

portfolio of artworks

arshad hakim

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arshad hakim draws and makes films. he works with forms of narrative that are first-person, fragmentary and non-linear. he is interested in conditions of impasse, interludes, parentheses, and suspensions, derived and sourced from philosophy, film, theology, music, and poetry.

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adrift: graphic notations for watermusic ii

2025

pigment, ink, graphite, and vinyl on paper

20.32 x 25.40 cm (series of 12)

link to PDF [here](#)

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i started making these drawings while i felt adrift in my life. at the same time, i kept listening to watermusic ii, which in many ways provided an atmosphere to what i was feeling. the drawings are the residue of that drift. at the same time, i was reading various texts, whatever held my attention—another kind of drifting.

i had a day job at a museum where, as part of curatorial work, we would write alt text and image descriptions. my colleague, and later friend, passed her obsession with alt text and image descriptions to me and she kept saying, isn't this like poetry? the text are descriptions of various sensations and sensoriums i had and want to share with you, my reader. these texts were written while listening, drawing, and drifting.

watermusic ii is an hour-long, one-track album by William Basinski, released in 2003. this work is imagined as a triad: to be heard, read, and seen together.

i want to thank Vaishnavi for sharing her obsession with me. to Sarasija, Shveta, and Vrishali for their comments which helped me see the work anew, and for being patient with me when i was not. to Nihaal, for guiding me through the business of book making. to William Basinski, for their music and for this album. thank you William for making music that is deep within us, like melody cut in a disk of flesh.

*this essay is about letting go
or sleeping in bent light*

The Context:

A playlist acts as a memory. The after-effects produce a sensorium that has already been felt and lived. A memory to drench myself in, to feel familiar. It has been months since this loop formed and now I don't know if the comfort is a sedative or a stimulant.

The Mise-en-scene:

Walking. Along the street, the park, while getting groceries; the rhythms of everyday life. Thinking of the 'what ifs' and 'perhaps'. I take a screenshot of a poem titled 'Small Sentence to Drive Yourself Sane' by Lew Welch¹ from my Twitter feed:

*The next time you are doing something absolutely ordinary, or even better
the next time you are doing something absolutely necessary, such as pissing, or making love, or shaving, or washing the dishes or the baby or yourself or the room, say to yourself:
"So it's all come to this!"*

The Gesture: An Incantation.
Close your eyes and feel the earth moving
beneath your feet.

Think of the sky; it's night and the light makes it appear violet [read as violent]. The clouds move rhythmically, with soft changes in shape. And then there is volume. He tells me to look up as much as I can, and when he does that, I think he wants me to escape or he wants to escape, for those few brief seconds.

A self-recursive refrain that I keep telling myself: I am open to you because I can afford you. I think of you, all of you. I oscillate between affordance and attendance;² does my affordance to you translate into attending to you? Memory takes over at this point, the sky, your smile, the frown, the sharpness of your nose, your boyish gait in an old man's body, the old man's charm, the rush in your speech; his sense of certainty, the ease with which he moves, the assuredness of knowing who and what he is. I take all of this in, look at the sky, and say to myself: repeat the incantation for however long you want.

[This text is written at 37,919 metres above sea level; suspended. Flatness and depth dance in a mirage.]

Robert Ashley in *Private Parts: The Park* at 06:28, speaks, *the other side works with the things that are alongside us, the attachments*.³

For the longest, I thought I was bound to him and to the idea of him, bound in the ways he moves, how he sees the world, what he makes of it—all of it. There was a madness to it. And then I replaced 'bound' with 'attachment'. The attachment of being in relation, reciprocity, reconciliation, and resignation, with him.

I make a playlist for him and I call it: *fragments: i see you in shards*.⁴ The list of songs in it moves between joy, longing, hope, and what it might feel to hold power. There are five tracks in it: a two-part EP released by Parallax Editions, the tracks titled, *Ride and Flowers*; the theme from *Gay Man's Guide to Safer Sex*; Japanese *Planetarium* by Legowelt; and *IWD4U* by Prince interpreted by El Perro Del Mar.

The soundtrack is the genre of ineloquence most conventional to melodrama: it is what tells you that you are really most at home in yourself, bathed by emotions you can always recognize, and that whatever material harshness you live is not the real, but rather an accident that you have to clean up after, which will be more pleasant if you whistle while you work.

² I would like to thank Shreya Sarda, for pointing me towards this shift from affordance to attendance. She speaks of attendance in the context of care-takers and the question of what it means to attend to a care-taker. See: "SEA Conversations To Ishaan, With Care #8: A Collective Reading on Care." YouTube, 30 Sept. 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5_wdr9boY.

³ I first heard Ashley years ago, and like most music, I go back to it when I need it. I feel I need to slow down. The first track in *Private Parts: The Park* begins with a man in a hotel, trying to figure something out. What makes me go back to *Private Parts* is 1. Ashley's voice 2. the narrative structure: the loops and arcs he forms in telling this story, which are vague at best, but leave me with a sense of comfort. The second deals with Ashley describing various kinds of twilight, and then says, "Dear George, what's going on? I am not the person whom I used to be." See Ashley, Robert, "Robert Ashley - Private Parts (1978) Full Album," YouTube, 7 Feb. 2018, youtu.be/QpHJWjNSL_k.

