# 7. Sonic Selfies: Equalizing the Encounter with the Other

In conversation with Jodi Dean (JD) and Geert Lovink (GL).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**GL:** **For many cultural critics, the selfie is a symbol for neo-liberal self-promotion. There is a constant pressure to perform, to show-off, be present. The selfie embodies the desperate attempt by the ‘failed individual’ to show that she (or he) still in the rat race: I am alive, don’t forget me, look at me and think of me, next time you can do me a favour […] But first, how do we deal with the selfie phenomena beyond forced participation or moral accusation, and develop ways of seeing that integrate machine readable interpretations?**

It is a winter afternoon in the jhuggis. Whilst Delhi summers evoke kindness of a very particular kind, the winters bring a peculiar conviviality. And thus in one of the lanes of one of the camps, where I am also present, just hanging about, this conviviality is performed in all its loudness. However, there is a moment of rupture in the din of conversations, casual banters, conflicting musical performances, an old woman with frizzled hair rather casually lifts her arse, in full sight, and let out a garrulous fart, brrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaar. A moment’s silence followed with an equally loud collective laugh, but it was not to embarrass or make the old woman conscious. She shifted her arse back to the comfortable position, taking her time.

Retrospectively, I think that was the moment when I started thinking of sonic performances as particular ‘individuated moments’ of establishing and extending one’s sense of self and space. This was much before the ‘selfie’ days, Smartphones had not yet invaded the everyday life. From my middle-class location, this public performance of a very ‘private’ sonic moment (which I distinctly remember being taught to curb, especially in public), I was intrigued. The slums are highly gendered space, and especially women’s mobility and performative potentialities in every regards comes under intense scrutiny. However, the old woman on account of her age had accrued permissions which are otherwise limited to the young women, and thus the permission without the embarrassment. A transgressive space is thus claimed and created.

I retrospectively attribute ‘sonic Selfies’ as a framework to locate the individuated moments of sonic performances, particularly of the identified Others, which when located within listening as a methodological and political intervention exposes the potential to displace, disturb and disrupt the ‘encounter’ in the Althusserian sense.[[2]](#footnote-2)And thus from my almost two decades of listening into the slums of Govindpuri, I highlight other encounters which the sonic selfies necessitated, which I later extrapolate to macro-level encounters from the everydayness of the jhuggis. The insistence on recounting the sonic selfie encounters with the slums is to disrupt the imagination of the slums, or perhaps any people, spaces and ideas on the margins, as homogenised, flattened existences.

A young girl, not a day more than 15, from a conservative family, who insist on ‘controlling’ her mobilities and bodily spatialities and performances. She practices the ultimate defiance by insisting on adorning a pair of jeans, a forbidden epitome of ‘modern’ ways reckoned unbecoming by her family. She is beaten, abused, threatened with dire consequences by her mother and brother, but she asserts her ‘sonic selfie’ by a stoic muted, silent response. She does not retort. When hit, she does not even cry, even though the tears streaming down her face evidence to the momentum of the movement of the hand that landed on her frail cheeks. But neither her silence or the jeans she is wearing can be taken away from her. After a while, the family members relent. And in the days, months, years, as I saw that young girl accumulating years, her styling of her jeans just got better.

I can go on to list such moments in some length, but those are replete in the other essays in the book. I want to return to GL’s evocation of the ‘moral accusation’ and ‘failed individual’ which the creation and circulation of ‘sonic selfies’ via mediated technologies, smartphones to be precise, brought on to the residents of the slums as a constitutive representative others in the broader urban imagination.

Sonic selfies as a moment of individuated performative sonic selves and claiming of spaces by the others, here the residents of the jhuggis, induce anxiety, particularly when performed in the shared public spaces, which within the hegemonic imagination needs to absented of the presences of these others. When the ‘sonic selfies’ were merely limited to bodily presences[[3]](#footnote-3) and performances, there were adequate strategies of silencing, disciplining and absenting these performances from these hegemonic spaces.

