Image vs. text:
Aesthetical operations and ethical–political spectatorial production
in Amar Kanwar's *A Season Outside* (1997)
and *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007)

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For Tyra and her beloved grandparents

Abstract

The thesis puts forward close readings of Amar Kanwar's essay film *A Season Outside* (1997) and the multiscreen installation *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007) to explore how an ethical-political spectatorial mode is produced in the two documentary-based artworks. The applied understanding of an ethical-political mode is derived from what Okwui Enwezor claims is a new articulation of the ethical-political in contemporary art, located in the encounter between the artwork and the spectator as an increased sensitivity to the other, related to human rights, biopolitics and the consequences of globalization.

The readings of the two artworks suggest that a particular "community of sense" is produced by means of an allegorical layering of polysemic narrative structures that interlace different texts of communalism, colonialism and nationalism from the Indian subcontinent. As evoked by Jacques Rancière, a "community of sense" designates the sensory fabric that binds human beings together, thinking politics as a sharing of the sensible. The narrative techniques also draw on features of Indian narrative traditions incorporated into new art history in India, and aspects of storytelling, as viewed by Walter Benjamin. The readings propose that the image-word operations at play and a heterogeneous exchange of media approaches the allegorical qualities and paratactic logics in what Rancière terms "the great parataxis" as an organizing principle with renewed political force within the aesthetical regime. The result is a kind of community of sense where the spectator as a site of meaning-making is woven into the composition of the work to create emancipation and a politics of plurals.

The textual perspective offers a different approach than previous research history regarding the artist, suggesting that a narrative approach opens the image-word relations onto another political function. The textual optics enables an understanding of how the sense community of the artwork is construed, but does not access questions of embodied perception and affect in screen spectatorship.

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If the world is a book of words and images, it comes with an ethics of transnational reading, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The book is also a vast network of signs, and as we go along we produce text even as we are written in text not of our own making. In this fabric we are together building sense communities, attesting to the political importance of being sensed.

This text of course would not have been possible without the articulations of the others.
My deep gratitude goes to all those who have helped me on the way: To Amar Kanwar who shared his time and most generously let me sit watching for days in a studio in Saket, New Delhi; to Sanjay, who came by with a smile and a cup of tea; to Shomo, Ravi and Dorothea, Gargi, Julie and all the others who enlightened my restricted competence in India, as anywhere else; to Levin, who provided the shelter; to Ragnhild and Finn, who helped to keep befuddlement at bay; to dear family and friends in extended family; to Tom, who always believed in me; and to those who tried to talk me out of the venture—we all belong to the same universe of learning. The faults, however, are mine alone and, as always, serve to provide yet another possibility of understanding.

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Contents

1. Introduction

> *Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.*
>
> —Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

1.1. Research question: Aesthetical operations and their effects

This text takes its initial cue from this reader's first encounter with the essay film *A Season Outside* at Kunstindustrimuseet in Oslo on February 4, 2006.[1] Amar Kanwar's personal travelogue exploring Mahatma Gandhi's concept of nonviolence across past and present conflicts on the Indian subcontinent, expressed an unexpected force that, from within the walls of an old art institution, spelled out new possibilities for a "different politics of the sensible,"[2] as Jacques Rancière puts it. A joyous sense of coexistence on the film's imaginative level, or a rare belonging within the readerly experience the film induced, emerged. Evoking compassion, it also generated a mode of thinking in the form of an event that perhaps could resemble the image of thought that Gilles Deleuze designates as a shocklike encounter with dormant potentialities outside consciousness itself.

The documentary-based visual essay produced an articulation of an ethical–political mode that did not perform politics explicitly in its constellations of words and moving images; rather, I suggest, the work opened an ethical–political space residing in the subjectivities that the film construed. The question rose with urgency: by means of what kind of aesthetical operations? In an attempt at thinking with the artwork to approach and propose a possible articulation of the political in contemporary art, the previous remains the main research question of this thesis as a

[1] The museum is part of the National Museum of Art, Architecture, and Design. Kanwar's Trilogy, *A Season Outside* (1998), *A Night of Prophecy* (2002), and *To Remember* (2003), was exhibited as a unit for the first time internationally.
[2] Jacques Rancière, "The Intolerable Image," in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 105.

reading of *A Season Outside* and *The Lightning Testimonies*, chosen to represent different formats and a relevant time span in the artist's production.

The title of the thesis implies the concept of an ethical–political mode of spectatorship derived from what Okwui Enwezor claims is a new articulation of the political in the relationship to the other in contemporary art and documentary practices,[3] launched in the proliferation of the discussion between aesthetics and ethics, or art and politics, caused by the recent upsurge of documentary-based artworks. Related to human rights, biopolitics, and the consequences of globalization, the ethical–political in these practices is located in "the composition of the subject induced by the process of spectator and the work of art,"[4] according to Enwezor, who includes *A Season Outside* in his account.[5] Mediated by a procedure he terms *verité*, a possible space for an ethical encounter between the spectator and the other takes form in the artwork as a "process of unraveling, exploring, questioning, probing, analyzing, diagnosing, a search for truth, or shall we say veracity,"[6] which Enwezor connects to what Alain Badiou terms the ethic of a truth in the relationship to the other or "the principle that enables the continuation of a truth-process . . . that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth."[7] The crux of the argument regards the new site of political in art articulated as a particular sensitivity to the other, understood in line with Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of "being-for-the other,"[8] which governs any exchange between two people, recognizing the basis of power relations and "one's limits in relation to another subjectivized position, be it a text, an artwork, a spoken exchange."[9]

An imbrication of the subjectivities of the readers into the fabric of the artwork corresponds with an explicit urge in what Amar Kanwar puts forward as an aesthetics of "multiplicity" in his

[3] Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité: Bio-politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," in *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, vol. 1, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press/III CCS Bard, 2008), 77. Essay first published in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 4–5 (2003–2004): 11–42.
[4] Ibid., 84.
[5] Ibid., 85.
[6] Ibid., 97.
[7] Ibid., 83. From Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 44.
[8] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1991).
[9] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 83.

work: “If you’re able to see the complex inner diversity and heterogeneity within individuals and therefore in audiences, then you’re able to see the many dimensions of communication itself. Film is an unbelievable medium—you can do what you want with sound, music, ambience, image and color. You find that when you start putting these together it is possible to create a constellation of experiences that have the capability to relate with the multiplicity of life and audiences.”[10]

Enwezor does not analyze the artworks he mentions in his definition. A main concern of the text is thus to understand what these aesthetical strategies and operations might be, leading to an opening onto an ethical–political mode of spectatorship in the case of Kanwar’s two works, presented in separate readings in chapters 3 and 4. The thesis explores the artworks in light of Enwezor’s concept, but is not a discussion of his concept as such.

Boasting a previous list of awards from global film festival circuits,[11] *A Season Outside* (30 min., 1997) was Amar Kanwar’s debut on the international arena of contemporary art, launched at Documenta 11 in 2002. The multiscreen installation *The Lightning Testimonies* (32 min. 31 sec., 2007) opened at Documenta 12, the first of his works to use the installation apparatus, largely increasing the spatiotemporal possibilities of the artist’s interlaced narrative techniques. *The Lightning Testimonies* weaves together intimate stories of sexual political violence with historical events on the Indian subcontinent, in the political tension between the individual and the public. In the recent upsurge in postdocumentary attempts to reinvent the documentary beyond facticity and endow the image with a lyrical quality, this text proposes that Kanwar’s approach is distinguished by a strong literary presence and articulations between words and images with affinities to allegory as well as narrative traditions in India. Appropriating the interrelated texts of colonialism, communalism, and nationalism in post-Independence India and South Asia within a new global economy, Kanwar’s aesthetics challenges the conventional opposition between the artist, the characters of the depicted stories and the viewers.

[10] Anne Rutherford, “‘Not Firing Arrows’: Multiplicity, Heterogeneity and the Future of Documentary: Interview with Amar Kanwar,” *Asian Cinema* 16, no. 1 (2005): 118.
[11] The film won the Golden Gate Award at the San Francisco International Film Festival and the Golden Orange Award of the Thirty-sixth Antalya International Film Festival, Turkey, both in 1999, and the Golden Conch Award at the Mumbai International Film Festival in 1998.

1.2. Theoretical approach: A textual perspective

At the heart of the twofold title of this thesis is the particular "community of sense" emerging from the aesthetical operations of Kanwar's two artworks. As evoked by Jacques Rancière, a "community of sense" designates the sensory fabric that binds human beings together, expanding the conception of aesthetics to include all sensuousness and the political to be a matter of the distribution or sharing of the sensible, meaning how some phenomena in society are seen and heard, and by whom, while others remain invisible and inaudible, and how we create relations through the sensuous.[12] The idea that "politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together'"[13] is a way of thinking about aesthetics and the ethical-political that largely informs this text.

Rancière's concept offers a model for how new constellations of text and images can open up passages toward new forms of the political, in his attempts to rescue the political force of the image from the widespread idea of its passive identification with the spectacle, derived from Guy Debord's cultural critique in *The Society of the Spectacle*.[14] In Rancière's terms, art does not become political by operating outside itself in a way that often becomes self-parody. Renewed confidence in the political capacity of images assumes a critique of "the disappointed belief in a straight line between perception, affection, comprehension and action."[15]

Inscribed into a different politics of art, images can produce new forms of perception and sensory experiences of the world, and new communities of sense, on the condition that "they are not anticipated by their meaning and do not anticipate their effects,"[16] to disrupt the obvious line between cause and effect. Rancière here puts forward a concept of the "image" as a "complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the

[12] Rancière's definition of aesthetics is drawn from Friedrich Schiller.
[13] Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," in Elliott, *Emancipated Spectator*, 56.
[14] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).
[15] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 105.
[16] Ibid.

unsaid."[17] In this optics "image" stands for the ever-shifting processes of inscription and articulation, referring to connections between sight and writing that mutually inform one another.

In his approach to moving images, Rancière suggests a political potential in the way textual and visual elements are interlaced in a new kind of syntactical construction that differs from the image collusions of Sergei Eisenstein's montage, in a novelistic tradition raging from Flaubert to Godard.[18] Within what he calls the aesthetical regime in art,[19] which is "first of all a new regime for relating to the past,"[20] Rancière observes an organizing paratactic logic in the "great parataxis" or the "sentence-image," where elements are played out against a relationship to a historical narrative in a discontinuous montage of dialectical conflict and symbolist unity, both organizing a clash and constructing a continuum.[21] As a new trait of rhythm within the law of the great parataxis, the sentence-image is not the mere combination of verbal sequence and visual form but a combination of two functions overturning the representative relationship between word and image in an interwoven montage, which, at the same time, reveals its artifice. Causing the image to pass into the word in a "common factor of dis-measure or chaos that now gives art its power,"[22] the sentence-image suggests a renewal of the political potential of the image as an object of resistance and contemplation, offering enlarged possibilities in the apparatuses of new media.

As Ina Blom pointed out in her review of *The Future of the Image*,[23] Rancière's model here bears resemblance to a theory of allegory, which the thesis suggests has relevance to the system of visibility that is construed in *A Season Outside* and *The Lightning Testimonies.* In my view, the two screen-based artworks are the tangled constructions of a storyteller who, in words, images, sound, and the temporal devices of moving image technologies, reads past through present in

[17] Ibid., 93.
[18] Jacques Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," in *The Future of the Image,* trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009).
[19] The aesthetical regime in art refers to the strictly singular regime of art freed from any rules or hierarchy of genre or subject matter. See Rancière, "Artistic Regimes and the Shortcomings of the Notion of Modernity," in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).
[20] Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 25.
[21] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History." Rancière suggests Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1998) as the prime example of this logics, in the film's examination of the history of the concept of cinema and how it relates to the twentieth century.
[22] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," 45.
[23] Ina Blom, "En ny allegoriker," *AGORA*, nos. 1–2 (2008): 353–59. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*.

allegorical structures to engage with social-political narratives on the Indian subcontinent. Blending poetical figures into his prose with allegory's particular proximity between words and images, Kanwar also applies the poetics of the Indian epic in its "sprawling, extensive format, which tends to be loose and elastic."[24] The narrative modes commonly held to be a core element of Indian art as the cradle of the art of narration are here not an image of temporal concurrence serving a common preconception that India is simultaneously ancient and modern; rather, they generate a critical negotiation of the complex sources of historical knowledge to "brush history against the grain,"[25] as in Walter Benjamin's historical concern to rescue the allegorical fragment for the future: "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[26] Also, a heterogeneous exchange of different media and their powers and "automatisms"[27] generates resistance to transparency with temporal and perceptual estrangement in "a politics based on the variation of distance, the resistance of the visible and the uncertainty of effects."[28] A signature trope in Kanwar's aesthetics of slow-moving images inserts timeless immensity, criticality and photography's morbid hold on imagination into the immediacy of digital video. The photographic archive is employed as a "historical site that exists between evidence and document, public memory and private history."[29]

In the readings of the effects of new media and the photographic in the two artworks, the text primarily applies D. N. Rodowick's discussions on media ontologies in *The Virtual Life of Film*,[30] supported by Roland Barthes's ontology of photography and theorists from the still-moving field.

[24] K. Ayyappa Paniker, *Indian Narratology* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts/Sterling, 2003), 45. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Ramayana* are considered the two great epics of India.
[25] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 257.
[26] Ibid., 255.
[27] The use of the term in this thesis is derived from D. N. Rodowick, who, with Stanley Cavell, defines *automatisms* as "what brings the medium into existence, the expressive means through which the artwork presents itself and establishes its conditions of existence in space and time." In Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 86.
[28] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 105.
[29] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Centre of Photography and Steidl, 2008), 26. Published in conjunction with the exhibition at the ICP in spring 2008.
[30] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*.

Condemned as an "aesthetic error"[31] in romantic art and modernism, allegory reentered the art historical discourse in postmodern art production. A function of language, the concept of allegory in this text mainly follows Craig Owen's description of an "allegorical impulse" in postmodern art, understood as "an attitude as well as technique, a perception as well as a procedure."[32] Owens bases his reflections on allegory on the theories of Walter Benjamin[33] and Paul de Man,[34] who both set out to rescue allegory from its critical suppression and unsettle the traditional didactic sense of the term presuming that a system of thought can be extracted from allegory. Instead they contrast allegory with the univocal signification of the symbol. According to de Man, an in-built mechanism of dispersal creates the potential for an allegorical mode of reading as a critical sense-making practice. In Owen's account, allegory describes the structure of the artwork and emerges "whenever one text is *read through* another."[35] Conceived as a supplement and causing counter-narrative, Owens suggests that allegory is closely related to appropriation and he also links allegory with the historical fragment, derived from Benjamin's conception of history as a random series of fragmented experiences, unhinged from Hegelian idealism. A crucial function in the allegorical artwork is the reciprocity between the visual and the verbal, and "the projection of metaphor as metonymy."[36] A main achievement is the attention toward the meaning-making of the spectator.

The allegorical aspects of my readings also share elements of Bhaskar Sarkar's readings of fiction films on the Indian Partition as allegories of mourning,[37] where he likewise evokes allegory as it is understood by Benjamin and de Man.

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[31] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 1 and Part 2," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 58. The Part 1 essay was first published in *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86.
[32] Ibid., 53.
[33] In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), Walter Benjamin relaunches allegory related to the baroque world of the German *Trauerspiel*. However, allegory returns as a prime trope throughout Benjamin's aesthetics.
[34] In *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), Paul de Man illustrates his thesis of allegorical illegibility with examples from both literature and philosophy.
[35] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 54; italics original.
[36] Ibid., 83.
[37] Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

Allegory's piling of historical traces overwritten by the present was as a prime strategy in postmodernism. At stake in the poststructuralist critique of representation as it was conceived by modernism is the question of how meaning is constructed, or what Fredric Jameson distinguished as the "relation to what is called the 'truth-content' of art, its claim to possess some truth or epistemological value."[38] Instead, allegory recognizes the impossibility of having a single intention in writing and speaking.

Taking part in what theorists of the documentary call a representational "shift of epistemological proportions"[39] that has transformed the documentary from its traditional realms of suggesting "fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms,"[40] I suggest that Kanwar's screen-based artworks employ allegory for the postdocumentary condition to access instead "incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, image of personal worlds and their subjective construction"[41]—inscribed into a paradigm where art is considered to generate temporalities and that which constitutes the self, more than being merely representative in a mimetic faculty.

Exploring the effects of allegorical operations in the two works, these readings do not assume that allegorical signification is necessarily consciously produced; rather, it attempts to dissociate the intentional, which was privileged in the classical reading of allegory. Considered "a structural possibility inherent in every work,"[42] this reading is also an allegory, dispersing *A Season Outside* and *The Lightning Testimonies* as texts to engage with the surplus meanings produced.

Derived from the aesthetical strategies that I suggest are crucial to the effects of the two artworks, the textual and narrative approach that follows this text wishes, as Mieke Bal proposes, to "do justice to an aspect of images and their effect that neither iconography nor other art

[38] Frederic Jameson, "In the Destructive Element Immerse," *October* 17 (Summer 1981): 99–118.
[39] Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 74.

historical practices can quite articulate."[43] For how a text, be it a film or a poem or a painting, is structured clarifies the share and responsibility of the reader after what Barthes termed the "death of the author,"[44] which implies the artwork as a fluctuating function, always interacting with other functions in the larger discursive field. In what is known as *new art history*, the relevant question is not what the artwork means but how it works. It has also been important in my approach to draw on elements from the recent attempts to sketch out new social and political foundations for Indian art history as a less object-related discipline in *New Indian Art History—Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*,[45] suggesting the relevance of the poetics of Indian literature as a scarcely explored linguistic source for rethinking Indian art.

1.3. Research history

The textual perspective, however, leaves little room for questions of embodiment and affect in recent critical debates related to screen spectatorship. Thus my readings offer a different approach than Anne Rutherford's discussion regarding *A Season Outside*, explored among other fiction films and documentaries in her doctoral thesis "What Makes a Film Tick? Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Innervation."[46] Rutherford locates an affectively saturated encounter with the image in the opening sequence of *A Season Outside* and examines the way the sequence establishes the relationship with the viewer as bodily "mimetic innervation," in Walter Benjamin's terms, through an energetic saturation of sound and image: "In *A Season Outside*, the image does not just portray experience, it is experienced. Here the film-maker goes into the world with eyes to see, to connect with the world in a mimetic way."[47] Rutherford suggests that

[43] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 166.
[44] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).
[45] Shivaji K. Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji, and Deeptha Achar, eds., *New Indian Art History—Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2003). The book grew out of the progressive Department of Art History and Aesthetics at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda after the seminar organized in February 2002 called "New Art History and Indian Art."
[46] Anne Rutherford, "What Makes a Film Tick? Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Innervation," PhD diss., University of Western Sydney, 2003. The PhD dissertation comprises seven published essays and an overarching chapter. *A Season Outside* is examined in "The Poetics of a Potato: Documentary That Gets under the Skin." First published in *Metro: Media and Education Magazine*, no. 137 (Summer 2003): 126–31.
[47] Rutherford, "What Makes a Film Tick?," 234.

the image-affects are detached from narrative: "This energetic saturation had nothing to do with narrative meaning, or pinning it down as significant in a historical narrative, but was tied to the indeterminacy that allowed the image to stay up in the air and gave the space for engaging with it as an image, absorbing it on a material level."[48] My reading of *A Season Outside* instead argues for the narrative function of the image–word operation of the same sequence, as in the two other defining sequences of the film, proposing that a narrative approach opens the image–word relation at play to a different and political function that is not accessed by exploring cinematic affect. The two approaches, instead, can be said to complement the understanding of the opening sequence.