⁴ See: "fragments: i see you in shards." SoundCloud, soundcloud.com/arshad-hakim-193346503/sets/fragments-a-MF-66beU9zFHsI-bb4-62e1eca9e405c8d3dc...&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

this essay is about letting go, or sleeping in bent light

2023

essay in a publication titled, *inordinate skies*
link to the essay, [here](#)

He said: I want he who can bend gravity, and when he bends light, he shall see me.

i told him:

The world has to survive the long episodes in which one or one's people do not know what to want, apart from something vaguely affective; then there are episodes in which crisis threatens survival norms and everyone's scrambling to find an anchor and the resources seem limited, except for those of aggression, which are unlimited; and then there is the ordinary in which incompatible needs and fantasies are always on , the table, related to structural crisis or the singular chaos people bring to relationality. My point here is this: incompatible needs and fantasies induce ambivalence. Internal chaos produces external chaos, that expresses it without copying it. Any social theory worthy of its ambition requires a space for enigmatic, chaotic, incoherent, and structurally contradictory attachments; it needs a way to assess the attachment needs that put people in relation without promising to deliver "a life" that feels cushioned. There is no cure for ambivalence. This is what it means to move within an object world.¹⁰

Exit Seductress.

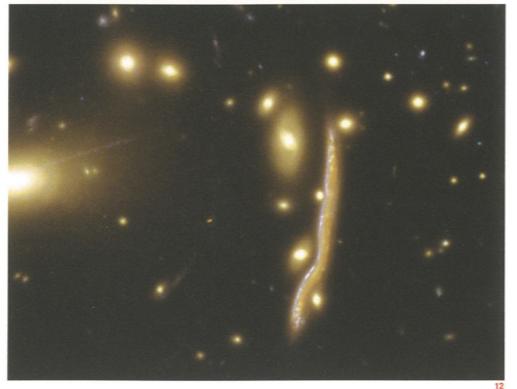
¹⁰ Berlant, Lauren. "A properly political concept of love." That's Not Us in ten pages. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2011, pp. 683-691.

¹¹ Conni Leinahan, NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope image (open source) See: www.spacetelescope.org; www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw2319a/. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

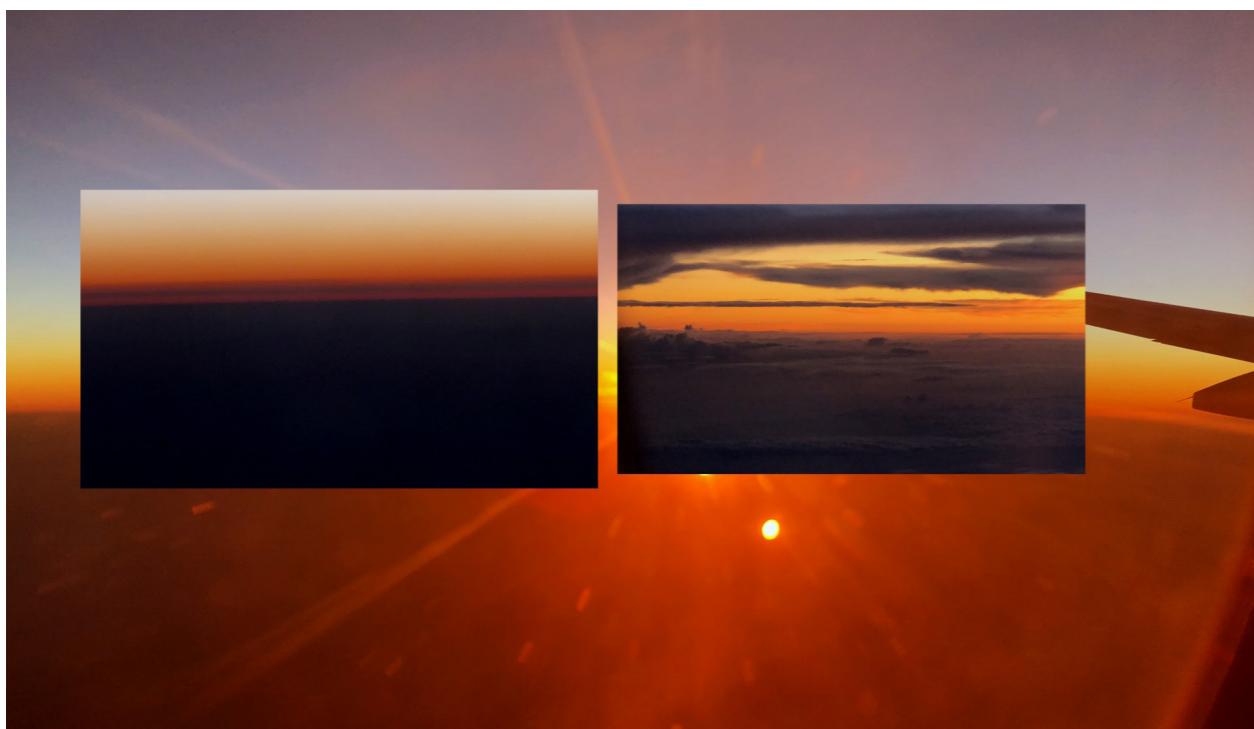
¹² Cosmic Stake, 2022 May, NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope image (open source) See: www.spacetelescope.org; https://www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw17a/. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.



