Scaffolding Sentiment: Money, Labor, and Love in India’s Real Estate and Construction Industry

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Accessibility
Abstract

This dissertation is an ethnography of the building and real estate construction industry in India’s National Capital Region (NCR). It is a cross-class study based on fifteen months of ethnographic research in NCR with real estate developers, planners, contractors, architects, engineers, foreman, migrant laborers, and locals.

Within the dissertation, I excavate creativity from its relegation to artistic realms and examine the politics of creative action in real estate. The building construction industry, I argue, deploys creativity as a fetish through the celebration of creative terms and actions such as jugaad, improvisation, fixing, corruption, innovation, and quick thinking. This discourse enables social mobility and survival, but at the same time enhances unequal conditions of work and life. Creativity thus acts as the fetish in building construction.

Chapters play with the human and non-human duality of tropes such as plans, money, labor, love, and roads to demonstrate the processes of creative destruction. A critical phenomenology of life in the industry serves as a critique of its political economy.
for Aju,

coop-conspirator in the passion for writing, exploration, and all things labeled fun.
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Introduction

The Indian Tigers

Omaxe Limited, a publically listed, real estate Development Company in India, claims to have built 90 million square feet of space in India since 1989 (Omaxe 2015). The company initially founded and operating in India’s National Capital Region (NCR) now controls projects in nine states and thirty cities. Mr. Rohatas Goel, the Chief Executive Officer of Omaxe Developers started Omaxe as a small-scale building contractor with little knowledge of the industry or background in business. A mere fifteen years later the company was listed on the Indian stock exchanges in a move that marked its spectacular growth and ambition. In 2010, as I began fieldwork in NCR, I spoke with Mr. Goel’s team about the company and its successes. In the smoothness of a glass and steel office, with tasteful wood finishes, and a plush carpet they narrated the story of how a small-time, not very well educated contractor, almost singlehandedly, built a company from the ground up.

During my fifteen months of ethnographic research on the real estate and building construction industry in NCR, I was to learn that Mr. Goel’s story is not uncommon. Over the past two decades, real estate development companies in India, but business houses more broadly, attribute a celebratory status to the men, and rare women, who built them from their humbler roots. In these decades the real estate and construction industry in India’s National Capital Region came to be its third largest industry after agriculture and manufacturing (Census of India 2001). In 2001 alone it employed over 11.5 million
people¹ (Census of India 2001), who drew from different classes, geographies, and religions. In a mere decade real estate and construction work quadrupled the urban area of NCR.

Mr. Goel’s story marks the rise of a discourse surrounding the rapid, visceral, and transformative change in urban environments in India. His story speaks of dynamic growth enabled by the initiative and entrepreneurism of a growing private sector and the select individuals who run them². Big business in India celebrates its entrepreneurs and the industry upholds individuals like Mr. Goel, Mr. K.P. Singh (Delhi Land and Finance Company), and Mr. Ramesh Chandra (Unitech Builders) as key drivers of NCR’s growth. Their success and fame is emblematic of a transforming India and the synergies and potentials it has brought. This celebratory discourse on the Indian innovator and entrepreneur reverberates across the world.


This sample of news headlines and book titles are part of a plethora of commentaries and writings on Indian entrepreneurism. They serve to demonstrate not only the celebration of entrepreneurism in Indian business practices, but also the

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¹ This is a slightly obfuscating number as the data counts only main workers in the organized sector and a
² I use the term “individual” throughout the dissertation. By individual I mean an analytic entry point through a mind-body in space and am not conjuring the heavy history of the individual as a liberal, autonomous subject.
accompanying connotation that entrepreneurism is a way forward from the wild tribe (Brave hearts), backward (caste system), and opaque social-cultural context (wild) that is India. Here it is the brave, bold, fearless individual who builds India up from the ground.

The discourse of entrepreneurism in formal, corporate worlds is matched with a parallel discourse that occupies India’s informal sector. Entrepreneurial Indians, in the informal sector, are celebrated through the idea of *jugaad*. Roughly translated as quick improvisation or quick fixes, *jugaad* is a marker of the inventiveness of the average Indian amidst limited resources. Iconic images of *jugaad* include the image of a street vendor who rigs a pressure cooker with a rubber tube to sell cappuccinos on the street or an entire family of four using a single motorcycle as a car. The popular presses print books such as “Jugaad Innovation: a frugal and flexible approach to innovation in the 21st Century” (Radjou et al 2012), and news articles such as “Jugaad: The art of converting adversity into Opportunity” (Ashoka 2014), “Getting to Mars through ‘jugaad’” (Schomer 2014), and “Jugaad: A New Growth Formula for Corporate America” (Radjou et al 2010) written in the Harvard Business Review. These carry the entrepreneurial and innovative potentialities of *jugaad* beyond the boundaries of India.

Indeed, Indian real estate and construction forms an able model to speak of creative entrepreneurism, innovation, and improvisation. The industry comes to consolidate itself through a spectrum of actions including acquiring land outside of city limits to evade building controls, creating alliances with local landholders, laundering money from other industries, lobbying banks and politicians to lift regulations on loans and land use, and drawing in large banks of labor from the hinterland. At a smaller scale creative actions include the quick learning of construction skills, leveraging familial ties
to gain a job, and the drawing together of small loans to buy rental equipment or start small contracting businesses. A spectrum of actions unites the Anglicized “entrepreneurial” to the Indic “jugaad”. Both mark a range of creative, improvisational practices that work on differential scales and through differential modes of power to transform the spaces and socialites of NCR.

I believe that Indian entrepreneurship and jugaad form two ends of a spectrum of discussions on innovation and creative action in India. Increasingly, the Indian national space and the figure of the Indian are presented as resourceful, argumentative, innovative, and quick thinking. This constellation of creative concepts, which include terms such as improvisation, innovation, entrepreneurship, and invention, serve to valorize Indian talent and create a “feel-good” atmosphere for Indians. Indians come to be understood as bearers of a unique skill set, tactical, and full of “spunk” and “grit”. Simultaneously, the discourse also marks individual ability to survive and prosper in a country that is read as over populated, deeply patriarchal, violent, backward in thinking, and politically torn. Creativity and innovation are presented as the golden horizon of a country in darkness.

My fieldwork in the real estate and construction industry in India’s National Capital Region was steeped in conversations of entrepreneurism, innovation, improvisation, resourcefulness, and survival skills. Developers, contractors, migrant laborers, and skilled foremen deployed these terms and employed a range of improvisational and entrepreneurial practices to set up small scale business, find work, make a little money on the side, learn new skills, and grow their business. Within this dissertation, I approach laboring practices within the real estate and construction industry

\[3\] In the dissertation I am attentive to how labor varies according to class categories and how creativity also functions depending upon the level of symbolic and economic capital an individual possesses.
as forms of creative labor or action. Working across a range of class categories I explore different forms of creative action in real estate and building construction and examine their powers and potentials. Creativity as an analytic is a means to work against the dominantly positive implications and connotations of creativity, and place it firmly within the political economic field of Indian real estate and construction.

Two rough intellectual genealogies of creativity inform my work on the political economic dimensions of creativity: that of creativity as a generative concept and the study of creative industries. I argue, that in the political economy of real estate and building construction, creativity emerges as not only an agentive and improvisational act but the very discourses of creativity (marked through entrepreneurship, improvisation, quick thinking, and jugaad) serve to mask the production of inequality and exploitation within the industry and the rescinding of the state from critical arenas in which it once used to intervene. Creativity serves to mobilize and mask. Not only does real estate and construction perpetuate an economic cycle of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 2003:81-86), but it also conceals this creative destruction through the celebration of creative action. Creativity thus becomes the fetish of the real estate and construction industry in NCR: a celebratory ethic that blurs the actual conditions of work and life in the city-region.

