

Captions for Two Drives:


1. A pink grey sky splits above the jungle to produce [emit] a charcoal sun, a sun with a “carnal texture” of soot. I am reading Kristeva in my downtime, on the berm. This is the berm: a trash heap so bright the cows are a curiously festive sight. We stopped to feed the first chapati of the day to one of them, rolling down the window of the Maruti Spirit. Is this the jungle? Yes, this is the perimeter of jungle culture so completely degraded that when the red cliffs bloom next to the highway I feel as if needles have pierced my eyeballs, though there’s no pain. I am here in India to give a performance in memoriam: for Jyoti Singh Pandey, who was gang-raped and thrown from a bus in December 2012. A sign above the road, as the jungle gives way to the global city, reads Stop Girl Hate in bright red letters above the traffic lights. Another sign, touting the Canadian pipeline, reads: Did you know this will reduce your mobile phone costs? Wow. I am commuting from the jungle to South Delhi where Jyoti Singh Pandey (Nirbhaya) (Damini): Lightning/The Fearless One: was thrown from the bus and lay, for forty minutes, her intestines extending from her body like a black rope, an organ beyond the frame: before anyone called the police. I am interested, you could say, in those forty minutes, next to the Mahipalpur flyover, in front of Hotel 37: the dirt of that place.

My first attempt to visit the site where my performance will take place ends badly. A group of men throw hardened pieces of sugarcane and small rocks at the backs of my legs and my head as I walk from the taxi to the spot. They are laughing. Why? I get back in the taxi, and, feeling depressed, go home to the enclave where my uncle and aunt live. Day 2, they insist on driving me but first we have to feed a cow. There is a gorgeous black cow sleeping in the polybag trash heap next to the paan stall on Gurukhul Road. I remember being little and the chai wallah gave you tea in a clay cup and you threw it on the ground after drinking your tea in gulps on a freezing morning to the north. Now it is all plastics and the ancient gesture of throwing the home and food waste onto the earth, to be re-circulated, is still intact. They cut a cow’s stomach open and half of it was full of plastic bags, says my aunt, in Hindi. We consider milk, briefly. Most importantly, the cow gets up, eats the chapatti then gazes into my eyes. That’s your blessing, says my aunt. Okay. It is then that I see the boy. He is wearing grain sacks that have been made into clothes. He is holding a spent fluorescent tube like a wand or sword or light saber. He is wearing a TIARA. He sees our car and turns toward us, frowning, neutral. Why are you taking a picture, says my uncle, don’t take a picture of this. But I do. And feel a light shame mixed with greed. The pleasure of having seen such things.



2. Perhaps also, though I don’t have any images, I could speak about the landfill just past the Kashmere Gate, which is to say, the boundary wall.

The bright red scrawl of a beak-anus above the municipal dump. The golden eagle is charred, feral, a variant specimen, a digestive tract in the form of a throat. I am mesmerised. I think of Jennifer Scappetone’s dance/trash collaboration. That she once described. Transposed. I observe the fuschia and orange seams in the grey seething heap as huge as a mountain range, on the outskirts of Delhi. Is fire a subcutaneous membrane, exposed, fluttering, seeping a kind of liquid energy? A great longing to observe or paint or film the trash heap comes over me, but I am heading north.

 Recording of finches migrating from Russian, recorded by Bhanu in Delhi as she was writing.

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