11



12



to see the sun at midnight/ loving against time

2023

digital film with sound, 28 mins 34 secs

this film was made possible through the support of the Generator Cooperative Art Production Fund, 2021-22.

this is the story of the changing of the light. of what transformations are and what they do. this is the story of an eclipse, or many eclipses—the change in and of light making us believe in the magnificent and the insignificant.

the film takes its cue from *The Stellar Rays of the Stars* by Al-Kindi and a re-reading of Iblis's narrative by Husayn Ibn Mansur al- Hallaj—foregrounding the image and the phenomena of the eclipse. *The Stellar Rays of the Stars* is an astronomical and astrological treatise by Al-Kindi, who was a philosopher during the Abbasid period. he proposed that rays from the stars travel in straight lines and when those rays reach an object they carried some part of the star within them; in turn affecting the object that the light has touched. working with Al-Kindi's framework, i speculate on how he would frame shadows—light being blocked by an object and the effect light being blocked can have on us.

three Sufi saints re-read the story of Iblis and propose that he is a lover par-excellence. the narrative of Iblis mimics the narrative of the fall of Lucifer within Judo-Christian theology. the Sufis defend Iblis by stating that he does not prostrate to Adam as per God's command, because he is so much in love with God that he couldn't take his eyes off him. within Sufi iconography, Iblis is known as the Peacock Angel, Black Light and the Tresses of a Lover.

framed within a dialogue, the film speculates the effects of light changing and marks them on the registers of the ethereal, the emotional and the theological.

film stills

contact the artist for preview access

Suspended Volatility: Act 2

An Interior Image

ARSHAD HAKIM | AUG 20, 2022

How should I describe getting into water?

Do I mention how cold the water felt, or that being submerged felt like I belonged, or that the moisture felt like home, or that I wanted to be swept away by the high tide, or that looking at water hypnotised me, or that the twilight reflecting on water possessed me, or that I was haunted by golden light crashing on the shore.

Wet
glistening, yet
inundated
a movement that is between levitating and floating.

Time is reduced to 75% of its actual speed.

he
him
his

Hunted.

Windswept.

How do I describe how the wind feels?

[David Wojnarowicz](#): *In the shadow of forward motion*: the meaning of the title is: Consider you're in a car and you're speeding along the expressway, and everything you see out of the corner of your eye that doesn't register in the pursuit of that speed, in terms of motion, is what's in the shadow. It's all things quietly occurring within the absence of sight that take place in the pursuit of speed, in terms of motion.