Representing a challenge to disciplinary borders, Kanwar's work operates within a number of discourses in the interstices between art, documentary, and new media, which makes rethinking of disciplinary boundaries necessary. Also, as Nicolas Bourriaud points out, the task of art history today is no longer to tell a unified narrative of European culture "as a locus of identity," [49] but rather a "question of inventing a common world, of realizing, practically and theoretically, a global space of exchange."[50] Indian art today is of course a palimpsest of "our" culture and "theirs," which I can only hope gets reflected between the lines of my readings. Perhaps Hans Belting is right in proposing that new technologies have enabled a special "meeting-place" and "alliance of non-Western art with Western media culture."[51] The question of whose media culture we are dealing with, of course, appears increasingly blurred.

My aim is to convey a reading that first of all does justice to the operations of the artworks, in an attempt at approaching what Bourriaud calls for as an ethical mode of translating and exchanging, rather than imposing.[52] As any reading after poststructuralism will imply, we can only ever speak for ourselves, and thus the following is my reading, which does not carry any universal truth-claim. Only the lines and depths of the argument will show what relevance the text holds for other readers and which contributions it can make.

[48] Ibid. Rutherford's text explores the opening sequence and not the whole of the film.
[49] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, trans. James Gussen, Lili Porten (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009), 64.

[50] Ibid., 188.

[51] Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Caroline Saltzwedel, Mitch Cohen, and Kenneth Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 68.
[52] Bourriaud, *The Radicant*.

1.4. The research material

A few words on the practical circumstances surrounding the method of these readings are in order: I watched and revisited *A Season Outside* at Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, in 2006, and later *The Lightning Testimonies*, first at the Documenta 12, Kassel, in 2007, then at Gallery Marian Goodman, Paris, March 2008, and in the group exhibition *Indian Highway* at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, May 2009.[53] For a few months, I was able to watch a preview copy of *A Season Outside*. To be able to further come to terms with the multiple and excessive scale of *The Lightning Testimonies*, I was allowed to study the files at Amar Kanwar's studio in New Delhi in January 2009. The work has been facilitated by the scripts of both artworks, as well as a copy of the single-channel documentary version of *The Lightning Testimonies*. Seeing, and seeing again, and again, of course proved a most crucial tool. The artwork itself is, as always, the best teacher.

Other parts of the artist's oeuvre that are not analyzed in the thesis have been accessed less systematically, on tape, in exhibitions, and at a public art venue.

Before proceeding to the readings of *A Season Outside* in chapter 3 and *The Lightning Testimonies* in chapter 4, chapter 2 will give a brief presentation of the artist's work and its contexts.

[53] *Indian Highway* was first presented at the Serpentine Gallery, London, in winter 2008–9.

2. Amar Kanwar: Artist and activist

I, poison-drunk and restless,
would dig my fingers into the
gooseflesh-navel,
profusely pouring black blood
into her psychic wounds.
"Hey, Ma, tell me my religion.
Who am I?
What am I?"
"You are not a Hindu or a
Muslim!"
You are an abandoned spark
of the world's lusty fires

—Prakash Jadhav, *Under the Dadar Bridge*

In a recent essay "When You Step Inside You See That It Is Filled with Seeds," Amar Kanwar recalls the epiphany of first reading *Dalit*[1] baggage porter and poet Prakash Jadhav's long and brutal poem *Under Dadar Bridge*,[2] a dialogue with Jadhav's deceased prostitute mother in a desperate demand to understand his merciless position in Mumbai's casteless underclass: "*The clarity that I experienced was amazing. I understood many events and processes from the last several years* and then felt that the key probably lay in understanding transitions and the multiple passages of time. . . . I wondered maybe *it would be possible to understand the passage of time through poetry? And if . . . just if . . . it were possible, even for a moment, then would I be able to see the future*?"[3] The quote reflects the urge to understand the present and how it relates to the past in Kanwar's aesthetics but also a deep belief in poetic figures and language as a way of accessing processes that lie beyond language and linear temporal conception.

[1] *Dalit* is the preferred term of self-description by communities previously designated as "untouchables" or "lower casts" in India. In Hindi and Marathi, it means "downtrodden" or "broken to pieces."
[2] Jadhav's poem was written in the early 1970s.
[3] Amar Kanwar, *Evidence*, eds. Urs Stahel and Daniela Janser (Göttingen, Germany: Fotomuseum Winterthur and Steidl, 2012), 189; italics original.

Amar Kanwar's work as an artistic inquiry into issues of political injustice, human rights and ecology in contemporary South Asia[4] was fueled by two pivotal events of communalism and corporate crime when the artist read history in a politically engaged ambience at Delhi University in 1984: on October 31, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards a few months after ordering the military attack Operation Blue Star to remove separatists from the Sikh holy Golden Temple in Amritsar on a Sikh religious day.[5] The assassination of Prime Minister Gandhi caused unprecedented anti-Sikh communal riots in Delhi and the northern parts of India. Having killed thousands, the complicity of the Delhi police and the Indian government, headed by Rajiv Gandhi, is widely acknowledged.[6] With the history department shut down in protest, Kanwar spent his time doing relief work with affected families in a witnessing manner that would later inform his work ethics as a filmmaker. A month later, the Bhopal gas tragedy in Madhya Pradesh caused the deaths of thousands and the molestation of generations when toxic gas leaked into the atmosphere from the American Union Carbide pesticide plant. Considered one of the world's worst industrial disasters, poor working conditions under insufficient safety management and the near-vicinity of wide-spreading slums enhanced the immense extent of the catastrophe.[7]

Kanwar embarked on an engagement with the social problems among coal miners in central India's huge mining industry, a realm of notorious human rights violations and environmental disaster that continues to inform his artwork.[8] At the age of twenty, he enrolled in 1985 at the film school in the Mass Communication Research Center of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi, a vibrant breeding ground for socially conscious filmmaking[9] founded by Canadian documentary filmmaker James Beveridge. The professional path of making TV documentaries did not grasp his intent, and Kanwar returned to his research project on the living conditions of

[4] The terms *South Asia* and the *Indian subcontinent* are often used interchangeably, as in this text, and by some owing to geopolitical aspects. Definitions of the extent of the Indian subcontinent are not coherent, but it generally comprises six countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Including Afghanistan, Iran, and the Maldives, the region is also referred to as South Asia.
[5] In a previous situation of political instability, Indira Gandhi infamously declared the Indian Emergency (1975–77), bestowing on her powers to rule by decree, suspending elections and civil liberties.
[6] Rajiv Gandhi's infamous comment about the riots after the assassination of his mother inscribed the massacres into the inevitable: "When a big tree falls, the earth shakes."
[7] In his evolving critique of global capital and media, Alfredo Jaar treats the Bhopal disaster in his work *Business Week Cover, December 24, 1984* (1985).
[8] The issue is the subject of his latest installation, *The Sovereign Forest*, presented at the Documenta 13, 2012.
[9] Also attended by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta in Raqs Media Collective.

the coal miners. In 1992, he made the film *Lal Hara Lehrake* (37 min.) about labor union founder Shankar Guha Niyogi, who sustained the Mine Worker movement from 1977 until he was assassinated in 1991. A commission to document the making of a statue of the enlightened Buddha touching the earth[10] granted Kanwar the complete artistic freedom to experiment with narrative techniques for the first time. Presented at an international conference on ecological responsibility in dialogue with Buddhism, *Earth as Witness* (40 min., 1994) became an artistic turning point, and three years later, he made *A Season Outside*, initially a commission from The Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness The Dalai Lama.[11] As the legendary story goes, Okwui Enwezor discovered the essay film on a research trip for the Documenta 11, bringing also photographer and environmentalist Ravi Agarwal and the urban artist–sociologists Raqs Media Collective to the forefront of contemporary art from social–political practices taking place outside of the established visual art circuits in India at the time. Including *To Remember* (8 min., 2003), an ambiguous, mute meditation on the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, and *A Night of Prophecy* (77 min., 2002), exploring Indian traditions of poetry and song as a political expression with a revelatory potential, *A Season Outside* is a part of the Trilogy, in what the artist terms a common thematic exploration of power, violence, sexuality, and justice.[12]

A Night of Prophecy encompasses poetry and song across the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland, Kashmir, and Maharashtra, where Prakash Jadhav's poem constitutes the heart of the film, under the Dadar Bridge next to Mumbai's central railway station. The film leaves the stage to the poets, who speak and sing of systematic marginalization in a society built on inequality and injustice, and suggests poetry as a possible means of unraveling both the passage of time and prophecies of a brighter future. *To Remember* was filmed at Birla House in New Delhi, where Mahatma Gandhi[13] was assassinated in 1948, hosting today the Gandhi Museum. The film resonates with the assassination by a right-wing Hindu and its legacy in the recent rise of

[10] The statue was raised in the Buddha Jayanti Park, New Delhi. The "earth witness" Buddha is one of the most common iconic images of Buddhism, representing the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment, with his right hand touching the earth.
[11] The film was part of a series of seven films made by different film-makers under the title *India's Quest* produced by the Foundation.
[12] The films are also presented separately.
[13] "Mahatma" is an honorific first applied to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, from Sanskrit for "great soul." The text employs this most common name used for Gandhi today.

Hindutva[14] nationalism to governmental power, resulting in the massacre at the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992[15] and later the pogrom against Muslims in 2002 in the state of Gujarat,[16] where Gandhi was born in 1869. In the images of the interior of the museum, crammed with visitors and the new generation on school excursions, but also vacant, with only the mnemonic objects on display behind glass, the film maps the architecture of Gandhi's last hours in an act of collective memory. Its silence echoes Gandhi's, who regularly abstained from speaking to retreat to inner spiritual peace.[17] The museum features as an archival medium and a site of testimony, another signature trope in Kanwar's artwork that returns in *The Lightning Testimonies*, as we shall see in chapter 4. Also, the iconic figure of Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings run through Kanwar's work as an image onto which the current state of affairs is projected.

Kanwar's involvement in the exploitation of indigenous lifestyles and natural resources is reflected in a number of activist documentaries advocating the rights of the commons[18] in India: *Marubhumi* (52 min., 1996) strings together excerpts of the history, politics, and development of water harvesting in ancient and modern Jodhpur in Rajasthan, based on the narratives of two elderly gentlemen retired from their positions as municipality chairman and famine inspector, respectively.[19] *The Many Faces of Madness* (19 min., 2000), produced by Foundation for Ecological Security Anand in Gujarat, is a raging commentary on ecological self-destruction in India. *Baphlimali 173* (28 min., 2001),[20] the name of a hill containing 173 million tons of bauxite, is a film about the early years of the Kashipur tribal (Adivasi)[21] resistance movement

[14] Signifying "Hindu-ness," the term describes a set of political movements advocating current Hindu nationalism.
[15] The mosque was raised here by the first Muslim Mughal emperor in 1528. Claiming it to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Lord Ram, the massacre was spurred by an official Hindu nationalist campaign to demolish the mosque led by L. K. Advani, who, in 2004, became the leader of the Hindu political party, the Bharatiya Janata. The BJP headed the Indian government from 1998-2004.
[16] In February 2002, Hindu fundamentalists carried out a genocidal massacre of Muslims in the state of Gujarat. The genocide was conducted in a preplanned collusion with the police and the BJP state government. Between 2,000 and 5,000 Muslims were slaughtered, and more than 150,000 were rendered homeless. The pogrom took place after an Islamist mob burned fifty-eight Hindu pilgrims alive, including women and children, inside an express train at Godhra. A number of artworks in India have dealt with the genocide.
[17] Monday was a day of silence for Gandhi, who, without compromise, reserved the two exceptions of speaking to high functionaries on strictly urgent matters and attending to the sick.
[18] The "commons" were traditionally defined as the shared elements of the environment to be enjoyed by all, including forests, atmosphere, rivers, and grazing land. Today the commons are also understood within a broader cultural sphere, including the arts, media, and sites of heritage.
[19] Residents of Jodhpur city, Y. D. Singh Liaquat and Ali Khan.
[20] The film was awarded the Certificate of Merit, Golden Gate Awards, San Francisco International Film Festival in 2002.
[21] *Adiva*si describes the indigenous population of India, representing roughly one-sixth of the population, divided

against environmentally disastrous bauxite mining operations in the eastern state of Orissa, an ongoing conflict of indigenous consciousness against multinational aluminum cartels. The mining industry contributes significantly to the economy of India,[22] at the immense cost of fragile host communities, who mainly inhabit the large areas in the nation's mining belt.[23] Also, *Freedom*/*Azadi* (58 min., 2002) is a film about different people's resistance against the appropriation of forests, coastal communities and tribal lifestyles, from British colonial rule to the corporate interests in a current global economy.[24]

The issue of the socially devastating conflicts surrounding the doomed mining landscape in Orissa returns in Kanwar's mixed-media installation *The Sovereign Forest* (2010-12) at this year's Documenta 13 as a work in progress.[25] The installation was also shown at the Samadrusti campus, an independent media group in Bhubaneswar, near the affected areas. Including books and seeds, *The Sovereign Forest* encompasses the single-channel projection *The Scene of Crime* (2011).[26] Signifying the forest as a supreme, independent authority, *The Sovereign Forest* previously occurred as a public art project in central New Delhi in 2008.[27] On a triangular island in the middle of the polluting traffic jams, adjacent to a space designated for public protest by the Delhi police, Kanwar incorporated a single tree into an installation of screens, words, and images.

A more intimate trajectory in Kanwar's filmmaking is found in the single-channel works *King of Dreams* (30 min., 2001), *Henningsvaer* (15 min., 2006), and *Love Story* (5 min., 2011). Travelling through terrains of stereotype masculinity and sexuality in India, *King of Dreams* is a deeply personal film integrating several anonymous first-person narratives as fragments of the

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into many groups.

[22] India is the world's third largest producer of iron ore and bauxite and the largest producer of sheet mica.

[23] Around forty percent of Adivasi communities have been displaced from their traditional homes by so-called development projects. India has a National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation for Project Affected Families, but the tribals are hardly compensated for the livelihoods they lose. The violent nature of conflicts is increasing in these rural areas of central India, where the Indian Maoist Naxalite militias also are largely present.

[24] The film won the GRAND PRIX, EnviroFilm 2002, Certificate of Merit, Golden Gate Awards, San Francisco International Film Festival, 2002, and the First Prize, CinemAmbente, Torino International Environment Film Festival, 2002.

[25] Produced in collaboration with Samadrusti, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for Documenta 13.

[26] *The Scene of Crime* premiered at the Centre Pompidou in the exhibition *Paris, Delhi, Bombay* (2011).

[27] The project was part of the public art festival 48°C Public.Art.Ecology in December 2008.

same converging dark dream.[28] *Henningsvaer,* titled after a fishing village located on several small islands in the northern part of Norway, was made when the artist was the resident recipient of the First Edvard Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway (2005). Looking outward through the many-layered windows of a seaside house, the film explores a thin line between paradise and exile. In *A Love Story,* the artist elevates images from the expanding slums of the Indian metropolis into a four-act miniature epic tale of love and separation.

Kanwar first started transforming his film narratives into multiscreen installations with the eight-channel work *The Lightning Testimonies,* commissioned by Documenta 12 in 2007.[29] The work also features as a single-channel 113-minute-long documentary in Hindi (*Roshan Bayan,* 2008) and has been touring a number of off-the-art-circuit venues and film festivals. The artist further increased the format and sculptural features of his "screen-reliant"[30] work with the nineteen-channel video installation *The Torn First Pages* (2004–8), presented in three parts to mark the first anniversary of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution led by Buddhist monks in Burma.[31] Including Burmese books and magazines, the installation evolved as a work in progress in honor of the Mandalay bookshop owner Ko Than Htay, who, in 1994, was sentenced to three years of imprisonment and torture for tearing out the obligatory ideological slogans from the military regime on the first page of all books and journals sold in Burma. Kanwar here elaborates his exploration of image and text as a fragmented, poetic expression, collecting and archiving material evidence of crime, political resistance, and cultural memory. Interwoven narratives witness the courageous protagonists of Burma's pro-democracy movement, and the use of media is embedded with resistance in both the ontology of the still moving image and clandestine video shots. Projected onto fragile sheets of paper, *The Face*, *Thet Win Aung (a&b),* and *Ma Win Maw Oo,* among the six videos in the installation's Part 1, are frequently shown also as autonomous units. *The Face* dissects and accelerates footage Kanwar secretly shot of Burmese military dictator Than Shwe tossing rose petals at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial site in a controversial

[28] The film won the Jury's Award Film South Asia, 2001.
[29] The installation was coproduced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and Public Press, New Delhi, with support from the Ford Foundation.
[30] Kate Mondloch coins this term to cut across media-specific boundaries and draw attention to the structuring role of screens in spectatorship in *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2010.
[31] The installation opened at the Haus der Kunst in Münich in fall 2008, coproduced by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary and Public Press, New Delhi.

ceremony in New Delhi on October 25, 2004, revealing the absurdity of the act by freezing, accelerating, and reversing the gesture of the junta leader. *Ma Win Maw Oo* animates the photographic image of a dead female student shot in the 1988 uprisings[32] into a moving, silent icon of resistance. Resistant time is at stake also in *Thet Win Aung*, a still moving meditation on a photograph being hung onto a white wall, depicting a young man who was killed in Mandalay prison in 2006 as he served a fifty-nine-year sentence for organizing student protests.[33]

2.1. A new criticality in Indian art

Geeta Kapur locates the work of Amar Kanwar at the forefront of a new criticality in the Indian contemporary documentary and art production in its relationship to the market-liberal nation-state's support of an increasing global economy.[34] This development is seen as a response to the crises in democracy spurred by the right-wing Hindu party Bharatiya Janata's (BJP) five-year run in office (1998–2004) and the peak of the Hindutva ideology reached with the state-supported Gujarat genocide in 2002. An attempt to impose state censorship on Indian films at the Mumbai International Film Festival in 2004 provoked a censorship campaign resulting in the action platform Films for Freedom assembling over three hundred Indian documentary practitioners. In this context, Kanwar's work, described by Vinay Lal as "a site for a radical new political aesthetics,"[35] provides "an advanced example of how a new criticality imbricates itself in what are also new subjectivities within the 'abandoned' space of the national—as indeed, now, within the total dominion of global capital."[36] Kapur proposes that the radical documentarian has become a definition of the political artist of today, emerging from these different crises in the

[32] More than three thousand people were killed by troops as they marched in urban areas across the country in what is known as the 8888 Uprising, begun on August 8, 1988.
[33] The installation also includes *The Bodhi Three*, which shows painter Sitt Nyein Aye at work in his New Delhi exile, and *Somewhere in May*, a film about expatriates in Norway, where the media organization Democratic Voice of Burma is based. Part 2 shows the diaspora in Fort Wayne and a road journey in search of banned poet Tin Moe, who left Burma after four years in prison for pro-democracy activities. Part 3 revives footage secretly filmed inside Burma by amateurs with their cheap digital cameras, revealing to the world images of the 8888 Uprising and the hundreds of monks confronting army tanks in the nonviolent Saffron Revolution.
[34] Geeta Kapur, "Tracking," in *Indian Highway*, catalogue to the exhibition (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2008).
[35] Vinaj Lal, "Travails of the Nation: Some Notes on Indian Documentaries," *Third Text* 19, no. 2 (2005): 175–85.
[36] Geeta Kapur, "Secular Artist, Citizen Artist," in *Art and Social Change: A Critical Reader*, eds. Will Bradley and Charles Esche (London: Tate Publishers, 2007), 438.

democratic situation in India, and that the contradiction inscribed between art and documentary is an excellent point of departure for a dialectical view on the nature of art's radicality.[37]

In a history of close interactions between the concepts of "nation" and "artist" in post-Independence India, the recent development articulates a new radical mode of critical address to the nation and the state. Tapati Guha-Thakurta shows how the concepts of "colonialism," "nationalism," and "modernism" have interacted throughout the making of the modern in Indian art: "The national remains, then, the crucial mediating site where a distinctly modern art history found its unique Indian location."[38] Through the national movement, the national democratic state first led by Jawaharlal Nehru looked to the intellectual and artist communities for an honorable transition from a feudal to a secular, modern, and democratic socialist society. Artists in India have played a substantial mediatory role in the progressive project of the postcolonial state, holding a position as honorary members of the national elite in a strongly class-oriented society and representing through the national movement acknowledged forms of critical and aesthetical strategies for addressing the national.[39] Deepta Achar, Parul Dave Mukherji, and Shivaji K. Panikkar describe how the project of nation making and an elitist approach have rendered Indian art history unable to examine the ideological implications of art processes.[40]

More subaltern[41] artistic positions have been explored, most significantly among Dalit writers and artists associated with different Marxist movements in India. In the mid-1980s, the Kerala-Baroda-based initiative Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association raised issues concerning left-wing political activism in alternate art practices.[42] From the 1990s, artists like

[37] Ibid.
[38] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Lineages of the Modern in Indian Art: The Making of a National History," in *Culture and the Making of Identity in Contemporary India*, ed. Kamala Ganesh and Usha Thakkar (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 106.
[39] In Kapur's account, there is a recognized set of historical precedents exemplifying styles of political intervention in modern Indian art, and she mentions Maqbool Fida Husain and K. G. Subramanyan as examples of a painterly language corresponding to what the secular Indian state and elite public would define as a national, modern consciousness.
[40] Deepta Achar, Parul Dave Mukherji, and Shivaji K. Panikkar, "Towards New Art History," in Panikkar et al., *New Indian Art History*.
[41] Derived from Antonio Gramsci's Marxist discourse, the term has been widely applied in the history of South Asia to denote the colonized. In post-colonial theory, the term describes the lower classes and social groups at the margins of society, excluded from society's established structures of political representation. Though ambiguous, this is how the term is used in the thesis.
[42] In the manifesto "Question and Dialogue" (1987), put into writing by Anita Dube, the group formulated a critique of both the postmodern and Indian high modernism, including everything international, commercial, and Western, to

Vivan Sundaram, Rummana Hussain, Navjot Altaf, and Nalini Malani represented a left-liberal refusal of the BJP ideology introducing altered media languages and new aesthetics of video, documentary photography, and social interventions that added to a more unstable and radical role in artistic subject positions.[43] New technologies and feminism fueled a democratization of artistic vision and distribution and changed the course of what until then was a predominantly classical–modernist art scene.