**Creative Tensions**

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4 Here I follow Cris Walley’s (2013) belief of “class as process”. Class status changes based on your own reading of your status. In India categories of class are also understood not only as middle or laboring classes but also as gareeb (poor) and amir (rich), angrezi raj (the rule of the English speaking class), and bade log (big people).
Anthropological and sociological studies reflect the multiplicity of understandings of creativity within NCR’s real estate and construction industry. Creativity is read as set of operations occurring in both everyday mundane acts but also acts of will and power (de Certeau 1984), creativity can be a part of work and is a skill (Sennet 2008), or can be seen as a formal or informal form of cultural or artistic production (Lavie et al 1993). The legacy of Victor Turner and Theodore Adorno (writing with Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school) are particularly salient in understanding creativity as an analytic. The productive tensions between the works of Turner and the Frankfurt school, as well as scholars who extend their legacy into contemporary anthropological research, presents the different modes through which creativity operates in the construction industry: as an agentive and generative laboring practice, as a generator of economic as well as social value (Povenelli 2011), as a political economic strategy, and as a obfuscating discourse. I begin by discussing Turner’s generative and processual understanding of creative action to link it to the capitalist framework adopted by the Frankfurt school.

In his study of Ndembu rituals in Southern Africa, Turner (1982) marks the beginnings of an anthropological conversation of creativity in everyday worlds. For him, ritual and process are rife with creative improvisation and negotiation and are sites of creative and generative action. Creative processes, for Turner—be they ritualistic, performative, or ordinary—allow individuals to negotiate between the oppositional tensions in their everyday worlds. They are strongly engaged with, and rely upon, material and sensorial worlds, and serve as a way of reckoning and reconciliation. Creativity is also read as a process of negotiation between rational and organized social processes and individual improvisation. It is also a mode through which to expresses and
channel emotion. Creativity can provide meaning and resolution within Ndembu everyday worlds.

Turner writes that creative resolution and reckonings amongst the Ndembu arise through the performance of rituals “in times of crisis of social life in the villages” (1982:10). Building on Levi-Strauss’s work, Turner implies that the creativity of rituals works with the material realm. “[H]omologies, oppositions, correlations, and transformations … are wrapped up in a material integument shaped by … experiences” (1982:42), that is the ritual process exemplifies the role of “sensorially perceptible objects” in acts of transformation and reckoning. The symbols these objects encode and their classification acts as a “set of evocative devices for rousing, channeling, and domesticating powerful emotions “(1982:42-43).

[R]itual may be a framework that engenders creativity in individuals both through mandatory improvisation (liminal periods, trance, visions) and through highly structured, rule-bounded activities, both of which produce a concentration so extreme that there is a loss of self-consciousness, and a feeling of flow. [Falk Moore, Myerhoff 1977:8]

Creativity is thus a material, sensorial, and emotive mode of production: a process that I will demonstrate is mirrored in real estate and building construction.

In their edited volume entitled Creativity/ Anthropology, anthropologists Lavie, Narayan, and Rosaldo (1993) celebrate Turner’s work as part of a critical legacy of the study of creativity within anthropology. “Turner’s processual notion of accepted configurations,” they write, “their dissolution into constituent elements, and their subsequent reformulations has proven crucial in setting an agenda for the study of creativity in culture” (1993:3). While celebrating Turner’s emotive, generative, and
improvisational approach, the three editors highlight two important additions to Turner’s legacy on creative process. First, they add an attention to the temporalities that are negotiated within creative processes. Creative practices, they emphasize, rework the past and move towards a renewed future (1993:1). Second, they add an emphasis on cultural specificity and the groundedness of creativity. They remind us that creativity works differently in different contexts.

Lavie, Narayan, and Rosaldo place creative processes within the production of culture. Here creativity is seen as a grounded and sensorial act that allows for the transformation of culture and adds cultural value. This approach resonates in the field of cultural studies with authors such as John Leip. In his edited volume on Creative Industries, Leip (2001) too emphasizes cultural sphere as a space of creative intervention. He defines creativity “as activity that produces something new through the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices or forms” (2001: 2). For Liep, and the authors he engages with, creativity is a generative process, made from recombinations, and is necessarily understood in the “social and existential conditions that are its foundation” (2001:47-49). Simultaneously, however, Friedman, writing with Liep, acknowledges the ability of creativity to be an “iron cage” (2001:46) and stifle the very processes it supports.

The iron cage however does not restrain studies of creativity. In recent years, anthropologist Tim Ingold comes to dominate anthropological conversations on creativity. As the series editor of Ashgate Publication’s “Anthropological Studies of Creativity and Perception,” Ingold has several publications that engage with creativity as an analytic. The edited volumes unpack different dimensions of creativity including lines, drawing,
and process (2011); the production and engagement with material and sensory landscapes (2012); creative making and growing (2014), and walking (2008). Undergirding these series is Ingold’s multi-species and developmental approach to human life worlds, etched out in his own work on the *Perception of the Environment* (2000) where he suggests:

that a combination of ‘relational’ thinking in anthropology, ‘ecological’ thinking in psychology and ‘developmental systems’ thinking in biology would yield a synthesis … Crucially, such a synthesis would start from a conception of the human being not as a composite entity made up of separable but complementary parts, such as body, mind and culture, but rather as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships. [Ingold 2000:4]

[…]

Both cultural knowledge and bodily substance are seen to undergo continuous generation in the context of an ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings that dwell therein. [Ingold 2000:12]

Creativity for Ingold permits an investigation of the human-environment-production triad where human beings, environment, activity, and animal life are co-constituted and evolve together. His approach to creativity encourages a search for the creativity in acts of making.

In the 2007 book on *Cultural Improvisation and Creativity* Ingold extends this approach. Here he emphasizes practice-based approaches to creativity and engages with anthropological writings of creativity (including Turner, Liep, and Lavie et al). He argues that previous studies have tended towards the study of consumption and consumable products (2000:3). Ingold proposes a “reading that would recover the productive forces” of creativity” and deigns it as an act always in the making (2000:3). Ingold draws in de
Certeau’s analysis of tactics to emphasize creative practices as improvisational, generative, and processual.

Ingold’s engagement with de Certeau, however, highlights the critical differences between the approaches of the two authors. As an archeologist and anthropologist, Ingold’s interests have developed from ontological explorations of the historically interdependent relationships and shared world of human and non-humans. His work engages with the construction of essentialized social relationships through acts of making, moving, and engaging. de Certeau in his text on everyday practices is far more interested in collapsing the “binary set [of] production and consumption” (de Certeau 1988: xxii) and is very concerned with power and social capital. His improvisational tactics and potent strategies act and react in a matrix of power that production and consumption brings. De Certeau utilizes Foucault’s work on power and Bourdieu’s on symbolic capital to argue for creativity as a mode through which practices lend agency.

Ingold’s use of de Certeau conversation highlights an important elision in Turner’s work. Turner and his lineage, in their generative approach to creativity, fail to account for the political economic dimensions and workings of power that form and frame creativity. The work remains tied to thinking of creativity in a celebratory, cultural mode and insulated from politics, power, and difference. Taking Ingold’s productive provocations seriously, within the context of NCR’s building construction industry, raises several questions: If creativity is considered to be a culturally productive process how does it factor into the processes of capitalist production in the contexts we study? How do forms of capitalism and forms of creativity entangle? How does creativity situate itself in relationship to politics and power in the particular space of NCR?
The writing of the Frankfurt school answers some of these questions. Adorno and Horkheimer (1989) in their essay on *The Culture Industry* describe how cultural products are both subsumed by and further the logics of capitalism in the post World War Two era. Integral to their drawing together of cultural production and industrial logic is the blurring of the boundaries between producers and consumers. The absolute power of capitalism is such that through its forces of production it serves to produce consumers out of the producers themselves. In their writing, the inhabitants of cities, are drawn into capitalist systems as both “producers and as consumers” (1989:120). To work in the city is to desire and consume the very products you produce. Adorno and Horkheimer’s essay etches the logic of this. The rationalistic, industrial model of WWII capitalism gradually conscripts cultural products like film. Experimentation is constrained and cultural products begin to act as extensions of capitalist modes of domination. Pleasure is made part of the spectrum of work through its projection of the industrial ethic into leisurely life. Creativity and capitalism combine to collapse the boundaries between “work and pleasure” (1989:120), occupy and control senses and emotions (1989:131), and unleash the entrepreneurial system (1989:120). A creative industry rises that serves to turn the producers into consumers themselves: an ethic that resonates in the real estate and construction industry in NCR.