suspended volatility: act 2: an interior image

2022

essay

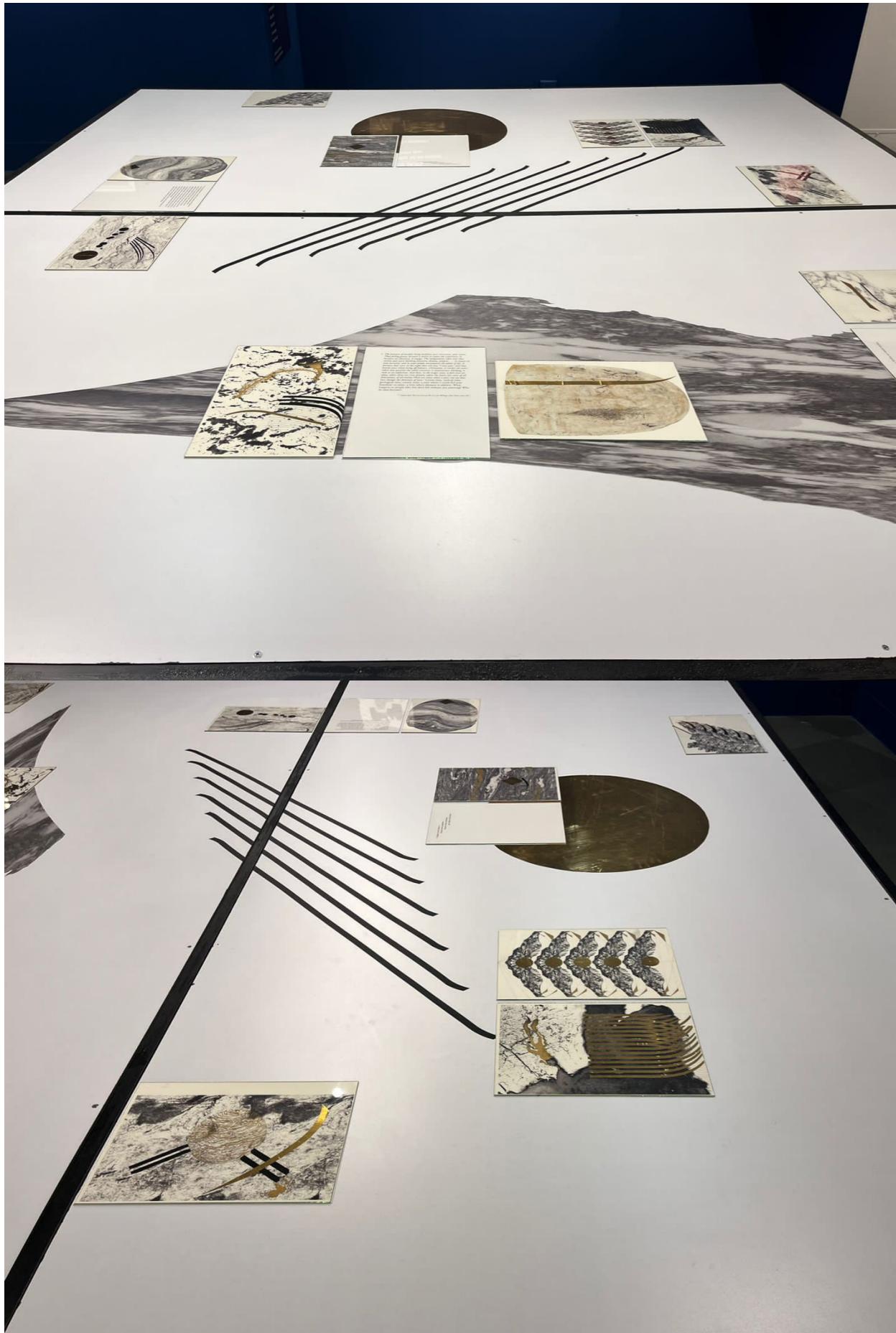
this piece was commissioned for ASAP, Fiction.

link to essay [here](#)

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In an experimental piece—part-prose, part-poem—arshad hakim stays with an image. Through jumps, cuts and loops he tells and never shows, a moment as freeze-frame, as screenshot, as kinetic imprint. A force that suspends everything. Interlaced with music, literature and theory, Suspended Volatility takes us on the transmutative path of a lived moment to image to memory to software and finally, to history.

—Arushi Vats, Editor, ASAP Fiction



ghost rhythms

2022

digital print, gouache, gold ink, and gold vinyl on paper

21 x 29.7 cm (series of 15)

link to PDF [here](#)

(display images from an exhibition titled, *inordinate skies* at new delhi)

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this is the rhythm of the night

