great transformation of globalization but that it lives within transnational networks and on local streets. He suggests that a new perspective is required that combines a theoretical understanding of global change and a capacity to observe the micro-connections that occur in specific places and points out that artists take an active role in the mediation of the emergence of cosmopolitanism in an act of putting together different sets of interests,³⁹⁵ Mosquera also contends that, "Intercultural involvement consists not only of accepting the Other in an attempt to understand him or her and to enrich myself with his or her diversity. It also implies that the Other does the same with me, problematizing my self-awareness,"³⁹⁶ and these arguments can be linked to the direction that the art practices of the artists in this study are moving towards.

395 Papastergiadis, "Glimpses of Comopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art," *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (1), 141 & 150.

396 Gerardo Mosquera, "Marco Polo Syndrome," *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, eds. Rasheed Araeen & Sean Cubitt, 2002, 271–272.

This search for a 'space in common' has become one of the defining features of contemporary art practice in this period of globalization. And this space is also where the work of all these three artists situates itself. With diverse backgrounds, diverse places and diverse histories there is a place where histories interject and the mining of these spaces becomes an important frame for analyzing their work. The utopian quality of their desire therefore allows a fruitful transition into a post-national framework within which all the three artists are working.

With this set of works the shift away from the nation and national critiques becomes clear. Chopra's personas merge with all period identities to 'become' others themselves. Shah's Other is now monstrously uncanny, moving around in a half-light with its proboscis, a post-human creature of the netherworld. The uncontainable within is now visible. Ganesh's female figures now no longer engage with masquerades around social identity and critiques rooted in an Indian identity, they are now shape-shifters, time travelers whose fantasies are cosmic. With Riviere, masquerade was about knowing the rules and playing a social role but this masquerade has gone beyond this role play—the artists in this study perform a deeper visceral masquerade of a total transformation of self.

There is no transparent subject post-deconstruction, since every identity is now a masquerade. Shah's earlier works began with critiquing gender masquerade and now go beyond that to state that trans drag is acceptable. Chopra's performances masquerade with historical critique, show transformational change as *La Perle Noire*, he is behaving naturally as a drag queen and rather than distancing himself from that persona, he immerses himself in the masquerade to complete the transformation.

The queering takes place formally and aesthetically. The ideological idea of race functions as a social symbol, as each of these artists captures something that seeps through the cracks of these simplifications and stereotypes. All three confront the power of the stereotype to reshape their worlds, with their capacity to stick their fingers into the wound. Often artists—as Shah in her earlier works and Ganesh all throughout—are quick to reveal the extent to which violence and hate structures our psyche. As they move beyond castration fears and fetish fantasies, opening themselves up to global influences and concerns, they position themselves to get past symbolic orders like the nation, caste and gender. In the process, they become part of global movements and concerns—ecology, sexuality, race and alterity that are no longer solely national concerns.

Operating at the intersection of sexuality and sex, they confront the carnal organic quality of the body, and through it, the affect-ness of desire. Employing affect allows them to break taboos and move beyond a national discourse that dismisses discussions around sexuality. It is within the force-field of the affective domain that notions of the national are being broken down. In the work of

Shah who invokes the organic, animal quality of pornography with a vengeance through the explicit-ness of the acts on display with an immersive genre such as video, Ganesh's re-configurations of word and text critique national middle-class sensibilities transforming into an affective cosmic body that imagines apocalyptic scenarios. When Chopra shaves off his heavily masculine growth of body hair in full display during his performance to don the civilized persona of a gentleman or removes his blond wig to reveal his shaved scalp, he contradicts the presence of sexual masculinity in the excess of desire through Affect. The queer body with Ganesh gestures towards the future through the tropes of science fiction and fantasy, in Shah's work it is transanimal as it moves towards the anthropocene, no longer gendered, defying classification. Chopra moves away from all stable referents as he keeps slipping between the cracks of gender, white-ness and black-ness.