Adorno and Horkheimer also notably unite studies of capital and psychoanalysis through the questions of desire and its repression. Consumption and production work through desire. “The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses. By repeatedly exposing the objects of desire… [t]he mass production of the sexual automatically

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5 Also important in their discussion is the urban context or the city as a site where production and consumption intertwine.
achieves its repression” (1989:140). For Adorno and Horkheimer, in this and other texts, capitalism and the rationalist, technological cultural systems that form its accomplices serve as constant sites for both the production of desire, but through its visibility enable its repression. This psychoanalytic plane, for the Frankfurt school serves as a marker of a new realm of domination of individuals. “The whole intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion” (1989:167). Cultural industries allow for the gradual take over and control of the emotional lives of individuals.

The work of the Frankfurt school is integral in understanding the constitutive and enabling role that creativity plays within capitalism. As the authors write, it is not only a means of coalescing consumption and production but intertwining them within systems of inequality and exploitation. Simultaneously, this alliance of creativity and capitalism, through its close ties to desire, wants, and emotional expression, forms the ability for capitalism to grasp and dominate inner desires and lives of citizens. Emotions come to be framed and formed through the processes of production and consumption.

The legacy of the Frankfurt school permeated cultural studies and featured dominantly in academic discussions of “creative industries” understood as industries in “which the product or service contains a substantial element of artistic or creative endeavor” (Caves 2000:vii). In his text on Creative Industries Caves opposes economic forces against creative (2000:363), and through this carves out a separate sphere within which creativity exists. Caves believes that:

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6 I am not arguing for a totalizing framework here, but believe that emotions can be individual and private but are also very much dependent and produced through the political economy of life around us.
artists idealize their creative process as arising out of inner necessity. The muse whispers erratically, and rarely on demand. This unpredictable and uncommitable character of creative inspiration hamstrings formal contracts between artists and gatekeepers or organizers of creative products. [Caves 2000:364]

Conversations on creative industries seek to attribute creativity solely to practices historically recognized as “artistic”. This also results in the “artist” and his or her creative process posited in contradistinction to the economic system in which their work is produced and commoditized. This play between creativity as a generative exercise and as a mode of domination extends within my work. I, however, like de Certeau (1988), believe that creative acts occur in the everyday. Further I believe that a creative act within the capitalist logics of real estate and construction in NCR is always already, both a form of agency and domination, often of the very individual who exercises it.

This duality of creativity echoes within anthropologist Michael Herzfeld’s work on “social poetics” (Herzfeld 1997:21). Herzfeld draws together studies of language and practices within anthropology and places them in conversation with creativity. Using the example of architecture, he argues for creative deployments of its semiotic forms, “constant signifiers mask shifting signifieds. The more fixed the semiotic forms the more surprising are the possibilities of violating the code itself” (1997:20). Herzfeld, ties these semiotic creativities to Bourdieu’s “theory of [social] practice” (1997:141) arguing that they “illuminate in specific, descriptive ways how emergent social structure can be creatively modeled and explored through the daily interactions of sentient human beings” (1997:141). Salient in Herzfeld’s discussions is the drawing of this creative action across scales and presenting them within both ordinary acts and acts of the state. Social poetics “links the little poetics of everyday interaction with the grand dramas of official pomp
and historiography in order to break down the illusion of scale” (1997:25). Social poetics form the realm of both state action and everyday acts.

Using Herzfeld, Turner, and Horkheimer I have etched out how creative practices are forms of both agency and domination. My writing works to exemplify this tension within creativity as moving across scales and being deployed by citizens, state actors, and business developers alike within the political economic workings of real estate and construction. Creativity, I believe, however, is also a form of value generation. I extract this legacy in engagement within anthropologist William Mazzarella’s work.

In his 2003 ethnography of the advertising industry in Mumbai, Mazzarella engages and extends the relationship of creativity and capitalism into a question of how the creative industry of advertising produces value. “The life world of the worker and the image-as-object,” he writes, “always necessarily retain concrete elements that exceed the abstracting requirements of exchange value,” they produce a “concrete excess” (2003:42).

Concrete excess, for Mazzarella, is an extension of use values. He uses Sahlin’s critique of use value as a way of highlighting the fact that use value has a greater complexity attributed to it than Marx ascribes (Mazzarella quoting Sahlins 2003:42). Creativity within Mazzarella’s discussions is a form of value generation not only in its construction of value through advertising, but he argues that the very circulation of the commodity-image occurs within concrete worlds where it works in multiple ways to generate value. This stream of thought, carries forward Lavie et al’s link to creativity as a form of value generation to think through creativity as producing a form of use and exchange value well embedded in the system of capitalism and as an agent of capitalism.
Taking Ingold and de Certeau’s practice based approach; I argue that the laboring processes within the industry are inherently creative as they are entrepreneurial, improvisational, and generative. Creative practices, through a discourse of *jugaad* and entrepreneurship serve to articulate creative tensions, where on one hand, creativity acts as an agentive and negotiative practice but on the other hand serves to trap workers into the dynamics of real estate and construction. This is seen, for example, in the desire of workers to buy and own homes as they build homes for others to buy. Taking from both Lavie and Mazzarella, creativity becomes a mode through which economic value as well as emotional, social, and moral value is produced, understood, and negotiated.

David Graeber (2001), in his search for an anthropology of value locates creativity in relationship to value as well. He moves value out of the realm of commodities into the realm of action (though that does not differ from Marx but highlights a different stage in the production process). Objects he argues “are frozen images of those patterns of actions that in practice are called into being by the very fact that people value them” (2001:259). It is our actions that produce and embed value in objects. He writes:

> But the ultimate illusion, the ultimate trick behind this whole play of mirrors, is that this power is not, in fact, power at all, but a ghostly reflection of one’s own potential for action; one’s “creative energies,” as I’ve somewhat elusively called them. However elusive, creative potential is everything. [Graeber 2001:259]

For an anthropologist ensconced in the study of political economy and inequality, Graeber, reverts to a strange pre capitalist essentialism to uncover “social creativity”. In a

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7 Chapter Three has a discussion of the forms of value that creative moments of money generate within NCR.
strange Victor Turner like move, Graeber ascribes the power of social creativity to human actions and marks the danger of contemporary society’s inability to recognize them as such. The value that we ascribe to objects is produced through our creative energies but is unconscious. For him the fetish of contemporary society is the fact that people do not realize that they create the powers that control them (2001:246). While I am sympathetic to Graeber’s political project of empowering individuals with the ability to recognize that the powers they endow capitalism are actually held by them. I do believe a commentary of “you hold the power” plays out in a strange way within the Indian context as a mode through which responsibility of capitalist action and state regulation and protectionism is elided.

While I agree with Turner, Lavie et al, Ingold and Graeber in the belief that creativity is generative of value be it economic, cultural, moral, or emotional. I believe that a rising discourse on creativity, in the real estate and construction industry, and academia and public spheres in general, is fetishistic in itself. It serves to move responsibility entirely into the body and actions of the citizens. I argue that creativity as a discourse (under the aegis of concepts of innovation, entrepreneurship, being self taught, taking initiative, or improvising) acts as a fetish and masks increasing inequality and dispossession as well as the rescinding of state regulation.

Creativity as an analytic within the building construction industry serves to draw three critiques of its fetishistic qualities. The first being that creativity forms a potent discourse that communicates the multinational, neoliberal economic belief that free market capitalism is the answer to India’s problems; the second that in actuality it serves to mask the rapid degradation and exploitation of both humans and environments that
takes place through privatized actions, while at the same time, placing the repercussions of this degradation as the inability of individuals to work hard and perform\textsuperscript{8}, and third, this sets up a particular sensory urban experience of struggle and survival of the fittest that create a frontier-like quality of life in NCR.

\textit{Creativity as a Fetish of contemporary economics}

It is unsurprising that discourses of creativity have seen a renaissance in both academia as well as several contexts such as the construction industry in NCR or the decaying city of Detroit. Neo-liberalism, as logic of economic restructuring, is accompanied by an emphasis on entrepreneurism and opportunity (Harvey 2006:145). It carries what David Harvey describes as the “carrot of individual entrepreneurism and consumerism” (2006:151). A technological change of rapidity of communication, an emphasis on speed and individual action, are part of the creative assemblage that multinational corporations carry with them. The “feel good” and happy ideology of creativity thus masks an increasing process of capitalist rationalization and mass destruction, thus becoming the ephemeral golden cloud that obscurcs the true workings of big, multi-national capital, a cloud that grew larger in India through the country’s 1991-2 economic restructurings. I etch the material and economic effects of this change and draw out the role of the real estate and building construction industry in the same.

