

**2018**

**Everyday Revolutions**

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The contemporary moment is so replete with assumptions that freedom is made universal through liberal political enfranchisement and the globalization of capitalism that it has become difficult to write or imagine alternative knowledges, or to act on behalf of alternative projects or ways of being. Within this context, it is necessary to live within but to think beyond this received liberal humanist tradition, and all the while, to imagine a much more complicated set of stories about the emergence of the now, in which what is foreclosed as unknowable is forever saturating the “what-can-be-known”. We are left with the project of imagining, mourning, and reckoning “other humanities” within the received genealogy of “the human.”<sup>1</sup>

These words from Lisa Lowe’s *Intimacies of Four Continents*, have been a point of departure for my practice as an artist working within transnational contexts of geopolitics and institutions. They have been important to the production of my work not only in their mere academic sense, but also have been vital in reconciling my engagement with the world around me.

As a non-resident alien in the United States, originally from formerly colonized India, I am compelled, both personally and academically, by the subjects of identity and politics. Working in the mediums of photography, video, installation, sculpture, and new media, my ongoing body of work, which goes by the collective name of *Pre/Post/Eros*, explores the transition from postcolonialism to neocolonialism, with special attention paid to history, capital, and spectatorship. Within this series, my most recent work deals with the issue of labor and is attentive to the shifts that mark this subject, not only temporally across history, but also spatially, as it manifests across geopolitical borders and more immediately, the space of the gallery. As is often the case, this work functions self-reflexively and reflects an awareness of my

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 175.

labor as artist and the way art – my product – functions within institutional spaces. Often, my art exists both in both physical spaces, such as galleries, and virtual spaces, such as those “found” online; however, in either case, my work is consistently in dialogue with its own formal properties and the spaces and mechanisms of display. My work literally and conceptually interrogates the apparatus, the tool, the image-maker, the agent, the laborer, the product, and the politics of its own making. Imbued with humor, futility, and violence, the pieces occupy a precarious position between being a parody of “socialist nostalgia” and an expression of sincere concern towards exploitation of labor.

My materials include physical objects, as well as data and image sources, such as readymades, scans, products, computer generated product images, declassified army documents, educational documentary films, and stock photography – all fluid signifiers of history, economics, and culture. Yet, it’s important to stress that my work is not indifferent to aesthetics and actively works to seduce the spectator through the languages of advertising and industrial design, making use of a saturated palette and a clean, fetishistic presentation of the object. However, these seductions ultimately fail to satisfy because, in my work, the viewer is deliberately implicated by the socio-political content of the work, which often addresses imbalances in power.

*Pre/Post/Eros* as a whole indicates my interest in a number of interconnected and inherently integrated issues present within the scope of neocolonialism from race and nationalism to colonialism and outsourcing; from technology and empiricism to ideologies and legislation. It is important to note that meaningful investigation into these issues separately without the context of the others, without an interdisciplinary approach is impossible.

Moreover, it is challenging to theorize about this body of work in a sequential manner, hence, in this essay, I will focus on a particular set of works within *Pre/Post/Eros* produced mostly in 2017 and consider them as explorations into labor within institutional spaces. More specifically, I will explore how labor can be defined not only in terms of *work & effort*, but also in terms of its relationship to displacement, language, and history. In fact, it is these factors that make labor extractable as a means for production of capital.

*Outsourced: Fall* comprises of a short fictional text, a site-responsive installation, and a web-component that corresponds to both the text and the installation. The fictional text is displayed on the gallery wall near the installation in a way that viewers will come across it on their way to the piece. The language is staccato, often repetitive, and the use of a single pronoun 'he' for two characters frequently makes it difficult to decipher which subject the pronoun is indicates. The installation itself incorporates a laser printer placed on a shelf about eight and a half feet high on the gallery wall. The printer's "face" is tilted down at an angle towards the viewer as it intermittently prints out a sheet of paper that then slowly falls to the floor underneath it. The power cable to the printer runs through a thin, long channel towards an outlet placed near the bottom of the wall. This provides the printer with a sense of a body and anthropomorphizes the piece. The printed sheets accumulate in an arbitrary manner on the floor and form a pile. The printer itself displays the manufacturer's logo, *Brother* boldly across the front face. The *Brother* logo refers back to the word 'brother' mentioned once in the text as a descriptor for the protagonist Arun.



(left and below)  
*Outsourced: Fall*  
 Site-responsive installation  
 Brother-brand printer

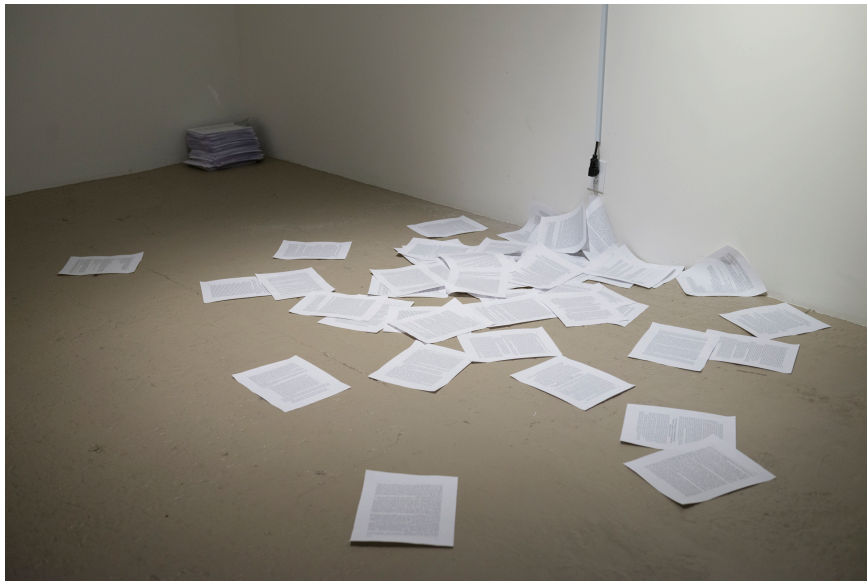
(left)  
 2017- Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia,  
 Atlanta, GA  
 160 sheets of paper per workday  
 6.5 copies of *Capital, Volume 1, Chapter*  
*10: The Working Day*, per workday



(right)  
 2016- Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S290  
 250 sheets of paper per workday  
 10 copies of *Capital, Volume 1, Chapter*  
*10: The Working Day*, per workday

Near the installation, a label text further describes this installation. During the first iteration of this install at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S290, the printer printed two-hundred and fifty sheets of paper per workday, and the text it printed was ten copies of Karl Marx's *Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 10: The Working Day*.<sup>2</sup> In its second iteration at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia, the printer printed every two minutes printing a total of 160 sheets of paper during the open hours of the museum. About six and half copies of the chapter were printed per day. The museum staff would sweep up the sheets and put them in stacks in that corner and reload the printer with paper every day and with toner when needed.