The mediated sonic selfies, particularly the extensive usage of the smartphones to listen to music, have ‘loud’ conversations over the phone in public spaces - malls, metro, amongst others, and the performative presence of the others of using the ‘same’ kind of technology, namely the Smartphones, exacerbated newer forms of ‘anxiety of proximity’ with the others. Unlike the ‘second visuality’ of selfie communism which images produce, as JD insists, these mediated ‘sonic selfies’ are not as easily to be ignored, absented and silenced.

Before proceeding with the transgressive capacities of the ‘sonic selfies’, a pause is in askance to locate these tendencies in the broader context of the bureaucratic-technocratic imaginations of locating the other.

In 2013, the Government of India released a report, ‘Housing Stock, Amenities & Assets in Slums—Census 2011[[4]](#footnote-4)’. In this report, along with the access to potable water and sanitation facilities to the slum dwellers, it accounts the ‘number of households availing banking services and number of households having each of the specified assets’. These assets include, amongst others, mobile phones. I wrote an article[[5]](#footnote-5) responding to the media coverage, particularly focussing on the usage of mobile phones in the slums. The manner in which articles in mainstream media articulated these data sets is quite revealing of the popular perceptions of ‘slumming’ in the cities. They were nothing short of being virulent. Consider these: ‘Amenities in slums match up to urban homes...India’s first-ever census of household amenities and assets in slums has revealed that slum dwellers are also spending more on TV sets, computers and mobile phones rather than sanitation[[6]](#footnote-6)’ in one, and the following in another: ‘34 per cent in slums have no toilet, but 63 per cent own mobile phone […] Depending on how one looks at it, “slumming it” may just have acquired a whole new meaning—either most Indian towns live the life of slums or the quality of life in slums is improving’.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In both these articulations the tension to reckon the slum dwellers as ‘consumers’ is contemptuously palpable. The first blatantly overlooks the structural factors leading to the systematic lack of sanitation facilities in slums, which in fact is a state responsibility, by shifting the onus on to the slum dwellers for not tackling these issues; it is also clearly disapproving of the fact that the slum dwellers spend more assets clearly meant for ‘entertainment’ than investing in ‘improving’ their everyday conditions. The second articulation, more subtle in its tonality, at the outset sets out the anxiety of sharing the same ‘consumerist-cultural’ space with the slums.

I juxtapose these reckoning with my experience and involvement from the early 2000’s in the Open Source Movement in India and ICT4D project, the heydays of the obscene celebration of new media technologies with perverse potentials. Interestingly, in those days my issues (and eventual departure) with the ICT4D movements and projects was not a response far from my more recent articulation. Then, it was reckoned, and I loosely articulate my own perspective on these initiatives, ‘seek out the poor, marginalised people and spaces, equip them with one or the other fancy new media technologies - computers, phones and such - and teach them life skills, and lo behold, their lives will improve’. In both these reckoning of the ‘poor’ - the eternal other - are denied any foundational sense of ‘self’ wherein they can make ‘informed’ choices, whether it be about what life skills and technologies might be most useful or in their capacities as ‘consumers’ who in fact make an informed choice about spending their own money on technologies, particularly smartphones, just to have *fun*.

The issue I had with such a reckoning that the sole and singular mandate of these initiatives leaned towards a ‘utilitarian’ use of the new media technologies for the poor and thus further ‘rendering technical’ the terms of these engagements, such that, ‘[f]irst, they reposed political-economic causes of poverty and injustice in terms of amenable to a technical solution. Second, they highlighted only those problems for which a technical solution in fact be proposed[[8]](#footnote-8)’. These initiatives were beyond the concerns of the fact these were a strategic way for the State to absolve of its own responsibilities by outsourcing them to these funding organisations and, more importantly, these were insidious ways for the capitalist agendas (which usually also inadvertently served the purposes of the funding organisations) to enter into erstwhile unidentified, untapped markets and to impose a certain form of governmentality[[9]](#footnote-9).

In the aforementioned article, I argued, and I quote at some length for its set the backdrop to ‘develop ways of listening’ into the ‘sonic selfie’ phenomena.

