"My Flight Is the Rebellion" – History, Ghosting, and Represencing in Nalini Malani's Video Installations

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Award-winning Indian artist Nalini Malani has been making socially and politically engaged art for nearly five decades. Since the end of the twentieth century, she has created video plays and video/shadow plays (installations); the latter centre on rotating, reverse-painted Mylar cylinders. These works include: *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998), *Hamletmachine* (2000), *Transgressions* (2001), *Unity in Diversity* (2003), *Gamepieces* (2003), *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* (2005), *Remembering Mad Meg* (2007), and *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2012). Malani's two-part retrospective show at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and at Castello di Rivoli in Rivoli-Torino attest to the international recognition of her work and its powerful exploration of the contradictions and paradoxes of global modernity.[1]

In *Unity in Diversity (Unity)* and *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain (Transactions)*, Malani enacts a radical aesthetic of materialising absence that I call *represencing*. In these works, wandering female ghosts and other allegorical figures render visible ideological processes, subjectivities, social groups, and representations that have been forgotten, erased, repressed, silenced, or covered over in India, as well as the discourses and practices that produced their invisibility. In Malani's video installations, female ghosts haunt the hollow chambers of time and the archives of history, extracting its thoughts, movements, and processes. Through their haunting, they drag what is dark out into the light, represencing, reembodying, and reenacting the horrors of the past in order to render those horrors visible and palpable.

In *Unity,* the female ghost takes the form of a musician/violinist who has been reanimated and placed outside of a famous painting. In *Transactions,* the women who died during the mass migration and sectarian violence of the 1947 Partition of the British Raj also find a new ghostly voice.[2] Malani deploys two strategies for materialising absence: allegorical critique and a feminist subaltern critique. Two types of images enable both of these strategies: the allegorical-palimpsest-image and the schizo-image. Both images can be approached as variants of the Deleuzian time-image, often taking the form of visibly layered shots. In the time-image, as Deleuze outlines, we can

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[1] Malani was born in Karachi in 1946. Her family had to migrate to India after the Partition of colonial India. To date, the artist has received several important awards including the Asia Arts Awards in 2016 and the Fukuoka Prize for Arts and Culture in 2013. For a detailed and probing study of Malani's video/shadow plays, see Mieke Bal, *In Medias Res: Inside Nalini Malani's Shadow Plays* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2016).

[2] India and Pakistan won independence in August 1947. The Partition of British India was accompanied by the largest mass migration in human history and by local fighting, looting, and pogroms, leading to the estimated deaths of up to one million people. The borders between the two new independent states of India and Pakistan were hastily drawn without much consideration of the huge problems it would create, such as with Kashmir (claimed by both states). For notable historiographic and ethnographic records of the Partition, see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics, and the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, *Literature, Gender and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence* (London: Routledge, 2017). See also Vinay Lal, "Select Research Bibliography on the Partition of India" http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/History/Independent/partition_bibliography.html (last accessed 1 February 2018).

access at once pure time or duration and the layers and folds of history, memory, matter, and experience as they co-constitute one another. The allegorical-palimpsest-image in *Unity* and the schizo-image in *Transactions* may be seen as forms of (virtual) re-embodiment that foreground the female ghost. Through their haunting and ghosting, Malani's installations articulate radical diffractive (re)readings or represencings of historical processes that shimmer in and out of durational time.[3] Through her materialisation of historical and virtual events, Malani's works allow the viewer to intuit further revelations through what may be described as a topology of shared pain and its ethical consequences.

The Allegorical-Palimpsest Image and *Unity in Diversity*

Unity is a single-channel installation piece that consists of a reconstruction of an Indian middle-class living room, a framed video projection, wall lamps and 13 black and white photographs featuring episodes from the career and close relationship of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The video opens with an animation that features the making of a palimpsest. Thick layers of black and white paint are laid over Raja Ravi Varma's allegorical painting *Galaxy of Musicians* (ca. 1884) with large, aggressive brushstrokes. The text that follows informs us that this painting was shown at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and that the well-known religious thinker Swami Vivekananda spoke at an affiliated event (the World's Parliament of Religions), warning against orthodoxy and sectarianism.