With Kanwar's *A Season Outside* as her main example,[44] Jyotsna Kapur observes a revival of the strong tradition of radical poets as social reformists in India in the new autobiographical address of Indian documentaries.[45] Both Marxist poetry and the spiritual Bhakti poets represent important countermovements in India, where the tradition of poetry is "as old as Indian civilization itself."[46] Emerging in the sixth century in South India, the devotional Bhakti tradition advocated social reform and the religious equality of all humans, rebelling in song and poetry against caste and the Brahminical stronghold over Hindu religious practice, moving the language of worship from Sanskrit to colloquially spoken languages.[47] The Bhakti saint-poets often sprang from the lower orders of society, and later, Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary social discourse would often be derived from them.

2.2. Human rights and contemporary art

A human rights activist mode is closely linked to Kanwar's art practice, whose position can be defined by an individual involvement outside the established left, but with a general left-leaning

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emphasize the political, humanitarian, and social.

[43] These artists were all part of the key exhibition *Ways of Resisting*, 2003, which marked cultural resistance to a decade of communalism, at the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, New Delhi, also drawing on radical Sufi-Bhakti music and poetry.

[44] In addition to Pankaj Rishi Kumar's film *Kumar Talkies* (1999).

[45] Jyotsna Kapur, "Why the Personal Is Still Political—Some Lessons from Contemporary Indian Documentary," *Jumpcut*, no. 43 (2003), http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc46.2003/indiandocs.kapur/text.html. Kapur suggests that an emphasis on the collective has been predominant with a Griersonian authoritative narration in Indian documentaries owing to the social imperatives of a postcolonial society but also the political left's dismissal of the first-person narrator as bourgeois self-indulgence.

[46] Edward C. Dimock Jr., Edwin Gerow, C. M. Naim, A. K. Ramanujan, Gordon Roadarmel, and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds., *The Literature of India: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

[47] This also enabled the expression of women. Bhakti poets as e.g. Kabir have a large popular following today.

ideological orientation critical of dictatorial and democratic institutions alike. The artist often teaches filmmaking to communities who use the media of moving images in their resistance struggles. The screening of his films in schools, in colleges, for film clubs, and at conferences by nongovernmental organizations and in campaigns of different people's movements around India is central to his practice, engaging with different grassroots movements to empower civil society.

Operating from both inside and outside the art system in two parallel value systems, Kanwar's double take resembles Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's mode of "translation,"[48] in which she juxtaposes the task of training teachers in rural India with her position as professor in literature at Colombia University, New York. Spivak's term designates the relationship between academic and "revolutionary" practices in the interest of social change and a deconstructive, readerly operation to access language as the process of meaning construction to serve the subaltern at the core of her cause as a postcolonial literary theorist: "It is a simple miming of the responsibility to trace the other in the self," she writes.[49]

A major force running through Kanwar's work is the will to articulate an audiovisual space for the marginalized characters of his films and to retrieve their living circumstances from oblivion. His approach seems compatible with how activist and artistic strategies get consciously hybridized in Okwui Enwezor's conception of a new political mode in contemporary art, responding to human rights and the concern for the other "as the ethical limit of any engagement with the world."[50] These practices differ from the historical avant-garde's procedures against fascism and are instead inscribed into a new kind of ethical thinking rooted in the conception of biopolitics, "a politics grounded in explorations of the meaning of life and the ethico-juridical sanctity of the human within current global realignments of political, economic, and cultural formations."[51] In his use of biopolitics, Enwezor employs Hannah Arendt's concept of labor, work, and action as the fundamental condition investing positive content in all human life,[52] as it

[48] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[49] Ibid., 179.
[50] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 71.
[51] Ibid., 68.
[52] Arendt, *Human Condition*. Although Arendt did not use the term *biopolitics*, she developed critical insight into the primacy of life in modern society and the reduction of people to mere living things in twentieth-century totalitarianism.

intersects with Michel Foucault's biopolitics: "The 'right' to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs and, beyond all the oppressions or 'alienations,' the right—which the classical juridical system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power which did not derive, either, from the traditional right of sovereignty."[53] Enwezor connects this new ethical–political mode that was articulated in the documentary art practices at the Documenta 11 to Georgio Agamben's idea of bare or naked life, which can never be separated from its form-of-life ("a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life"[54]). This is precisely what political power attempts to do today as the hidden foundation of modern political power, according to Agamben. Kanwar's practice can be said to give form-of-life to naked life in his artistic articulations on behalf of his subjects and it produces Arendt's belief in the potentiality of new beginnings in human action and plurality. As in the work of Alfredo Jaar and Hans Haacke, which Enwezor mentions, Kanwar's strategies turn local injustice into universal concern and show how the new practices also mediate the relationship between the national and the transnational.

A small selection of Amar Kanwar's (b. 1964; lives and works in New Delhi) solo exhibitions: *Amar Kanwar—Evidence*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, 2012, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2010 and Marian Goodman, Paris, 2008, Film Huis Den Hag in collaboration with Amnesty International Film Festival, 2009, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2008, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 2007, and Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi, 2007.

Recent major group shows: Documenta 13 (2012), Documenta 12 (2007) and Documenta 11 (2002), Kassel, *Being Singular Plural*, Guggenheim Museum, New York (2012), and Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2010), *Paris, Delhi, Bombay*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2011), *Indian Highway*, Serpentine Gallery, London (2008) and Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo (2009)[55], and *Everywhere Is War (and Rumors of War)* at The Bodhi Art Gallery, Mumbai (2008).

[53] Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power Over Life," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 267.
[54] Giorgio Agamben, "Form of Life," 1993, in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 2–3. Quoted in Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 97.
[55] The show travelled to different museums in Europe and Asia.

In June 2012, the Fiftieth International Short Film Festival in Kerala, India, presented a retrospective of Kanwar's work, and the year before, the Thirteenth Madurai International Documentary and Short Film Festival, India, held a retrospective.

The artist received the International Edvard Munch Award for Contemporary Art[56] as the first recipient (2005) and holds an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Maine College of Art (2006) and the MacArthur Fellowship, India (2000).

[56] Initiated and developed by the Office for Contemporary Art in Norway in 2004–5 to enhance exchange in international contemporary art. The prize has been awarded twice.

3. *A Season Outside*: The allegorical impulse

> *Why is it that the furthest reaching truths about ourselves and the world have to be stated in such a lopsided, referentially indirect mode?*
>
> —Paul de Man, "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion"

Projected onto the walls of museums and galleries, but also shown on monitors in colleges and at film festivals around India, *A Season Outside* opens in a long nocturnal take along iconic silhouettes of barbed fences on the high-security border between India and Pakistan, one of the world's most-watched border zones. Recalling the first minute of Alain Resnais's essay film on the Holocaust, *Nuit et brouillard* (1955),[1] the slow, investigating images are enhanced with low-frequency acoustic sound and gongs in a sense of imperative. Then a continuous lyrical and self-reflective voice-over, often with a direct hint to the viewer's perception, starts invading the images *in media res*,[2] evoking personal memories, historical events, legend, traumas, allegories, poetical figures, and future hopes in a dense, essayistic inquiry into the nature of division and conflict—including ours. We are at the Wagah border crossing,[3] a postcolonial *lieu de mémoire* representing "a plunge into time to identify those primary moments when a new relationship with the national and collective past crystallized."[4] Here the so-called Radcliffe line, drawn by the British lawyer who, infamously, had not been to India before,[5] slashed the Indian map into a Hindu and a Muslim nation, instigating recurring political tension in the subcontinent's long history of complex national, regional, and religious identities.[6] Tearing through villages, water systems, and families, the final act of remapping the colonized at the end of Empire triggered the killings of more than a million and one of the largest migration movements in contemporary

[1] Resnais's essay film (*Night and Fog*) on the Holocaust is recognized as an early departure from the documentary norm in the way the narration and music create a counterpoint to the image, as in Chris Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia*, 1957).
[2] A Latin term (into the middle of things) to describe a narrative technique in which the relation of a story begins either at the midpoint or at the conclusion rather than at the beginning.
[3] Bordering Kashmir, Wagah falls between Lahore in Pakistan and the sacred Sikh capital Amritsar in India.
[4] Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France, Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Vol. 4, *Histories and Memories*, trans. David P. Jordan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), viii.
[5] The line was decided by the Border Commission chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was to equally divide around 450,000 square kilometers of territory with eighty-eight million people.
[6] See Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

history. A less-known underside of Independence, the Indian Partition as a social cataclysm remains an affective terrain and a social schism in the subcontinent's cultural memory and the lives of millions.[7]

Produced around the time of the fiftieth anniversary of Partition and in an ambience of increasingly tense nuclear relations between India and Pakistan in conflict over Kashmir,[8] the essay film dwells on the literal origin of this mass trauma of division at the present-day check-post and negotiates the event as the fracture to which present events return and on which they are projected. Turning to an immersive visual depiction of the manual work of a group of the two countries' more than thousand coolies (porters) making a living by carrying trade goods across the borderline, the artist's voice-over ruptures the images with a parallel story—the trauma of his own family and their violent dispersal across the subcontinent caused by the 1947 truncation. Liberated from a conventional dependence on documentary images, Kanwar's first-person narrator embarks on a journey where the thoughtful quality of his voice and accent dissolves into the gaps between the images it invades to create a horizontal montage, as in André Bazin's landmark description of Marker's essay film *Letter from Siberia*: "The montage has been forged from ear to eye."[9] Cutting to a military sunset flag ceremony where crowds from both sides applaud members of the Pakistan Rangers and the Indian Border Security Force as they express their mutual contempt in a fierce choreography of over-the-top salutes and gestures, the narrator inserts excerpts from a dialogue between Lord William Hunter and Mahatma Gandhi about the latter's nonviolence[10] principle of Satyagraha ("Soul-Force" or "Love-Force"[11]) after the Amritsar massacre in 1919, which encouraged a critical step toward Independence in India.[12]

[7] In her fierce prose, Arundhati Roy writes on the event, "That wound, those torn but still unsevered muscles, that blood and those splintered bones still lock us together in a close embrace of hatred, terrifying familiarity, but also love." Roy, "Nine Is Not Eleven (and November Isn't September)," in *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 186.

[8] The territorial conflict in Kashmir has been ongoing since the Partition, and the region is today divided between Pakistan, India, and China.

[9] André Bazin, "Bazin on Marker," trans. Dave Kehr, *Film Comment*, July–August 2003, 44. Essay first published in the *France-Observateur*, October 30, 1958.

[10] Rooted in the Indian religions of Jainism and Buddhism, Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence (Ahimsa) denotes "the absence of the desire to kill or harm" in Sanskrit. *Ahimsa* as the expression of the deepest love for all humans includes not only a lack of physical harm to any opponents but also a lack of hatred or ill will toward them.

[11] The practical extension of nonviolence, designed not to coerce the opponent but to set into motion forces which could lead to his conversion. Satyagraha was Gandhi's official strategy against the British rule in India.

[12] On April 13, 1919, the British Army opened fire on the large crowd gathered in a public garden in Amritsar for a peaceful protest against the arrest of two leaders of the Indian National Congress. Lord William Hunter led an

The incongruity between image and text suggests uncertain interconnections and invites the multiplication of meanings and open-ended interpretations in the spectator's experience. As the "fabula"[13] of the images, resonating with Partition and the current political tension between India and Pakistan, meets the characters of Lord Hunter and Gandhi in scraps of historical narrative, freeze effects start to transform the military gestures into lyrical suspense and resistant fragmentation. Resistance to speed is central to the language of the film, inserting the morbid stillness of photography into the moving digital images to disturb a linear conception of time and memory. A subversive exchange between stasis and motion producing an interval "in which rigorous thinking can emerge"[14] is at the heart of Kanwar's aesthetics, enabled by new moving image technologies that make possible new speeds and delay in combinations of motion and stillness, by many viewed as one of the most striking features in contemporary art and cinematic practices.[15] Filmed in digital video, the long meditative takes and images of *A Season Outside* are refashioned to look "cinematographic" and as such mimic the detached criticality that Stanley Cavell observed in the medium of cinema and photography: "The camera has been praised for extending the senses; it may, as the world goes, deserve more praise for confining them, leaving room for thought."[16] Like photographs, film presents a mode of existence split by qualities of presence and absence, present and past, now and then. Keeping the world at a distance, the cinematic nevertheless represents a modern self-examination of time, memory, and history and a longing to regain contact with this world through our perception of it, according to Cavell, who, like Roland Barthes, was less interested in what photographs represent or mean

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investigatory committee, and Mahatma Gandhi was appointed the head of a Punjab subcommittee to conduct its own investigations. The brigadier in charge was removed from duty and forced to retire yet was reckoned a hero by many.

[13] Mieke Bal divides a narrative text into three levels as a tool to enable a better understanding of the reader's share and responsibility: *fabula* refers to the level of interpretation and imagination in the three parallel structural levels of narrative, whereas the *text* is the product of the use of the medium and the *story* is a product of ordering. Bal, *Narratology*, 13.

[14] Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, eds., *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

[15] See Eivind Røssaak, "Negotiating Immobility: The Moving Image and the Arts in Andy & Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix*, Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son*, and Bill Viola's *The Passions*," PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2008, 3.

[16] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 24.

than in how they place us subjectively.[17] The deeper lesson of photographic media is how photography returns the world to us while nonetheless holding perception at a distance.

Exposing its own artifice, the disjunction between the story of the narrator and the story of the images creates a defining aesthetics of opacity in *A Season Outside*. In an allegorical structuring between the spoken narration and the story of the images, the different narratives of colonialism, communalism, and nationalism are appropriated and read through one another to create "an expenditure of surplus value."[18] Craig Owens describes the strategy: "Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images, but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hand the image becomes something other."[19] Producing an overwritten "palimpsest"[20] of words and images, which Owens terms the "paradigm"[21] for the allegorical work, the spectator becomes integral to its structure and is turned into a kind of co-writer, thrust into creating new narratives of the world.

In the narrator's story as a travelogue, journeying from Wagah into the Sikh community in Punjab and the Tibetan exile settlement Manju Ka Tilla outside Delhi and back to the border zone to reflect on Gandhi's concept of nonviolence, the film embodies allegory's state of travelling in perplexity through a rebus of words and images to be deciphered, famously employed in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Bal puts it with a pun: "A traveler in a narrative is always an allegory of the travel that narrative is."[22] The author–narrator confesses to being inevitably drawn into an ancient vortex of conflicts and division and encounters his Vergil in the disguise of a monk in the spoken narration, blending with the black-and-white archival images of Mahatma Gandhi walking with his entourage, projected here in an empty film auditorium. As if driven by allegory's desire to find a path in the midst of chaos, the befuddlement which the

[17] Barthes characterizes the powers of the metonymic force of the photograph triggering an inward process of self-investigation and memory by means of the "punctum" in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
[18] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 64.
[19] Ibid., 54.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Bal, *Narratology*, 140.

narrator admits to seems to advocate the uncertainty of his journey which "only generates further allegorical writing."[23]

3.1. Paratactic ordering and episodic serialization

Proceeding from the two opening border sequences, a chronological account of the film's story follows, suggesting the paratactic composition of autonomous sequences, arranged in a coordinate rather than subordinate construction:

Armed guards survey the high-security border fences, this time in lush daylight. Some traverse the surrounding green fields on foot, the sound of birds singing breaking the tense human silence. Speaking in first person and in a direct address to the viewer's third-person position, the narrator reflects in metaphoric terms on the invisibility of borderlines in nature and on the roots of violence in our hearts.[24] *A couple of uniformed guards in Sikh turbans ride horses along the fences, traversed by a white butterfly. Images from the introductory nocturnal take of the barbed barrier return, accompanied by dense cicadas and a metaphoric riddle on mortal attempts at crossing over and the observation that only butterflies can. A black puppy is bullied by a number of crows, and the frustrated puppy fights back the insistent birds. An abstract aural backdrop continues to unfold, extending the sensation of both time and space.*[25] *The narrator suggests that there are times when it is necessary to take to arms.*

Streets in a town at night overflow with people carrying burning torches, most of them men in recognizable Sikh turbans. Facades are adorned with ornamental strands of light, and the moon is full. Prayers or speeches sound from crackling public loud speakers, and we see ancient, silvery swords close up. On the lightened terraces of a temple, the weapons are displayed by men in bright blue turbans and solemn ceremony, as devotees cheer, sitting on the ground below. Some kneel in prayer nearby. We learn that the swords are sacred and that the narrator now is

[23] Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 167.
[24] The artist requests that the script as an essay not be quoted separately, and as such this account does not do justice to its literary qualities.
[25] For an extensive study of role of sound and aurality in recent film and video, see Tina Rigby Hanssen, "Strategies of Silence and Background Noise in Artists' Film and Video," PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2011.

placed amid a community forced to turn to violence in defense of its identity. The sixteenth-century heroic saint Guru Gobind Singh claimed the right to draw the sword when all else failed, we are told.