The web component of this piece is currently hosted at <http://www.deepanjan-art.com/fall>. On the website, the fictional text appears in large font on a white background, where the viewer is required to scroll down to read the text entirely. Once the text ends, further scrolling reveals a product image of the *Brother* printer floating in the negative space



*Outsourced: Fall*

Detail from  
2017- Museum of  
Contemporary Art,  
Georgia, Atlanta, GA

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "The Working Day," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, first English edition., trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887), 1:162-212.

surrounding it. The action of scrolling makes it rise or fall, referring to the last lines of the story that mention a falling printer. On scrolling down further, the viewer comes across a diptych of animated images that play in a loop forever. On the left is an animation of the installation with the printed sheets falling from the printer on to the floor below it. On the right is an animation displaying the text from every page of the aforementioned *Chapter 10: The Working Day*. Each page is shown for a fraction of a second before moving on to the next page rendering the chapter incomprehensible. This is true for the physical installation as well since the viewer is

*The leaves were beginning to take their rusty shade. Not all of them. He could smell the leaves being raked and burnt across the city. This meant the air was colder, heavier in the early morning. This meant winter was not far away. Year after year as long as he could remember, his parents would always remind him that fall was getting shorter. Fall would be short. Like every year, fall would be short.*

*It was too early for him to be up and around. Standing at the street-corner, he was waiting for his friend, his brother, Arun. He saw the milkman pass by on his bicycle. He saw the newspaperman pass by on his bicycle. He saw an auto rickshaw pass by. It stopped. Arun was here. Backlit by the golden early morning sun, Arun made his way towards him. The heavy air held the rays of the sun going past Arun's body. He raised his camera and took a photograph. Arun was here.*

*"How could you possibly read Capital on screen? Here," Arun said, handing him volume one of Capital. He was dressed in a black suit and tie. He carried a sports backpack. The backpack looked out of place. He looked out of place wearing a suit in the streets of Kolkata. "How is your new job Arun?" he asked. Arun had finally found himself a job in an IT firm. He had spent a year looking for a job after he got his degree in mechanical engineering.*

*"I have to wake up too early. I'm looking for a government job," said Arun. They both laughed.*

*An hour later he was home pinning up his quick print of the photograph of Arun. The high contrast photograph stood out amongst the other prints. There was the silhouette of Arun's body with his arm raised holding his cellphone. Arun was now at his desk. He was logging in to his workstation. Social media was not allowed in the office. He uploaded his new profile picture through a proxy server. His body engulfed by the sun.*

*It was fall again.*

*"I'm looking for a government job," said Arun. It was late evening. They were at Arun's place. They were slightly drunk. "I've been working on Saturdays for the past few months without additional pay. My contract with those fuckers meant that I couldn't quit before the year was over without having to pay them lakhs. I couldn't complain. There are enough people waiting to take my place. The year is over. Fall is here."*

*"I was supposed to be working as a software developer and one fine week they sent me out to setup fucking routers around the office of one of our clients."*

*"I quit," said Arun. He got up and grabbed the camera. "Thanks for this. It's time you paid me back for all those books I lent you to read." He took a photograph of his bookshelf. He headed out the door. "Where are you going Arun?" he asked. He followed.*

*They were at Arun's office. It was afterhours. All the cubicles were empty. They walked to Arun's cubicle. Arun plugged his flash drive into his workstation and copied over all his files. "That's all I needed," he said. On his way out Arun grabbed the common printer. "What are you doing Arun?" he asked. He followed.*

*"I've quit. I just want to make a photograph. They're not going to come after me for a printer," said Arun as he looked through his camera. Arun asked him to hold the printer over the rails. They could see the lights of the city from up there on the roof. Arun looked through his camera. He waited to hear his flash charge up and give him the beep. He heard a beep. "Make it fall," said Arun.*

### Text accompanying *Outsourced: Fall*

not expected to pick up every sheet of paper from the floor to read the entirety of *Chapter 10*.

It is anticipated that the viewer responds to the piece with a certain pre-existing knowledge

about Marx's *Capital* if not about the particular chapter. In *The Working Day*, Marx lays out the

conflict between laborer and employer for surplus labor where labor is a function of time. The site of this conflict becomes situated in labor laws, and Marx uses examples from the English industry, and even examples of African slaves in the American South to scrutinize the oppression of laborers by the capitalist due to their intrinsic greed for surplus labor.<sup>3</sup>

On the website, the animations that play endlessly are a response to their location on the internet. When placed here, the printer prints forever, since there are no labor laws specifically for the internet. Also, due to the virtual nature of the internet, the animated piece is freed from material constraints involved with the physical piece in the gallery, namely refilling of paper, and toner ink. *Outsourced: Fall* spits out material in the form of printed pages when it is in the gallery, therefore there is work being done and material being processed. This work, of processing or producing material for the gallery, sometimes within the gallery, is deemed the work of the artist. In this case this work has been outsourced to the printer. The entire installation might be classified as an assisted readymade where the printer, the shelf, and the material being printed were all pre-existing, and have been appropriated with little or no manipulation by me. And, in doing so, the labor in the production of these objects -which is often hidden- has also been appropriated. The point of contact with the institution hosting the piece is again through an act of labor by the institution, that is, gallery staff, namely the act of sweeping up the accumulated pages of *Capital* and restoring the means for production that is refilling the printer with paper. In cyberspace, the point of contact with the institution, that is the apparatus of the internet, is in the labor of the browser loading the files for viewing and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 179.

perhaps in the changing of pixels on the viewers' screens. Echoing the nature of the Internet, this labor inherently carries with it a multiplicity as every instance of viewing reproduces this labor.

In-between spaces are explored through the negation of hierarchy concerning the physical object and its image, or the hierarchy concerning its location in physical space and cyberspace. Here, re-presentation becomes a strategy to displace the work in space and time. Artie Vierkant in *The Image Object Post Internet* writes specifically about this mode of artistic operation:

In the Post-Internet climate, it is assumed that the work of art lies equally in the version of the object one would encounter at a gallery or museum... The less developed stratagem for pointing to a lack of representational fixity is that of taking an object to be represented (to be more direct, *presented*) as another type of object entirely, without reference to the "original." For objects after the Internet there can be no "original copy."