In the next scene, one of the female musicians in Varma's painting awakens after having been startled by a gunshot. She stands up and steps out of the painting's frame. Meanwhile, an actor's voice begins to read the testament of a witness to the 2002 Gujarat pogroms (a three-day period of violence that occurred in the western Indian state of Gujarat). The text is also based on Heiner Müller's play, *The Task: Memory of a Revolution* [*Der Auftrag: Erinnerung an eine Revolution*, 1979]. Raw archival footage of an abortion surgery appears and is superimposed over Varma's painting. We then hear a child's voice reciting the "Angel of Despair" section from *The Task*. In the video's closing sequence, the revived musician from Varma's painting appears among a group of female soldiers. A piercing scream is heard and the screen goes black. In Hindi, a woman's voice explains: "They poured petrol in the mouth of a six-year old and threw in a lit match. He blew up like a bomb." This text, also, has been adopted from an eyewitness account of Gujarat.

Figurations of allegory and the palimpsest can be traced throughout Malani's paintings and her installation works. The latter feature three techniques of imaging that may be described as palimpsests: doubled or multiple exposure shots; the use of layered imagery (the result of projected superimpositions and shadow loops); and animated palimpsests, such as the one that opens *Unity*. In addition, Malani's works are often steeped in allegory. In Walter Benjamin's view, allegory evokes ruin, decay, and the destruction or subversion of hierarchies. It is a dialectical image; a shocking flash that not only condenses disparate fragments of the past, present, and future but also has the capacity to shatter and conserve at the same time. Cinema, in the work of Benjamin, has an inherently allegorical and allegorising potential.[4] Theorists such as Craig Owens, Bliss Cua Lim, and Michelle Langford have all explored the relationship between allegory and the palimpsest. Langford proposes that the allegorical-image is a concept that mediates between and combines

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3 My use of the term diffractive reading derives from Karen Barad and feminist new materialist scholarship. Diffraction involves "reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter." See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 30.

4 See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 159–67, pp. 175–217; Walter Benjamin (trans.) in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), pp. 229–31; and Michelle Langford, *Allegorical Images: Tableau, Time and Gesture in the Cinema of Werner Schroeter* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006), pp. 55–8.

features of Benjaminian allegory with the Deleuzian time-image.[5] Owens further contends that allegory can be seen as a palimpsest insofar as it entails doubling: one text is read through another. Like Benjamin, Owens ascribes to the allegorical palimpsest the capacity to redeem a history that is threatened by oblivion by inscribing it anew.[6] In *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (2009), Bliss Cua Lim argues that many contemporary Asian ghost films are also conceived as historical allegories or palimpsests, subverting, or rewriting national time and cinema as well as national history. She writes that these films often reveal a plurality of heterogeneous, immiscible temporalities, supernatural worlds, and conflicting traditions that cannot be reduced to a historicist or nationalist view of time and modernity.[7]

Together, the reflections of Langford, Owens, and Lim enable us to redefine the allegorical-image as the *allegorical-palimpsest-image*. In Malani's installations, double and multiple exposure shots and superimposed image loops bring historic discursive processes and practices into view. Furthermore, Malani's images enable at once topological and diffractive readings of both virtual and historical assemblages, including those that are produced by affect, sensation, gender, class, religion, and race.[8] In Malani's work, the allegorical-palimpsest image functions as a ghostly and a ghosting machine, enabling diffractive perception and the materialisation of otherwise obliterated historical processes.

The Angel of Revolution: The Allegorical Critique of History in *Unity in Diversity*

In Malani's revisioning of Varma's painting, the violinist who is awakened by a gunshot time travels to the Gujarat site of carnage. As she journeys to 2002, the violinist passes through four different "stations" or points of crisis: her sudden awakening and shock; the sequence featuring surgical imagery; the photograph of the female soldiers; and finally, the epilogue that testifies to the horrific murder of a child during the anti-Muslim pogroms in Ahmedabad. By critically revisioning and transforming specific spatio-temporal, discursive, and material constellations, *Unity* conducts a powerful allegorical critique of colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary India, engaging with violent nationalist Hindu anti-minority discourses and practices as well as the "Idea of India" (secularisation, democracy, and unity).[9] The time travel of Varma's reanimated violinist is also quite clearly topological. Imagery of her location (late nineteenth century India as well as the World's Exposition, where *Galaxy of Musicians* was first exhibited) is overlaid with the Gujarat pogroms.

Unity's script adapts two specific passages from Müller's *The Task*: Galloudec's deathbed letter to Citizen Antoine with which the play opens and the "Angel of Despair" monologue. The former text is inserted into *Unity* to call attention to the crimes that were committed during the Gujarat pogroms (including the collusion of the then Prime Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi's BJP-led government, and the Gujarat state police). Malani's most striking reworking of *The Task,* however, may well be her recasting of the Child Angel as a feminist Angel of History and a visionary Angel of Revolution. In *Unity,* the Child Angel recites the "Angel of Despair" monologue verbatim:

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[5] Ibid., pp. 55–8, 66-80; Benjamin, *Origin*, pp. 208–09.