Official records as the ‘Housing Stock, Amenities & Assets in Slums—Census 2011’ (GOI 2013) are testimonies of, and by, the State to report on the ‘reality’—the transformations and progress; often reckoned as staid these testimonies, in fact, are ways in which the State not only ‘reflects on the real’, but also strategically sustains the idea of ‘the real’ it wants to purports. Considered on its own the report in question projects a ‘reality’ of the slums that is totally divorced from the ‘real, everyday’ experience of slumming. The media response to the Census 2011 report then can be identified by the State to mask its inadequacies (lack of inclination), as well as justifying the market-logic of development, by insisting on the ‘increased purchasing’ power of the slum-dwellers. In celebrating the dense penetration of mobiles the analyses fails to take into cognizance that for the first decade following the opening of the economy[[10]](#footnote-10) **(1991)** and the subsequent telecom policies **(1994[[11]](#footnote-11), 1999[[12]](#footnote-12))**, slums and other marginalized spaces, were not part of the network and remained ‘disconnected’. These were essentially meant to cater to an urban, middle-class population. Indeed the penetration of mobile networks in the slums (facilitated by cheap hardware and competitive call rates) have introduced ‘new’ cultures and practices of communicating, but these are not dramatic ruptures and, in fact, in most instances either a continuation and convergence of existing practices, replete with their social and cultural discrimination, prejudices, politics of control and access. While it is of significance to highlight how the everyday of the residents in marginalized spaces is transformed by the use of mobile phones, these practices ought to be situated within the backdrop of whether these technologies allow for residents of these spaces to become ‘empowered, engaged’ citizens with capabilities and capacities to make informed choices about participating in the democratic processes. Mobile penetration and its cultures of consumption in marginalized spaces is affected by the market forces or government and non-government interventions to ‘incorporate’ the residents of the slums as ‘citizens’ by illicit participation in initiatives designed to exhibit ‘model citizenship’ patterns; any digression from these narratives causes anxiety, as is evident from the media reportage to the Census 2011 report.

The anxiety-inducing tendency has to be located in the broader context of the position of the others - in their corporeal presences but also in imaginative potentialities. But when the other announces herself in fully glory, the summer causally swaging in her hips, singing a song she desires - however out of tune and unharmonious - walks the same paths as the hegemonic self, the latter quite literally loses the plot. And sets about to imagine other ways to summon, discipline the other.

I thus propose ‘sonic selfies’ as a conceptual framework, in all its loudness and corporeality, as moment of displacing, disturbing and rupturing the aspirations and imaginations of the tapestry of the hegemonic self whilst also dislocating the sites where power, control and violence could be exerted. In that, the ‘sonic selfies’ compel an equalising moment, however momentarily, in the encounter with the other. I also remain astutely and cynically aware, and thus do not overemphasis on these practices to compel structural changes, set in motion a revolutionary momentum, and I am not averse to admitting that these ‘equalising moments of encounter’ might only be compelled by matters of compulsions. However, the encounters with the Other does not need to be predicated on the premise of ‘love thy neighbour’ but a mutual, mutable respectability to not silence them. The ‘sonic selfies’ have compelled such an encounter wherein the Other cannot be muted, and the hegemonic self has to listen, however grudgingly. Because, the ears, they never close and thus insisting on a collective listening project of the selves of the others.

**GL: The object watches us: the selfie is watching back […] Selfies can be read as proofs of utter presence, not as evidence of electronic solitude, let alone a symptom of a personality disorder; they do not exemplify who we are but show that we exist, at this very moment.**

**JD: We should take this point to its logical extreme, selfies are a communist form of expression, social products appropriated by capitalism, now of course the critical reflex is to dismiss selfies as yet another indication of a pervasive culture of narcissism, I disagree. The narcissism, the narcissism critique approaches the selfie as if it were analysing a single photograph, it views the person in that photograph as the photograph subject. Selfies though should be understood as a common form emerging out of the communicative practices of secondary visuality. Understood from within this practices, the selfie has a collective subject, the many participating in the common practice, the many imitating each other, the figure in the photo is incidental. So, a selfie is a photo when makes of oneself using a mobile phone in order to share the photo on social media, it exists digitally in that weird in between of instant and forever, it’s not meant as a commemoration, it doesn't memorialize what we’ve done, it's a quick registration of what we're doing.**