Even if an image or object is able to be traced back to a source, the substance (substance in the sense of both its materiality and its importance) of the source object can no longer be regarded as inherently greater than any of its copies.<sup>4</sup>

Viewers assume the indexical nature of images and project back into the image their sense of the source object, the existence of the original object in its physical form at a certain time before it was made into an image. Therefore, the act of looking at an image creates a virtual history of the object. This is where Lisa Lowe's ideas of *past conditional temporality* and Vierkant's ideas of *image object post-internet* merge. In making this particular connection I am focusing primarily upon Lowe's methodologies in reading of history (which in turn are influenced by Foucault) rather than on the specific histories on which she has used it. Lowe

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<sup>4</sup> Artie Vierkant, "The Image Object Post-Internet," 5.

attempts to define *past conditional temporality* while reflecting on the absence of displaced labor groups such as Chinese emigrant labor within modern histories:

... it is to consider this absencing as a critical node—a cipher, a brink—which commands us to attend to connections that could have been, but were lost, and are thus, not yet. It is a thread of possible ways for understanding the world that is and the world we might have made. The inquiry into this lost figure may open a different set of questions about the intimacies out of which our contemporary moment arises. The absence marks a rupture where some new and other type of knowing might emerge.

I explore in my readings a relationship to the past that attempts another approach, what I refer to as a *past conditional temporality*, through which I suggest it is possible to conceive the past, not as fixed or settled, not as inaugurating the temporality into which our present falls, but as a configuration of multiple contingent possibilities, all present, yet none inevitable.<sup>5</sup>



*Code-Switching*, 2017, LCD screen, magazine cutouts, text animation

<sup>5</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 174-75.

Code-switching is a linguistic term used to describe how speakers of multiple languages alternate between languages. This switching is often governed by the societal and consequently institutional context of the conversation and conforms to the syntax of multiple languages simultaneously. In the piece *Code-switching*, a 15" tall LCD screen seems to have been hurled sideways into the wall of the gallery. The screen is stuck into the wall at an angle and juts out about 10" towards the viewer. The LCD screen has been taken out of its plastic shell casing. It is housed within its minimal bare aluminum casing. A text animation plays on the LCD. There are Bengali words in red on a white background that move sideways out of the wall and settle where the glass meets the wall conforming to the line of the wall.

**আমার ভাষায়**

**কোনো capital নেই তবুও**

**শালারা গান্ডুর মতন দেখছে দেখ**<sup>6</sup>

The words hover slightly before slowly moving back into the wall. As it does, you notice one Bengali word changing into the word *language* just before it disappears into the wall. There are a couple of cutouts from TIME magazine collaged between the actual LCD-layer and the backlight below it. They read *TIME & INDEX*- and are both cut as hard-edged geometric shapes resonating with the aesthetics of the hardware itself. *TIME* is placed right at the vertical center of the screen where it meets the wall and consequently falls below the word গান্ডুর in the animation. *INDEX* is placed near the bottom right corner of the screen. Through the craft of its

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<sup>6</sup> Text present in *Code-switching*

clean presentation, *Code-switching* cloaks the violent labor of cutting into the gallery wall required for its installation. Similarly, through the general incomprehensibility of the Bengali language presented to an American audience, *Code-switching* obscures the meaning of the somewhat violent and propagandist text.



*Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*, 2017, Telephone headset, audio

An elementary way in which language can become violent is through its utterance. In *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*, a red phone handset hangs from a hook on the gallery wall. The coiled cord of the handset is plugged directly into the gallery wall. (Other variations exist where it is plugged into a tiny white box) On the top part of the handset that is meant to be near the users' ears, there is a white brand logo with the words *NATIVE UNION* and

two stick-figures. Distorted voices can be heard from the headset that become clearer once one places the headset to their ear. Voices of men and women with distinctive Indian accents introduce themselves with generic American names, and occasionally the title of an officer. Only these introductions are heard as the audio moves along from one person to the next, often with a significant change in the volume of their voice. Incongruously American names such as Jerry Brown and Michelle White resonate through the surrounding space as the headset is placed back down on its hook and the earpiece faces the wall.

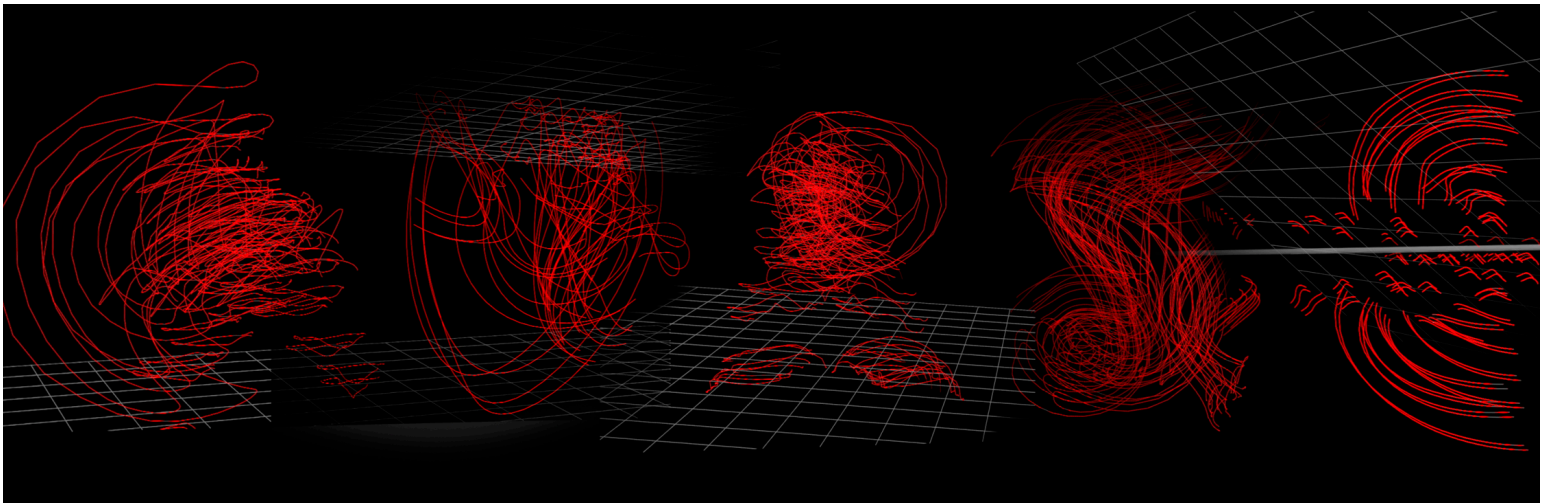
The audio has been sourced from numerous videos on YouTube where there is a community of uploaders who create videos about scamming the scammers by recording these scam calls. The calls sampled in this piece were specifically made during the American tax-season when scammers from India pose as agents and officers of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This sort of scamming is a form of subversion of bureaucratic structures while at the same time existing because of them. These scams result in the siphoning of funds from within a regulated economic cycle into deregulated underground economies. The scamming infrastructures, like the ones in India, are dependent on replicating the modes of operation of other legitimized structures such as that of the IRS. The language of English as used in the American context is first leaned, then simulated and used against the American public.