[6] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October,* Vol.12 (1980): 68–9.

[7] Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 156–79.

[8] On diffractive reading/genealogical-topological analysis see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, pp. 93–4, pp. 243–46.

[9] See Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 3–5, pp. 171–82.

I am the Angel of Despair. With my hands I dispense ecstasy, numbness, oblivion, the lust and torment of bodies. My language is silence, my song the scream. Terror dwells in the shadow of my wings. My hope is the last gasp. My hope is the first battle. I am the knife with which the dead man cracks open his coffin. I am the one who will be. My flight is the rebellion, my sky the abyss of tomorrow.[10]

The Child Angel's monologue is spoken over the confronting, raw images of an abortion surgery, previously described. Intertwined with the time travelling musician, the Child Angel is depicted as part of the musician's "progress" through India's post-colonial history. Malani's Child Angel is clearly envisioned as a contemporary version of both the "Angel of Despair" from Müller's play and a reworking of Benjamin's Angel of History. She is not merely an Indian version of the Angel of History, however. Rather, she is part of an ensemble of allegorical figures that Malani enlists to produce a radical reinterpretation of history and the hastening of revolution.

Significantly, the Angel of History who appears in the middle section of *Unity* is also European. Her depiction suggests the defeat of French Revolution ideals as staged in Müller's *The Task* as well as all the bourgeois, socialist, and communist revolutions that have occurred in modern Europe.[11] In Malani's allegorical-palimpsest-image, superimposition (for instance, the overlaying of the surgical imagery with the Child Angel and the musician) occurs alongside other various allegorical images, helping to materialise longstanding historic processes of betrayal, failure, and defeat. In the Indian context, that failure would be the very ideal of "Unity in Diversity"; that is, the harmonious, peaceful coexistence of a heterogeneous array of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and linguistic groups within the same national territory. Such failure is foreshadowed by the inclusion of Varma's painting and Vivekananda's writings on the one hand and by the suggested betrayal of secularism and democratic egalitarianism in contemporary India on the other. What Malani's video implies is that the Hindu-centric, nationalistic ideal of secularism, democracy, and national unity has been channelled into religious fundamentalism and state crimes, or what Perry Anderson calls the "Indian Ideology."[12]

As Sigrid Weigel has shown, Benjamin's Angel of History is a dialectical thought-image [*Denkbild*] that gathers and condenses all the major strands of Benjamin's musings on history, language, art, Jewish Messianism, and dialectical materialism into a single allegorical constellation (still maintaining the tension between these disparate reflections). The Angel of History functions both as allegorical practice and as redeeming critique [*rettende Kritik*].[13] In *Unity,* it is the violinist who performs this redeeming function. Enfolded with the allegorical figure of the Child Angel, she makes visible, bears witness to, listens, and preserves what historical and contemporary accounts have tended to obliterate, misrepresent, or silence. Appropriated from Varma's painting, the violinist is granted the role of (feminist) historian and ethnographer. It is she who rescues the life narratives

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[10] Heiner Müller, "The Task" in *Hamlet-machine and Other Texts for the Stage*, ed. and trans. Carl Weber, *Performing Arts Journal Publications* (1984): 87.

[11] *The Task* addresses the violence, terror, and repression that accompanied the establishment of socialist and communist regimes in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and in the "Third World," as well as the totalitarian stranglehold on democratic citizenship and freedom of expression that occurred during the Cold War. Müller's play was inspired by Anna Seghers' story "The Light on the Gallows" as well as by plays and stories by Brecht, Büchner, Artaud, Genet, Kafka, and Beckett. According to Jonathan Kalb, Müller's "Angel of Despair" also evokes the figure of Genet, a writer and playwright much admired by Müller. See Jonathan Kalb, *The Theater of Heiner Müller* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2001), pp. 123–37. The critique of totalitarian communist regimes such as that of the German Democratic Republic and European intellectuals who have betrayed revolutionary ideals is articulated in *The Task* in the monologue "Man in the Elevator" ["*Der Mann im Fahrstuhl*"].

[12] See Anderson, The Indian Ideology.

[13] Sigrid Weigel, Body-and Image-Space: *Re-reading Walter Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 55–9.

of subalterns and minorities from oblivion or misrepresentation (including the Ahmedabad Muslim). Passing through time, the violinist/Angel of History exposes the subordination and oppression of women, and the instrumentalising of the female body and sexuality that has occurred in post-colonial and contemporary India. She materialises the savagery committed by the Hindu mob against Muslims during the Gujarat pogroms (crimes that included gang rapes and fetus extractions).