A confession is in order: compared to most, I am a novice when it comes to the use of Smartphones. I only acquired one, and that too as a gift from a friend, in 2017. Until then, I carried a Nokia 1100, which cost as much, and had none of the ‘smart’ capacities. I carried the phone ‘un-smart’ phone, almost as a chip on my shoulder, an announcement of a counter-cultural statement: I refuse to participate in the obscene, perversity of over-connectedness, indulgence in the ‘self’, and resigning myself to the diktats of the market. I would often remark, and not without a certain self-congratulatory moralising, partronizing tone, that integral to the identities of the young girls, with whom I shared momentary space whilst traveling in the ladies compartment of the Delhi metro, are the three *S’s: Skinny jeans, Smartphones and Selfies.* I was both intrigued and exasperated with this project of having ‘oneself stare back at itself’. I am the child of socialist India, where acquiring a landline was a bureaucratic battle, and its usage permitted none of the immediacy, intimacy, privacy and unimaginable connectedness (or perhaps dis-connectedness of connections) which the smartphones allow.

The pervasive takeover by the Smartphones in Govindpuri also amused me, though perhaps I was gentler in my critique. But, there was one. I remember returning from Australia in early 2015, and as had become the habit over the years, one of my first visits would be to the jhuggis, carrying gifts and presents not from some distant lands, but often the ‘non-place’ sites of the duty free shops. Amidst the catching up, the food, celebrations, I found the ‘gang of girls’ - all in early 20s, more or less - with whom I shared more personal and intimate relationships, huddled and having hushed conversations in the corner. I interrupted and inquired whether another of their assignations was being plotted, and feigned irritation at being left out. Seethu, whom I had first seen as a young, confident teenager, had by now acquired a job in a fashion merchandising firm and who regaled all by her ‘out-worldly’ adventures, said, ‘well, Didi, no, no, there is nothing we are planning of that sort, and if we were, we would need you. But this is something different, I hope you don’t take it any other way, but we were planning to pool in money to buy you a proper phone. We think you might be having some money issues’. I was tad bit amused, but mostly flattered by their attention. I told them, I was perfectly happy with my non-smart phone, I had no use for it. I used the phone for what it is meant to do, and not everything else. These ‘smartphone’ toys were for the young ones.

And over the years, I was fascinated by the increasing use of the Smartphones (hereafter, SPs) in the jhuggis, particularly the young girls. I was not engaged so much in their agendas and projects of ‘presenting and performing’ themselves, but identified the usage of smartphones as emerging sites of 'feminine' assertions – in terms of romances, venturing into external networks, etc. – especially as cyber cafes, when they were really prevalent and popular were essentially masculine spaces. And, secondly, the manner in which the inherent capabilities of the smartphones was allowing to circumvent the text based, literate modality of engagement which the non-smart phones did not allow.

On every visit to GP, I found myself more and more intricately seduced into this world of non-text, verbal, visual mode of ways of being, making meaning the residents of the slums, particularly women, were venturing into. What was most fascinating for me was the manner in which a certain kind of de-colonization of the erstwhile otherwise reckoned-democratic, but still elitist, space of the Internet was being achieved by the constant and consistent presence the others were etching onto it. Through the various social media platforms, these others - the mostly illiterate, lacking technical skills and technological tools, residents of GP - were inserting their ‘footprints’, so to say, on this uncharted territory to become producers in their own right, instead of merely consumers. These others silenced and absented in this space were making their noises, without inhibitions and much aplomb, and like how!