**You taught me language, and my profit on't  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Folger Shakespeare Library), 39, <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Tmp.html>.

*CURSE: A Study in Acts of Violence* is a looped video created by sampling motion capture data from both the scientific industry and gaming industry. Red streaks slowly appear in the dark. Around the streaks, there are multiple perspectival grids that overlap and move imperceptibly into and away from each other. The streaks of red grow longer and multiply, slowly forming discernible figures. The streaks are markers tracking the actions of actors in three-dimensional space as they were captured performing different acts of violence such as stabbing with a knife or throwing a grenade. The video is projected at a large scale such that the figures are life size. The bottoms of the figures touch the base of the wall and some of the grids fall on the floor. At a certain point in the video loop, the five figures come together to vaguely make up the word *CURSE*, filling up the entire projection area. At this point the projection is also at its brightest and the reflected red light spills onto the surrounding dark room and the viewers.



*CURSE: A Study in Acts of Violence*, 2017, Looped HD video containing samples of motion capture data

My work explores the relationship of language to labor in a contemporary neocolonial context pointing to the occupation of physical space by language as it manifests in my work. In

*Code-switching*, *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*, and *CURSE*, language is animated, performed, iterated (vocalized), and in all cases displaced in space. Specifically, in *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International* and *CURSE*, language is vocalized and performed in order for it to be iterated in a location away from its site of production. It is both this displacement of language and the tendency of language to be understood through the dominant culture, either by translation into, or by mimesis of the dominant language that leads to language commodification. Marnie Holborow writes:

Language commodification, a term now current in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, describes how language has become reconfigured for market purposes and treated as an economic resource. One aspect of this is the commodification of workers' language skills for use in sales and service work.<sup>8</sup>

If *Minutes* is most obviously about this idea, the commodification of language is an issue in many works from *Pre/Post/Eros*.

In *Drop Ceiling*, a standard four-tube fluorescent light fixture hangs precariously from a chain near the gallery floor. The fixture is about 4 feet long and a 16 inches wide. On the bottom end, one of its corners touches the gallery floor. None of the angles/lines of the fixture conforms, that is, is parallel to any of the angles/lines in the space. On close inspection one notices that it has been plugged into an outlet on the floor. On the other end, the fixture is pulled up by a metal chain that hangs from a hook about 12 feet high on the gallery wall. There is plenty of space beneath the chain and from the wall to the fixture for a person to walk around the piece. A red, pinkish, and white glow emanates from the fixture. The diffusion

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<sup>8</sup> Marnie Holborow, "Language, Commodification and Labour: The Relevance of Marx," *Language Sciences* (2018), 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2018.02.002>.

screen makes it difficult to understand or read the emergent patterns. However, in positioning oneself at certain angles to the pieces, one is able to read the word *UNITE* albeit broken down. The light fixture, the kind often found housed in drop ceilings of office and retail spaces is therefore tied to the hosting institution through the chain, and through the power cord, receiving support and necessary electricity for its operation, yet bound to the institution. In this way, the light fixture perhaps embodies forms of bonded labor through history from slaves, to immigrant labor.



*Drop Ceiling, 2017, Modified fluorescent light fixture, chains*

Jack Halberstam reaffirms language as a site for resistance in his introductory chapter, “The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons” to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*:

In order to bring colonialism to an end then, one does not speak truth to power, one has to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism. Indeed, blackness, for Moten and Harney by way of Fanon, is the willingness to be in the space that has been abandoned by colonialism, by rule, by order.<sup>9</sup>

*The University & the Undercommons*, is the most recognized chapter from this open-source book since its dissemination as a PDF amongst academics at American universities where the authors speculate strategies for operating as othered individuals within governing institutions. Much has been written within postcolonial theory about the violence of language, and the re-wielding of the colonizer’s imposed language as a tool for resistance. The texts in works such as *Code-switching* and *Drop Ceiling*, much like the objects that they inhabit, are perhaps the remnants of everyday and ubiquitous revolutions, the words without words, that is the text without its utterance, the resistance without its fulfillment.

Manik Bandyopadhyay’s 1946 Bengali short story *Shilpi* (শিল্পী), is set in the within the exploitative economic practices of the British concerning cotton in India. Written a year before India’s independence from the British, *Shilpi*’s narrative revolves around its protagonist Madan who is a weaver. Along with his fellow weavers who look up to him as a leader, he is caught in a dilemma of choosing to weave with affordable lower-quality cotton and synthetic fiber

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<sup>9</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 8.

manufactured by the British or being unable to weave at all. Their future seems bleak since their ability to afford Indian traditional silk hinges on weaving with British fibers in the first place to save up enough money, that is to accumulate capital, in order to buy the more expensive and higher quality Indian cotton and silk. It is to be noted that the root for *Shilpi* (শিল্পী)- *Shilpa* (শিল্প)- means both industry and art. Much like the Greek word *techne*, there are not different terms for, and therefore an understanding of the difference between art, industry, and technology that is inherent to Bengali (and broader Indian) culture. It seems Bandyopadhyay attempts to distance himself from the usual nationalist narrative for preference towards Indian fibers and rather focuses on the worthiness of the material to be weaved by prominent artisan Madan. There is an effort to intertwine the stature of the artisan with the quality of material he weaves and the quality of the produced fabric.

I refer to *Shilpi* not only because it is a text situated in the intersection of colonialism, labor, and art, but more importantly because of the specific mode of resistance to the economic situation that Madan espouses. Madan decides not to buy British cotton and therefore not to produce any textile. Looking up to Madan as a leader, the community of artisans in the village decides to do the same. Empty looms lay idle as all earnings have ceased. Families struggle to feed themselves. All this while middlemen for British cotton tempt the weavers to buy their cotton and give up their resilience.