2019

lecture performance

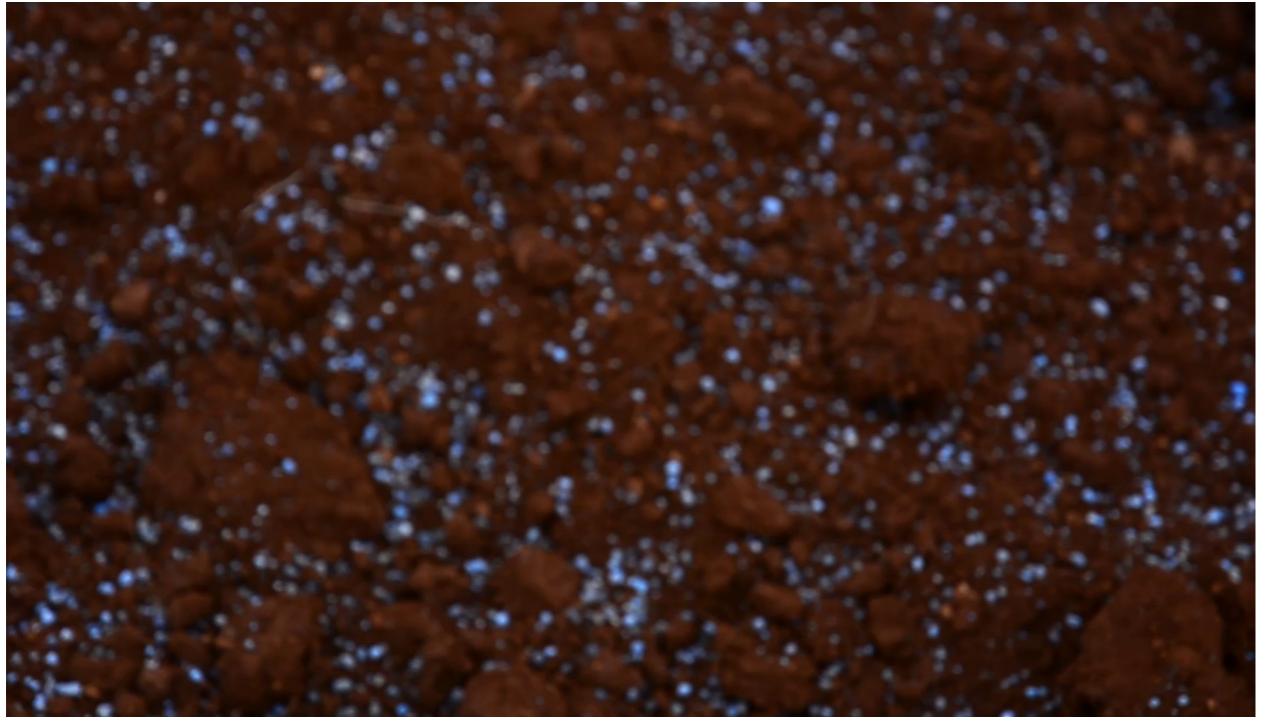
approximately 50 min

performance document [here](#)

—

this lecture is about how a body moves while one is dancing, what sensations are generated during this event through these movements and the zones of inflicted autonomy they lead to. taking this as its premise, the lecture describes various conditions that occur within this temporal frame and how the body and communality become vectors—a *Temporary Autonomous Zone* that operate within the frame of a night.

the lecture takes two digressions in order to illustrate vectors of movements that may not rest within the body but are rooted in the body—taking instances from cosmology and Islamic theology. it also has components of electronic music—techno, jungle, amongst others, which provide an mise-en-scene to this thought.



at the overturn

2018

digital video and sound, 17min 55sec

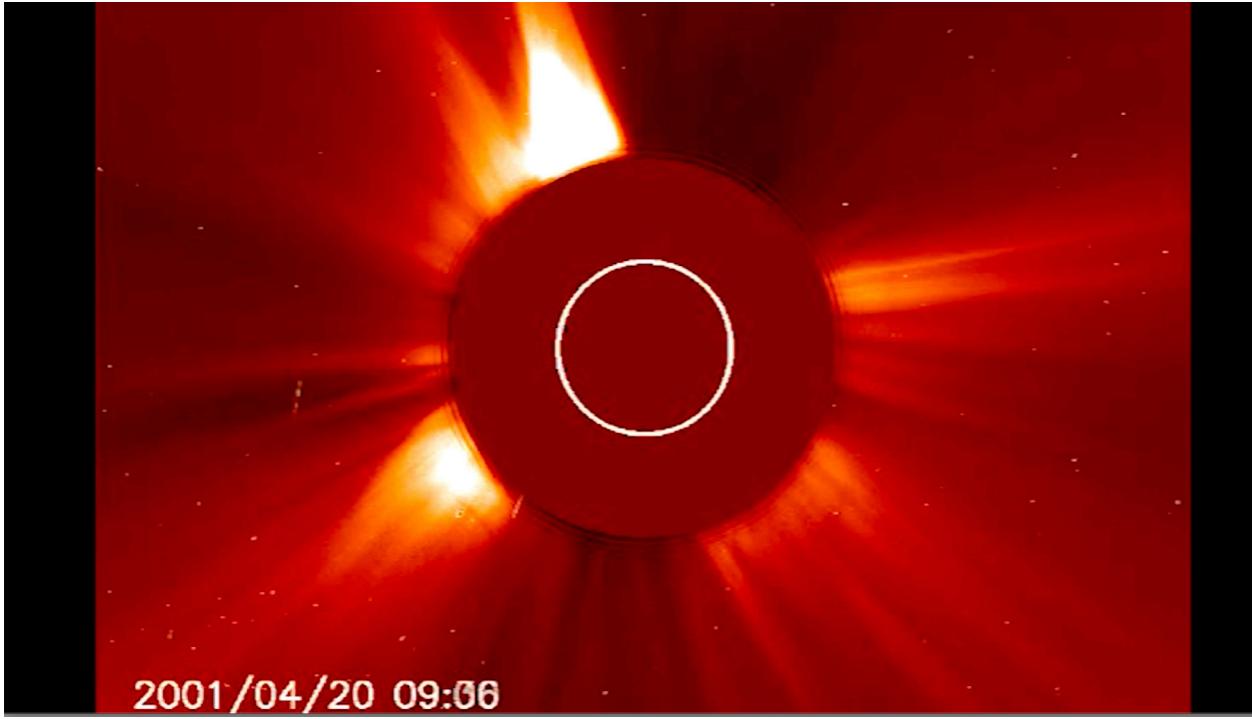
the film's central pivot rests on the idea of a dislodged and a fragmented sense of consciousness, where boundaries—between what one is and what is not—are hazy. as a result, this consciousness lacks a centre, and is constantly looking for one. in doing so, it acts as a parasite looking for a host, to attach itself to and consume. linked with the idea of the parasite, is the idea of nihilist subjectivity; where points of not knowing and points of meaninglessness become generative sites for forging ideas around this dislodged consciousness.