Bearing historical witness to such events, the violinist/Angel of History also assumes the role of a shaman, voicing narratives of the dead. As the Child Angel announces: "My language is silence, my song the scream/terror dwells in the shadow of my wings," voicing the suffering of the victims of the Gujarat pogroms as well as victims of other episodes of communal and/or political violence in modern India. As Malani's violinist/Angel of History serves as a seer who moves with history, she is also able to foretell the future. The redeeming critique of Benjamin becomes a radical rebellion that is led by a visionary figure.[14]

Unity's Child Angel may be regarded not only as the Angel of History but also as the Angel of Revolution. As with her counterpart (Sasportas) in Müller's play, the Child Angel's monologue contains the prophetic vision of a worldwide rebellion that is enacted by black slaves. Inspired by a poem by Aimé Césaire, this powerful text is implicitly evoked by Malani's video to underscore the redemptive quality of the Angel. Her speech conjures up a struggle for liberation that will mobilise humans, non-humans, and indeed the entire planet. Here is Sasportas' final speech, heard echoing through the Child Angel:

> I've said that slaves have no home. That isn't true. The home of the slaves is the rebellion. I will enter the battle armed with the humiliations of my life ...
> When the living can no longer fight, the dead will. With every heartbeat of the revolution flesh grows back in their bones, blood in their veins, life in their death. The rebellion of the dead will be the war of the landscapes, our weapons the forests, the mountains, the oceans, the deserts of the world. I will be forest, mountain, ocean, desert. I – that is Africa. I – that is Asia. The two Americas – that is I.[15]

In *Unity,* the monologue of the Child Angel/Angel of Revolution actualises dormant political and non-human material forces. Amidst horrific crimes, death, despair, and devastation, Malani's video envisions a new type of political subjectivity and a new possible future. As unlikely as it may seem, then, *Unity* is a work that speaks of hope – the possibility of a sweeping revolution and a planetary uprising that may either provoke total destruction ("the abyss of tomorrow") or the dawn of a new era. *Unity*'s vision of the future evokes an all-encompassing revolution that will obtain justice for exploited subalterns and change the conditions of life itself.

The Schizo-Image: Desiring the Goddess, the Partition, and the Abducted Woman in *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain*

First exhibited in 2005 at the 51st Venice Biennale, *Transactions* is a five-channel audiovisual installation work. It consists of a montage of original scenes created by the artist, archival footage from a documentary on Gandhi, images of Hindu gods and goddesses, and scenes inspired by Bollywood cinema. Though the play explores the trauma and legacy of the Partition, its title was inspired by the allegorical figure of "Mother India" (Bharat Mata) and by the Indian anthropologist

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[14] On the relation between Müller's "Angel of Despair" and Benjamin's Angel of History see Eva Brenner, "A Cancer Walk Through German History," in *The Cultural Politics of Heiner Müller*, ed. Dan Friedman (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 37–45.

[15] Müller, *The Task*, p. 100.

Veena Das. Das' 1997 essay, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," is cited at the very beginning of the video:

> How is it that the imaging of the project of nationalism in India came to include the appropriation of the bodies of women as objects on which the desire for nationalism could be brutally inscribed and a memory for the future made?[16]

A woman's voice begins to speak in an incoherent, delirious fashion, suggesting that she may be one of the thousands of women who were abducted, raped and forced to convert to the religion of the "enemy" during the Partition. Archival footage from the celebrations of India's independence then appears. Representing Nehru, an actor's voice declares that the women who were abducted during Partition "must be returned" in order to restore the nation's honour.[17] An archival sequence extending over all of the installation's screens shows us a mass of seated women spinning *khadi* (hand-woven cloth), in support of the anti-colonial freedom struggle.[18] A still evoking a scene from Mehboob Khan's film *Mother India* (1957) follows on the central screen. On the other screens, archival footage documents the chaos and mass migration that occurred at the time Partition.

In the next sequence, the holy cow and popular pictures of Hindu gods appear. The outer screen on the right reveals a working-class family (including a young girl). They all sit on the ground, looking straight at the camera. We then see the negative exposure of a Muslim woman framed on the far right. In extreme close-up, left and right of the centre image, a huge grotesque mouth is superimposed over the stomach of an anonymous woman, creating a composite "mouth-belly" shot. The two outer screens of the installation repeat the imagery of the girl and the holy cow. At this point, the narrator laments: "I died at the border of the new nations, carrying a bloody rag as my flag." The video closes with a close-up of Gandhi's face after his assassination on January 30, 1948, the superimposition of multiple female faces, and a sped-up succession of stills from the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat.[19]

Like *Unity,* Malani's *Transactions* is a complex allegorical work that reimagines a host of allegorical productions, including Müller's *The Task* and Khan's film. The work's allegorical genealogy of the Partition and its legacy (and Das' feminist ethnography) suggests that the hysterical narrator of the installation is Bharat Mata, the modern goddess of the Indian nation. This

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[16] Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 68.