Frankly, the “strike” does not make economic sense for the community, and neither does Bandyopadhyay provide a resolution to the situation through the narrative. The twist in the plot occurs one night when fellow villagers hear the sound of Madan’s loom running through the night. The villagers suspect Madan of having bought British cotton and weaving

secretly at night. However, next morning Madan clarifies that he only ran an empty loom because his legs were restless from muscle-memory. I find a connection between the sound of Madan's empty loom – a sound that is heard but whose source is not seen – and what I refer to as “the text without its utterance, the resistance without its fulfillment” as present in *Code-switching* and *Drop Ceiling*. Language in those pieces, like muscle-memory for Madan, is learned through assimilation and embodiment, and then lived. Therefore language, like muscle-memory becomes the only mode of resistance – a resistance of habit. Perhaps a more immediate connection in the sense of displacement of sound can be made with the audio of *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*. Similar to Moten's *Undercommons*, Holborow, too, discusses the origins of resistance and agency within language commodification as a “subterranean stream of hostility,”

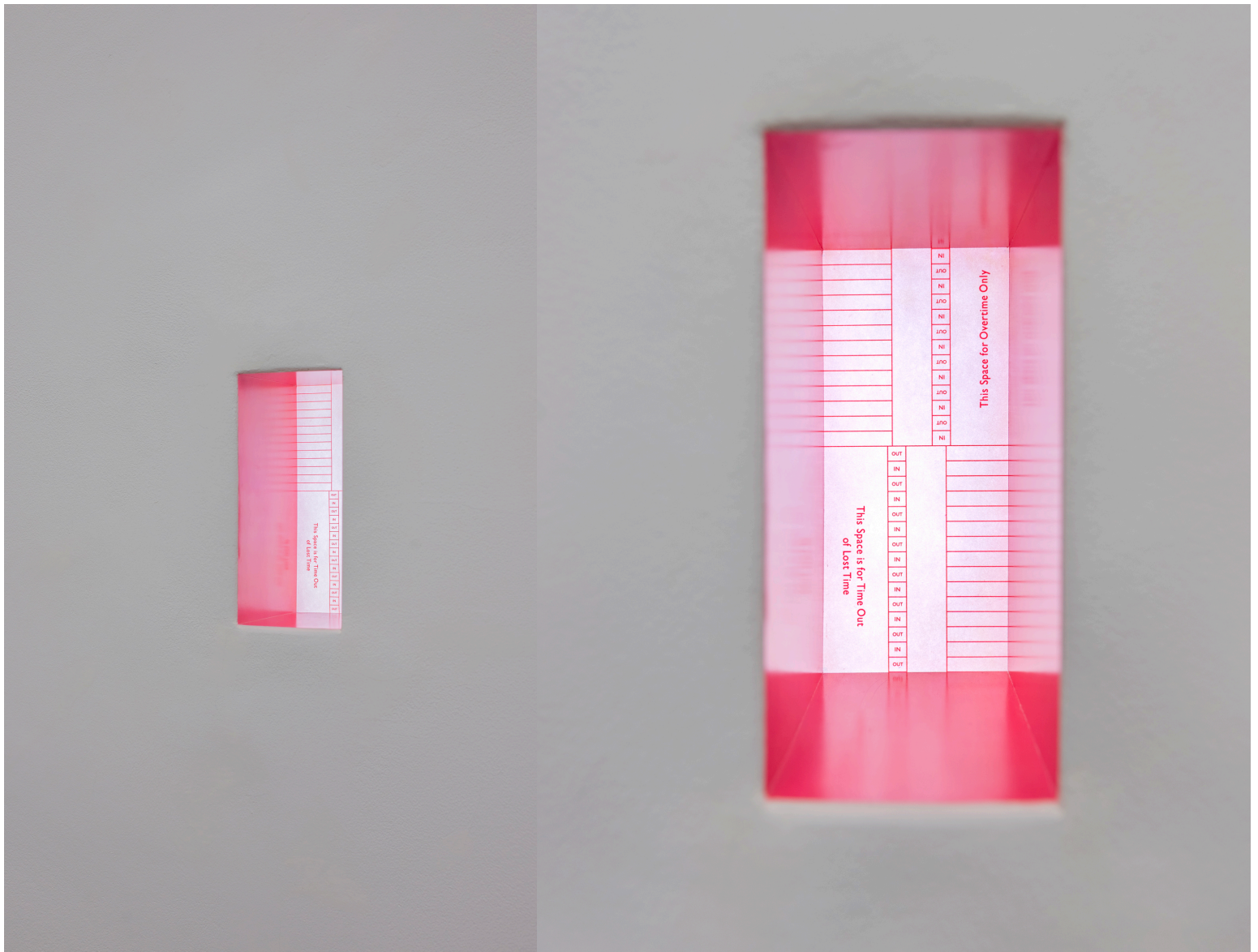
...I have argued that the permanent presence of exploitation in the workplace gives rise to a “subterranean stream of hostility” identified in the call centre studies referred to here. It is true that language skills put to work in the work process are subjected to commodifying practices such as pre-scripting, timed speech and measurement. But language commodification accounts tend to ignore the presence of conflict in these workplaces and to underestimate the dynamic aspect of language and the ability of speakers to “talk back.” Even in the most restrictive of situations where the language expected is supposed to rigidly follow pre-scripted models, we find unpredictability and speaker agency.<sup>10</sup>

Along with language, I've also been interested in the Western ideas of encoding and mapping of physical space, especially through the technology of perspective enabled by the grid. Like language, not only is space itself mapped and encoded, but also how we interact with that space is strictly coded and legislated. It is important to reckon with the space where the work

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<sup>10</sup> Holborow, “Language, Commodification and Labour,” 9.

was made and is shown both in regard to its institutional nature and the formal architectural aspects of the space.



*Red Shift*, 2017, Lightbox

As I work within, through, and sometimes in line with the spaces around me, the idea of decolonizing time often haunts me. *Red Shift* is an approximately 3" wide, 7" high, and 4" deep recess in the gallery wall. Inside the recess is a backlit timecard and a semi-reflective red surface lines the four walls to its sides and the backlit time card is reflected on these walls,

expanding into the space around itself in all four directions. The white timecard is left blank – not filled out – and contains ruled spaces marked “in” & “out” to be filled up. There’s also the two standard texts – “This space for overtime only” and “This space is for time out or lost time” except the “or” has been substituted by “of” and it reads “This space is for time out of lost time” All markings and writings on the timecard are in red. Red Shift is the name given to the phenomenon of light rays stretching when traveling through space due to the expansion of the universe. This expansion of the wavelength causes the light from distant stars to shift towards the red end of the electromagnetic spectrum. Decolonization of time holds several registers of meaning for me. At one level, it is about revisioning of history and insertion of othered histories into dominant narratives, through the hijacking of forms, and aesthetics. On the other level, it is the utopic vision of banning the function of the variable of time in measuring and commodifying labor.