For the Government of India (GOI) 1991/2 were years of great social and economic crisis. The country was still recovering from the 70 billion dollar debt crisis

\textsuperscript{8} Increased social inequality within a territory was necessary to encourage the entrepreneurial risk and innovation that conferred competitive power and stimulated growth. If conditions among the lower classes deteriorated, this was because they failed, usually for personal and cultural reasons, to enhance their own human capital.
that created extreme levels of poverty and famine (World Bank Group 2012). The central government launched a World Bank supported 500 million dollar structural readjustment operation that sought to reduce debt and prompt economic liberalization (World Bank Group 2012). Simultaneously, rising ethnic tensions spurred religious riots and bomb blasts that marked the worsening state of ethnic relations in the country. The 1990s were a moment of structural change for India’s social, economic, and soon to be spatial landscape.

The built environment transformed as India’s fast-fading socialist bent came to be replaced by consumerist capitalism. The Indo-USSR festivals, weaponry, and television shows faded away and new names appeared on the horizon – MTV music television, Mac-Donald’s, Microsoft, and Coke. The blue gray tones of the eighties were transformed through a burst of colors, as advertising and packaging claimed urban space. Words like “outsourcing” and “call centers” began to surface and with them came a class of middle-income workers with false American accents. A variety of makes of cars and buses came onto the road. Urban life was punctuated with a different grammar as buildings, materials, and technologies changed. A new urban environment was under construction and an increasingly dominant real estate and construction industry came to control its production.

The demand for new office space in India has grown from an estimated 3.9 million sq. ft. in 1998 to over 16 million sq. ft. in 2004-05. 70% of the demand for office space in India is driven by over 7,000 Indian IT [Information Technology] and ITES firms [Information Technology Enabled Service] and 15% by financial service providers and the pharmaceutical sector. In 2005 alone, IT/ITES sector absorbed a total of approx. 30 million sq. ft. and is estimated to generate a demand of 150 million sq. ft. of space across major cities by 2010. [Sahni 2008]
The liberalization of Indian banks and industries in 1991 and 1992 grew into a real estate rush in Indian metropolises. The growth of outsourcing, the movement of foreign investment into big industries, expanded business and increased the demand for office space. With the rise in India’s professional middle class also came the demand for housing and investment properties. The movement of foreign investors prompted the labeling of India as one of the world’s largest consumer markets and brought about a wave of new products, advertisements, and buildings to sell them in, malls and markets expanded in size. Neoliberalism, as form of economic restructuring in India, presented its most visual and sensory face in the country’s urban built environment.

In his explorations of neo-liberalism as a set of political-economic practices, David Harvey, argues that neo-liberalism is a process of “creative destruction” (2006:151). In an analysis of a variety of nations and the emergence of international institutions, he claims, that neo-liberal processes have enhanced class struggle and exacerbated the accumulation of capital. This political–economic understanding he believes has swept the world.

Neo-liberalism as … a theory of political economic practices … proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practice.

Harvey further argues that:

[n]eoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse, and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practice to the point where it has become
Harvey believes that the “historical-geographical trajectory of capital accumulation” will unfold through an “increasing connectivity across space and time” (Harvey 2006:157). Like Smith (2008), Harvey believes that this is also “marked by deepening uneven geographical developments” (2006:157). This unevenness, Harvey believes, “must be understood as something actively produced and sustained by processes of capital accumulation, no matter how important the signs may be of residuals of past configurations set up in the cultural landscape and the social world” (2006:157).

While Harvey tends to foreground unevenness as a logic of capitalism his dismissal of cultural landscape, social world, and pasts is telling. Harvey’s approach to economic restructuring, in the name of neoliberalism, tends towards a top-down, overarching explanatory framework that glosses over the particularities of economic restructuring in different contexts. He actively presents neo-liberalism as an entity detached from context and the histories of the same. Through these modalities, however, Harvey belies against his own narrations of neo-liberalism informing the “ways we interpret, live in, and understand our world” (2006:145).

Contrary to Harvey’s abstract comment, economic restructuring in India ties strongly to an existing local landscape and history. Neoliberalization, like the global in Tsing’s explanation, looks different from different places (2005:xi). In the context of cities in India, the opening of India’s economy worked in tandem with the social and

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9 This is indeed ironic for Harvey as his comments (1991) on postmodernity are a form of critique of thinking about postmodernity as a rupture from modernity or an entirely new entity within the historical logic of capitalism.
political life worlds of cities, towns, and villages. Within each space the opening of an economy relied upon and united with an existing matrix of kin-based business networks, a tendency towards accumulation of immovable capital such as gold and property, the intermixing of material wealth and social capital, as well as an emphasis on scientific education and technology to name a few (Subramanian Forthcoming).

The transformation of the built environment was also a key category through which economic and political change in India sensorially manifested itself and came to be experienced and understood. The built environment as a powerful mediator of urban experience has the ability to shape and govern bodies and encode new ethic within them. The built environment became a symbol of the changing face of a new kind of Indian urbanism and urban social life as well as symbolic of the increasing class disparity of an economically steady India. Representations of the built environment became the primary devices through which the class dividedness of India’s urbanity came to be understood.

This dissertation tells the story of urban transformation through the voices and work of a spectrum of classes working within the real estate and construction industry in NCR (through its city suburb of Gurgaon). Here I write of the ways in which individual lives are tied together: through the political economy of their labor and through being both producers of and consumers in the real estate race. The lives of both the poor and elite are infused with the dynamics of this industry and blended together through its production-consumption circuits. Simultaneously, I aim to articulate the longer temporalities of social, political, and economic life that grew more aggressive or were tactically deployed or transformed through the changing political economic logic or real estate and construction in Gurgaon. This is also a story of how neo-liberalism as political
economy, acts, feels, and plays out differently in different spaces though an engagement with the historical, social, and spatial landscapes of NCR.

**Majdoori (labor) of the industry:**

Each and every person is compelled to work all his or her lives, you study, you have to work to survive, and so does that man there. We all have to work in order to survive.”

In summer 2010, Bilal, a young welder, very poignantly united classes and genders under the rubric of labor (*majdoori*) in his narrations of life and work in NCR. His use of the term “*majdoori*” stuck in my mind as it enabled him to construct relationality, albeit rife with difference and inequality, between different individuals living in the city. While the word *majdoori* in the Indian context often references manual labor, Bilal utilized the term to navigate across varied forms of work, a spectrum of classes, and a male-female divide. This flexible and emergent understanding of labor, as presented by Bilal, questions dichotomies such as mental and manual, blue collar and white collar, and professional and parochial. *Majdoori* exposes the ways in which various forms of labor coalesce into the production of the built environment, and demonstrates class interdependences and interactions. It is the site of understanding class difference and class struggle and the modality through which value—social, emotional, or economic—is produced and understood. Labor also becomes the mode of creative action and intention and is a way through which creativity can be accessed and analyzed.

Interestingly *majdoori* takes on a particular connotation under the aegis of neoliberalism and the discourses of creativity. It is increasingly seen not as an interdependent and industrial act but as an entrepreneurial and individualized action (See
Chapter Four). It becomes a primary governing unit of individual life, is tied to
domesticity as well as work environments, and articulates individual desires for the future.
In the construction industry it is also the primary generator of urban environment and
through it experience in NCR.

My ethnography was structured around the understanding that labor within the
industry is intrinsically linked to the formation of urban areas. As I moved through NCR I
met and shadowed a range of individuals including bureaucrats, planners in Town and
Country Planning Offices, directors of real estate firms, bankers who invest in real estate,
finance, construction, and marketing heads and their teams, land owners, brokers,
engineers, architects, contractors, material suppliers, site supervisors, foremen, skilled
workers, manual laborers, and farmers. Their forms of labor ranged from planning and
acquiring property, financial analysis, contract negotiation, procuring materials, physical
acts of building, drawing and design, and brokering.