[17] On raped and abducted women during Partition see Das, "Language and Body" and *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 1–107; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Ritu Bhasin and Kamala Menon, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000).

[18] *Khadi* or *khaddar* refers to handspun and hand-woven cloth in India and Pakistan. In the 1920s, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) began to promote the spinning of khadi for rural self-employment and self-reliance in defiance of industrially manufactured cloth imported from Britain. Khadi fabrics became an icon of the Swadeshi movement and an integral part of the anti-colonial freedom struggle.

[19] The carnage and looting in Gujarat was presented as just retaliation for the setting on fire of the Sabarmati Express train by alleged Muslim perpetrators in the town of Godhra on February 27, 2002. Returning from a temple-building campaign in Ayodya, 58 Hindu activists and their families died as a result of the train burning. Though no evidence linking Muslim terrorists or religious activists to the incident was found, a large crowd of Hindu men and women (including Dalits and tribals) went on a rampage in the city of Ahmedabad, leaving about 2,000 dead and over 133,000 Muslims without shelter or relief from the Gujarat government. On February 28, 2002, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi called a secret meeting where he asked senior government officials and high-ranking police officers to allow the anti-Muslim pogroms and looting to continue. Modi (who was a member of the rightwing para-military Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in his youth) is now Prime Minister of India. On the Gujarat pogroms see Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

identification is present both in the video play's title and in several scenes featuring iconic imagery drawn from popular culture. For instance, Malani's inclusion of the still of a sari-clad woman (seen with one of her arms raised in effort, her face and posture showing great determination) was inspired by the performance of the Muslim actress Nargis in *Mother India*. Representations of the goddesses Durga and Lakshmi and of the monkey god Hanuman also feature. Other sequences in the video show Mohandas K. Gandhi (popularly called Bapu or the father of the nation). As "Mother India" can also be read as a paradigmatic allegorical-palimpsest-image, Malani presents India here both as a literal palimpsest (that is, a doubled or multiple exposure shot) and a metaphorical palimpsest. Snippets of the trauma of Partition are seen through the "mouth-belly" shot, the mask-like "mutant" that appears, and the closing series of stills that document the random looting and destruction of Muslim neighbourhoods.

Malani's engagement with Das' feminist reading of the Partition is readily apparent. The superimposition of the mouth that appears over a women's belly evokes Saadat Hasan Manto's story *Fundanen* [Pompoms], also cited in Das.[20] Das resonates, also, in the Nehruvian voice's demand for the recovery of "our (Hindu) women" and the return of "their (Muslim) women," as well as that voice's insistence that the new Indian nation's honour can only be restored through the exchange of abducted women. Cast as the ghost of an Abducted Woman, the video play's hysterical narrator (Bharat Mata) spouts a delirious monologue. As Das' work explains, those women who survived sexual assault while attempting to flee over the border into Pakistan lived in the zone between two deaths. They suffered a "living death" as a result of their violation and a "social death" as well, as their own kin often rejected these women upon their return.[21] In Malani's installation, the crazed narrator is rendered all the more tragic because of her condition as an unmourned and wandering ghost. She cannot find a place for herself in the cosmos ("I died at the border of the new nation/carrying a bloody rag as my flag"). She is paradigmatic of the subaltern who cannot speak and is excluded from social mobility. Her ghosting articulates a position that is *without identity* for what the Abducted Woman embodies is the post-colonial, sovereign nation-state.[22] This position is reiterated through the prominence of the sari-clad woman, as she evokes the oxcart-pulling Radha (Nargis) from Khan's film. Malani's meta-allegorical reimagining points us to the historical and gendered yet indeterminate nature of the allegorical-palimpsest-image. What *Transactions* reveals is the (non)identity of "Mother India" as an empty placeholder without fixed boundaries, properties or meanings. Here, the goddess of the nation is visualised as an elusive substitute for an abstract idea. She is a ghost or a haunting; a phenomenon produced through the material co-constitution of colonial cartography, post-Independence nationalism, Bollywood cinema, genealogies of Partition, and so forth.