Several of my works rely on the aesthetics and forms of Minimalism through their strategies for seduction. I consider these tactics of using commercial lights, clean industrial design, and saturated bright red palette to be not only be related to Minimalism, but also to the language of advertising, which perhaps inherited these approaches from Minimalism. Similar to the language of English, as an artist working within American institutions, I consider this an inheritance. Of course, through its materials and lack of decorative ornamentation Minimalism is hitched to a certain kind of power, often blatantly echoing the production and products of capitalism.<sup>11</sup> However, most often, I arrive at and inherit Minimalism through the appropriation

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<sup>11</sup> Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” *Arts Magazine* (Jan. 1990): 44.

of products which are references to specific institutions. My approach, I believe, is similar to Cameron Rowland's use of the readymade and baring of the production, distribution, and context of those objects. Although I do not provide as much explicit information regarding the readymade as Rowland does, my work in the end serves a similar function in calling attention to and implicating the institutions within which they operate. Both our works are concerned with the provenance of products.



Cameron Rowland, *Attica Series Desk*, 2016, Steel, powder coating, laminated particleboard, distributed by Corcraft, 60 x 71.5 x 28.75 inches, Rental at cost

The Attica Series Desk is manufactured by prisoners in Attica Correctional Facility. Prisoners seized control of the D-Yard in Attica from September 9th to 13th 1971. Following the inmates' immediate demands for amnesty, the first in their list of practical proposals was to extend the enforcement of "the New York State minimum wage law to prison industries." Inmates working in New York State prisons are currently paid \$0.10 to \$1.14 an hour. Inmates in Attica produce furniture for government offices throughout the state. This component of government administration depends on inmate labor.

Rental at cost: Artworks indicated as "Rental at cost" are not sold. Each of these artworks may be rented for 5 years for the total cost of the Corcraft products that constitute it.

I have been interested in my own coordinates within the web of interconnected global histories. Growing up in cosmopolitan, post-colonial, and communist-influenced Kolkata, and then having spent the last five and a half years of my life in the American South, I exist within, and also am a product of multiple histories. Of course, this idea of history and time is not separate from the ideas of geography and space. Hito Steyerl writes:

Art affects reality precisely because it is entangled into all of its aspects, it's messy, embedded, troubled, irresistible. We could try to understand its space as a political one instead of trying to represent a politics that is always happening elsewhere. Art is not outside politics, but politics resides within its production, its distribution, and its reception.<sup>12</sup>

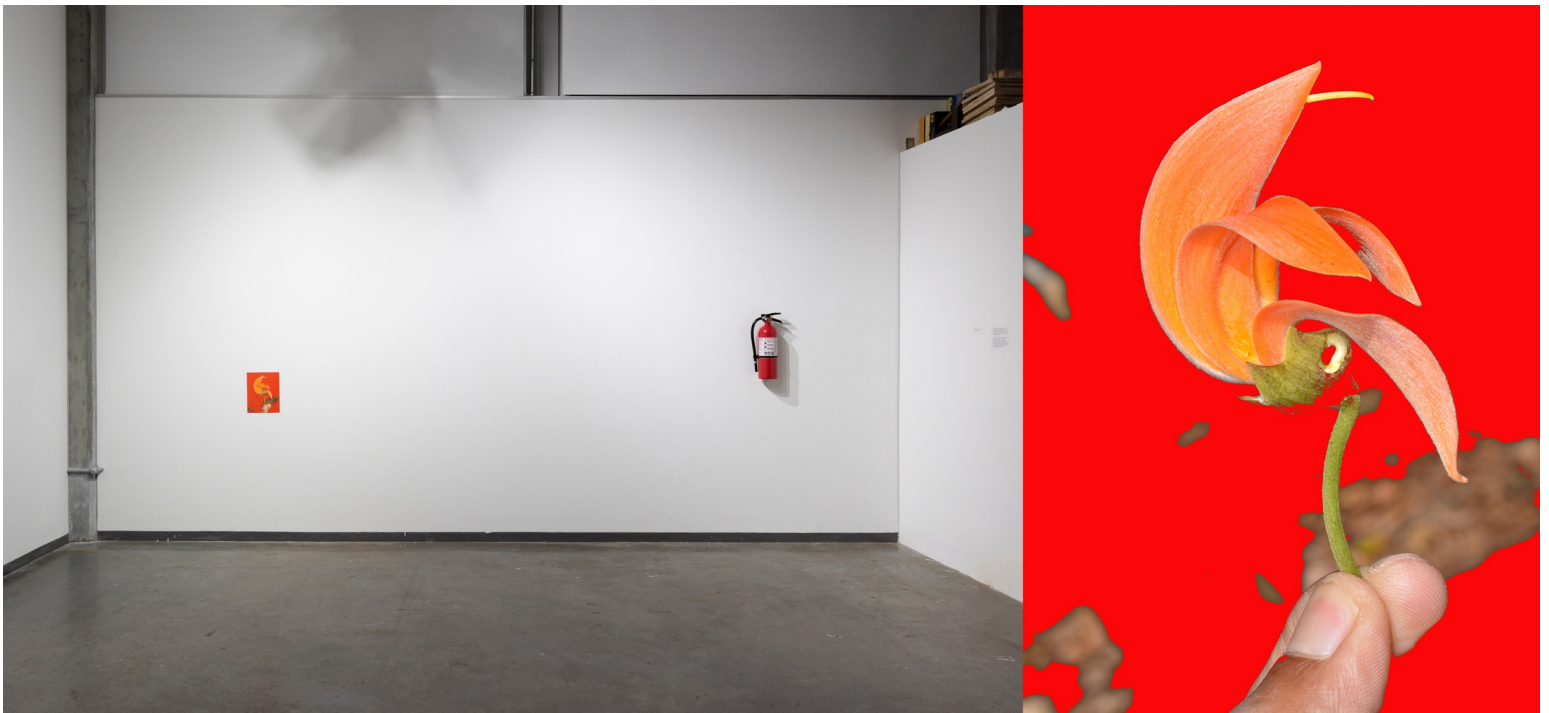
In agreement with Steyerl, I consider the production, outcome, and context of art as political. And within that process, there is a spectrum that includes art that is *about* politics, that is, trying to represent politics, as well as art that is intrinsically political through its production and distribution. While Steyerl encourages an understanding of these differences and perhaps urges for work that is intrinsically political, the position of a particular art on that spectrum often depends on the context.