For a number of individuals, such as laborers and site supervisors, work is
confined to a specific construction site. They work on the site everyday until a project or
work is completed and then move to a new site in a new area. Another set of individuals,
such as architects, consultants, material suppliers, and head contractors, circulate from
office to office and site to site. The labor of these individuals also includes visits to head
offices, government offices, banks, and material markets. The simultaneously situated
and circulatory mode of production of urban built environments speaks to urban life as
both rooted in a grounded sense of place, but also formed through pathways through the
city: a tension between roots and routes if you will (Clifford 1997). In order to capture
the various forms of labor, as well as understand the tension between the construction
sites as metonymic of the production of city space and the broader processes that form an urban area, I adopted a situated and a mobile ethnographic methodology. My field came to be through a series of productive tensions between the site and the circuit.

_Sites_ here are a series of spaces defined through a physical boundary: construction sites, homes, offices, and farms, spaces that I dwelled and lingered in for large periods of time. These included: 1) Two construction sites: one a small bungalow project and the other a massive real estate venture led by developers I call Webuild. 2) Webuild’s corporate offices that deal in marketing, finance, and development. 3) A village home on the peripheries of Gurgaon 4) The office of the Haryana Urban Development Authority and Town and Country Planning Offices of Gurgaon. Within these spaces I learnt to relate to individuals as groups and observe sociality and forms of work. It is within these spaces that I developed closer relationships with contractors such as Jitendraji; site supervisors such as Shreelal; foremen such as Sharifbhai and Munnalal; husband wife working teams such as Mahaab and Mohamed and Meera and Miriraj; young men laborers and tribal laborers from Bengal like Shafi, Veer, and Lallu; architects and engineers such as John and Neel; consultants such as Mr. Reddy and Mr. Srivastav; planners such as Mr. Mannsingh and Mrs. Singh; as well as senior directors of real estate firms such as Amar and Bansilalji.

_Circuits_ were pathways of movement with or without people. Ways of travelling through the city either accompanying people to work or going to work myself. I travelled to and from the large construction site with Mr. Kumar the chief engineer of the site; a senior retired planner Neelkanth Sir and I travelled together exploring urban change; two architects, Gautam and Seema, formed my guides to the city of NOIDA. I travelled
through the region extensively, sometimes traversing 150 km in the span of a day, asking
lifts with individuals I interviewed or moving to the spaces they worked in.

While this formed my overall methodological structure for the fifteen months of
fieldwork, as a child of an architect and an architect by training myself, my field has a
larger temporal dimension extending from my childhood to my continuous present.
Spending time with my mother meant spending time on construction sites or in her
architectural office (which while I was growing up was also my parents bedroom and my
playroom). Site supervisors and contractors babysat me as my mother gave instructions
on site and our home remains full of building material samples. Family friends and
familiar faces included the contractors, carpenters, clients, and masons who worked with
my mother. The real estate boom coincided with my teenage years and architectural
training, Indian cities, my architect friends, and I grew together. Even today meetings
with architect, planner, banker, and the fast increasing category of entrepreneurial
developer friends blur the boundary between catching up and talking shop. Through them
I am regularly immersed in the constantly changing world of building construction in
India. This dissertation’s engagement with architecture and urbanism articulates the
collapsing of professional and personal journeys for me as well as for the people with
whom I stood with and moved amongst on construction sites in NCR.

How fast does an NCR grow?

India’s National Capital Region (NCR) comprises the multiple districts of Delhi
(the national capital), the city of Gurgaon (my primary field site), the city known by the
governing body that runs it New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (Gurgaon’s
twin city in the neighboring state), and Faridabad (old industrial town). The area is the seat of government and in recent years emerged as an educational and technology hub. This growth saw an influx of middle class populations who worked for or serviced the public sector. It drew a bank of students and often their parents to its shores. As a city under strong governmental development control, urban development activity in Delhi took place through infrastructural development for the Asian Games in 1984 and the Commonwealth Games in 2008 as well as through the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) housing initiatives. This combined with forcible slum clearing projects from the emergency of 1977, the riots of 1984, and the games of 2008, each of which marked the construction of new areas as part of major resettlement drives. These pushed the poor out of the city and forced informal settlement growth in surrounding villages in the area.

As Delhi grew it demanded more space. The Delhi Development Authority reigned over the city space. The strict land development regulations the DDA enacted negated plans to increase the density of Delhi and created a shortage of space. Land prices in Delhi escalated as office and housing space fell short. Two suburbs emerged to compensate for this demand: the privatized real estate development led suburb of Gurgaon and the state controlled New Okhla Industrial Development Authority town or NOIDA. While the two came to be defined for their privatized growth or their state led development model respectively, the dynamics of the real estate and construction industry was fundamental to the growth of both cities. In the case of NOIDA the state acted as the land acquisition mediator, thus controlling, to some extent, the infrastructural planning of the city\(^\text{10}\). Simultaneously, the push from developers to acquire land in

\(^{10}\) NOIDA too is nowhere near ideal in terms of infrastructure or governance. The capacity of the roads in NOIDA fell short due to the high volume of real estate. NOIDA is also said to have far more crime.
NOIDA, led to the exploitation of farmers who sold land to the state, at state controlled prices, and increased private coffers. This eventually led to allegations of wide spread corruption as well as put several properties under litigation due to farmer protests (Economic Times 2012).

Gurgaon on the other hand followed a different model. Private Developers acquired property directly from farmers and amalgamated small land holdings into giant real estate colonies. Few road, electric, or sewage lines were planned. The city literally had pools of sewage in low-lying areas as untreated sewage drained into canals. The city grew unplanned and its rapid development led to massive criticisms of its road, sewage, and electric infrastructure. As both the cities grew and expanded the National Capital Region (NCR) came to be.

As real estate developers in NCR gained political clout and financial might, they began to diversify their holdings across industries and cities. They began real estate ventures in states based on their political and kin networks. Gurgaon was test site for a real estate development model that occurred in cities across North India: cities such as Allahabad, Lucknow, Agra, Guwahati, and Jaipur. By 2010, corporate offices of developers, contractors, and architects in NCR governed construction in cities across the Indo-Gangetic plain. A site supervisor, working in Lucknow, very eloquently explained this organization of power: “All the big bosses are in Delhi: the minister, developers, architects, and contractors, they meet in Delhi and make decisions about our site. We get the orders here”. Similarly, a planner in the Government of Sikkim narrated how most ministers of development in Sikkim spent most of their time in NCR to liaison with the central government. Construction in NCR, and Gurgaon in particular, due to the
privatized model of development, became a keystone and precursor to models of urban
development of North-Indian cites.¹¹

Gurgaon, the city suburb of Delhi and the site of my fieldwork used to be a sleepy little town detached from the capital by a green-forested belt. The town, in the Indian state of Haryana, was located south West to Delhi further down the highway from the New Delhi international airport. Two major highways connected the city to Delhi—the National Highway Eight (NH8) and the Mehrauli Gurgaon Road. Both wound their way through dense, brambly forests, full of archeological relics, and the hidden farmhouses of New Delhi’s elite. The forests hid communities of cowherds and were filled with myths and monuments of Indian Gods and Saints.

Gurgaon was home to farmers from the Ahir and Gujjar communities. The Ahirs were the majority landowners of the region. Originally a community of cowherds and believed to be descendants of the Hindu God Krishna, the Ahirs pride themselves on their vegetarianism and devoutness. They believe themselves to be less aggressive than the Gujjars they live with. Gujjars, originally wandering communities who came to settle in large parts of North India, are the famed black sheep of the larger National Capital Region. They are spoken of as Neanderthal-like, loud, and violent and blamed for the rising levels of crime in the region, a marker of the resentment of their rising economic and social status.

Prior to the escalation of land prices and the arrival of multinational companies and back offices in Gurgaon, the town was a military cantonment and had an ammunition depot. In the late 1970s the Maruti Suzuki car company was built in Gurgaon, which led

¹¹ Though one can also argue that this model of urban growth began in Bombay and then moved to Gurgaon. The real estate firms that control the north and west differ, so I trace the growth based on the firms and their expansion.
to the construction of homes for workers and ancillary service industries and offices.

Entrepreneurial developer K.P. Singh, is credited with kick-starting urban development activity in Gurgaon as he moved from building real estate in Delhi to bigger and better prospects. "I am dreaming, dreaming of a new city," Singh wrote in his memoir (Singh et al 2011:5). He speaks of spending hours with farmers on wooden and rope *charpois* (traditional bed frames), drinking tea and convincing them to sell their land to him. Years later he parcels off this land to middle class families from Delhi and builds Gurgaon’s first gated apartment complexes in a vehement icing pink.