By highlighting the entanglements of nationalism, sexuality, the female/subaltern body, and capitalism in colonial and post-colonial India, *Transactions* articulates a subversive, allegorical genealogy. Throughout, Malani reimagines the subcontinent's modern history as a powerful

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[20] A survivor of rape and abduction from the time of Partition, the protagonist in Manto's story mumbles that in those days women had to grow two stomachs – a normal one, and one for bearing the pain of their violation inside the body. Manto (1912–1955) was an Urdu language writer and journalist who also authored film scripts and radio plays. His masterful stories on Partition – *Toba Tek Singh, Khol Do* [Open It], *Thanda Gosht* [Cold Meat] – are admired both in Pakistan and in India. On the hysteria of the protagonist of Manto's story and on survivors of the Partition in general see Das, *Life and Words*, p. 55.

[21] Das, "Language and Body", pp. 82–9; Das, *Life and Words*, pp. 24–37.

[22] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the subaltern, like gender and a strict understanding of class, is a position without identity. She points out that subalternity entails not only a lack of access to social mobility and to the welfare mechanisms of the state but the absence of a recognisable basis for action. See Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 430–31.

"schizo-image," all the while evoking the possibility of what Deleuze and Guattari term "the permanent revolution" (as completion of the schizophrenic process).[23]

My perspective on the schizo-image privileges what this type of image *does*.[24] Affiliated with the allegorical-palimpsest-image, the schizo-image mediates and enables a dismantling of subjectivating machines (such as representations of "Mother India"), allowing for the tracing of a line of flight. Let us linger for a moment on two characteristic examples that express and mediate *Transactions'* critique: the "mouth-belly" shot, previously described, and the "mutant-seer" shot. While the latter can be linked to the recurring motif of the mutant in Malani's art, here the mutant appears as a palimpsest of several superimposed women's faces. Both the "mouth-belly" and the "mutant-seer" shots allude to the problem of the face and faciality, as well as evoking ideas of escape. For Deleuze and Guattari, the face represents an inhuman close-up; an assemblage of "white walls" for the projection of signs and "black holes" of subjective investments.[25] If the face in its capacity as a faciality-machine must be dismantled because of its production and controlling of subjects, then the affection-image (epitomised by the close-up) has the potential to liberate affect and desire from the determinations of subjectivation and signification (*signifiance*). The affection-image has the potential to transform the face into a site of vibrating intensity, singularity, and a becoming-imperceptible. It holds the possibility of a schizophrenic escape, extending what Deleuze and Guattari call the line of flight "toward the... asignifying, the asubjective, and the faceless."[26]

Malani's "mouth-belly" and "mutant-seer" shots envision both these potentialities: a dismantling of the face and the possibility of schizophrenic escape. Clearly, the face (or rather, the faciality-machine) that these images distort and attempt to undo is not the face of a specific individual. Rather, it is the overinvested and saturated visage of "Mother India" – that iconic representation of India's national identity, history, and culture. In *Transactions,* the critique that Malani's schizo-images mediate and embody is twofold. On the one hand, we can discern a feminist questioning of male-centred, caste-based, Hindu-centric cultural-religious nationalism, and anti-colonial nationalism, as well as the role that nationalisms have played in India since the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, Malani implicitly articulates a "materialist-transcendental critique" of the identity and subject-based constructions that are enabled by nationalisms.[27] Through its striking schizo-images, *Transactions* suggests that identitarian subjectivities are oppressive machines that have to be destroyed. Nonetheless, Malani acknowledges that these machines provide crucial clues and routes for the eventual realisation of universal history and the permanent revolution of an unceasing desiring-production.

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[23] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 340–82. See also Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 18–9, pp. 92–3.

[24] For Patricia Pisters, the neuro-image/schizo-image is a type of time-image that gives access to thought and the brain, is related to chaos and complexity theory, and is epitomised by delusional or schizophrenic characters in thrall to the data, screens, and information of contemporary media culture. In contrast, Jamie Murray contends that the schizo-image is an image of thought in which thinking produces itself on the plane of immanence and as incessant rearticulation of a problem. See Patricia Pisters, "Numbers and Fractals: Neuroaesthetics and the Scientific Subject," in *The Force of the Virtual: Deleuze, Science, and Philosophy*, ed. Peter Gaffney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 235–37 and Jamie Murray, *Deleuze and Guattari: Emergent Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 38–41.

[25] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p.187.

[26] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 168–90. See also Gregory Flaxman and Elena Oxman, "Losing Face," in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 47–51, and Amy Herzog, "Suspended Gestures: Affect, Schizo-analysis, and the Face in Cinema," in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, pp. 66–71.

[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 270–71.