Cut to daylight and large crowds of men dressed in colorful costumes and turbans, dancing, playing drums, and riding decorated horses toward the banks of a river. The camera follows a young boy on a white horse carrying a sword with an attached saffron ball. The men practice equestrian sports and horseback stunts; some horses flee and cause a stir in the crowd. We see close-ups of bearded elderly men in blue and saffron dress looking straight into the camera and young boys, their turbans adorned with symbols. Some men throw colored powder and practice martial skills. Singing resounds from the public loud speaker. The narrator weaves a montage of myth and legend, his own family fleeing from Punjab in 1947, his father justifying violent resistance and metaphoric excerpts from a violent historical account of massacres and mutiny, victors and vanquished. Observing the stars in the eyes of children, the account encompasses Operation Blue Star. There is purchase of knives and swords from street vendors; a boy puts a knife in his pocket and a woman pays. The narrator's chaotic experience of this powerful historic field of legend and reality forces him to withdraw to a domestic scene.

The voice-over does not reveal that we are at the site of the Hola Mahalla festival in Punjab, where Sikhs demonstrate martial skills and military strength in simulated battles. The event was initiated by the mentioned tenth and last of the Sikh gurus in 1701. The guru was at war with the Mughal Empire and had just established the militarization of the Sikhs and the ideal of the saint–soldier. The men in distinctive rich blue turbans hold prominent positions as Nihangs, warriors of the past and direct descendants of Guru Gobind Singh's army. The custom of sprinkling colored powders is inherited from the Hindu spring festival Holi, which happens the day before the Hola.[26]

A cock cries out. From inside an apartment and through an empty window, we see an outside jam of changing traffic and pedestrians and soon a large military parade. The digital images

[26] The Hola Mahallah takes place on the first day of the lunar month of Chet, which usually falls in March, and sometimes coincides with the Sikh New Year.

produce an effect of quick-dissolving changes in the outside street scene. An old woman watches, then puts on her spectacles and closes the window. The narrator recalls reading Tolstoy's War and Peace for a whole summer to disengage with his own reality. Gandhi named his first ashram in South Africa after the Russian author, and Kanwar later learned about Tolstoy's abuse of his wife, Sophie, who gave him thirteen children. In the interior of families and the narrator's home, we are told, there is hidden violence.

The narration does not locate the outside military event that shows the Indian army's grand parade on National Day in Delhi.

From behind barbed wire, a train slowly traverses the rural landscape. The narrator remembers his mother telling him about how women during Partition would jam the windows with hammer and nails to keep the men outside from entering. People hang from train windows; we distinguish the faces of women, men, and children flowing by, some waving to the camera. The voice-over locates the train route still running from Wagah to Attari, the two last railway stations on both sides of the border, and produces literary images of the ghostly Partition trains crammed with refugees and dead bodies. Military officers pass the train, one on a galloping horse, as cows graze nearby. Kanwar remembers a returning dream about his mother with hammer and nail, but no windows to jam, to escape from domestic violence.

A small crowd of men argue loudly and gesticulate; others gathered around in an outdoor audience, young and old. Then two billy goats are lifted and set up in a full frontal bullfight, which transforms the audience into cheerful applauding and smiling. The camera mingles with the audience and its different characters and puts a firm halt on a man among the spectators lighting his cigarette. With a personal and universal address, the spoken narration turns to a dense inquiry into the painful nature of repeating circles of violence and the need to find a way to transcend ego, honor, and past aggression in dealing with conflict.

Again, the nature of the scene and its location are not given: a clandestine goat fight in Old Delhi.

Amateur images of police beating up Tibetan monks and civilians introduce images of smiling Tibetan children taking a close look at the filmmaker's camera. The text informs us that we are at a Tibetan refugee camp outside a city.[27] *Images describe the idleness of the place—old men and women sitting around in narrow streets—as sign plates signal restaurants inside. Typical Tibetan prayer flags wave at a location close to a river. The images focus on the children playing, and in a story within the sequence, a small boy pushes another, who falls to the ground crying. The attacker escapes through a nearby doorway. In another location, a realistic street play stages the police attacking Tibetan monks in chains; people are gathered to watch.*

Faced with sustained violence, the narrator is tempted to react with blunt attack and asks an old monk for advice. The final part of the spoken narration consists of an argumentative dialogue between the two about how to perform nonviolence in practice, the monk demonstrating the noncompromising Satyagraha *method of both engaging in conflict and enhancing the dignity of opponents. Archival black-and-white images of a Tibetan prisoner in chains are shown as well as snow-covered Tibetan slopes, followed by images projected in an empty film auditorium of Mahatma Gandhi walking barefoot in rural surroundings in his iconic handspun cotton wear.*[28]

The monk guides Kanwar back to the start of his journey, at the Wagah border. Images from the journey's narratives reappear in brief flashes, then the location of the lowering of the flags ceremony returns. The ceremony is now over, and military representatives are closing the gates, and the audience is instructed to leave. Some are reluctant to depart from the event, and the final sequence of the film observes them closely: a young boy who was featured seated in the first take from the same site; a mother carrying her baby, looking across from behind the Pakistan gate; another in a light pink sari turning her face toward the Indian side; a bearded man nervously addressing someone on the other side, while being asked to leave.

[27] Majnu Ka Tilla is a Tibetan refugee settlement on the bank of the River Yamuna in North Delhi, considered to be the commercial center of the exile community.

[28] Gandhi wore the handspun Khadi-cotton in a protest against imported fabrics. The locations of the cinematic images are Bihar, from where he launched the civil-obedience movement, the villages of Noakhali (now Bangladesh) during Hindu-Muslim riots in 1946, and Ahmedabad, Gujarat, where Gandhi ran two ashrams.

The narrator realizes that he came to this line between the two gates looking for comfort in an escape from violent memories. He hopes to have found a key to other possibilities locked inside the line, and also in the final image of a boy in black spectacles amid spectators clinging to a gate adorned with the celestial symbols of the white star and the crescent moon.

Kanwar's paratactic mode of narration here approaches the logics of what Jacques Rancière terms the great parataxis as an organizing principle within the aesthetical regime, in a kind of syntactical construction where elements are presented side by side in no particular hierarchy, creating both chaotic juxtaposition and seamless continuity:[29] "The space of these clashes and that of the continuum can even bear the same name: History. History can indeed be two contradictory things: the discontinuous line of revealing clashes or the continuum of co-presence. The linkage of heterogeneous elements constructs and, at the same time, reflects a meaning of history that is displaced between these two poles."[30] Constructing counternarrative, the allegorical impulse at play, substitutes "a principle of syntagmatic disjunction for one of diegetic combination"[31] in an arrest of narrative that "superinduces a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events."[32]

The narration of the film also corresponds to distinctive features of Indian narratology as listed by K. Ayyappa Paniker:[33] *interiorization* explains how narratives often have layer on layer of signification, leaving much to be imagined and interpreted by the listener; *serialization* implies an episodic structure that provides an expansiveness to the central story, without being integral to it; Buddhist *cyclicalization* makes the placement of a single story in a chain of stories a common form of narrative art in India. Though frequent in Indian narratology, it is important to note that these traits, of course, appear in narrative traditions worldwide and are simplifications of the baffling diversity of Indian languages.[34]

[29] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History."
[30] Ibid., 60.
[31] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 57.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Paniker, *Indian Narratology*.
[34] Indian languages belong to a large number of language traditions, and listed mother tongues number in the hundreds.

Reading fiction films on the Indian Partition as allegories of mourning, Bhaskar Sarkar notes how allegory and the dispersive narrative modes of the Indian epic constitute "a vernacular historical consciousness: continual narration and reinterpretation become ways of apprehending and imagining history."[35] The epic mode provides a model for how voices and temporalities collide and coalesce in vertiginously nested narratives to engage with political realities: "The convergence of these layered, polysemic modes has produced capacious and ingenious aesthetic formations that can engage the pluralities and contradictions of contemporary India. In modern Indian art, epic and allegory combine to take on the problematic of the narration in both its empirical and utopian dimensions."[36]

Sarkar recommends that any allegorical reading practice sensitive to the "specificities of Indian cinema" look for signification that might reside in the historical context, "conjured up forcefully or as the most obscure hint."[37] Following his example, before proceeding to the further analyses of what I suggest are the three defining sequences of *A Season Outside*, a few remarks are obligatory on the sociopolitical context of the film's critical articulations within India's "unruly historical rhythms"[38] and postimperial narratives. These can only remain superficial regarding the complexities in Indian society and what has been termed the "strange rise of modern India."[39] They serve, however, to highlight aspects crucial to any reading of the film. The film's strategy of withholding factual references will no matter leave fragments or riddles up in the air for the viewer to engage in, which I suggest is also the intention, proposing how traces of history continue to resonate with contemporary events. Producing a sense of oscillating time, the topic of allegory's strategies of overwriting "is not necessarily temporal at all,"[40] as we shall see.

[35] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation,* 96.
[36] Ibid. See Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (1993): 261–97.
[37] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 96.
[38] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 10.
[39] Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India* (London: Abacus, 2006).
[40] Stephen J. Greenblatt, ed., *Allegory and Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981),1.

3.2. Imbrications of colonialism, communalism, and nationalism in India

A Season Outside emerged within a politically turbulent decade that saw prime ministers come and go in the fast rise of "the world's largest democracy"[41] to its new role as an international superpower. By dismantling the tight systems of state permits and controls known as the License Raj implied after Independence, India radically changed to a neoliberal economic course in 1991. The financial boom caused by the free market did not decrease the harshly unequal opportunities for the hundreds of millions of poor and illiterate who in large numbers would be displaced from their land to make room for multinational investment.[42] In the ambience of blooming corporate globalization, right-wing Hindu nationalism increased, as we have seen in chapter 2. Five decades after a Hindu extremist assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, who strongly opposed any politics based on religion, the Hindutva movement's political party Bharatiya Janata (the Indian People's Party) headed India's coalition government from 1998 to 2004. A short time after the BJP's entry into office, large-scale nuclear warheads testing, known as Operation Shakti, took place for the first time in India,[43] which was ascending to its new global power status with one foot firmly placed in its medieval and mythological past. Pakistan answered by testing mass-destruction weapons a few days later, and these events radically raised the level of menace on the subcontinent, frequently labeled the most dangerous nuclear flashpoint in the world.[44]

Sarkar suggests how the increase in fiction films on the Indian Partition has been influenced by economic liberalization and the rise of Hindu-chauvinist nationalism and how the truncation of the nation lies at the root of nationalism. At stake in a recent increase of cinematic treatment of this wound in the collective psyche of South Asia is a hope to end the trauma resurfacing in the

[41] An ambiguous category that Arundhati Roy instead has termed "demon-crazy." See Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*.
[42] India remains the home of one-third of the world's chronically malnourished children, as defined by the United Nations, and almost one-half of the female population does not know how to read and write. Farming and ecology have been severely affected by the changing economy, causing a reported 250,000 suicides among Indian farmers from 1995 to 2010.
[43] Operation Shakti ("Cosmic Energy of Hinduism") was conducted in the Rajasthan desert twenty-four years after the first so-called peaceful test, the Smiling Buddha, in May 1974. Prime Minster Nehru authorized India's nuclear program after Independence.
[44] A phrase first employed by president Bill Clinton. Luce, *In Spite of the Gods*, 21.

nuclear race between India and Pakistan, and the escalation of violence in major national crises of communalism.

The Sikh community and the image of the Khalsa saint–soldier warrior is reflected in two major sequences representing the military radicalization of Sikhism, founded in a rejection of the Hindu caste system. Sudhir Kakar attests to a continuing heightened awareness of the Sikh identity and militancy in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the massacres in Delhi.[45] Here students and activists, including Kanwar, as we have seen, "displayed exemplary courage in trying to prevent rioting and providing crucially necessary relief about which the Delhi administration was astonishingly lax,"[46] whereas "the middle-class Hindu had nearly complete sympathy with the killing and lynching of Sikhs."[47] Sarkar reports how the events of 1984 stunned activists, historians, and sociologists alike and "forced them to reconsider Partition in terms of disconcerting and under-theorized collective proclivities, and acknowledge continuities within the past."[48]

It is thus fitting to propose that *A Season Outside* negotiates the many-layered configurations of Indian historiography: "Indian historiography, perhaps more than any other national tradition, is the generic comparison of modalities: no matter how complex the minutiae of personalities, texts, practices and events, for Indian historians, these interpretations are all necessarily to be governed by implications that are 'superstructural' in order. . . . This dynamic feature of the interpretation for Indian historiography is the conflict between colonialism, communalism and nationalism."[49]

This chapter will now further explore these articulations in the second Sikh sequence of the film, in addition to the opening sequence of the Wagah border coolies and the lowering of the flags ceremony, suggesting that these three are crucial to the film's spectatorial effects. I propose that

[45] Sudir Kakar, "Some Unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Surviviors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 135–45. The book was one of the first to bring issues of violence within the anthropology of South Asia.
[46] Ashish Banerjee, "'Comparative Curfew': Changing Dimensions of Communal Politics in India," in Das, *Mirrors of Violence,* 50.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 237.
[49] Naheem Jabbar, *Historiography and Writing Postcolonial India* (London: Routledge, 2009), 37–38.

the image–word relationship here creates a defining force in the ethical–aesthetical operations at play as the site where the film develops a particular encounter between the spectator and the other, with affinities to Enwezor's concept, "as a process of unraveling, exploring, questioning, probing, analyzing, diagnosing, a search for truth, or shall we say veracity,"[50] presented in the introduction.

3.3. The Sikh festival: Runes of history

> *Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete—an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence.*
>
> —Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse"

Considered "synonyms in Indian historiography,"[51] mythological and historical events coexist when *A Season Outside* moves into the realm of the Sikhs celebrating the Hola Mahallah festival in their full regalia. As in a hall of mirrors, narrated lyrical scraps of legend and history from Mughal medieval times, the Indian Mutiny of 1857,[52] and the events of 1984 flow into the symbolic and color-enhanced images of bejeweled turbans, adorned horses, and children carrying ancient weapons to produce a crystallized landscape. Also Operation Blue Star is read as a metaphor into the starry eyes of little boys. Preserved in its traditional form and content as most Sikh festivals,[53] only vehicles overloaded with passengers remind us that the scene is taking place in present time.

Focusing on the materiality of the event in silvery swords and knives, vibrating color harmonies of indigo blue and saffron yellow in the turbans, and in the scarlet powder tossed around, the sequence opens a large, dense field of signs and symbols or "fragments or runes which must be

[50] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 97.
[51] Deepak Kannal, "History as Allegory: The Bhaja Narratives," in Panikkar et al., *New Indian Art History*, 192.
[52] Also known as India's first war of Independence, the mutiny of sepoys in the East India Company's army led to the British Crown assuming direct control of India in the new British Raj ("rule") from 1858.
[53] Whereas Hindu festivals in India are largely modernized, the Sikh festivals are renowned for keeping the traditional form and content.

deciphered"[54] and read through the fragmented story of the voice-over. Opening onto what is concealed from linear recollection of history and reflecting also the obstacles of the artist's experience of a mesmerizing universe, the autonomy of speech in relation to the images demonstrates the "heresy" that Theodor W. Adorno terms the "innermost formal law" of the essay and its concern with "what is blind in its objects": "Through violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which it is orthodoxy's secret and objective aim to keep invisible."[55] Residing in the oscillation between words and images is not only the renowned fierce Sikh reputation and a violent fusion of religion and politics. In the traces of experience carved into the solemn close-ups of the Nihang warriors, we sense the power of ancient conflicts, persecutions, and pain across centuries and the deep humanity of it all. Hands enveloping weapons and the bright faces of small boys in heavy costume serve to reveal the impossibility of any definite distinction between victors, martyrs, and vanquished on the battlefields of history.

Kanwar seems here to share Walter Benjamin's philosophical concern with history: "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."[56] In Benjamin's work, allegory features in cultural and ontological terms, arising from "an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent . . . a sense of its transitoriness, an intimation of mortality."[57] In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin argues that allegory is a kind of experience, or even a way of seeing (*Betrachtung*),[58] and an intuition, which discloses the truths of the world far more than the false wholeness attained in the unitary romantic symbol. Allegory, instead, takes the form of the revelatory fragment, transforming things into signs capable of recognizing "a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past."[59] Haunted by what is not present in the images, melancholy becomes a matter of form and history a narrative of

[54] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 55. Italics original.
[55] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature, Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 23.
[56] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.
[57] Bernard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique*, no. 22 (1981): 110.
[58] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), 166.
[59] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 262–63.

suffering: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[60]

With Kanwar's affinity to the detail that dramatizes thought and resists definitive meanings, the images of a young boy in a light blue costume on a white horse stand out in the field of perceptual alienation. A spear with a bouncing, saffron-colored ball in his right arm repeats the radiant color of his turban,[61] and the playful innocence of the ball and the boy's young age strikes great contrast to his warrior dress and conduct. On the level of the voice-over, a little magician from a legendary tale of battle and resistance is evoked, and the characters of the two separate stories blend into the images of the boy with allegory's reciprocity between text and image, turning the image into "rune" and "hieroglyph"[62]—or as Benjamin writes, "At one stroke, the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing."[63]

Opening onto the supplement of allegory, the boy on the horse seems akin to the free play of the signifier in what Roland Barthes terms the "third meaning."[64] In terms associated with allegory, Barthes's essentialist attempt to characterize the "filmic" locates these qualities in the film still, released from both the narrative flow and the flow of cinematic movement.[65] Residing in costume and makeup, this "obtuse" third meaning is not obvious, as in the image's levels of informational communication or symbolic signification. The function of the spear is universally legible, but the ball seems to be a "signifier without a signified" in this context, leaving an unresolved margin of incongruity.[66]

The appropriated excerpts from Guru Gobind Singh's transformation of the persecuted Sikh society into the Khalsa brotherhood of saint–soldiers resound within the *fabula* of the boy with

[60] Ibid., 257.
[61] Saffron is the main color of the flag of the Sikh nation and the color of the turbans in the Sikh constitution of the saint-soldier.
[62] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 57.
[63] Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragedy*, 176.
[64] Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills," in Sontag, *A Barthes Reader*.
[65] Barthes identifies the obtuse meaning in film stills from Sergei Eisenstein's epic film *Ivan the Terrible* (1944.)
[66] In his approach to the latent *pensiveness* of the image as the heterogenous presence of various modes of expression on the same surface, Rancière observes here in Barthes a simplistic approach that gravitates solely between hieroglyph and senseless presence. See Rancière, "Pensive Image."

the spear.[67] Perhaps the mock spear fighting at the festival could explain the ball. Used in the equestrian sport *bothati*, the lance, aimed at a pile of stones, is usually covered with a ball of cloth for safety and dipped in paint so that the hits may easily be confirmed. But with or without these or any other insights regarding the many Sikh codes at play, the boy with the ball "compels an interrogative reading."[68] Subverting "not the content but the whole practice of meaning,"[69] the images become allegorical by not being "underpinned by some reality with which we are familiar"[70] and create the political potential for subversive, sense-making practice. The image-operation attests not only to history as a ruin, in Benjamin's terms, but also to "the necessity to realize that we live in a 'state of emergency.'"[71]

3.4. The border coolies: A politics of metonymy

The image of division could not be more literal: in pairs, Indian and Pakistani workers meet up-front as they step from opposite sides onto a thin line painted white on the tarmac to unload heavy trade cargo onto each other's heads. The provisional trace of paint at the Wagah check post is the Radcliffe line itself in its current shape, the literal origin of the 1947 mass trauma. One by one, the coolies come forward to butt up against each others' feet without crossing the borderline in this poignant opening sequence of *A Season Outside*. The camera moves close to break up the porters' territorially color-differentiated blue and red uniforms, bare feet, sandals, and rubber flip-flops, dissolving the scene into an immersive ballet of color, costume, and legs struggling under the large weight of the burden on top of their owners' heads. The blue Indian tunics and the red of the Pakistani, which the narrator had thought would be of a different order, blend into a purple embrace of images that both blur and enhance the intention of territorial color division. In Kanwar's homage to the porters' hardship, their bodies collaborate and come

[67] According to legend, the guru called for a devoted Sikh who would give his head for him. A shopkeeper came forward and walked behind the guru to a nearby tent. The guru returned with his sword dripping with blood and demanded another head. This time a farmer stood up, and the sword again appeared drenched in blood. A tailor followed, then a water bearer and a barber. Then the guru emerged from the tent, hand in hand with the five disciples, three of them from the low castes, in saffron-colored dress and turbans of the same color.
[68] Sontag, *A Barthes Reader*, 319.
[69] Ibid., 328.
[70] Tambling, *Allegory*, 165.
[71] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257. The essay was written shortly before the German invasion of France and Benjamin's suicide in his failed attempt to flee Europe.

forward as a community helping each other, despite the official discourse of conflict and the efforts to keep them separated by the armed guards we see present.