Delhi Land (and) Finance Co (DLF) conducted large-scale land purchase operations in entire rural Delhi from the 1950’s onwards. DLF agents swooped down on Gujjar farmers taking quick advantage of the difficulties they faced in the rain-dependent cultivation of their fields. The DLF turned cheaply purchased agricultural land into plots of assorted sizes, provided road connections and electricity, and auctioned these developed estates to city-based, upper-class buyers. The installation of power-operated tube-wells enabled the new owners to use the rich subsoil water resources for the greening of their wall-enclosed fancy farms, which were cultivated and guarded by hired migrant laborers from eastern Uttar Pradesh. [Soni 2000:85]

The middle class flight out of Delhi into Gurgaon escalated land prices and prompted further growth of the city. K. P. Singh himself traveled to the United States and Korea and convinced multinationals to lease in Gurgaon.

Urbanization in Gurgaon took the form of privatized, informal development. Gurgaon in the late two thousands had gained international attention for its fast-paced, privatized growth accompanied by haphazard planning and infrastructural development. Jim Yeardley of the New York Times introduced the city to the United States by calling it the place where “dynamism meets dysfunction” (2011). The city grew outside Delhi’s
and Gurgaon’s original jurisdictional boundaries, on what then was largely land owned and governed by a number of villages. The choice of Gurgaon as a site to acquire land was influenced by several political and social histories. The area did not receive as many benefits as other regions of the state during the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution, a government-led and Ford Foundation supported scheme boosted agricultural development through high-yielding seed varieties and irrigation infrastructure. The region was considered arid\(^{12}\). Land prices in Gurgaon, which did not receive irrigation infrastructure, were lower than lands that surrounded it.

Simultaneously, the state of Haryana in which Gurgaon grew was a stronghold of the ruling Congress party. The Congress Party governed the central Government since 1992 and governed the state of Haryana as well. Haryana and Gurgaon in particular received several development benefits from this alliance including critical changes made to land acquisition and holdings policy, as well as tax benefits, which encouraged large-scale, multinational investment. The presence of the State and Japanese collaborative automobile company (also established by the Congress Party) had seen a history of Japanese-led development in the region. The airport and the army ammunition camp had already laid out road infrastructures that enabled easy access to and from New Delhi. From 2003-2010 the Government of India focused on large infrastructural development projects to prepare NCR for the Commonwealth Games. Urban development increased rapidly in the region in response.

A larger regional history informed the growth of Gurgaon in particular and NCR in general. The area holds several resettlement colonies for refugees of the 1947 India-

\(^{12}\) I have received mixed information about this. While several people, who moved there, claim it was arid. Local farming communities insist that it was not and that there were several tube wells in place. I am inclined to believe that a small portion of the land was arid but the city fast outgrew the arid portions.
Pakistan partition and later the refugees from East Pakistan now Bangladesh. In 1947 as New Delhi became the capital of the Indian Nation-State, the city soon developed into a bureaucratic, cultural, and educational hub. The city is often described as having a refugee ethic where entrepreneurship and survival skills developed due to the fact that most of its population rebuilt their lives from scratch. The ethic of accumulation of property is also said to have roots in the fact that most refugees had nothing when they came to the city and the memory of this is inscribed in their need to hoard property.

A very specific neo-liberal economy grew from this history. A strongly bureaucratic city emerged where political connections and control played a large role. The elite of the city show their power through cars, bungalows, festivals, and clothes. To throw money around is to have political power. The history of refugees and aggressive farming communities prompted stories of this space as a tough and aggressive space. It is considered a space of entrepreneurism and individual drive because of this history. The rapid infrastructural drives have made it a more likely destination for expats and multinationals as its rival city—Mumbai’s—infrastructure shudders and fails under the weight of its twenty-five million strong population. Gurgaon on the other hand due to its tax benefits and large, commercial real estate grew into a multinational hub. The patriarchal farming community, already affluent through green revolution intervention, grew rich through the rise in real estate prices. The rise of a professional class in an area with India’s highest female infanticide rates produced a clash of cultures. Neoliberal Gurgaon is simultaneously professional, parochial, liberal, and patriarchal. The three dominant cities of NCR: New Delhi, Gurgaon, and NOIDA each created specific political
economy of neo-liberalism with a distinct set of morals, practices, and culture attached to them.

**Chapter Summaries**

My ethnography of the construction industry in India’s National Capital Region (NCR) illustrates the modalities through which creative labor structures the political economy of real estate and building construction. I argue that practices such as *jugaad*, improvisation, fixing, corruption, innovation, quick thinking, and tactics of holding power, are part of a spectrum of creative actions in the construction industry that serve to enable social mobility and survival, but at the same time enhance unequal conditions of work and life. The dissertation uses a “critical phenomenology” as a critique of political economy. I etch the experiential and sensory dimensions (sensory including the material) of production and consumption to demonstrate how individual action and experience is a critique of their times and constitutive of political economic action.

Chapter one expands the political economic discussion of creativity. Here I explore the construction site as a lens through which to analyze creativity. I introduce Gurgaon as a city continuously under construction but also embed the idea of change as historical and continuous. The particular context of Gurgaon, but of Indian cities in general, captures this contemporary moment in Indian urbanism where change is accompanied by great emotional and physical violence (seen for example in the clash of different communities and changing values, dispossession, transformation of the environment, and income inequality). Creativity is a play of temporalities and of emotional negotiation. I demonstrate how creativity works with temporality within the working of real estate and construction. This I argue also gives rise to heterogeneous
social and spatial landscapes that enable creative dysfunction. The construction site becomes an important stage in which to capture these tensions, as it is a space at the threshold of the old and the new. Creative practices on site not only act as modes through which individuals grapple with this time of transformation, but are also deployed by the developer and the state to mask the creative destruction their actions bring.

Chapter two introduces the spaces of NCR, Gurgaon, New Gurgaon, and the construction site of Whistling Woods. This chapter studies diagrams and drawings of urban space in NCR as the construction of conditions of possibility for NCR. I move through several different types of drawings: including regional master plans created by planners, architect’s drawings, makeshift diagrams of property by brokers, and sketches of homes by laborers. The lines of drawings etch an imagined future but in actuality are ephemeral and are creatively made and unmade. The chapter analyzes power in relationship to these diagrammatic imaginations of property. The changes in the lines of the diagrams reflect the lines of power within the region and the ways through which property, power, and luck are intertwined. Here I argue that it is the very ephemerality of these lines that enable the real workings of power and politics in the region.

Chapter three deals with the circulation of money. It focuses on the dominant presence of black money (cash exchanged to avoid taxation) within the political economy of real estate in NCR, arguing that it is grows in tandem with formal financial practices. Corruption articulates a variety of creative ways of moving money that play on the ability of money to transform from material to immaterial states. This magical or fetishistic quality of money enables creative actions and sets up a parallel financial circuit of cash that moves from bank accounts, to gold, to property, and back to cash again to generate
urban space in NCR. The specificities of this movement result in the production of a speculative, disjunctive, improperly constructed, and empty city. I parallel this material environment produced to social change that manifests in discussions of black money. I etch the anxieties and social mobilities that circuits of black money and its accumulation in certain hands create. The creative capacities of both large scale and individual corruption I argue create a splintering of economic, moral, and spatial value in NCR.

Chapter four discusses the labor of machines and men. The chapter analyzes the work machines do and the work that men and women conduct on the construction site. Speed is the central trope of analysis here as machines speed up the pace of construction of the city and through this force labor to match their intensities. The working of machines is paralleled with the concept of the ‘tez ladka:’ the smart, young man who ascends hierarchies on construction sites by learning fast. I argue that the speed of machines is produced through a change in rhythm and it is this rhythm that bodies and behaviors strive to match. I argue that the dominance of machines, the changing patterns of work and life that they introduce, and the struggles for productivity and survival they mark, set up a series of discordant rhythms that result in the noises of protest. Here I argue that the very tendency towards aesthetic and acoustic rationalization becomes a mode through which corporate and individual creativity clash and articulate the angers of the moment.