One particular aspect of the claiming of these uncharted territories, modes and modalities of being, performances was the use of WhatsApp voice messaging feature in the smartphones which caught my imagination and intrigue. Within the scope of the retrospectively attributed framing of ‘sonic selfies’ whose canvas, so to say, is much broader, here I want to insist on the practices of using this particular feature to respond, and perhaps even modestly further the disruptive potential of ‘selfies’ as ‘communist form of expression’ and ‘as proofs of utter presence’.[[13]](#footnote-13)

I also draw on my experience of producing, creating and consuming ‘sonic selfies’ - via the WhatsApp voice feature - which has exploded my relationship with the ‘field’, already firm and solid, into a sonic constellation of a kind of commoning which could not be performed earlier. And it is in this capacity of commoning is that I locate the possibilities of ‘communist form of expression’ to be sophisticated. Most of my closest and oldest associates here have never received formal education and autodidacts in their own rights; in fact, it is to these I owe the hacks into a lot of applications and their potential to which I remained blissfully unaware. Until I was not available on the WhatsApp, the communications had to have a certain preparedness: what time, missed calls, low credit balance and other such considerations. The WhatsApp voice feature, a gesture which in its physicality requires a flattening, has disrupted, displaced and ruptured the matrix of the spatial-temporality-physicality of our encounters. And I insist on this particular feature of the WhatsApp to emphasise on ‘sonic selfies’ because in my encounters with my middle-class, educated, mostly upper-caste, rarely Muslim collegiate (a slice of the hegemonic self, perhaps) via WhatsApp, this feature is rarely, if never, used. Our exchanges are text-based and visually orientated.

And thus: a young woman, with no formal education, ensues a romantic liaison with a man - who knows of what age - whom she met surfing one of the social media platforms by sending him voice messages. Sometimes he would send text, which she would rush to her friends who could read to be translated. And recorded an adequate response. He was, as she found out, an engineer, living in a not so far off middle-class settlement. He never questioned her intent to not respond by text messages, because when he did send her a text to say he was busy or could not talk, she would compensate the ‘silence’ with an emoji reflecting her reaction: sad face, its OK face, thumbs up! She sustained and circulated an idea about herself, a mirror reflection, akin to Narcissus but unlike him not succumbing to it even to be the golden flower, and thus allowing herself simultaneously to announce her presence but also transcend it. And is not transcendence the fundamental essence of claiming the ‘self’ in most fundamental Marxist sense towards a collective, unalienated Utopia? Perhaps the deception was dually performed, he was not who he said, but does it matter? This medium - an equalising encounter with the Other - activated by ‘sonic’ exchanges allowed both of them to go ‘beyond the given reality, the world as it is, overcoming it practically, conceptually and ideologically[[14]](#footnote-14)’.

In the essay, *An Obscene Calling*, I called out the tendencies of the hegemonic self to deny ‘emotionality’ to the other. Without extending too much importance solely on the WhatsApp voice message feature, I evoke it more in an illustrative sense to highlight the manner in which this feature allowed a ‘voice’ to the emotions which otherwise remained unactualized. Baby, of whom I also spoke in that essay and another essay, *Subaltern as a Political Voyeur*, in the present has finally left the services of the Tamil Brahmin household she had been with for the last twenty years. She articulated her decision thus:

Over the years, I have bitten my tongue on all kinds of humiliations they pelted on to me. Because it suited their interest, they presumed me to be Hindu, and such was their indifference, but also authority, that I had no choice to play the game. I am not complaining, they did a lot for the family. But I am talking more about the humiliations at the everyday level. Of course, there were no prescribed days of leave or off, and god forbid, if I chose to take one day off, the bloody Madam would make feel like a worm, and then giving me stale leftovers and me having to show gratitude for doing so. I had to constantly be grateful. But one day I just had enough, perhaps it is also a matter of age, and the fact that the family is doing well and maybe even 5 years back I wouldn’t have been able to take the decision, but that day the camel’s back broke. So, one of my relatives passed away, I called the cunt of the Madam in the morning to say I won’t be able to make it today as I had to attend the funeral. Bloody behenchod (sisterfucker) of the Madam, first she was obviously angry and then she had the bloody gall to tell me, could you not have informed me about it yesterday? What the fuck, I thought, as if I knew that the relative was going to die on me; as if everything in my life should be aligned just so she doesn’t have to fucking do her own dishes one day. I hung up. But, bloody hell, was I fuming? So I took out my daughter’s one, and sent a voice message to hers with the bloody choicest of abuses, letting her know how pathetic her existence was, the passes her husband had made at me at least in the initial years, but also the little thieving I had done in her house, and the ultimate fucking bomb was to say, you fucking whore, you think you are very chaste, right, for the last twenty years you have been eating food cooked by a Muslim who makes the best buff kebabs. She also had Rukshar’s number, so she must have known who it is, but after a while I saw that she indeed listened to the message, the two ticks established that. I felt so relieved for finally letting all of it go.