Into this habitual ritual, the narrator inserts the text of both his personal and the cultural trauma of the Indian Partition in metaphoric language. Giving the effect for the cause, the fragmentations of the porters' work and bodies echo with the truncation of 1947 and confuse mental and physical time in the rift between word and images. The scriptable images illuminate also "a unique engagement between the verbal and the visual" [72] in the essay. Kanwar's strategy here transforms the assumed authenticity of the documentary images with allegory's typical disregard for aesthetical categories, making it "quite capable of transforming the most objective naturalism into the most subjective expressionism, or the most determined realism into the most surrealistically ornamental baroque."[73] Brushing history against the grain, as Benjamin has it, by compelling a vertical reading of the images, the operation performs "one of the fundamental strategies of allegory":[74] the projection of metaphor as metonymy–synecdoche. In the procedure, "the symbolic is revealed for what it truly is—a rhetorical manipulation of metaphor which attempts to program response."[75] A thing or concept is not called by its own name in metonymy but by the name of something associated with it in a turn of the phrase that puts a poetical twist in meaning. *Synecdoche* is closely related to *metonymy* and refers to the part by the whole or the whole by the part. In linguistics, Roman Jakobson defined this projection of metaphor onto metonymy as the "poetic function,"[76] associating metaphor with poetry–romanticism and metonymy with prose–realism. "Allegory, however, implicates both metaphor and metonymy,"[77] Owens writes, to cut across stylistic categorizations and aesthetic boundaries.

Disrupting the counting of the individual and the multiple, the metaphor of Partition projected on the metonymies of the bodies of the coolies inscribes the sequence into what Jacques Rancière calls a "politics of metonymy."[78] Rancière locates this politics of aesthetics in Alfredo Jaar's

[72] Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.
[73] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 57.
[74] Ibid., 83.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Quoted in ibid., 57.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 97.

installation *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* on the Rwandan genocide.[79] Here the part stands in for the whole in the image of the eyes of a woman who has seen the massacre of her whole family, a metonymy that puts her empowered gaze in place of the spectacle of horror. Producing a resistance to anticipation, metonymy charges the work with political force: "It is a question of constructing an image—that is to say a certain connection between the verbal and the visual. The power of this image is that it disturbs the ordinary regime of that connection, such as it is employed in the official system of information."[80]

The image–word operations in this opening sequence of the film also articulate the multiplicities of time, history, experience, and subjectivity in the montage of visual and textual elements attributed to Rancière's concept of the sentence-image as a new trait of rhythm within the law of the great parataxis. The concept of the sentence-image serves to highlight how the representative relationship between word and images is overturned in the sequence, in an "extreme proximity of contrasting logics"[81] displaced between the dialectical and the symbolic: "The power of the sentence-image that couples heterogeneous elements is then that of the distance and the collision which reveals the secret of a world – that is, the other world whose writ runs behind its anodyne or glorious appearances."[82]

Kanwar's essayistic *camera-pen*[83] depicting flip-flops struggling onto the cultural wound of the Radcliffe line unveils the bodies' potential power to act and resist, resonating with the intimately connected "three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action,"[84] according to Hannah Arendt's concept of the human condition, embedded in Enwezor's understanding of the relationship between biopolitics and the ethical mode in postdocumentary art at the core of my argument. Kanwar's images seem to explore Arendt's distinction between labor, which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, and work as "the activity which

[79] In Alfredo Jaar, *Let There Be Light: The Rwanda Project (1994–2000).*
[80] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 95.
[81] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," 60.
[82] Ibid., 57.
[83] Term coined by French critic and film director Alexandre Astruc to describe a new era of the "writing" camera of directors like Godard and Rosselini. Astruc's manifesto, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," was first published as "Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo," *L'Ecran*, March 30, 1948.
[84] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence"[85] and open onto action as the human condition of plurality or "to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[86] Throwing thought off balance in the image-operation's disciplining of our senses, the "twofold character of equality and distinction"[87] in the depiction of the coolies encompasses the viewer and the narrator and points toward Arendt's stress on the possibility of new beginnings capable of interrupting the chain of events set in motion by previous actions. Positing what Giorgio Agamben might call an indivisible and dynamic form-of-life, "in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power,"[88] Kanwar's image-operations here, of course, do not tell a coherent story, and seem paralleled in Bhisham Sahni's key novel, made into a controversial 1980s TV event, *Tamas* (1975), in which a porter laughs to the news of the Partition of India: "Babujii what is that to me? I am carrying loads now and shall continue to carry them."[89] Ten years after the release of *A Season Outside*, confrontations between the police and the coolies became violent in their protest when trucks, for the first time since Independence, were allowed in their place.[90] In the context of the booming economic situation, the historic decision favored the bilateral trade effects of the new free market to the terror risks that previously had banned vehicular movement on the border.

The poetical grasp of the allegorical operation in Kanwar's opening sequence shows allegory's political potential to capture historical experience, no longer "elaborately and gratuitously fictive, but rather closely bound to historical and political necessity."[91] As the historical materialist in Benjamin's account, the artist here reconfigures past and present in a manner

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 175.
[88] Agamben, "Form of Life," 4.
[89] Bhisham Sahni, *Tamas* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001), 127–28. First published in Hindi in 1975, *Tamas* (darkness) was made into a landmark television film on the state-owned television network Doordarshan in 1986. The controversial and much-watched series triggered violence from Hindu militants.
[90] The coolies flagged off a truck with tomatoes to Pakistan, and the police took to so-called *lathi* charge, hitting the porters with batons. Following the demonstration, Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal assured that not a single porter would be rendered jobless following the decision, expecting instead that truck movement on the check post would boost trade activity between the two nations.
[91] Holly Wallace Boucher, "Metonymy in Typology and Allegory, with a Consideration of Dante's Comedy", in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 145.

capable of "blast[ing] open the continuum of history,"[92] enveloping the spectators' integrity of reading in the process, as previously described.

3.5. The military border ceremony: Temporal pensiveness

> *The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.*
>
> —Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form"

In its depiction of the military lowering of the flags ceremony on the Wagah border, the film offers a parallel way of generating forms of resistance encoded in the image–word operations. Here members of the two countries' security forces perform a spectacular lowering the flags ritual in an energetically synchronized combat dance intended to show the maximum amount of contempt and physical strength, watched every evening before sunset by applauding crowds from both sides.[93] Kanwar's camera was allowed access to the center of the parade on the Indian side, producing images that closely observe the physical gestures and salutes. The present tense of the military participants stomping their black boots and swaying their arms in masculine mannerism is thrown into suspense as slow-motion effects stretch the ritual with "melancholic ambivalence between fixating and moving beyond the past"[94] to highlight "an unreconciled tension between stasis and temporality, remembrance and disawoval, individual and collective memory"[95] in the ontology of freeze effects. Into this collapsing and juxtaposing of tenses, the narrator fuses excerpts from a 1920 rhetorical dialogue on nonviolence between Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Hunter. Again, the conventional fluidity in our reading of the verbal and visual is disturbed to create what W. J. T. Mitchell has termed a "site of resistance."[96] Lacking intimate

[92] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 262.
[93] The forty-five-minute parade had been jointly followed since 1959, but in October 2010, Major General Yaqub Ali Khan of the Pakistan Rangers decided that the aggressive aspect of the ceremonial theatrics should be toned down.
[94] Jean Ma, "Photography's Absent Times," in Beckman and Ma, *Still Moving*, 116.
[95] Ibid.
[96] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 285. In his reading of pivotal photo essays including Walker Evans's and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), Mitchell understands the photograph both as language and as not. Resistance arises in

knowledge of the realities behind the story of the voice-over, which produced a decisive move toward the end of British rule in India, the spectator is galvanized into uncertain modes of translation, redolent of the complexity and depth of history. We sense here the film's affinity to the hybrid essay's nonidentical force, its polar opposite being "the philosophy of absolute knowledge,"[97] turning the sequence into what Adorno calls a "force field, just as every intellectual structure is necessarily transformed into a force field under the essay's gaze."[98]

Thinking in fragments, the freeze effects suspend the military bravado of the lowering of the flags ceremony into both ridicule and thrill, depicting the ceremony as a hypnotizing anachronism by means of the photograph at the founding core of moving images: "Driving a wedge between memory and history, the melancholy of photography contradicts the idea of history as a collective origin, which presumes that individuals are simply completed by the historical narratives available to them as part of their social identity,"[99] Jean Ma writes about the freeze frame. Intimate close-ups of a soldier in fierce concentration expose the spectator to a rupture in the military facade and the official story of hostility. Drawing attention to the materiality of the event in the color attributes of the charcoal black and crimson red military berets, the sequence taps into Walter Benjamin's historical sensitivity, as we have seen in the two other sequences: "To articulate the past historically . . . means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."[100]

The presence of photography in the rhythms of cinematic hesitation and interruption here "contribute to the disintegration of organic constructs of memory and temporality"[101] in an exchange between the powers of different media to show us how the bond between experience and its representations is the fault line between the world and our knowledge of it. The heterogeneous interplay of different media evokes pensiveness, according to Rancière, and "puts every conclusion in suspense. What is interrupted is the relationship between narration and

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the equality between the disruptive text and the images, which thereby are enabled to take on a kind of independence and humanity that would be unavailable in a more straightforward text.

[97] Adorno, "Essay as Form," 1.

[98] Ibid., 13.

[99] Ma, "Photography's Absent Times," 116.

[100] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

[101] Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, introduction to *Still Moving*, 17.

expression. . . . The logic of visuality no longer arrives to supplement action. It arrives to suspend it or rather to duplicate it."[102]

As historical events in the relationship between India and Pakistan have transformed the Independence movement's dream of a united India into nuclear armament, the image-operations of the sequence produce a deep ambiguity in the quoted legacy of Mahatma Gandhi.[103] Again, the film displays the mechanics of allegory in a construction that creates also a critique of the concept of progress itself. Allegory here perhaps serves a purpose to acknowledge "the darkness, the arbitrariness, and the void that underlie, and paradoxically make possible, all representation of realms of light, order, and presence." [104]

3.6. Emancipated subjectivities

The characters of the story blend within the kind community of sense that *A Season Outside* sets up. As we have seen, the figure of Mahatma Gandhi coincides with the monk Kanwar meets in the narrated story. The narrator's mother, defenseless in protecting her domestic arena from internal violence, is weaved with the image of the old woman watching the Indian army's parade and the story of Sophia Tolstoy's agonized marriage to the Russian master of human compassion. Recalling Roland Barthes's famous essay on photography, *Camera Lucida*,[105] the artist's mother is subtly veiled at the center of events, establishing interrelations with the images of every woman in the film. Breaking down the polarities of subject–object relations, this mode of narration does not advocate a mere psychological memory of the individual but rather a serialism that transforms the individual at the same time as the collective, constructing memory as a question of mapping one's trajectory through a collective cultural realm. With the essay

[102] Rancière, "Pensive Image," 123.
[103] Gandhi continues to be treated as an icon of moral force yet encompassing ambiguities by contemporary artists in India, who question and challenge the prevailing notions of reality in the context of the Gandhian philosophy, as in the exhibition *Detour* (2009) in Mumbai gallery Chemould Prescott, featuring photographers Ravi Agarwal, Sonia Jabbar, Samar Jodha, Dayanita Singh, and Ram Rahman. Subodh Gupta's installation *Gandhi's Three Monkeys* (2008), portraying the mascots in the principle "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" in military headgear, is another well-known artwork on the legacy of Gandhi.
[104] Stephen J. Greenblatt, preface to *Allegory and Representation*, vii.
[105] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

film's unstable subject–object relations, ensuing thinking fit "to multiply one's selves,"[106] not only the autobiographical narrator becomes made and remade "through the pressure of the resistant reality of the film";[107] also, the viewing subject is drawn to inhabit unstable viewing positions in the film's essayistic thinking through the world as "the necessary recasting of subjective experience in the shifting interstices that define worldly experience itself."[108]

The subjectivities produced in the artwork's fiction also reflect the fundamental Buddhist tenet behind the nonviolence argument at play[109]—that we are the temporary container of countless other beings to whom we are linked and thus responsible. In Buddhism, all existence is interdependent, teaching that what we call ego or the self has no real independent entity in our impermanent existence, which changes from moment to moment. In its negotiations of words and images, the film engages us as spectators to question or own ego-governed responses to threat in a manner parallel to the Satyagraha technique, designed not to coerce opponents but to set into motion forces that could lead to his or her conversion, advocating that we all have an equal share and responsibility in a collective realm.

The allegorical imbrication of the subjectivity of the spectator into the operations of the film, as we have seen in the film's three major sequences, can be said to launch viewers into an increased proximity to the *fabula* of the film, which takes place as "the fidelity to a truth that the documentary ceaselessly constructs and deconstructs,"[110] extinguishing the image of an omnipotent author. The mode inevitably comes with a sense of responsibility of reading, which I suggest could be compatible with the "shared zone of responsibility"[111] that Enwezor stresses in his concept of a new location of the political in art, induced by "new flows and transactions between images, texts, narratives, documents, statements, events, communities, institutions, audiences."[112]

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[106] Corrigan, *Essay Film*, 35.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 35–36.
[109] Gandhi saw Buddhism as the most revolutionary attempt at nonviolence, and in the 1920s, he proclaimed himself a Buddhist, saying that Buddhism was rooted in Hinduism and represented its essence.
[110] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 101.
[111] Ibid., 84.
[112] Ibid.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows us how allegory can work as "an ethics of reading,"[113] understood in terms of a disruptive reading and speaking "otherwise."[114] From Spivak's activist rendering of allegory emerges "a way for writer and reader to acknowledge and negotiate discursive and socio- and geopolitical situatedness as complicity."[115] Animating the reader with otherness, allegory reveals the nature of linguistic functionality and resides in the reading process as an interruption of the main system of meaning. Spivak's use of allegory is derived from Paul de Man's deconstructive definition of the term as it overflows into irony. *Allegory*, in one of his complex formulations, is "what disrupts continuity between cognitive and performative rhetorics":[116]

Allegories are always ethical, the term ethical *designating the structural interference of two distinct value systems. . . . The ethical category is imperative (i.e. a category rather than a value) to the extent that it is linguistic and not subjective. The passage to an ethical tonality does not result from a transcendental imperative but is the referential (and therefore unreliable) version of a linguistic confusion. Ethics (or one should say ethicity) is a discursive mode among others.*[117]

Inducing an ethics of reading, I propose that the film's strategies set in motion a sense of spectatorship that approaches what Rancière has termed the "poetic labor of translation"[118] attributed to the "emancipated spectator."[119] The emancipated spectator is not an isolated entity to be enlightened or politically awoken by the artwork but an equal part in a mutual exchange, challenging the conventional opposition between viewers, the artist, and the depicted subject matter. Rancière's concept is developed from his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*,[120] about the teacher who knows that there is no gap to bridge, no inequality of intelligence between herself or himself and the pupil. Rancière calls for an emancipated *community* of spectators who are active

[113] Mark Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2006), 11.
[114] In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Spivak takes the "speaking otherwise" of allegory into account, as in Greek *allos* (other), not speaking "publicly," as in the latter part of the term, *allegorein*. Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 16.
[115] Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 11.
[116] Ibid., 17.
[117] De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 206.
[118] Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 10.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

narrators and translators, in fact, a theater of no spectators, thus including the artist: "That is what the word 'emancipation' means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body."[121] In this view, there is no such thing as those who possess capacity and those who do not: "It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect."[122] The concept is put forward to deconstruct the intents of Brecht's epic theater and Artaud's theater of cruelty, whose methods of distance and proximity only serve to confirm the idea of an inequality of intelligence, according to Rancière. The screen itself could be enough to prevent this kind of emancipation, presenting a world from which we are absent but wish to rejoin, as Stanley Cavell saw it: "A screen is a barrier. It screens me from the world it holds—that is, screens its existence from me."[123] My point is, however, that an enlarged space for the integrity of the spectator is opened within the structures and the image-word operations of the film, that with Enwezor's concept can be located in "the composition of the subject induced by the process of spectator and the work of art,"[124] as I hope to have shown in this chapter.

Resonating with the self-destructive forces of division in India, and elsewhere, and offering new constellations of words and images, the politics of the sensible in *A Season Outside* does not "avoid the aesthetic cut that separates outcomes from intentions and precludes any direct path towards an 'other side' of words and images."[125] According to Rancière, this is exactly the point in an understanding of how artworks today can open toward the political: "To dismiss the fantasies of the word made flesh and the spectator rendered active, to know that words are merely words and spectacles merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in."[126]

[121] Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 19.
[122] Ibid., 15.
[123] Stanley Cavell, *World Viewed*, 24.
[124] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 84.
[125] Rancière, "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," 82.
[126] Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 22–23.

4. *The Lightning Testimonies*: Retelling the intolerable

Drop falling in ocean everyone knows
Ocean falling in drop
A rare one knows
—Kabir

As the synchronized digital images start unfolding on eight split screens surrounding the spectator in the theatrical space of the black box, Kanwar's voice once ruptures the great silence: "How to remember? What remains and what gets submerged?" Playing on the powers of various representations of trauma, the multiscreen installation explores the repressed and sensitive subject of sexual political violence against women and young girls across different times and regions in a history of communal conflict on the Indian subcontinent. In a complex montage of simultaneous narratives moving allegorically and in the political tension between individual stories and historical events, text, images, and sound unfold in musical rhythms of both simultaneity and delay, encouraging open-ended interpretations.

The immediacy of the electronic images and the slowness particular to Kanwar's aesthetics generate immersion, enhanced by the continuous ebb and flow of the minor key acoustic sound patterns. Blending a range of heterogeneous media, including the archive, the installation also generates resistance in its materiality and production of temporality. In a poetic and meditative exchange between the sociopolitical and the lyrical, the work conjoins the epic and the allegorical to produce a contemporary discourse of great empathic and political potency.

The words take the character of images on the screens and images express the paradox of representing what resists representation. The images testify in silence, mutely inscribed with textual excerpts of the testimonies, dates, names, locations, and questions from a "second-person"[1] narrator translated into a first-person format in a disjunction of facts and affect, spoken and indirect speech and thought. It is not the victims or witnesses who speak but a collective multifocal narrator who accounts for all.

[1] Bal, *Narratology*, 29.

Taking media into consideration, the main concern of this chapter is to bring to light the particular kind of system of visibility and sense of community that the work produces, within the textual approach that I suggest is of relevance. Transcending victimization, this reading of the installation proposes that the work takes the character of storytelling, a genre with revolutionary potential, according to Walter Benjamin, residing in the collective and immediate bond between listeners, the storyteller, and the story.[2]

The text will first give a closer introduction to *The Lightning Testimonies*' complex and vast subject matter. Furthermore, I will present what I regard as major strategies in the installation's mode of storytelling before proceeding to a closer analysis of certain of these aspects.

4.1. Silenced, resonating narratives

Immensely researched across South Asian history and its vast regions, *The Lightning Testimonies* was initially created in response to the great extent of gender-based violence in the course of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom. The artist expresses that his intent is not to convey a mission but rather to attempt to understand.[3] Recalling unbearable suffering, the work gives visibility and acknowledgment to the innumerous silenced stories of violence against women on the Indian subcontinent as a common trope in its interwoven communal conflicts. Kanwar's installation sketches the intersection of gendered, caste, and feudal modes of power in the subject of sexual political violence on the subcontinent, suggesting that the violence belongs to a system of meaning.