My fifth chapter discusses the economics of love. The chapter is structured around the differing understandings of love that emerge from the Hindi word pyaar. The term references notions of romance, brotherly love, sexual desire, and familial love. The chapter works with the images and architectures of home and domestic life drawn by
laborers on walls of construction sites. These writings and drawings form modes of signification of the ways in which emotions of love drive the political economy of real estate. The different understandings of love embed themselves in and structure the political economy of the real estate industry through the desire for better futures for children, working relationships, and friendships struck on the site. Through this love intertwines with property relations and structures the production and consumption of real estate in NCR. At the same time I demonstrate how the emotion is deployed as a coercive and exploitative strategy to speed work and maintain class relations on site.

The final chapter focuses on human, infrastructural, and natural ecologies. I trace pathways and networks both literal and metaphorical that bring people into the construction industry in Gurgaon. I write off the construction and design of roads in the area. This is paralleled with the ways in which people moved through different spaces and forms of work and were drawn into the construction industry. The construction of roads speaks to the connections between forests, hinterlands, and new urban developments. I talk of the growth and consolidation of an industry and its people in parallel with the growth and development of cities as geographical areas. I end with a commentary on the ritualistic aspects of real and metaphorical roads, as creating the opportunity to negotiate between oppositional spaces, societies, and emotions that are part of our lives, demonstrating the changes and challenges to social and spatial ecology in Gurgaon.
Writing Style

My concern with writing style is embedded in a conversation of style as an aesthetic experience. Here by aesthetic, I take from authors such as Jameson (1991) and Ranciere (2004), who consider aesthetics to be a critique of the political—a sensorial and materially driven form of communication that forms a phenomenological critique of the subjects it engages with—seen in theatre, architecture, painting, and fiction to name a few, but extending to everyday life.

Within this dissertation, I experiment with a writing style that uses the built environment and its materialities as a provocateur of theoretical engagement. It deploys the form, modes of circulation, history and techniques of production, and sensoriums of objects and landscapes to critique forms of urban development. This form of analysis takes seriously a longer conversation in the interdisciplinary field of materiality studies that extends from Marx to Miller and beyond. I adhere to the contention that material environments, social life, and senses of self are co-produced (e.g. Berman 1982, Ingold 2000) or the life cycles of objects necessarily present forms of social relations (e.g. Mauss 1990, Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986, Miller 2005). Simultaneously, I believe that materialities such as landscape, infrastructure, architecture, technologies, commodities, and money reveal not only the resonances of human-non-human worlds (e.g. Latour 2005) but also the politics, inequalities, and hierarchies through which NCR operates today. The realm of one world thus has the potential and possibility to shed light on the other. The machines, landscapes, walls, and drawings within NCR’s construction worlds form my analytical lens on the lives, politics, and socialites that produce them.
The question of writing style in anthropology also embeds itself with two disciplinary concerns. The first, the relationship between ethnographic granularity and abstract philosophical style, or more colloquially put the increasing (and I might add falsely) widening distinction between theory and ethnography\textsuperscript{13}. The second, a question of interpretation of culture and modes of its representation deriving from anthropology’s critical turn in the 1980s. Reflecting on these conversations my writing style has two intentions. The first that I seeks to convey the deeply transformative and sensory world of building construction and use the phenomenology of reading itself to articulate political critique. That is I strive to convey pain and anger, happiness and everyday cyclical mundane-ness, ambiguity, and multi-vocality in Gurgaon through the style of writing. In that sense style becomes philosophy within itself\textsuperscript{14}.

Simultaneously, engaging with discussions of translation, I extend the notion of translation and representation not only to culture but to philosophy as well. Writing is an act of translation and representation and my style seeks to speak to both social life and philosophy. I juxtapose ethnographic detail and analytic commentary. Through this I attempt to navigate out of a mode of writing, of switching between theory and ethnography, in a jarring manner, that does violence to the communities and processes we seek to write off through their subsuming of detail and their reduction and rejection of the concrete elements of everyday life. Life escapes and oozes out of the intellectual commentaries we make, but, as several anthropologists repeatedly remind us, it is our

\textsuperscript{13}Clifford, Marcus, Fortun, Rytherford, Jackson, Taussig, Stewart, Raffles, and Stankiewicz’s 2012 discussion in \textit{Cultural Anthropology} is an example of a recent discussion of the same
\textsuperscript{14}I am not alone in this endeavor, anthropologists such as Steedly (1993), Tsing (2005), and Walley (2012), to name a few, have long paved the way.
very task to represent this “precarious, and creative-world making” and through them to “make politics matter differently” (Biehl et al 2012: 1224).
I

Creative construction:
the construction site as a locus of creativity

The Whistling Woods construction site sits at the edge of Gurgaon amidst numerous residential and commercial construction sites. The area is interspersed by agricultural lands and industrial sheds. Every day over three hundred and fifty workers troop, drive, and run through the white and blue gates of the construction site, recording their presence, donning their hard hats, and moving onward into their workday. They gather together at the gate as the day’s activities are read out. Whistling Woods comprises three phases: Phase I is the large box-like office structure that was almost complete the time I began my fieldwork. Phase II, a undulating tower had ten out of its twenty three floor plates, and Phase III a large basement, plaza, and entertainment building just existed as a giant three-storey, deep pit (Figures a, b, c).

These spaces fill with bodies at work as the time horn sounds every morning. Some drag mud and earth to and fro heaving their bodies into the ploughs and shovels they use. Others work machines, shifting gears, driving rollers, and channeling pipes from floor to floor. Some stand and supervise to maintain order and work upon the floor. Many do rounds across the three phases, inspecting, instructing, and often chiding.
Figure 1.1a: Phase I of Whistling Woods. Photograph by author.
Figure 1.1b: Phase II of Whistling Woods. Photograph by author.
Human and machine noises mix and reverberate through the floor plates, the vertical stairwells, and the gaping pit: sounds of the drill, hammer, and generator mix with shouts yells. Each activity connects but maintains its independent realm. This profoundly and provocatively human world of production is redolent with emotion and strife. There is, anger and aggression, despair and angst, and joy and laughter. The emotions bubble, simmer, and infuse into the work on site. This world is unexpected, ever-changing like an Escherian landscape: there are staircases without stairs, gaping holes in the middle of your path, and ledges that jut out into nothingness. There are mazes of scaffolding and deep, damp spaces where water floods every crevice and drips down the walls around you. Some walls radiate a searing, searing heat and others exude a bitter, bitter cold that enters your bones.
This thriving space of work and life, the space of a construction site, alive with activity, half-formed, half destroyed, occupied by myriad classes, reeking with anger and exploitation, and infused with desire and despair, is a profoundly fecund space to speak of urban experience and environment. The acts of construction, through the making of dust and anger-filled architecture, display the interdependencies of phenomenology and political economy in the production of urban space. The semi-formed state of construction activity articulates the energies and aspirations of a transforming Gurgaon and demonstrates how creativity occupies a multiplicity of scales within it.

This chapter analyzes construction sites as metonymic spaces of creativity in its myriad forms. Construction sites and their workers, I argue, act as scalar repositories of the modalities through which individuals, class, state action, economies, locale, and history intermix to create new forms of urban space and experience. Construction sites here, are not only small-scale building sites, but I approach Gurgaon, the city, as a large-scale construction site, as well as think of self, collectivities, and identities as constantly under construction: city, spaces, and bodies are all sites that are under construction.

If “creativity as Roy Wagner (1981) has argued is always emergent (Lavie et quoting Wagner 1993:5) then construction captures the multiplicity of this emergence. This chapter weaves through the entangled meanings of construction and creativity. The very act of construction is that which creates, builds, and produces. Through relations of the city, space, and body I demonstrate how construction sites are ways through which urban, social, and spatial transformation and creative energies present themselves. Gurgaon, the city as under construction, articulates the very necessity of human creativity as a mode through which cities and civilization grow. Simultaneously, through Gurgaon
and NCR’s history I emphasize the violence that this transformation embeds and shrouds. Through the lens of creative labor I argue that the act of construction is a temporal navigation between past, present, and future. It is a negotiation of what once was, is, and will be. Creativity seen this way is a mediator of temporalities, material worlds, and senses of self. As spaces, construction sites manifest material relations and display the creative techniques through which political economy reworks self, space, and environment. Creativity, I argue, becomes a mask through which the politics of development grow increasingly corporatized as key state actors are co-opted and contrive privatized modes of development. It marks a shift from state development to privatized entrepreneurship forcing and encouraging micro practices of creative labor. Through this construction articulates the processes of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 2003).