The potential for schizophrenic escape that is immanent in these two shots (as in many of Malani's images) is indicative of *Transactions*' revolutionary potential – as the liberation of desire, the drawing of a line of flight and the becoming imperceptible of identity/subjectivity. A sense of haunting pervades the installation, especially as embodied by the ghostly presence, voice, and suffering of the Abducted Woman. Haunting/ghosting lends (im)material articulation to India's modern history and to Malani's own experiment with making revolutionary art. The Abducted Woman not only stands in for the horrors, trauma, and painful legacy of Partition, as well as subsequent episodes of "communal" sectarian and anti-minority violence. She also embodies the turbulent, entangled histories of nationalism(s), sexuality, the state's minority politics and governance, belated capitalist industrialisation, contemporary consumerism, and more. Her deranged lament and her restless ambulation contaminate and subvert the aesthetic and political world of the installation and its imaginary of the subcontinent's modernity. Another schizo-image, the Abducted Woman reveals the "identity in nature" of abstract desire/desiring-production and abstract-labour/social production that has taken place under India's late colonial and postcolonial history. That history is implicitly rearticulated as the primordial essence of Hinduism or the "production in general" of national belonging.[28] In Malani's installation, abstract desire and abstract labour are redefined as male-centred, Hindu-majoritarian, caste-inflected nationalist desire, and as caste-regulated labour, respectively.

Ultimately, what the ghostly schizo-images of *Transactions* suggest is that the most powerful desiring-machine that has shaped twentieth and twenty-first century India was and continues to be... "Mother India" or the ideology of modern Indian nationalism. As the convergence of caste-inflected nationalist desire and caste-regulated labour, this ideology has substituted for, and functioned as, the very life force of Indian modernity. Malani's critique of this (mis)understanding permeates the entire work. Pictures of Hindu deities, the archival sequence of a mass of cotton-spinning women and the sari-clad women who evoke Khan's film all point to the (con)fusion of desire and labour. The final sequence of stills documenting the 2002 destruction of Muslim neighbourhoods shows us the fatal consequences of such a conflation.

Malani's Testing for Be(com)ing

Malani's video installations inevitably raise the question of escape. What escape is possible from the sway of the Indian Ideology and the destructive expansion of globalised capital? Is the advent of a "new earth" following capitalism possible, as would be consistent with *Unity*'s planetary rebellion? In the concluding section of this article, I propose some tentative responses to these questions.

In spite of its gloomy atmosphere and the haunting testimony of the Abducted Woman, *Transactions* anticipates the advent of a "new earth" and "the people to come."[29] This occurs through Malani's immanent technique of a *topology of shared pain*. That topology may be seen as revolutionary as it enters into various combinations, allowing for a new mode of "conciliation of desiring-production

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[28] Ibid., pp. 302–03.

[29] Deleuze's notion of "the people to come" is a generative, heterogeneous multiplicity that re-invents and experiments with group subject relations/social relations in a creative polity superior to the present (a polity that does not lay claim to a utopian resolution of its internal differences, tensions, and political issues). See Ronald Bogue, "Deleuze and Guattari and the Future of Politics: Science Fiction, Protocols, and the People to Come," *Deleuze Studies* Vol. 5 (2011):87–90. On sympathy with "the people to come" as a politics of intervention see Peter Pal Pelbart, "The Deterritorialised Unconscious," in *The Guattari Effect*, ed. Éric Alliez and Andrew Goffey (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 78–9.

with social-production."[30] Through shared, affective entanglements of art, bodies, and the world, Malani's installations give rise to a revolutionary, potentially restorative ethics.

In the "Language and Body" essay that inspired *Transactions,* Das writes movingly on the relationship between language, pain, and the body. She argues that the other's pain needs to find a home both in language and in our bodies. In order to understand the pain and horror experienced by women during the Partition, Das suggests that one has to let their pain happen. Since the women themselves were often unwilling to talk about the wrongs that had been done to them, Das writes that one has to be willing to listen to their silence, moulding it into an act of witnessing. Citing the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell, she contends that lending one's body to another's pain or to the experiences of another entails a working out of boundaries – an imagining or intuiting of the other's difference and their separateness from me. With respect to revisiting the Partition, it is the experience of a shared pain that allows the recording historian, ethnographer, or artist the opportunity to acknowledge "the complex relation between... building a world that the living can inhabit with their loss and building a world in which the dead can find a home."[31]