Applying power to the lives and bodies of individuals who have been deprived of basic human rights, men of official power, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, appear as characters alongside the individual women and survivor–witnesses who come forward in the

[2] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).
[3] Put forward, for example, in the artist's introduction to the presentation of *The Lightning Testimonies* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Hertogenbosch, in 2008.

work, assuming the simultaneity between narratives from the following regions and zones of conflict:

- The infamous human rights violations and routine abuses of the Indian armies in the northeastern provinces of Manipur and Nagaland, where the Indian Security Forces are present due to separatist movements. Here the Armed Forces Special Powers Act allows unlimited access to persecution without warrant by military officers, regardless of rank, of any person acting in contravention of any law.[4]
- The ongoing civil war in the northwestern region Kashmir, a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan and the object of three wars in 1947, 1965, and 1999.
- The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, resulting in the secession of East Pakistan, which became the independent nation of Bangladesh.
- The ethnic cleansing of Muslims carried out by Hindu fundamentalists in Gujarat in 2002, conducted in a preplanned collusion with the police and the BJP.
- Contemporary atrocities against members of the untouchable castes (Dalits) and tribals (Adivasis). A long-standing commonplace practice in India of stripping and parading Dalit and Adivasi women is usually prompted by their refusal to take a subordinate position or accept persecutions.[5]
- The wide-scale rape and abduction of women during the Indian Partition in 1947.

As Bhaskar Sarkar claims, all post-Independence communal riots seem to echo the unprecedented violence that broke out in 1947 "as a way of framing and understanding the latest atrocity,"[6] representing also a disconnection from the past that "condemned the nation to compulsive reenactments of social violence. Haunting took the form of both disquieting memory traces and tragic repetition."[7] In Sarkar's account, an elastic conceptualization of Partition, extending backward and forward in time, "highlights the way in which seemingly disparate

[4] Arundhati Roy writes about the reputed act. "Nobody who lives in India can harbor any illusions about what that leads to." Roy, "How Deep Shall We Dig," in *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2004), 100. Widely perceived as a merger forced on Manipur as one of the last states to be incorporated into the Indian nation, in 1949, the ungratified accession to India remains one of the reasons for the large number of insurgencies in the region, in addition to the Indian government's lack of response to the need for development and infrastructure.
[5] See Deepti Misri, "Are You a Man? Performing Naked Protest in India," *Signs* 36, no. 3 (2011): 603–25, http:/www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/657487.
[6] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 28.
[7] Ibid.

historical moments congeal in the popular imagination around the fulcrum of 1947. Thus 1905, 1946, 1971, 1984, 1992, and 2002 fold into 1947; the Bangladesh War, the continuing civil war in Kashmir, the riots in Bhiwandi, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Bombay, and Godhra become elements of one single experiential chain that many place under the sign of Partition."[8]

Intimately connected to the project of nationalism, Independence, and the representations of the Empire, Veena Das traces a narrative trope in the "violence that women have endured in every communal riot since 1947":[9]

In the literary imagination in India, the violence of Partition was about inscribing desire on the bodies of women in a manner that we have not yet understood. In the mythic imagination in India, victory or defeat in war was ultimately inscribed on the bodies of women. . . . Yet, the violence of the Partition was unique in the metamorphosis it achieved between the idea of appropriating a territory as nation and appropriating the body of the women as territory.[10]

The Lightning Testimonies mediates this issue of women as sanctified property targeted for vandalism in the history of political violence on the subcontinent. But the work also addresses the zone of silence surrounding the traumas both in private and public realms. A "collective amnesia"[11] reigned for almost four decades after the Partition because of the infant challenges facing the rationalist nation-building project but also because of the social taboos involved. The political discourse was dominated by national honor and the necessity of returning the women to the right side of the new border between India and Pakistan. As Das writes, "it was assumed that once the nation had claimed back its women, its honor would have been restored. It was as if you could wipe the slate clean and leave the horrendous events behind."[12] In 2002, the documentary version of *The Lightning Testimonies* tells us, one of the main protagonists of Kanwar's installation became the first woman ever to file a court case for rape in communal riots in India.

[8] Ibid., 15.
[9] Veena Das, *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 89.
[10] Ibid., 82–83.
[11] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 28.
[12] Das, *Social Suffering*, 87.

Revealing a dark chapter of severe violations of human rights by juridical institutions, police authorities, and the armies in the "world's largest democracy," Kanwar's mise-en-scène is structured into an increasing display of anger and uprising by its female lead characters. Running in a thirty-two-minute loop, the installation presents the spectator with a total duration of four hours across the eight screens, and the viewer must at every moment choose her or his focal point amid the synchronized choreography of projected narratives. In the closing minutes of the loop, the intense simultaneity expires to converge into a single running projection depicting the Manipuri actress Sabitri Heisnam[13] performing the famous disrobed protest of raped tribal heroine Draupadi in the concluding scene of Mahaswata Devi's[14] documentary rewriting of a key scene from the ancient Indian epic the *Mahābhārata*.[15] The bold and beautiful Draupadi from the national epic is often seen as an early feminist, and the attempt to strip off her sari is regarded as one of the reasons for the *Mahābhārata* war. In Devi's story, Draupadi appears in the context of Maoist tribal resistance in the 1970s. Sabitri's monologue on the single remaining screen adopts the character into the political framework of state violence in Manipur, and follows after the projected amateur shot of the 2004 national media event when Manipuri women undressed in a raging protest against the use of rape and sexual violence as a repressive weapon by the Indian security forces in the region.[16] The image of Draupadi thus materializes into a prime allegory of the installation.

Remarked on in gender studies, the operation is idiosyncratic of Kanwar's construction of cognition, causing supplant meanings in the encounters between different texts: "In thus bringing together protest and play, I would suggest, the documentary stitches together a new site of

[13] Renowned for her powerful voice and body–centered acting style in the rich performance traditions of Manipur, the actress has appeared in different projects exploring the construction of meaning around women's bodies. Her husband Kanhailal's 2000 theatre version of *Draupadi* staged into the political context of Manipuri counterinsurgency, stirred much controversy.

[14] *Draupadi* (1988) is one of acclaimed writer and social activist Devis's most known stories, translated into English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Here Draupadi's rebellion takes place in Naxalbari in West Bengal, the origin of today's communist Naxalite movement in India. Draupadi is hunted down in the governmental attempt to subjugate tribal groups, and after continuous days of rape and abuse, deprived of food and water, she faces her abusers, naked and fierce.

[15] The *Mahābhārata* has been a source text for the mythology of the Indian nation in anticolonial as well as postcolonial phases of Indian writing since the nineteenth century.

[16] The protest exposed a hidden part of the repression in Manipur and came four days after the torture, rape, and killing of thirty-two-year-old Thangjam Manorama, a few hours after she was picked up by personnel of the Assam Rifles on the suspicion of being a militant. The slogans attacked the sexual atrocities committed by the security forces and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

meaning for remembering both enactments in a continuous frame where each may be regarded as constituting the meaning of the other in retrospect," Deepti Misri writes about the overwriting operation.[17]

Briefly transcribed here, in the story the narratives convey in words and images on the eight screens, the epic dimensions of *The Lightning Testimonies* include the following persons and events:

Screen 1: *In the village Ngainga in Manipur, the young girl Luingamla was shot dead when she rebelled against the Indian soldier's attempt at raping her in her home.*[18] *Sitting in her home and in the same position as her daughter when the soldier came, the mother, M. Lungshimla, recalls the terror and expresses her grief. Zamthingla has designed a hand-woven sarong worn by many in Luingamla's memory. Its design and patterns symbolize Luingamla's bravery and aspects of the court case and struggle for justice that lasted for years. Her family members gather around her grave in silence.*

Screen 2: *In Ungma in Nagaland, on February 24, 1957, Mangyangkokla was paraded naked through the main street to the village church by the Indian army representatives, before being raped for three weeks in the army camp. To die in peace and on behalf of all who have not yet spoken, she revealed the story. In 1971, the Mountain Division of the Indian Army arrived in Yangkeli village, Nagaland, because the villagers supported the Naga insurgency against the Indian state. They stayed for six days and raped both women and children, including a mentally challenged girl. Mrs. Nzano still lives but was pregnant and lost her child. The village orange tree witnessed.*

Screen 3: *Testimonies from the Indian Partition when around 75,000 women were abducted are inscribed on images of the ornate colonial-Indian architecture of Punjab and the city of Amritsar.*[19] *A testimony recalls a seventeen-year-old girl who tried to kill herself to escape the fatal social consequences of being raped; her husband and brother aided in the failed attempt to*

[17] Misri, "Are You a Man?" Misri refers to the single-channel documentary version of *The Lightning Testimonies*.
[18] The documentary tells us that the murder took place in 1986.
[19] Amritsar and Lahore experienced some of the worst communal riots during the Partition of India.

strangle her. In Punjab, Muslim elders encouraged young women to commit suicide in the wells when the Sikhs came in rage. A woman kept her best clothes and jewelry on and called friends over, awaiting her expected death.

Screen 4: *Social worker Mridula Sarabhai organized camps both in India and Pakistan to rescue abducted women after the Indian Partition. Sarabhai advocated the rights of every woman without compromise, but religious, national, and social convention decided their fate. The two countries set up an abduction law to negotiate the exchange of the victims. Archival black-and-white photographs show Mridula at different stages of her life, also with Mahatma Gandhi.*[20] *This screen narrative also encompasses contemporary images of a quiet rural compound with women at the spinning wheel, a quintessential symbol of the Indian Independence movement.*[21]

Screen 5: *In the Liberation War Museum in Dacca, Bangladesh, singular stories and images are extracted from the more than 150,000 women raped and the millions massacred by the Pakistani soldiers during the Bangladesh War of Liberation in 1971. A testimony recalls three pretty, newly married women and their mother-in-law who became the victims of the Pakistanis before they set fire to the women's house. A young girl visiting the museum reads a letter on display to the prime minister from a father whose daughter's chastity, honor, and future were taken away by the soldiers. He prays for her to be included in a rehabilitation office for Veerangana women, the name formally given to the raped woman by the Bangladesh government, signifying "brave heroine."*

Screen 6: *On February 28, at the advent of the Gujarat pogroms in 2002, pregnant Bilkees Yakub Rasool returned by foot from Eid celebrations with sixteen family members, including her three-year-old daughter. On March 3, two jeeps with men shouting anti-Muslim slogans encountered the group. Bilkees was the only survivor left after the attack and mass rapes. She*

[20] Sarabhai was a Gandhian follower and played a significant role in the fight for Independence. Later in life, she became a supporter for Kashmir self-rule.

[21] The spinning wheel became an Independence symbol after Gandhi, in 1918, started the *khadi* (handspun cotton) movement aimed at boycotting British-manufactured clothing and promoting self-reliance. Images are from the Gandhi Vanita Ashram in Punjab, where women without means and in need of protection are admitted and given technical training in various handicrafts. The ashram was started in 1948 to help widows, destitute women, and immigrants. This location is veiled in the installation.

hid in the habitat, and Adivasi women supplied her with clothes to wear, before Bilkees reported the crimes to the local police. The name of the rapist was not recorded, and neither was a medical examination conducted. The case was closed, but Bilkees got it reopened, spending five years in court with the help of her family, community, women's groups, and human rights organizations.[22] *The Adivasis built a shrine at the site of the atrocities. The images follow her route across the dry Gujarat landscape.*

Screen 7: *Bhaiyalal Bhotmange is the only survivor of a Dalit family murdered by upper-caste farmers over a land dispute in Khairlanji, Maharashtra, on September 26, 2006. His wife and daughter were paraded naked, raped, and killed in front of the villagers; Bhaiyalal's two sons were sexually assaulted and beaten to death. The place is two hours from Nagpur, the city where Ambedkar rejected Hinduism and its caste system and converted to Buddhism in 1956.*[23] *Similar events against Dalits and Adivasis are recalled, and the groups' various attempts at resistance against injustice are listed as the reasons for the violence. Blunt amateur photographs depict the horrors. Pain and isolation is given a more abstract expression in etchings.*

Screen 8: *In Kashmir, the ongoing military conflict has caused the deaths of sixty thousand people, thousands are missing, more than a million have been displaced, and sexual attacks on the female population continue. The lack of juridical and human rights is farcical. Victims with or without names are listed on images of the beautiful Kashmir scenery.*

On February 28, 2002, armed mobs attacked the Gulbarg Housing Society in Ahmedabad, where more than seventy people were burned alive and women and girls were sexually attacked. A man revisits the ruins, his eyes heavy with sorrow. We read that the police watched without taking action. A number of attacks, killings, victims, and locations from the Gujarat pogrom in February and March 2002 are listed and dated.

[22] The documentary reveals that Bilkees was the first woman to take rape in communal riots to an Indian court of law.

[23] A key political leader and intellectual, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar campaigned against social discrimination, advocating political rights and social freedom for India's untouchables, and was also chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution. He became one of the first Dalits to obtain a college education in India.

A Manipuri couple staged the adapted documentary play from Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi's story about the Adivasi couple Draupadi and Dulna who were part of the Naxalite-armed rebellion against the Indian state in 1971. Actress Sabitri performs Draupadi's disrobed monologue, facing her terrified abuser.

On July 14, 2004, Manipuri women belonging to various social organizations reenacted Draupadi's naked uprising outside the headquarters of the Indian Assam Rifles at the Kangla Fort in Imphal. The amateur footage includes close-ups of one of the women, Ima Ngambi, addressing the army members in a fierce oral attack. On a provisional bamboo stage in the forest, Sabitri performs Draupadi's monologue on the single remaining projection of the installation.

4.2. Strategies of storytelling

4.2.1. Narrative companionship

Achieved by means of minute musical editing,[24] the structure of the installation's narration can be aligned to the serial, episodic looseness of the epic Indian narrative, which "seems to prefer an apparently never-ending series of episodes to a unified, single-strand, streamlined course of events."[25] A particular feature are the polysemic layers of coexisting, paratactic narratives in a "multiplicity of motifs and styles of narration,"[26] narrated by a communal authorship "full of multiple voices."[27] The sage Vyasa comments on the structure of the *itihasa* (epic) genre in the first chapter of the *Mahābhārata*, comparing it to a tree of branches, leaves, roots, flowers, and fragrances: "The tree of the Bharata, inexhaustible to mankind as the clouds, shall be a source of livelihood to all distinguished poets."[28] Ignoring man-made laws of historical linear progress, "the story-tellers of India have assumed that all tales are recycled, even as living organisms are

[24] Sameera Jain's meticulous editing skills are a constant presence in Amar Kanwar's works.
[25] Paniker, *Indian Narratology*, 6. The *Mahābhārata* , the *Rāmāyanas*, the *Puranas* and the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories are encompassed in the author's description. He also suggests how aspects of these modes are echoed in modern and postmodern European fiction, mentioning Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf.
[26] Paniker, *Indian Narratology*, 43.
[27] Ibid., 54.
[28] Ibid., 55.

themselves recycled perpetually in the natural world," acknowledging that the art of narration is "an attempt to construct tales in accordance with this fluid notion of backward and forward movement."[29] As one story inaugurates before another in Kanwar's installation, temporalities and voices coalesce, providing expansiveness and improvisation to the central story.[30]

The genre of storytelling gets shaped by its communal context, as opposed to the solitude of reading a novel, according to Benjamin: "A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller, even a man reading one shares this companionship."[31] Images of people gathered in conversation around a bonfire intensify the impression, and the story of the Manipuri stage-version of *Draupadi* is narrated in the common term "once upon a time."

Storytelling became central to Benjamin in the revolutionary potential of human transmission of a seemingly archaic genre that he tried to rescue from modernism's will to silence in the mute repressions of the experiences of the soldiers returning from World War I. "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell,"[32] Benjamin writes, and blends storytelling with the epic faculty: "Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on the one hand and, with the passing of these, make its peace with the power of death on the other."[33] The natural history to which the stories refer back, the storyteller has "borrowed his authority from death."[34] In his reading of the cinema of Bengali film director Ritwik Ghatak, Bhaskar Sarkar notes how the Indian epic mode resembles Benjamin's take on storytelling: "Indian epics and mythologies have a direct relevance to contemporary Indian life: as culturally shared cognitive resources, and discursive frames of reference they remain integral parts of the nations' living traditions."[35]

A double focus on the individual and the group is a poignant feature in the community of sense in the classical Indian narrative, according to Paniker: "The classical epic narrator achieves

[29] Ibid., 10.
[30] Paniker, ibid., proposes that this narrative mode is paralleled in the decentralization in Indian palace architecture and also in the Raga system of Indian classical music, where the basic structure is given but a lot is open to improvised variations.
[31] Benjamin, "Storyteller," 100.
[32] Ibid., 94.
[33] Ibid., 97.
[34] Ibid., 94.
[35] Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, 210.

impersonality by transcending the personal and the private, whereas the folk-tribal narrator is impersonal because he is fictionalizing community experience. In both, romantic egotism is subverted."[36] The narration of *The Lightning Testimonies* integrates these elements of epic and oral storytelling as a social act of exchange between speaker and listener.

Both lyrical and factual narratives with the oral character of the tale are inscribed on the images, sometimes as captions, but also in the form of text as image. The months and years of the different episodes in Bilkees's long fight in court form a timeline of resistance adorning the silhouette of the hills where she hid, as does the list of known and unknown dead women written onto the beautiful scenery of Kashmir—a literary unfolding of trauma into cultural space. In indirect speech and thought, the multifocal narrator of plural identities speaks of the victims and the survivor–witnesses, addressing them in person but also leaving questions open to the audience:

How does one remember you Mridula?
Why didn't you leave behind a diary?
Were there no prophecies hidden in your dilemmas?

In the closing words of the Bangladesh narrative:

Will the Bangladesh heroine of 1971 ever reappear?

Thus the "storyteller" at work offers a special invitation to the spectator, suggesting with allegory's political potential that we are "participating in a critical response in which real personal and cultural events are used to enlarge the ethical, social, and political meanings they suggest." [37]

[36] A poignant example is the tale of honey collectors who kept the story going all night to keep awake and protect themselves against possible danger.
[37] Brian Wallis, "Telling Stories: A Fictional Approach to Artist's Writings," in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 1991), xv.

Creating excess "by the simple placement of 'one thing after another,'"[38] allegory "superinduces a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events,"[39] as we have seen previously to set free the idea of a totalizing model of history in the collisions and the connections between the narratives. Again, as in the force of the unexpected that Rancière describes in paratactic rhythms, it is "the clash of heterogeneous elements that provides a common measure."[40]

4.2.2. Mixed verse and prose

The prose of Kanwar's narration unfolds into poetical figures that suggest how trauma resists language but resides in the imaginary and visual with revelatory potential. Implicating "*both* metaphor and metonym,"[41] allegory "tends to cut across and subtend all such stylistic categorizations, being equally possible in either verse or prose."[42] Inserted into the story as ornate stanzas, these poetical passages resemble how frequent outbursts of lyrics and songs are inserted into the epic Indian narratives in "highly sophisticated stanzaic form. But although narrative, the stanzaic integrity of the poetry is stringently maintained. . . . With rare exceptions, the poetic individuality of the stanzas is not subordinated to the requirements of sequential narrative."[43] The mode of mixed verse and prose is attributed to the separate genre *campū* in the history of Sanskrit poetics where "the variety of composition enlarges the scope and ease of the poet's expression and entertains the reader by the presentation of combinative of varying melodies."[44]

Five poetical figures return frequently as recurring emblems of the installation:

- the slow pan over a red-flowered tree, with the bright fruits of an orange tree in the background

[38] Ibid., 56.
[39] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 57.
[40] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," 55.
[41] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 57.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Dimock et al., *Literature of India*, 152–53.
[44] M. Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), 496. The *campū* was recognized as an independent genre around A.D. 10, but mixed prose and verse occurs earlier in India and is found also in other narrative traditions both in Asia and Europe.