taking this as a base, the film explores these ideas of parasitic time in relation to a lover; notions of heat, self-immolation and how they are intrinsically tied to notions of nihilism. the film is sourced from a range of ideas and sequences, which include: a confrontation scene from *Solaris*, 1972 (By Andrei Tarkovsky), *Self Immolation by Qung Duc*, 1963 in Saigon, Vietnam and *the Promethean myth*.



film stills

contact the artist for preview access



it was high noon and i slept with the sun

(after *Blade Runner*, 1982)

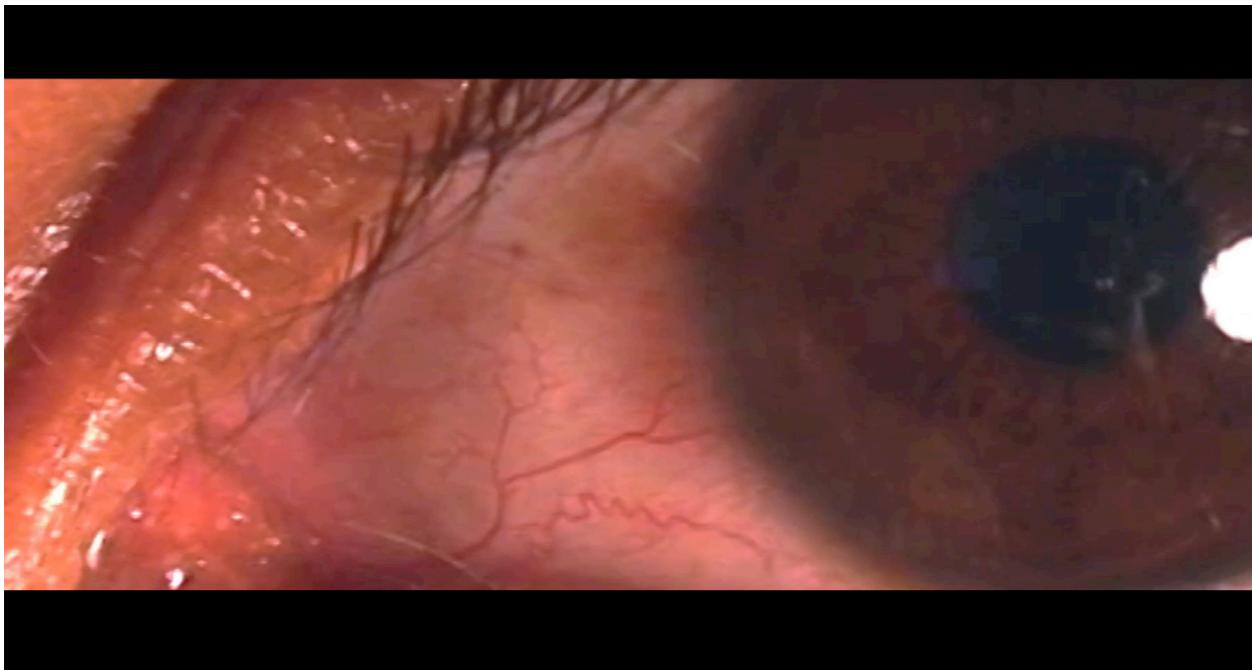
2017

digital video and sound, 3minutes 40sec and 1 minute; loop time: 13min 06sec

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my impulse of making this video was to repurpose a sequence from *Blade Runner, 1982* by Ridley Scott. i was intrigued by the sequence where Roy (replicant) confronts Dr. Tyrell (Head of the company who manufactures these replicants), asking the doctor to extend his life (according to the plot the replicants are very human like. their life is cut short to 4 years in order to prevent any revolt from them). my intrigue was: what does it mean to ask for more life? why are we plagued by this existential question and how does it address the time that we live in?

the second video is a found footage taken from the NASA archives. it captures solar flares and magnetic waves emitted from the sun for a period of a month, which has been compressed to a minute. the piece is played on two separate screens, which are placed keeping the back of the screens together.



film stills

contact the artist for preview access



stages in return that i did not want

2016

digital print, rust transfer, tea stain and gouache on paper
27.94 X 38.1 cms (series of 09)

link to PDF [here](#)

(display image from an exhibition titled, *a voyage of seemingly propulsive speed and an apparent absolute stillness* at Gallery Ark (now Ark Foundation for the Arts), Vadodara)

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these set of drawings are of an internal monologue of a cyborg in love. the cyborg couldn't recollect what the monologue was, it only remembered how it felt, and "feeling" was alien to it. it thought of its body, what responses the body had to its condition and how memory shaped what it felt. in this case, feeling something was to disintegrate.

images within these drawings are sourced from an open-source cellular archive.



ouroboros

2016

12 X 1.5X1 feet, LED Scrolling Board

link to video [here](#)

(display image from an exhibition titled, *Imagined Futures, Reconstructed Pasts* at bikaner house, new delhi)

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this work was conceived while these few words kept going around in my mind:refrain/resist/hesitate/wait/agitate/dance/red/inertia/speculate/rush/revolt.

additionally, i had recently seen Sergei Parajanov's, *Colour of Pomegranates*, in which a line says: *you are fire, your dress is made out of fire*. i changed the line to: *i am fire, my dress is made out of fire*, and it was running with the words on the LED board.