The ‘voice’ that the said feature allows to the unactualized emotions are not limited to only the encounters with the hegemonic self as the other of the Other, the residents of the jhuggis find ingenious ways to use this feature to express their emotionality within their own life worlds. Whether it be in regards to communicating displeasure over a lover paying undue attention to another by sending a ‘silent’ recorded message, or to tell an estranged brother that in spite of the loud, brutal recriminations and altercations, the love is still there.

Perhaps Baby’s instance sets up a notion that all encounters with the other of the other are tense and acrimonious, and the WhatsApp voice feature allows to perform and exert one’s presence whilst subtracting ‘real time’ implications. There are enough instances to illustrate that these ‘sonic selfies’ - mediated via the WhatsApp voice feature - allow, in my reckoning, an equalising (not necessarily always translating into equitable, ethical co-habitational spaces) plane for the other to assert their ‘presences’ to announce that they are in fact ‘present’ in the same space-time continuum, that they in fact cannot be absented. Of course, the same WhatsApp voice feature which enables this ‘equalising encounter’ also comes with the capability to ‘block’ or ‘unlisten’ to these ‘sonic selfies’. However, that conditions is predated by the fact that the ‘presence’ has been inserted and performed.

In that, I find myself seduced by the possibilities of an ‘equalising encounter’ of the voice feature of WhatsApp, whose imagined and intended usage has been extended in its appropriation to be claimed to announce ‘presences’, form ‘collectives’ and practice commoning erstwhile unavailable on the same technological platforms to the identified others. In this essay, whilst the inspiring anchor remains the everyday negotiations of and with the residents of the GP, the other I evoke is the constituent group of people who are denied, structurally and systemically, to participate in knowledge production, consumption, circulation, recalibration and disruption processes. In that the ‘voice’ that the said feature allows has implications more far reaching than just matters of utterances, it opens possibilities of a collectivization which has been denied to this group. The denial of the self to the others, of course, is the foundational premise which does not even permit this group to participate in the ‘pervasive cultures of narcissism’.

Within the hegemonic project, the self of the other is a muted entity. It refuses to recognise among the others the otherwise celebrated contours and curvatures which the hegemonic self so callously either claims, disrupts or denies as a matter of right and choice (my own resistance to Smartphone being a pathetic testimony to this tendency). The hegemonic project does not want the others to be complex entities, but static receptors without the capacities to transmit.

And thus I evoke ‘sonic selfies’, one of its particular manifestation - the use of WhatsApp Voice feature in Smartphones - as an illustrative instance which has evidenced the transcendental, transgressive potential to sustain ruptures in the anxiety-ridden distancing, silencing absenting agenda of the hegemonic forces with the encounter with the other.

The task at hand for those of us who listen, but also have the capacities - however limited in the broader schematic of insidious capitalist subordination - is to activate these sites of ‘equalising encounters’, even at the cost of disrupting, displacing and disturbing our own positions within the comfortable womb of the hegemonic self we so often find ourselves curling into in foetal positions when the encounter with others becomes too real, too anxious, too neurotic.

**JD: One does not replace or subordinate the other, they intermix mash and mingle, such that neither alone can be said to be the repository of truth, because images circulate as conversations, we find ourselves engaging in a new communicative form where the originality or uniqueness of an image is less important than its common generic qualities, the qualities that let it circulate quickly and easily that make it contagious […] It marks a contagious intensity, something about which people have strong feelings, crowds in squares and in media are generally diverse and tumultuous, imitation, repetition, contagion do not imply agreement.**

There are days, whilst visiting Govindpuri, even at the cost of not making appointments at the said time, I often find myself sat on the road under the Govindpuri metro station, the closest one to reach to the jhuggis. It is an overhead metro station, and the road over which Delhi metro’s tentacles spread is one of the main arterial roads leading to dense industrial areas of Okhala and further edges of the city. I sit here in my quietness, sipping a tea, rolling a smoke, revelling in the ‘intermix mash and mingle’ of the ‘sonic selfies’ which are reckoned to render this moment in space-time continuum a ‘noisy’ bearing.