- the view from a train window as speed dissolves the trees and the rural landscape outside into abstract greens, to the sound of the train's technology
- black-and-white cinematic images in slow motion from the Partition archive, in which a young girl is pulled onto the top of a train cramped with refugees
- close-ups of the meticulous work of an elderly dark-haired woman weaving the red sarong in Luingamla's memory
- the blurred pastel image of a woman hanging clothes on a rooftop terrace against a lavender blue sky

Detached from the stories they interrupt and interweave, as "a polished and self-complete whole,"[45] these stylized moving image "stanzas" attest to vision's special relationship to traumatic experience that cannot be accessed by words. In one of the founding texts of trauma studies as a dominant paradigm of recent historiography, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman claim, "The eye can often function as a mute witness by means of which events register as eidetic memory images imprinted with sensation."[46] As poetical figures and a "stylization"[47] of the story, they also express the artist's affinity with polysemic images and a deep relationship between man and environment, reconfiguring the relationship between the personal and the political. Kanwar writes about the mnemonic impact of the image of a wooden window that occurs in the retelling of the route to the church where Mangyangkokla was paraded naked: "The wooden window is the container of that morning 57 years ago and of every single day in time since then. You, me, Aunty and the child altogether. Forwards and backwards. Forever."[48]

In the *rasa* theories[49] as the critical foundation of classical Indian literature and aesthetics, directed in great detail toward nine defined experiences of the spectator as a "focal point of emotional, intellectual, and intuitive integration,"[50] the aesthetic experience provides a "release

[45] Ibid., 126.
[46] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 35.
[47] Dimock et al., *Literature of India*, 144.
[48] Kanwar, "When You Step Inside You See That It Is Filled with Seeds," 191–92.
[49] The *rasa* theory of Indian aesthetics was initially formulated in the theoretical treatise *Nāṭyaśāstra*, written by Bharata during the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, and in Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharati*, written between the sixth and the tenth centuries A.D.
[50] Gandhi, "Windowed Style of the Desktop Interface," in Panikkar et al., *New Indian Art History*, 329.

in the form of the temporal cessation of the demands of the phenomenal ego."[51] Fundamental to traditional dance, music, theater, cinema, and literature, the *rasa* theories represent a move from aesthetics to ethics to access the idea of the blissful "resting place of the heart tired of selfish practical pursuits,"[52] in "dim recognition that I could be all because my being myself rather than another does not matter."[53] The use of the poetics of narrative traditions in the installation possibly bears traces of this conjunction of ethics and aesthetics embedded in Indian literature.

Demonstrating nature's indisputable spiritual supremacy over man-made culture, the returning images of the red flower petals generate an affinity with ecology in identity and survival, another common trait of the South Asian narrative.[54] Resonating with the worship of sacred trees in Hindu practice, they also insert the captivating associative powers of color in which the installation is embedded, cast in warm, alarming reds or soothing blue pastels, expressing the sensory riches of its locations without hesitation. Asking us to reconsider the character of "evidence," the orange tree we glimpse in the background is presented as an autonomous village witness in the written story about the mass rapes in a 1971 Naga insurgency. Being that the background orange tree is the focus of the textual narrative, and not the dominating red tree of the images, Kanwar here subtly inserts deferral into our cognition. Also, the natural phenomenon of lightning testifies here, per the metaphoric title of the installation, represented in images that slowly transform the sky with the device of the digital images' poetical possibilities of expressing duration while unfolding perceptual immediacy. It is worth noting that lightning not only signifies destruction in Hindu mythology but occurs as a feature of the many new beginnings in the cyclical nature of the universe, when the god Vishnu takes on the character of Rudra-Shiva at the end of one day in the life of the world to destroy all life to initiate rebirth.[55]

The documentary's "tendency to transform ethical concerns into aesthetic devices and vice versa"[56] was a troubling aspect to some in the reception of the works at the Documenta 11.[57]

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[51] Robert Wilkinson, "On the Western Reception of Indian Aesthetics—The Grounds of Difference," in *Asian Aesthetics*, ed. Ken-ichi Sasaki (Singapore: Nus Press/Kyoto University Press, 2010), 219.
[52] Arindam Chakrabarti, "Ownerless Emotions in Rasa-Aesthetics," in Sasaki, *Asian Aesthetics*, 208.
[53] Ibid., 209.
[54] Paniker, *Indian Narratology*, 123.
[55] See, e.g., Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Puranas* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima, 1988).
[56] Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 77.

In "the pitting of 'truth' against 'beauty,'"[58] as "the product of a regrettable (Western) dualism that accounts for the rift between science and art, mind and body,"[59] Kanwar's operations here avoid what Mark Nash terms "the evacuation of signification from the signifieds of documentary practice,"[60] such that it becomes "simply" art, losing any connection to a social referent in what is often viewed to be the paradoxical underside of documentary-based contemporary art. The paradox, that these image-operations of the installation divert, occurs when aesthetic positions become substituted for their referent and reality becomes just another commodity or fetish.

4.2.3. Heterogeneous representation

Haunted by the echo of something that is inevitably not there, *The Lightning Testimonies* plays on trauma's various representations in text and images: the evacuated crime sites, testimonials and witnesses, the theater performance, the village sarong, the Adivasi shrine commemorating Luingamla and the massacre of Bilkees's family, drawings of the Dalits, trees, birds, architecture, images of children playing, a sleeping baby or the ornamental patterns of a blue-glazed window dispersing the storylines and testifying to the frailty and uniqueness of the domestic realm. The multiscreen installation as a theater of collective memory also blends the temporal and perceptual powers of different media: colored digital images, the black-and-white photographic and cinematic archive, the amateur video shot and photographs, vintage portraits, the museum and the cinema auditorium coexist in a highly symptomatic heterogeneous circulation between different media and formats. Occasionally images from the separate narratives reappear on other screens and narratives and in other formats, breaking up the stories but also connecting them, and increasing our attention, as when the image of a little girl among Luingamla's family members at her grave is inserted into the testimonies from the Indian Partition, or as the black-and-white image of a thirteen-year-old girl from the Liberation War Museum is reprojected in a cinema auditorium in the narrative about the war in Kashmir.

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[57] See, e.g., Stian Grøgaard, Georg Morgenstern, Ragnar B. Myklebust, and Marit Paasche, eds., *An Eye for Time: On Video, Art, and Reality* (Oslo: Unipax, 2004).
[58] Michael Renov, "Towards a Poetics of Documentary," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 24.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Mark Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics," *Frieze*, April, https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/reality_in_the_age_of_aesthetics/.

The emblematic train images, "the quintessential modern form of transport,"[61] as Nora Alter observes in the cinema of Ozu and Wim Wenders, echo the railway as the Imperial image par excellence, built by the British from the 1850s, both connecting and fragmenting the social structures of India. The powerful archival image of the girl climbing the refugee train, the icon of Partition in the Indian cultural imagination, touches the evocative relationship between technologies of inscription and psychic processes. As the powerful black-and-white anecdote returns in slow-motion effects, we start to perceive how the people on the train emphatically give way to the child's escape, on the top of wagons crammed with homeless on their way to uncertain futures. With almost unbearable historical weight, the archive here alternates "between document and monument"[62] to illustrates time's "slow immensity,"[63] in a mode of representation "stranded somewhere between allegory and history."[64]

"Speaking" in silence, the installation's poetical emblems amalgamate the mnemonic powers of photography into the media of digital images. In Sigfried Kracauer's "mummy complex" or Roland Barthes's location of the refuge of death in photography, we find variations on the topic of the photograph's ghostly qualities, producing death while trying to preserve life. The slow-paced and meditative rhythm of the detached camera, flowing across the "psycho-geography" of postcolonial India and the evacuated crime locations in long takes, favored by André Bazin for a spiritual potency,[65] opens up an enlarged space for the viewer's own translations. Also, the stilled moving images quivering in "dynamic stasis"[66] suggest that stillness and movement are not opposites, and that time oscillates rather than moving forward.

[61] Nora M. Alter, *Projecting History: German Non-fiction cinema, 1967–2000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 118.
[62] Enwezor, *Archive Fever*, 28.
[63] Ibid., 24.
[64] Ibid., 28.
[65] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugo Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
[66] Thomas Y. Levin, "You Never Know the Whole Story," in *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate, 2008), 460.

4.3. Displacing the intolerable

As if investigating the deaths and crime sites, allegory seems particularly suited to representing events that resist representation in a major narrative strategy of the installation, revisiting the spaces of the trauma in "referential encyclopaedic description,"[67] leaving missing details to be filled in by the reader. In Mangyangkokla's story, the stilled image of the inside of the church to which she was brought is haunted by the absence of the horrors she must have endured. In close-ups from a black-and white vintage family portrait, we see Mangyangkokla as a young woman with husband and children. The text is down to earth:

February 24th 1957
was a cold and chilly day in Ungma village
The children watched from the windows
As Mangyangkokla was paraded naked down the main streets towards the church

We are introduced to Luingamla's story in a long take of her mother sitting silently on a low wooden chair in the sparse interior of her home and in the same position as her daughter when the soldier ended her young life. The elderly woman is wearing the village sarong in her daughter's memory, into which symbolic traces of the events and emotions are woven. The narrated words are mythic:

Mother, will you tell the story of your little girl
and how she was woven into the textures of your dress?

Today only crows inhabit the burned-down apartments of the Gulbarg Housing Society in Ahmedabad. Incidents, names, and numbers of the atrocities that followed in the Muslim pogrom of March 2002 run across the screen as images. The story of Bilkees Yakub Rasool is told across wide shots revisiting the dry and vast ochre Gujarat landscape, the roads on which she traveled and hid. Examining her route from various long distances, the images encourage an effect of looking for traces, displacing what Rancière calls the "exhausted effect of indignation, to a more

[67] Bal, *Narratology*, 46.

discreet affect, an affect of indeterminate effect—curiosity, the desire to see closer up."[68] By showing the flags and clay pots of the shrine set up by the Adivasis who helped Bilkees, the location of her family's massacre is cautiously conveyed. Mieke Bal proposes how the "rape of women is allegorically related to invasion and destruction of space. The more allegorical this fable, the more political becomes its moral."[69] The narrator addresses Bilkees directly as a main character in the artwork's fiction:

How did you come this far Bilkees?

Kanwar's operations here displace the intolerable onto a powerful, reverse logic of not showing and thereby seeing better. In this image-system, effects of syncopation in the image–word connection produce resistance to anticipation in a disciplining of our senses. Frequently images show the events after they have been narrated in words, causing a disjunction of vision and speech and in-between spaces for heightened attention. When the image of the water pump where Bilkees came to drink occurs before the words associated with the action, the image-operation disturbs the logic of the conventional narrative mode. The result is that we head for an active search across the screen to complete the story, bringing us closer into her experiences, at a respectful distance. The cow grazing habitually by the water pump only enhances the sensation of engaging with her route, setting up a tension "where the eye does not know in advance what it sees and thought does not know what it should make of it."[70]

The camera flows across ornate courtyards and eclectic colonial-Indian architecture as reminders of the colonial project, onto which Partition testimonies from Punjab are projected. The stories of women who, during Partition, committed suicide instead of being raped coincide with illegible remains in stone, increasing the sense of puzzle and horror in its reluctance to reveal.[71] Withholding information, this aesthetics of opacity hovers in perceptual alienation, and again places the viewer in the role of figuring out how to relate to past experiences reverberating in the

[68] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 104.
[69] Bal, *Narratology*, 138.
[70] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 105.
[71] In India, the image of the well as a site of women committing suicide is part of a long tradition of mortal female sacrifice, however, this connotation of stone is not apparent to all audiences. The suicide wells feature also in the popular television film *Tamas* (1986).

present, where our eyes meet the open, smiling face of a small boy watching from a terrace. The projection of painful loss onto the pleasing surfaces of the decadent architecture seems to add yet another layer of equivocal meaning.

Also, humorous surprises testifying to the singular capacity of the everyday create effects that blur the obvious: a kid kicks a football, which again is forwarded by an elephant's trunk; a whimsical puppy enters the picture through an open window in Luingamla's house; a squirrel jumps onto the road. Umberto Eco notes how humor as a subversive action "reminds us of the presence of law that we no longer have reason to obey. In so doing it undermines the law. It makes us feel the uneasiness of living under the law—any law."[72]

Only in the narrative of the murder and rape of the Dalit Bhotmange family does Kanwar employ blunt amateur photographs from the authentic crime site and show us a corpse, floating in the river. Returning to the main strategy of displacement in the installation's mélange of materialities, a series of violations against Dalits and Adivasis is written onto the etchings made for the installation by artist Sherna Dastur, depicting the painful isolation, rage and despair of a social formation in the shadows of the Hindu caste system.

4.4. The politics of metonymy

Trauma and loss are displaced onto domestic metonymies with "a politics of metonymy,"[73] as discussed in chapter 3. Both evoking intimacy and propelling thought, the images of the steel cups from which Luingamla must have drunk echo with her sudden, young, and rebellious death. Resisting voyeuristic identification, minute detail invites the viewer to enter into a sensual relation with the material image, but to stop short of contact.

Edlie L. Wong writes about the found objects as strands of hair or silk fabric in Doris Salcedo's installations on political violence in Colombia: "The subtle traces of home and intimacy with the

[72] Umberto Eco, "The Frames of Comic '*Freedom*,'" in Umberto Eco, V. V. Ivanov, and Monica Rector, *Carnival!* , ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 8.
[73] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 97.

lost loved one—a zipper, lace ruffle, flannel shirtsleeve or button—impose a relation of silent, yet attentive proximity. This relation maintains the integrity of the dead when it requires the viewer to forgo a vision of the person in favor of a contemplation of a metonymic possession, an object that once characterized the bereaved."[74]

In the long take portraying the members of Luingamla's whole family posing around her burial site, a shade of red on a woman's lips or a piece of jewelry conveys the power of the singular and "obtuse meaning"[75] suggesting contrasting stories. Expressing grief and integrity, the firm gaze and quiet collective act of siblings and relatives embracing Luingamla's grave take the place of the intolerable in a metonymy that endows them with the same power as us. The sarong woven in her memory stands in for the whole and also stands in relation to the installation as a large tapestry of interlaced narratives.

Kanwar's images turn clotheslines into rhythms of color and pattern that evoke an indexical sense of the human bodies they are meant to cover. Images of colorful clothes on clotheslines among columns in a courtyard or decorating a facade return in various formations along the unfolding of the narratives, suggesting a number of untold stories and interpretations in homage to the female labor they convey. As metonymies giving the effect for the cause, the operations manage to create a silent connection with the narratives and the deceased. Redistributing the relationship between the single and the multiple, metonymy again is turned into a political figure: "That is how they are political, if politics in the first instance consists in the changing of places and counting of bodies. In this sense, the political figure par excellence is metonymy, which gives the effect for the cause or the part for the whole."[76]

In the story of social worker Mridula Sarbhai, history is recaptured in the present-day images of heavy rain pouring down on an Amritsar terrace, resounding with a cultural remembrance of the legendary monsoon following an extremely hot summer in 1947, another layer of denotation concealed for many yet reverberating within the melancholy image-operation, with allegory's

[74] Edlie L. Wong, "Haunting Absences: Witnessing Loss in Doris Salcedo's *Atrabilarios and Beyond*," in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, ed. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 177.
[75] Barthes, "Third Meaning."
[76] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 97.

"capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear."[77] A fragment of history, a worn-out vintage Indian–Pakistani passport floats around in a storage loft, and attests to the symbolic montage between foreign elements in the sentence-image as a "little theatrical machine that manufactures analogy, which makes it possible to recognize the poet's thought in the feet of a dancer, the fold of a stole, the opening of a fan, the sparkle of a chandelier. . . . The machine of the mystery is a machine for making something common, not to contrast worlds, but to present, in the most unexpected ways, a co-belonging."[78]

4.5. Heterogeneous media and their effects

Alerting us to its own artifice, the mediation of the story in a heterogeneous exchange of images between different media sets up a tension in the distances between several image functions and media presented simultaneously. Rancière coins the term *pensiveness* to describe the mode that emerges from the "latent presence of one regime of expression in another,"[79] in "exchanges between the powers of different media,"[80] as something in the image that resists thought both of the person who has produced it and of the person who seeks to identify it. Owing to the infinite possibilities in the materiality of the video-image replacing the temporalities of cinematic sequence and cut, the video installation and the "electronic paintbrush"[81] are particularly suited for rejoining different regimes of expression and powers of media, according to Rancière: "The video image has likewise been able to make itself the site of a heterogenesis, a tension between various regimes of expression."[82]

I suggest that the interlacing of the powers of media in the installation produces a supplanting, subversive potential in the differences between their "automatisms"[83] as a mode of "thinking historically in the present."[84] The material conditions of media generate modes of

[77] Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 52.
[78] Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," 57-58.
[79] Rancière, "Pensive Image," 124.
[80] Ibid., 125.
[81] Ibid., 128.
[82] Ibid., 126–27.
[83] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 86.
[84] In retrospect, Okwui Enwezor expressed this as a crucial aim of Documenta 11 in the lecture "Revisiting

epistemological questioning, temporalities and subjectivities that are fundamentally altered in what Rodowick prefers to term the "digital event."[85] Presenting to us a world from which we are temporally absent, but to which we wish to reconnect, the indexical arts of analog film and photography produce "a self-examination of our relation to time, memory, and history."[86] The novelty of the electronic screen, however, is the ability to express immediacy and change in real time. Subject to a variety of algorithmic transformations and unlimited layers and manipulations by means of keying and modulation, the ontology of the digital image is commonly characterized by unlimited present tense ("Once on video-tape, you are not allowed to die . . . in a sense."[87]) and control of information to produce a floating immersive experience. With scanning and projection, pixels are translated into a two-dimensional picture, and the electronic display actively constructs the images in time, producing a continual transformation of the image. We perceive a coherent image due to overlapping durations and the rapid scanning process, but there is never a single moment when the entire image is spatially or temporarily present to us, as with photography and cinema.[88] The image as "one" is just an illusion, or as Lev Manovich puts it, in celebratory terms, "The image, in its traditional sense, no longer exists! And it is only by habit that we still refer to what we see on the real-time screen as 'images.'"[89]

As in the apparently still images of the city of Amritsar unfolding before our eyes in a single frame shifting character from day into night, or the emblem of lightning slowly transforming the sky, *The Lightning Testimonies* plays on these possibilities in the digital to express duration while unfolding perceptual immediacy. The images of the survivor–witnesses hold a strong sense of tactile presence in the minute movements in facial expressions of large emotional effect and in the materiality of locations and the sensory presence of haunting absences. The reduced causal links to physical reality in the digital image underline the unstable states of visibility and duration in the perception of a continually changing present that can never be wholly present.

Documenta 11" on July 24, 2011.

[85] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 173. Rodowick defines the "digital event" as the fact that montage no longer is the expression of time and duration but a manipulation of the layers of the modularized image subject to a variety of algorithmic transformations.

[86] Ibid., 75.

[87] Nam June Paik, "Input-time and Output-time," in *Video Art: An Anthology*, ed. Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 98.

[88] Rodowick claims that we tend to assume that digital images produce the same effects as their forerunners in cinema and photography because of their "family resemblances."

[89] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 100.

This ambiguously weakened indexical bond possibly adds to destabilizing effects of uncertain cognition in Kanwar's installation.