Both *Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*, and *Luncheon* engage with history, the former with the history of British expansion in India and Bengali literature, and the latter with the history of Maoism in India. But they lie on different ends of the spectrum in terms of political art. *Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)* consists of a fire-extinguisher, and an 8" x 10" photographic print mounted directly to the wall. The fire extinguisher is a non-specific

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<sup>12</sup> Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy," *e-flux* 21 (December 2010): 5, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>.

readymade, meaning, it can be any fire extinguisher present within the gallery or museum space, or it can be one that is provided by me. The print shows a close up of an orange Palash (পলাশ) flower held by its green stem between the index finger and thumb. The entire image has been taken out of its original context, that is its background has been removed, and then transposed onto a red background using Photoshop. The results of this this process through layer blending in Photoshop has left detectable traces. In certain areas of the flower, near the bud, and at the edges of the fingers, the background red spills through effectively erasing those parts of the image. A brief history of the flower's connection to Bengali tradition, and to the Battle of Plassey is provided with the label for the piece. *Come Red* is an attempt at art that is



*Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*, 2017, Archival pigment print, fire extinguisher, wall intrinsically political through the quoting of the gallery wall between the image, and the fire extinguisher. 'Wall' is listed as a material on the label. It functions to insert an othered history within a primarily Western institutional space, and at the same time surrounds it via the

*Excerpts from an interview scene with Guillaume  
In Jean-Luc Godard's "La Chinoise" (1967)*

*[We don't hear the questions. We only hear the answers.]*

*Guillaume: A socialist theatre?*

*G: No, I don't know.*

*G: I'm looking.*

*G: Yes, yes... Mao's ideas can help me.*

*G: In any case, you need sincerity and violence.*

*G: You're getting a kick out of this.*

*G: Like I'm joking for the film, because of all the technicians here.*

*G: But that's not it.*

*G: It's not because of a camera.*

*G: I'm sincere.*

appropriation of the wall and the fire extinguisher, which are symbolic to structural and codified space of the institution.

*Luncheon*, a 25.5"x32" photographic image constructed in the tradition of a still life, depicts what appears to be a scene of a picnic spread. The background is a sweeping checkered red and white cloth. A metal container with stacked compartments forming a cylinder occupies the center of the frame. The metal trusses on both sides that hold the container together and form the handles rest slightly open, as if arms in the air. A twisted red and white cable runs through and around them from the top-left to the bottom right. In the foreground beside the container lies its lid, with the word *PLATE* in red and white on it. The lid obscures half of a small red book. Closer inspection reveals the words *QUOTATIONS FROM* in gold on the cover, leading us to believe that it is *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* or colloquially *Mao's Little Red Book*. A tag on the cloth reads *HANDMADE IN INDIA FOR THE RED AND WHITE KITCHEN*. Maoist insurgency prevalent in India has its roots in the Naxalite movement that started fifty years ago (1967) in West Bengal. Intelligentsia and students were part of the initial movement, although now there is little support from the urban elite for what has evolved into left-wing terrorism encompassing the tribal population.<sup>13</sup> Academics and social workers operating in rural areas with tribal populations are often accused of being Maoists. The insurgents use gamchha's (গামছা) as makeshift balaclavas. Gamchha's are traditional thin cotton towels with checkered

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<sup>13</sup> Pranay Sharma, "Spring Thunder that Wasn't: The Obituary of Spent Cartridges: 50 Years of Naxalbari," *Outlook* (24 April, 2017), <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-obituary-of-spent-cartridges/298747>.



*Luncheon*, 2017  
Archival pigment print,  
25.5"x32"

patterns that are generally red and white. Improvised explosive devices are often made out of steel *tiffin* containers-*tiffin* being the inherited British word for mid-day luncheon in India. Drawing these references together into the primarily Western form of a still life, similar to *Come Red*, *Luncheon* attempts to reference history through its acknowledgement of a tradition of art making. Unlike *Come Red* this inclusion of history is taking place within a form, and not necessarily the institution. Therefore, *Luncheon* lies towards the representational end of the spectrum of political art.



*Tips for Wealth Redistribution*, 2017, Site responsive installation, Money-gun, US currency, acrylic boxes on metal stands

*Tips for Wealth Redistribution* is a piece that requires maintenance by the gallery.

Between two clear acrylic boxes standing on long black metal stands, one a little higher than the other, a red device that looks vaguely like a gun is placed on another stand between them. The lower box contains stacks of money, and there is slit on top. The higher box, towards which the gun is pointed, has its slit facing the gun. The thin flat horizontal *nozzle* of the gun is an inch away from the slit. The gun runs every minute and bills slowly come out of its nozzle and enter the acrylic box through the slit. Sometimes a couple of bills are shot violently into the box, while at other times it takes a few tries for the bills to slowly transfer from the gun and into the box. Sometimes a few bills miss the slit and fall on the nearby floor. In maintaining this piece, the gallery performs a parody of its own economic system. The text provided with the piece reads:

The gallery or museum staff is in charge of maintaining this work. The gallery or museum provides as much money as they can in fresh bills at start. The gun runs about every minute. It needs to be refilled about every twenty minutes. Once all the bills are transferred over, they are stacked into bundles facing the same way, and put back in the original box. There's a slit on the box to your left. Any old bills or bills of different denominations may hamper with the proper functioning of the money-gun.

This work directly engages with the hosting institution through both capital and labor, that is, through the amassing of a starting fund by the institution, and through the act of the gallery staff facilitating the operation of the piece. In this regard, it is a work that is intrinsically political through its functioning within the institution. On the other hand, it also utilizes the loaded symbol of the gun to suggest violence as a means to wealth redistribution, which is setup to fail through the logic and underwhelming performance of the gun within the piece.

The displacement of labor of and onto populations across the world, as mediated in a broader sense by globalization and telecommunication technologies such as the Internet, but also more specifically through the printer, the telephone, the computer screen, through motion-capture, makes labor available for production of capital. As read in the fictional text provided with *Outsourced: Fall*, Arun has a degree in mechanical engineering, but like most recent college graduates of his generation, he works in the information-technology sector presumably for a multinational corporation. These multinational corporations have predominantly Western stakeholders, and consequently Arun's labor is outsourced to the West. There are many Aruns, and these Aruns make up India's new growing middle-class. In *Macaulay's (Cyber) Children: The Cultural Politics of Outsourcing in India*, Shehzad Nadeem writes:

The new middle classes exhibit many of the cultural "contradictions" of modernity – the undermining of the classic work ethic by consumerism and

“hedonism” – that a worried Daniel Bell discussed in his book on post-industrial America. In the South Asian context, status distinctions based on caste and ascribed characteristics are giving way to those based on education, occupation, income and wealth. Economic liberalization is further razing the walls – the traditions of sobriety and thrift, the government sinecures and stable career paths – that have hitherto kept India’s middle class in modest comfort. In their place rise ladders of corporate ascension as well as the multiplied possibilities of freefall.<sup>14</sup>

The information technology sector in India, despite being lucrative and helping boost to national economy, does not offer job security and ignores labor regulations. Employees often have to work odd hours and in some cases even night shifts to synchronize their service with the Western hemisphere. India’s labor laws are often archaic. Modified from pre-independence British laws, they are incompatible with contemporary labor models where the work has transferred from factories to offices, and the tools have changed from hammers and chisels to computers. In short, the laws are either incompatible or laxly enforced. In certain cases, private corporations have been exempt from these laws in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) by the central or state governments to promote investments and employment.<sup>15</sup> Employees holding jobs in the information technology sector within these SEZs in most cases have to sign an employment bond.<sup>16</sup> Often employment under the central or state government becomes more desirable due to job security, right to unionize, and regulated wages despite the bureaucracy involved in daily

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<sup>14</sup> Shehzad Nadeem, “Macaulay's (Cyber) Children: The Cultural Politics of Outsourcing in India,” *Cultural Sociology* 3, no. 1 (March 2009): 105.