Here, a pushcart with his frail attendant cries out to have his way cleared; a man in a SUV, with rolled up windows and AC on full blast (whose heat can be heard from a distance) keeps his hands on his horn, because he cannot hear the din he is making; a public transport bus in which many a lives will perhaps lose a dime or an opportunity because of the delay, announces a rather masculine sonic intervention of its desire to have its way; in the same bus, perhaps there is a young couple, I find myself hoping, who are only finding out they are in love, and which they know is forbidden, indulge in silent, slight touches amidst the demonic dances of the ‘sonic selfies’. Here, the possibility to ‘shut out’ is absent, and thus ‘shutting out and absenting’ of the Other itself not an option. The multiplicity of the ‘sonic selfies’ - whether they be the frail cries, or amplified horns, the clanking of the cycle rickshaws which itself creates its own moment, the music that plays from someone having a conversation on speaker mode on their mobiles, or just using their mobiles as transmitter of songs of love and longing, or simply lust. Or even those who lend to this ‘intermix mash and mingle’ in their silences - necessitate a moment, however momentarily, to cohabit, to acknowledge the ‘presences’ of the others, however unpalatable it might be to their sense of selves, to respect the logics of the collectivization that compels an accommodation which otherwise would be negotiated, distanced and/or silenced.

The poetics of the moment burst me into raptures of an equally poignant political possibilities. And I want to shout out to no one in particular and everyone in general, a spectre is haunting the world, the spectre of othering. Let us abandon our seats as silent spectators in this theatrics of the world drama wherein an identified other is maimed, raped, burned, silenced without an apology in full view. Let us make the noise.

1. Jodi Dean, Selfie Communism, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZvvH56XqCw. Geert Lovink, ‘Narcissus Confirmed: Technologies of the Minimal Selfie’, ‘Sad by Design: On Platform Nihilism, Pluto Press, 2019 , 98-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter Later Writings: 1978-1987*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, Oliver Corpet and François Matheron (eds.), Verso, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The bodily presences of the o*thers* itself reckoned loud, uncouth and immoral, and thus even in their ‘silent’ presences, these bodies are not desired. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Office of the Registrar & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, ‘Housing Stock, Amenities & Assets in Slums - Census 2011’, http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/Slum\_table/Slum\_table.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tripta Chandola, ‘Dumped through Technology: A Policy maker's Guide to Disenfranchising Slum Dwellers’, Journal of Creative Communications, (8(2–3), 2013), pp - 265–275. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Moushumi Das Gupta, ‘Amenities in the slums match up to urban homes’, *Hindustan Times,* 22 March 2013, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/amenities-in-slums-match-up-to-urban-homes/story-krqsZjciIVd7pb7vsCI8iP.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Uma Vishnu, ‘34% in slums have no toilet, but 63% own mobile’, *Indian Express, 22 March 2013,* http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/34—in-slums-have-no-toilet-but-63--own-mobile-phone/1091573/. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tania M. Li, *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics,* Duke University Press, 2007, PP. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. cf. James Ferguson, *The anti-politics machine:" development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho,* U of Minnesota Press, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Wikipedia Contributors, ‘Economic liberalisation in India’, August 2014, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\_liberalisation\_in\_India, accessed 1st April 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications, Government of India, ‘New Telecom Policy, 1994’, https://dot.gov.in/national-telecom-policy-1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications, Government of India, ‘New Telecom Policy, 1999’, https://dot.gov.in/new-telecom-policy-1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Here, I have to extend my sincere acknowledgements to Geert Lovink. It was only after hearing his talk, even though I had read the text earlier, at the Kochi Biennale, 2017, that the idea of ‘sonic selfies’ as conceptual framing began to hum a tune in my head, which I hope to have put together in symphony here. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jaroslav Krejci, ‘A New Model of Scientific Atheism, *Concurrence,* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1969, p. 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)