Flubber, 2002 (after Flubber, 1997)

2016

digital video and sound, 9min 14 sec, on loop

link to video [here](#)

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Flubber is a 1997 rom-com movie, a remake of *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961), directed by Les Mayfield and starring Robin Williams. the section that i have used from the movie is when Robin Williams is making Flubber at his basement cum lab. this section becomes ironic as a scientist is producing a material, which he does not have much control over and has human like qualities—Williams gives a strand of his hair into the solution that makes Flubber. the movie becomes relevant for me as i had seen this during the 2002, Godhra pogrom, and i was living in Ahmedabad, a city which became the centre of the pogrom. this memory resurfaced during the Dadri lynching episode (2015), where the university where i was studying in was a few miles away from Dadri and i used to go there almost every second day.

9 snapshots accompany the video from the same clip, where Flubber being green in color has changed to red and on the 10th sheet is a dua (prayer) for “ghar ki bifazat”(ayatul kursi)—the sheets being displayed on a light table.



9 Snapshots from Flubber, 2002 and handwritten ayatul kursi

2016

inkjet prints and ink on paper
21 x 29.7 cm (series of 10)





static photographs

2016

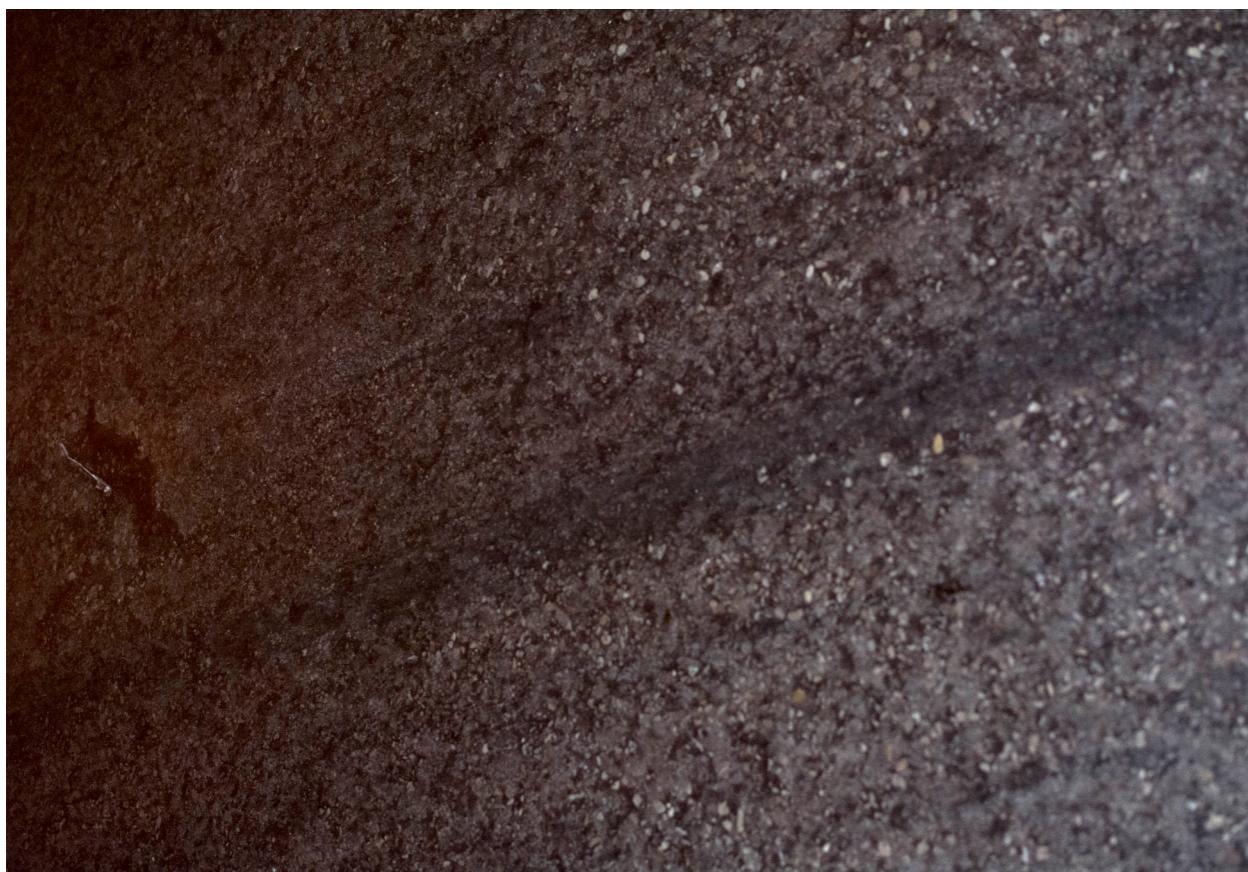
archival ink on paper and sound

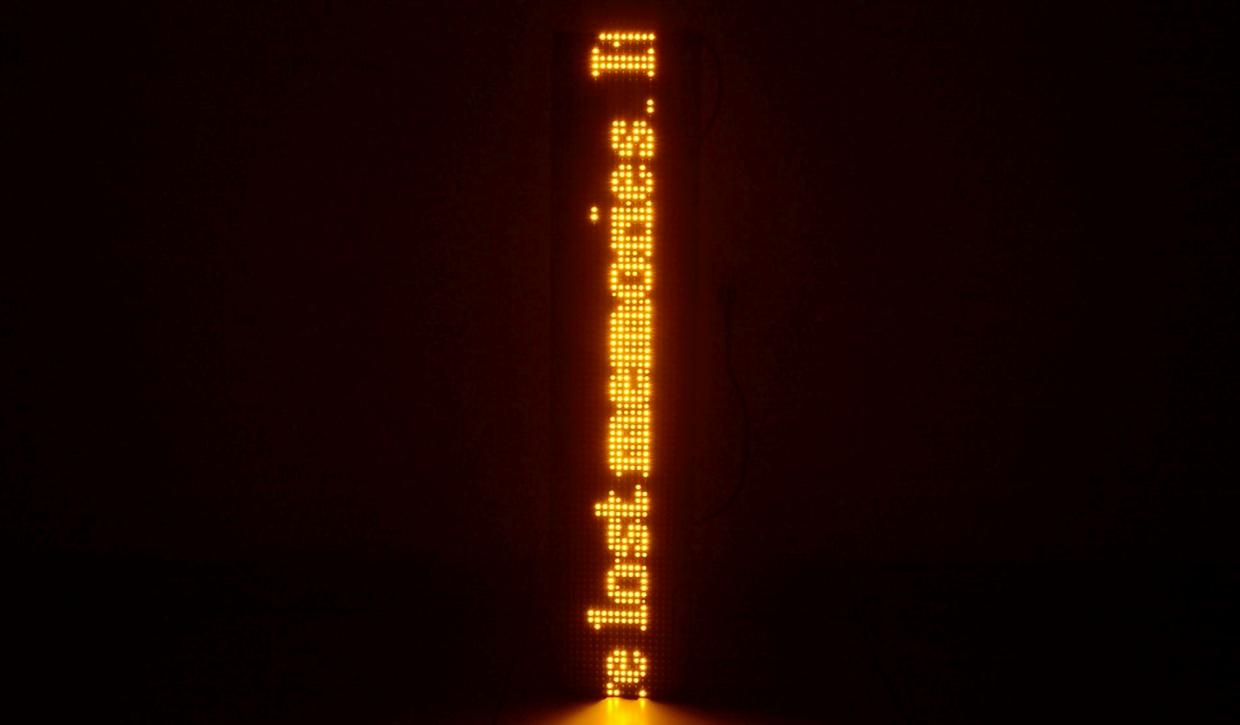
20.32 X 30.48 cms (series of 12)

link to video [here](#)

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the photographs were shot during a storm, later edited and synced with white noise.





nobody really knows (after 2046, 2004)

2015

LED scrolling board

dimensions variable

(screenshots from the documentation video)