A crucial technique of Malani's representing within and between shots as well as within the space of the installation itself is her evocation of "feeling the other's pain in my body/our bodies" (as it is described by Das). In *Transactions,* Malani enacts an iterative differential topology of feeling the pain of the Partition. Here, pain is shared through the "body" of the image and affectively felt in our/the viewers' bodies. Through charged schizo-images such as the mad Abducted Woman, the "mutant-seer" and the "mouth-belly" shots, the topological dynamic of "feeling the other's pain in one's body" is made present and palpable. All condense a variety of images, bodies, temporalities, and material-discursive practices, pointing to the ways in which they reconfigure one another. In the "mutant-seer" shot, for instance, pain reverberates through multiple bodies as well as through the bodies/subjectivities that it produces or traverses. Ultimately, what *Transactions* suggests is that the violence, pain, and suffering that women endured during the Partition would have been understood and shared by women who endured similar violence throughout the colonial period. It could be understood and shared by women who have endured religious, political, and military violence in India since the Partition and Independence. Likewise, the Abducted Woman's pain and suffering is shared by mythical characters such as Medea and Cassandra, by the rejected and victimised women in Heiner Müller's plays, and by the other female characters who feature in the installation.[32]

Despite its sombre context, *Transactions* topology of shared pain acquires the colours of an insurgent counter-performance and a rebellious counter-politics of protest and intervention that enables change. Through her evocative staging of virtual topologies of shared pain, Malani reveals that what is needed in order to understand the past, the present, and the future is a new aesthetico-

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[30] Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, p. 115.

[31] Das, *Life and Words*, pp. 39–40, pp. 56–8. Das' ethnography may be said to use a diffractive approach insofar as she reads the insights of Wittgenstein, Cavell, Tagore, and Manto, as well as the perspective of ethnographies of traditional mourning practices through one another, while highlighting the differences between these material-discursive practices. While resonating with recent feminist new-materialist approaches such as those of Barad, Das' and Malani's respective way of reenvisioning or representing unarticulated or repressed and painful female experiences remains committed to a human(ist) ethics.

[32] The ghostly allegorical figure/schizo-image of the Abducted Woman connects with the use of many mythical female characters in Malani's works. Malani often reinterprets India's modernity as well as global modernity, politics, culture, and philosophy through mythical, literary, or folk female characters: Sita, Radha, Draupadi, Kali, Medea, Cassandra, and Dulle Griet (Dull Gret or Mad Meg, the central, armoured allegorical figure in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's ca. 1562 painting of the same title). For insightful readings of Malani's female characters see Bal, *In Medias Res*; Bal, "Stains Against Violence: Nalini Malani's Strategies for Durational Looking," *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2018): 59–80; and Bal, "In the Absence of Post," *Revista Papeles*, Vols 6 -7, Nos. 12–13 (June 2014–2015): 20–5.

political paradigm. This paradigm would entail a permanent aesthetic testing for be(com)ing.[33] That testing would be comprised, ideally, of experimentations with a variety of artistic forms, media, and materials and contain critical (counter-)genealogies in the radical critical and social mode – such as those practised by Malani's own feminist allegorical genealogies of Partition, post-Independence, and contemporary India. In both *Unity in Diversity* and *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,* Malani's testing for be(com)ing involves highlighting and playing with the entanglements of art and the world, achieved through pronounced uses of allegory, the allegorical-palimpsest-image, and the schizo-image.[34]

Yet Malani does not rest content with allegorical critiques of history or with the mapping of virtual topologies of sensation. As with all of Malani's video plays, *Transactions* is indicative of how art can and must change the world; make it a better place and restore our belief in both art and the world's immanent ethics, poetics, and possibilities. The challenging experiment of Malani's work is to reinvent the possible and rearticulate our sympathy with the "people to come." As I have considered here, Malani's video installations suggest that the realisation of a "new earth" and the "liquidating [of] capital and the barriers it poses to freedom and enjoyment" may indeed be possible.[35] An emergent and poignant strategy for advancing this process is testing for be(com)ing. Like Malani's own radical reimagining of India, testing for be(com)ing demands a revolutionary aesthetic and politics. It is a strategy that makes visible intolerable absences and invisibilities.

[33] The phrase "testing for being" appears in Christa Wolf's novel *Cassandra* which was an important source of inspiration for several of Malani's works, including *In Search of Vanished Blood*. See Christa Wolf, *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays,* trans. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1988), p. 134.

[34] While Barad argues that knowledge is not separate from but an integral part of the world, process philosophies such as those of William James and Brian Massumi insist that their materialist, immanent metaphysics is committed to a mapping of the ethico-aesthetico-political, speculative-pragmatic character of matter, nature/reality and life processes. See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, pp. 184–85; Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 23–8; and William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 42–69.

[35] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 380–82 and Holland, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 114–15, pp. 122–23.