The ability of the digital image to combine different image sources and create slow cross-dissolves between images is largely explored in the Bangladesh war narrative, causing text to become image and also opening onto the non-identical figures of identity. Here vintage photographs of deceased and raped girls in the Dacca War Museum, figuring as a medium itself, fuse with the images of two female museum visitors and the stories in the textual narration. In awe, a young woman is reading a letter on display, which gets dissolved into an abstract image of color and signs with the digital's "painterly"[90] effects. This operation seems to blur the identity of the Veerangana daughter in the letter with the young woman reading it, to generate a sense of collectivity in the doubling of identities, aided by the modulation technique that "can be interpreted as the representation of ideas or mental images floating around in our minds, coming in and out of mental focus,"[91] as Manovich writes about Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*. Through an internalization of the viewer's virtual presence with the image's visual logic the spectator is transformed into something of a secondary witness.[92] Perhaps the elliptical nature of the digital input–output automatism, widely acknowledged to produce temporal material in a manner parallel to how the human memory function processes past and future material within a continual unfolding present, enhances the connection between the stories of the images and the viewer in the installation.

The Lightning Testimonies holds the image in the productive distances between the presences of the moving images and the stillness of photography. David Campany quotes Wim Wenders on the effect of the long take, a cinema Sergei Eisenstein called *stare-ism*: "When people think they have seen enough of something, but there's more, and no change of shot, then they react in a curiously livid way."[93] In the depicted crime scenes, stilled images holding the camera frame in long takes intensify the sense of both urgency and contemplation. The faint breeze in the strands

[90] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 123.
[91] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 151.
[92] Enwezor suggests that the scriptable documentary turns the spectator into both writer and "expert witness." Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité," 95.
[93] Wim Wenders, "Time Sequences, Continuity of Movement: *Summer in the City* and *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* (1971)," in *The Logic of Images: Essays and Conversations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992). Quoted in David Campany, *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

of grass creates imperceptible movement in what looks like a photograph of the wind itself. Giorgio Agamben writes on the imperceptible within sensory perception as fundamental to the revelatory potential of the photograph: "The photograph is always more than an image: it is the site of a gap, a sublime breach between the sensible and the intelligible, between copy and reality, between a memory and a hope."[94] The ontology of the black-and-white photographs of the young Mangyangkokla and Luingamla appearing on a 2003 Manipuri calendar inscribes the images with a mortifying and nostalgic function. The still image at the core of any moving image technology[95] is revealed in the freeze effects of flower petals flowing from the Indian flag according to custom on special occasions, producing ambiguity in the idea of the national. Beckham and Ma describe how the interconnectedness of film and photography in new media technologies disturbs convention and creates new connections: "The uncanny rhythms of hesitation, interruption, delay, and return released by photographic technologies undoubtedly contribute to the disintegration of organic constructs of memory and temporality, to the attenuation of older models of historicism; at the same time, however, they open onto new capacities of action and reflection in the interstitial zones of private and public remembrance, between individual subjectivity and a public sphere of collective memory."[96]

The tension between stillness and motion resides in the foundations of both art history and cinema and represents a site where these fields meet with new media.[97] Due to the digital image's possibilities of playing on the grammar of hesitation and motion, contemporary art practices have made the image "increasingly refashioned in the direction of demonstrating its abilities to not move, or to move in ways barely visible,"[98] according to theorists of the cross-disciplinary "still/moving field." Exploring how the contemporary image negotiates and remediates tactics and themes from the media archive of the past, Eivind Røssaak suggests a

[94] Giorgio Agamben, "Judgement Day," in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 26.
[95] As the founding myth of cinema, the first public screening of the Lumière brothers' *cinematographe* was an animated photograph of workers flowing out of a building, *Workers Leaving a Factory* (1895).
[96] Beckman and Ma, *Still Moving*, 17.
[97] Paradigmatic examples in the art history of the still moving are Hiroshi Sugimoto's series of photographs from movie theaters resulting in images of a bleached-out screen of overexposure; 1970s Andy Warhol's single-take "Stillies" of friends and celebrities spending hours in front of the rolling camera; James Coleman's *La Tache Aveugle* (1978–90), making half a second of James Whale's film *The Invisible Man* (1933) last for eight hours; and Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) .
[98] Røssaak, "Negotiating Immobility," 3.

"politics of the slow" [99] as a new artistic counterstrategy in the sense of time produced by delays, deferrals, slow motion, and frozen-movement effects.

In Kanwar's installation, the use of temporal media expresses impermanence and elliptical duration in a heightened attention toward the archeology of time. The tension between stasis and motion creates a critical Brechtian stop-action halt in the narrative, proposing, as Thomas Y. Levin attributes to video recasting photography, "that you never know the whole story because there never was a whole story to know."[100]

The powers of the cinematic and photographic archive are strongly present in the narration of the Indian Partition as a primary historical story that the other narratives are read through. Theorized by Allan Sekula as capable of liberating the possibility of meaning "from the actual contingencies of use," the use of preexistent images accessing an audiovisual archive also comes with a loss, "an abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context. . . . So new meanings come to supplant old ones, with the archive serving as a 'clearing house' of meaning."[101] The black-and-white images of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of the independent nation, giving his historic speech at midnight on August 15, 1947, ambiguously suggest that the Greek etymology of *archive* connotes both "commencement" and "commandment."[102]

No longer viewed as a neutral, transparent site of record but rather as a contested subject and medium in itself, the meditation on photography and film as the quintessential media of the archive has turned into a much-used strategy in contemporary art practices. Kanwar's video installation utilizes the archive as a mnemonic machine but also as a vehicle for the ordering of chaotic yet coexistent fragments. Authority is as much at stake as authenticity in the photographs of Mridula Sarabhai with Mahatma Gandhi during the ambiguous rescue of abducted Muslim and Hindu women after Partition. The black-and-white archive here serves to expose the social complexities of national honor, experiences and stigmas that words tell us led to a range of

[99] Ibid., 214.
[100] Leighton, *Art and the Moving Image*, 474.
[101] Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive," in Wallis, *Blasted Allegories*, 116.
[102] See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

personal drama for the involved women in the gendered narrative of nation building. Subordinating time to space, the device of the multiscreen installation transforms the document into monument, as an instrument of rewriting history, memory, and trauma.

Within the larger attempt to rethink the disciplinary boundaries of Indian art history, Nandini Gandhi suggests an affinity between the "web narrativity"[103] of new media technologies and the "hypermediacy celebrated in Indian art and architecture." This visual–spatial sensibility is "the underlying social imagining of our cultural sensibility. . . . Perhaps it is a sensibility to describe things as they are felt, not as they are seen, to tease meaning, a celebration of an artistic reality, an expression of a physical reality, a spiritual reality, not the visible reality. A yearning to reach 'those hidden realms' that Rabindranath Tagore referred to as the 'cave of the heart . . . where the song is heard.'"[104]

Rodowick proposes that the digital event not only produces immersion in the present but also "draws us toward the future rather than engaging us with the past."[105] This opens up a radical potential for a new ethics in a renewed affinity to the other: "But in contrast to the film screen, which holds us in a present relation to the past and sustains our belief in a past world through the qualities of automatic analogical causation, digital screens require us to acknowledge others through efficient communication and exchange: I think because I exist in a present time of exchange with others, who are not present to me in space."[106] Indicating a retreat from the problem of screen skepticism to the acceptance of it, Rodowick's proposal of renewed ethical relations to the world and to collective life in the ontology of the digital event could serve to theorize aspects of the relationship to the other that *The Lightning Testimonies* conveys.[107]

I suggest that Kanwar's installation benefits from the spectator who is familiar with orientating herself or himself in the immersive new media space. The legacy of minimalism revealed the exhibition ground to be ideological, and classical apparatus theory asserts how the power of

[103] Gandhi, "Windowed Style of the Desktop Interface," in Panikkar et al., *New Indian Art History*, 311.
[104] Ibid., 314–15.
[105] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 177.
[106] Ibid., 179.
[107] Rodowick, ibid., proposes that new media here run ahead of philosophy or our ability to grasp media ontologically.

illusion in cinema resides less in the content of films than in the instruments and institutions that make and exhibit them. While some celebrate the participatory and democratic empowerment and opportunities of new media technologies, others consider the mass media apparatuses as reflective of the control mechanisms of capitalism. Kate Mondloch notes that the ambulatory spectator who decides his or her duration, what Hito Steyerl terms "the incomplete, obscured, fractured, and overwhelmed vision of the spectator-as-laborer," which has replaced "the gaze of the bourgeois sovereign spectator of the white cube,"[108] ironically may "serve to reinforce an extremely conventional viewing subject."[109] The debate seems to depend on what kind of media competence the different positions trust the audiences with. In its demanding excess of images and complete break with classical perspective, *The Lightning Testimonies* requires a focused viewer who is able to spend a kind of time that is incompatible with what Dominique Païni in deeply skeptical terms has called the "return of the Flâneur"[110] in new media spectatorship. I suggest that the self-reflexive rhythms in the mediation and narration of the installation retain a criticality that Mondloch proposes can be "exemplary to the extent that they make viewers reflexively aware of this condition, persuasively (and persistently) reminding them of the necessarily embodied and material nature of all media viewing."[111]

4.6. Witnessing trauma

The multiscreen installation device seems particularly suited to performing storytelling's art of repetition in the cyclical distribution of recurring images across the eight screens, but also to accommodating the both polyphonic and paratactic narrative strategies at play: "For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to."[112]

[108] Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory?," *e-flux* 7 (June–August 2009), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museum-a-factory/.
[109] Mondloch, *Screens*, 57.
[110] Dominique Païni, "The Return of the Flaneur," *Art Press* 255 (March 2000): 39–41.
[111] Mondloch, *Screens*, 19.
[112] Benjamin, "Storyteller," 91.

Of relevance to the installation is narrative's potential to work through trauma, which, according to Mieke Bal, paradoxically can "stand for the importance of cultural memory"[113] as an activity occurring in a present in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed while shaping the future. Requiring "an exchange between first and second person that sets in motion the emergence of a narrative," acts of memory can become the work of the artist, who functions as a mediator in a narrative reintegration for trauma to enter into memory and possibly lose its hold. Voyeurism is always at risk in representation of the pain of others, as the pervasive debate on representation in trauma studies shows. Rustom Bharucha makes it clear: "It all depends on *how* the story is told, to *whom* it is being shared in the first place, and *why*."[114] The great debate on trauma and representation is outside the scope of this text. I suggest, however, that the described aesthetical operations of Kanwar's installation manage to displace the easy appropriation of the place of the other for an aesthetical experience of "emphatic unsettlement"[115]—or simultaneously feeling for another and becoming aware of the distinction between one's own perceptions and the experience of the other. Dominick LaCapra proposes the term in response to the crucial question of how to represent trauma in any kind of "writing" without creating victimization as a repetition of trauma.[116] The installation's narration displaces the exhausted effect of what Brecht calls the "crudest form of empathy"[117] as a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other's experience to the self, an immediate sentimentalism that Brecht rules out as a viable, critical response.

Inhabiting the space of difference is also the only possible mode of ethical reading and listening in Spivak's concept of "ethical singularity," and what is crucial in her politics of resistance is not just the act of speaking but the impossibility and possibility of being heard, predicated on the

[113] Mieke Bal, introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Dartmouth, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), x.
[114] Rustom Bharucha, "Between Truth and Reconciliation: Experiments in Theater and Public Culture," in *Experiments with Truth: Transnational Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation. Documenta 11-Platform 2*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 377.
[115] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 41.
[116] LaCapra, ibid., writes in the context of the great debate in trauma studies regarding representations of trauma after Claude Lanzmann's controversial 1985 Holocaust film *Shoah*. See Neal Ascherson, "La Controverse autour de Shoah," trans. Jean-Pierre Bardos, in *Au sujet de Shoah: Le Film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Michel Degu (Paris: Belin, 1990).
[117] Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948), in *Avant-Garde Drama: A Casebook, 1918–1939*, trans. John Willett, eds. Bernard F. Dukore and Daniel C. Gerould (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 518.

listener's willingness to enter into an encounter with the other.[118] In the subjectivities and relationships composed by the process of the encounter between the spectator and the installation, we are projected onto the others' lives through their dignity, not their deprivation of rights, proposing a postnational basis of collective identification.

It is important to note how *The Lightning Testimonies* is largely the witnessing act of those who had the courage and the resources to rebel, who, like the character of Draupadi, refused to remove the signs of violation on their bodies, fighting for their juridical rights against a system that prefers to annihilate these. As such, the installation also represents a symbolic significance for the numerous unheard stories of sexual violence, testifying to the state-supported attempts at exhausting the court cases and leaving the crimes on the periphery of official discourse. Transcending suffering, allegory's melancholy investigations of time perhaps also assume a certain mode of mourning.

The Lightning Testimonies, however, does not assume any causal relationship between viewing the spectacle and acting politically. Rather, as I hope to have shown, the work opens up passages toward new forms of the political by reworking "the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects."[119] Disturbing the status quo of the image–word relationship, Kanwar's system of visibility instead construes what Jacques Rancière terms "a politics based on the variation of distance, the resistance of the visible and the uncertainty of effects."[120] In the described operations of the installation, the relationship between cause and effect is deferred to form a sense community of words and meanings that manage to change our gaze, without attempting to supply images as "weapons for battles."[121] Between representations of the past and production of new, univocal meanings and their poetic constructions resides the transformative capacity of Kanwar's work, articulated in what Hannah Arendt calls the "*inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together."[122]

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[118] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, introduction to Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[119] Rancière, "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," 82.
[120] Rancière, "Intolerable Image," 105.
[121] Ibid., 103.
[122] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182.

5. Conclusion: A politics of plurals

In exploring the aesthetical operations of *A Season Outside* and *The Lightning Testimonies* by means of a textual perspective, I have come to one way of understanding how an ethical–political space is opened in the two artworks as a particular kind of community of sense construed by means of the aesthetical operations at play.

The reading of *A Season Outside* in chapter 2 suggests that the imbrication of the spectator into the *fabula* of the essay film by means of allegorical structures produces emancipation and re-directs both attention and responsibility to the viewer, in allegory's dispersal of meanings and ethics of reading. The narrative mode at play bears resemblance to aspects of Indian narrative traditions to unhinge a linear conception of time. It also can be seen in line with the paratactic logics in Jacques Rancière's term "the great parataxis," in the way the presence of the sequences are ordered and played out against larger historical narratives, creating both collision and interconnection, and attention toward the gaps between elements.

A particular force is located in the image-word relationship in three defining sequences where the textual narration and the images are related in a horizontal or incongruent montage which overturns the representative logics between words and images, resembling how the "sentence-image" within the law of the great parataxis with contrasting logics generates an unanticipated mode of cognition. In the proximity between words and images at play, which is also a common feature of the essay, metaphor is projected as metonymy in a fundamental strategy of allegory, turning the image scriptable. The result is a sense of brushing history against the grain, as in Walter Benjamin's conception of history as melancholy, fragmented experiences pointing towards the future with emergency. The strategy also creates opacity between words and images for the spectator to fill in.

The insertion of the ontology of photography into the moving images in freeze-frames, long takes, and archival footage adds to the heterogeneity of the essay film, opening up spaces of reflection and drawing attention to its own artifice. Also the cinematic qualities of the re-fashioned digital images of the film serve to both rejoin us with the world and keep it at a

distance. The political potential of the allegorical intuition extinguishes the false idea of totality both in history and identity, enhanced by the heresy at play in the genre of the essay film. The reading shows how *A Season Outside* expresses meaning as an open-ended process and tends towards unleashing the conventional hierarchy between the narrator, the story and the spectator, blurring the boundaries between those who look and those who act, yet recognizing the distance between them. The community of sense which emerges from these operations approaches the mutual exchange among equals in what Rancière calls "the emancipated spectator."

Reading the multiscreen installation *The Lightning Testimonies*, chapter 4 suggests that a storyteller at work sets up a common ground of experience. As in Walter Benjamin's account, the revelatory and political potential of storytelling lies in its inherent companionship, expressed here by a multi-focal narrator accounting for a plurality of witnessing acts, encompassing the viewer. The double focus on the individual and the group also exposes a common feature of the Indian epic and folk-tales.

Narratives of gendered political violence across past and present are allegorically played out against one another creating both simultaneity and syncopation on the eight screens, to convey the imbrications between communalism, nationalism and colonialism in Indian historiography. Inducing a vertical reading onto a syntagmatic chain of events, the polysemic narration offers a potential for creating new forms of cognition, conjoining features of the epic narrative with allegory's mode of thinking "otherness." The narratives converge into the bold character of Draupadi, from Indian epical and contemporary tropes, as a prime allegorical figure of the installation.

Employing a "politics of metonymy," the images tend to unsettle the straight line between cause and effect, and thereby enhance the viewer's engagement with the stories and their characters in a resistance to anticipation. Allegorizing effects also seems particularly suited to represent the un-representable in the haunting absences of the narrated crimes. Visual poetical emblems or "stanzas," transcending the narratives of suffering, are inserted into the prose of the narration as in the Indian epic and the *campū*, to dissolve the supposed Western dualism between "truth" and "beauty." Narrated textual elements are treated as visual phenomena with allegory's reciprocity

between words and images, disturbing the representative relationship between them as in the workings of the "sentence-image."

The law of the great parataxis is at work also in the different modes of expression and various media present at the same time, producing excess in the distances between them and creating *pensiveness* for the viewer to engage in. The ontology of the archive is inserted as allegorical fragments between document and monument, creating ambiguity in its supposed authority, and exposing the complexities of history and humanity. As in *A Season Outside*, the productive distance between stillness and motion generates resistance and contemplation. The device of the multiscreen installation and the digital images encourage immersion, yet the heterogeneous use of media and representation of trauma sustain self-criticality. The immediacy of the digital possibly opens up a radical ethical potential by forcing us to acknowledge the presence of the other and drawing us toward the future, as D.N. Rodowick proposes.

The aesthetical operations of the installation enable what Dominick LaCapra in the debates surrounding representations of trauma calls "emphatic unsettlement," as a mode of engaging emphatically with the subjects of trauma without assimilating the experience of the other to the self. The victims and the witnesses retain their integrity at a distance which the spectator is encouraged to engage in. With Agamben's term, the installation gives form-of-life to the marginalized existence of the innumerous suppressed and annihilated stories of gendered political violence on the Indian subcontinent.

The politics that the work performs resides in the system of visibility and the sense community it sets up, as in *A Season Outside*, without assuming political effects. My readings show how a plurality is produced in the sense communities that both works construe, "in which words and visible forms are assembled into shared data, shared ways of perceiving, being affected and imparting meaning."[1] These strategies could be viewed as generating an increased sensitivity toward the other, at the core of Okwui Enwezor's concept of a new political site in contemporary art. But most importantly, in my view, the political force of Kanwar's works consists of construing systems of visibility that acknowledge Hannah Arendt's fundamental insight that

[1] Rancière, "The Intolerable Image," 102.

politics goes on among plurals, in a perspective that can enable us to develop a shared sense of reality: "Without it, we are each driven back on our subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have reality."[2]

The main achievement of Rancière's textual approach that the thesis employs is the way it enables an understanding of how artworks pronounce communities, and also liberates a different way of looking at the political potential of images. Allegory offers a way of approaching the manipulations of time in contemporary art and new media, and also the open-ended construction of truth at stake. As Michael Renov suggests, perhaps it is "toward the 'interval' between terms…rather than to their identity or dichotomization that our fullest attention should be given."[3] I hope to have added to the approach readings of how the ontologies of different media exchange their powers and produce meaning in the two artworks.

The increased awareness of embodiment and affect in screen spectatorship remains outside the grasp of this optics. Readings of the artworks in this perspective would further enable the understanding of the ethical-political effects of the image-language of Amar Kanwar.

[2] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, xiii.
[3] Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 11.

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