link to video [here](#)

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the LED strip came as a response to living in a homogenised space and the sense of alienation that it creates. i kept going back to the opening sequence in *2046* by Wong Kar Wai, where the year 2046 is seen as a time warp and where memories are held still. in a sense, the homogenised space where i was living became *2046*, where everything was held very still and i could move in and out of it. taking this idea as a prompt, and from what I had written, a new text was written in order to intensify the sense of alienation.

Are you going to rekindle the blaze?
Is life without fire unbearable for you?
(After Lessons of Darkness, Herzog)
Nov 2015



*are you going to rekindle the blaze? is life without fire unbearable for you?
(after, Lessons of Darkness, 1992, Werner Herzog)*

2015

archival pigment print (edition of 3)
21.08 X 17.95 cms

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Lessons of Darkness, a Sci-Fi/War film by Herzog, documents the retreat after the first Gulf War. the film is largely shot from a helicopter and has biblical narrations as audio. as an aftermath of the war, there are huge oil spills, documented from a helicopter, seen from above. one does not know if it is water or oil. in order to fix the underground oil pipelines, the workers burn the oil in order to exhaust it. what results is a column of fire.

the entire film is divided into chapters, the image that is used is taken from the chapter titled, *Life without Fire* (Trans. Leben ohne feuer)

The audio is as follows:

leben ohne feuer (live without fire)

Trans: two figures are approaching an oil well.

One of them is holding a lighted torch.

What are they up to?

Are they going to rekindle the blaze?

Is life without fire become impossible for them?

fin.