<sup>15</sup> Jaivir Singh, “Labour Law and Special Economic Zones in India,” 7-14.

<sup>16</sup> Raghu Korrapati, “Information Technology (IT) Employment Contracts and Validity and Enforcement in India,” 6-8.

work. I am particularly interested in the questions raised by Nadeem in his conclusion – “Is globalization akin to colonialism in some of its cultural effects?” and “To what extent will the tools of corporate globalization be used to sabotage its machinery?” My work implicates the printer, the LCD screen, the office lights, the telephones as the tools within the machinery of global economy. But it also offers a more nuanced read, when, as it prints Marx’s words, the *Brother* printer oscillates in its connotations between brother as comrade and brother as Big Brother.

In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lowe brilliantly plots connections between labor classes across space and time especially in regard to coolie classes of Chinese and Indian labor in the Caribbean, settler-colonialism in Americas, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Although Lowe works within certain bounds on the synchronic axis, it is remarkable to see connections established on the diachronic axis between Marx’s examples from the American South, Lowe’s examples of different labor classes, and the contemporary aspects of signing employment bonds with foreign companies while working in the information technology sector in India. Similar to Lowe’s investigations in European liberalism and displaced labor classes, my work investigates the displacement of labor through contemporary technology onto a labor class as a dominating function of neo-liberalism. It questions the ontology of contemporary labor and associated labor-classes that are already problematized due to their shifting nature in time and space. As mentioned before, Lowe refers to this shifting or oscillatory nature of previously potent signifiers of imperial, capital, and colonialism when she writes:

I suggest that the “coloniality” of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the goal of the image-object artwork is to mimic contemporary “coloniality” by operating “through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection.” *Outsourced: Fall* is an exploration of displacements in labor, but through its own displacements in representation, it exists in-between times and spaces. Perhaps this *coloniality* is the late-capital, neo-liberal apparatus, and it gains its power from our inability to distinguish between the subject and the apparatus – that is to say, from our inability to draw clear distinctions between any binaries that may be at the core of the economic system, but also institutions willingly or unwillingly embedded in those systems. Thus artists, who are interested in subverting institutions, must work analogously with it. The inability to fix the connotative significations of the printer, the LCD screen, the light-fixture, the phone, the money gun, the fire extinguisher, the computer- between Big Brother, or comrade, between human, and a machine, between acting for itself and being acted upon, between being the colonizer accumulating capital, and being the colonized forced into labor – makes all these positions generative sites of subversive resistance that can effect everyday revolutions working within institutions.

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<sup>17</sup> Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 8.

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## List of works discussed:

1. *Outsourced: Fall*  
 Site-responsive installation  
 Brother-brand printer  
  
 2016- Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S290  
 250 sheets of paper per workday  
 10 copies of *Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 10: The Working Day*, per workday  
  
 2017- Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia, Atlanta, GA  
 160 sheets of paper per workday  
 6.5 copies of *Capital, Volume 1, Chapter 10: The Working Day*, per workday
2. *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International, 2017*  
 Telephone headset, audio
3. *Luncheon, 2017*  
 Archival pigment print, 25.5"x32"
4. *Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower), 2017*  
 Archival pigment print, fire extinguisher, wall
5. *Code-Switching, 2017*  
 LCD screen, magazine cutouts, text animation
6. *Red Shift, 2017*  
 Lightbox
7. *Drop Ceiling, 2017*  
 Modified fluorescent light fixture, chains
8. *CURSE: A Study in Acts of Violence, 2017*  
 Looped HD video containing samples of motion capture data
9. *Tips for Wealth Redistribution, 2017*  
 Site responsive installation  
 Money-gun, US currency, acrylic boxes on metal stands

The above listed works have been shown in groupings of different combinations. Here is a list of a few notable installations:

1. *Battle Cry in A Soundproof Room* - Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S290 and web
  - a. *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*
  - b. *Luncheon*
  - c. *Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*
  
2. *House of Un-American Activities* - Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S360 and web
  - a. *Code-Switching*
  - b. *Red Shift*
  - c. *Drop Ceiling*
  - d. *CURSE: A Study in Acts of Violence*
  - e. *Tips for Wealth Redistribution*
  
3. MFA Thesis Exhibition – Georgia Museum of Art, (Collaboration with Kaleena Stasiak)
  - a. *Minutes from the Congress of Scam International*
  - b. *Luncheon*
  - c. *Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*
  - d. *Code-Switching*
  - e. *Red Shift*
  - f. *Drop Ceiling*
  
4. *Outsourced: Fall and Luncheon - Fast Forward // Rewind*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia, Atlanta, GA



*Outsourced: Fall & Luncheon*

*Fast Forward // Rewind*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Georgia, Atlanta, GA, 2017 *Minutes*



*from the Congress of Scam International, Luncheon & Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*  
*Battle Cry in A Soundproof Room*, Lamar Dodd School of Art, Room S290, 2017



*Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower), Code-Switching, & Drop Ceiling*  
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, (Collaboration with Kaleena Stasiak), 2018



*Come Red It's Spring (Palash Flower)*  
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, (Collaboration with Kaleena Stasiak), 2018



*Code-switching*

MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, 2018



*Drop Ceiling*

MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, 2018



*Minutes from the Congress of Scam International, Luncheon, & Red Shift*  
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, (Collaboration with Kaleena Stasiak), 2018



*Luncheon*  
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, (Collaboration with Kaleena Stasiak), 2018



(above)  
*Minutes from the Congress of  
 Scam International & Red Shift*  
 MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia  
 Museum of Art, (Collaboration  
 with Kaleena Stasiak), 2018



(left)  
*Minutes from the Congress of  
 Scam International*  
 MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia  
 Museum of Art, 2018



*Red Shift*  
MFA Thesis Exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, 2018