A City Under Construction

Sunset in Gurgaon is a revelatory moment. The harsh light of the Thar Desert sun dilutes and the noise of traffic rises to fill the darkening sky of NCR’s multinational outsourcing and automobile hub. The playful screams of children rise as they step out of their homes to play in gardens with trampled, yellowed grass. They run between empty plots of land, amongst cars and cycles, holding crude cricket bats and each other’s hands. The rhythmic crunch of cricket balls hitting bats blends with the frustrated honks of tired drivers as they make their way home from a busy workday. The shadows of trees and buildings grow longer. Faces and bodies blur and take on strange shapes and forms. The safe spaces of the day turn into spaces of danger and darkness as they empty of people
and light. Lamps and lights turn on in homes to spread warmth into the night. Anger and happiness, expectation and loneliness, fatigue and pleasure, all mingle in the purple-orange light of the end of the day in Gurgaon (Figure 1.2).

It is on a cold evening in December, on an elevated metro station platform, that I stand and watch the city move to its own rhythms. From my vantage view, I see Gurgaon as it dissolves into the grey, blue shadows of the night. This is the first of fifteen months that I will spend in India’s National Capital Region (NCR): A region that comprises the cities of Delhi, Gurgaon, NOIDA, and Faridabad. An old friend from my architecture undergraduate days and a resident of Gurgaon—Preeti—just dropped me off at the Delhi metro station. I stare at the geography of Gurgaon as I await my train.

Preeti is a young woman who was born in Delhi and came to Bombay to study architecture. She offers to give me a tour of the city on my first days in Gurgaon. As we moved through the diverse kinds of neighborhoods in Gurgaon, Preeti spoke of her impressions of the spaces. Gurgaon, I discover, has two names: Gurgaon as it is known to the world, and the local “Gudgav” or “Gudgava”.

The duality of the city’s nomenclature emerges in its organization of space. The original town of “Gudgav” lies in the lop-sided center of the city on its western side. The train station and bus depot form part of it. This is the busy part of town. The roads are narrow here and a number of people crisscross the roads as they move between the small stores that sell everything from loose grains to air conditioners. A large ammunition depot sits on its North. The depot marks Gurgaon’s historic claim to ephemeral construction: the large flat grounds of the depot held dismantlable army tents as part of military exercises of the British in India. A number of shacks and makeshift structures
Figure 1.2: Sunset in Gurgaon. Photographs by author.
now occupy these once open lands. The militarized history of Gurgaon still echoes in the number of individuals it contributes to the Indian army. Several of who come home to work in the city’s growing real estate and construction industry,

Gurgaon was largely a cantonment town until a mass of refugees in 1947 grew the city spaces. Gurgaon expanded from a town of thousands into a city to house refugees from West Pakistan and later East Pakistan or Bangladesh. The construction of new homes and industrial spaces rose anew in the seventies when the Indian and Japanese Governments’ collaborative venture led to the Maruti-Suzuki automobile factory in western Gurgaon\(^\text{15}\). Around the factory came a large industrial estate, housing for the factory workers, and the construction of several state-led housing colonies. Today this history of colonial and state-led development falls on the wrong side of the tracks in the continuous waves of construction that is Gurgaon\(^\text{16}\).

It is not a railway line but the road, India’s new dominant transportation mode that cuts Gurgaon into its two halves. The National Highway Eight (NH8), part of the arterial corridor of North West India, slices through Gurgaon as a six-lane highway. On its east lie the newer, privatized developments of Gurgaon built in the last two decades. The rising mast of the ship-like headquarters of Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) real estate and Development Company symbolically marks the beginning of this multinational Gurgaon under construction\(^\text{17}\). Behind it unfold a series of icing-cake pink, postmodern apartment complexes with opulent arches and domes. The housing colonies and

\(^{15}\) See Gururani (2013) for more on postcolonial planning in Gurgaon.

\(^{16}\) See Brayne (1928) for more on colonial governance and Gurgaon.

\(^{17}\) Though construction activity now spreads radially outward along the edges of Gurgaon, in the direction away from Delhi.
accompanying bungalow plots are a scheme from the late eighties and early nineties as Delhi’s middle class began to move out of Delhi’s urban limits in search of better housing prospects. This form of gated development and plotted-bungalow layouts continues today in the empty plots of land further east. It is here that open plots of land await sale or form giant construction sites.

Anthropologist Shubhra Gururani describes Gurgaon as a city “in construction for three decades” (2013:119), construction that continues even today. Construction activity structures the everyday life of individuals in Gurgaon. Work never ceases as new real estate mega-projects, small-scale renovations, and giant infrastructural construction build and rebuild city space. Individuals move through a landscape composed of empty plots, construction fences, machines, and half-finished buildings. Clouds of dust form the city’s atmospherics. Its material landscapes are under constant transformation.

From my vantage view of the elevated metro station, the setting sun renders a new visibility and sensibility to construction. Light speckles across the newly built highways and glints in the delicate lattices of electric poles. The long rays of a December sun extend across empty tracts of land that await construction. They transfuse through the incomplete windows of concrete apartments blocks. The sun hovers behind unformed towers. It forms a glowing, orange ball that is tamed by the construction dust in the sky. Sunlight percolates through a landscape of cranes and empty building frameworks across the Gurgaon plains. Clouds of cement and sand hang over the city and turn the air opaque and asthmatic. The edges of the half finished structures appear hazy and blurred.

This construction sensibility is seen at street level as well. City-space in Gurgaon fills with the armatures and materials of construction work. The roads overflow with
dump trucks—full of scaffolding, stones, or sand—and large flat bed trucks with steel bars threatening to come through the windshield of the car behind. Fences and blockades announce construction activity and water drips onto the road as cement cures on the new-elevated railway lines above you. Pickup trucks full of young men plough through the traffic and the tools of masonry trade rest on the shoulders of many. An occasional cement mixer joins the mass of cars, its concrete belly swirling incessantly in the clogged traffic jam. The metal ellipse rumbles with the restless mix of stone, cement, and water inside (Figure 1.3).

The image of the continuously churning belly of the cement truck is haunting in its ability to evoke the energy that infuses Gurgaon and the wider National Capital Region (NCR) it sits within. In 2012 it felt like protest, anger, violence, and rage permeated the spaces of NCR and beyond. Twenty miles away, in the heart of New Delhi, sat Team Anna and his band of male youth, on a hunger fast, as they protested against corruption within the Indian government. This anger came rooted in a deep frustration of growing unemployment and inequality. On the other side of NCR in Muzaffarpur religious riots rocked a sleepy town and created a mass of Muslim refugees whose images circulated through the papers as a failure of governmentality. Farmers protested inadequate compensation for their land acquired by the state and blockaded highways. A few days’ later activists and students overtook India gate protesting the brutal rape and eventual death of a young, college woman picked up by a public transport bus and gang

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18 The Census of India notes a steady increase in unemployment from 3.5% in 2005 to 2.8 in 2011 (Census of India 2011); this is also paralleled with an increase in the youth population. Experts such as Sanjay Kumar (2012) argue that the degree of increase is situated within the youth population, i.e. a growing number of younger people are unemployed.
raped. Women took to the streets in Gurgaon organizing campaigns like “Take Back the Night” and “Slut Walks”.

This anger echoed into the everyday. Housewives raged about the rapid increase in the price of cooking gas, and, their husbands, the price of fuel. Village council heads lamented the death of tradition, the lusts caused by eating too much fast food, and the perils of inter caste marriages. They complained about “modern daughter-in-laws” who are spoilt by their parents. Newspapers screamed of Watergate-like scams of land, cell phone networks, and coal. The heat gradually rose and the Northern Electricity grid collapsed. Neighborhood wars over water, electricity, and gas exacerbated. The churning belly of the cement truck, the turmoil and restlessness, the half liquid and concrete state, dripped and seeped into our everyday.
In his writing on the dynamism and dialectical modernism of the late nineteenth century Berman (1982) too believes that periods of great transformation are accompanied by a restless energy. In his explorations of the “vital force of modernism,” Berman captures periods of industrial, technological, and social change in the Western world. He etches how they transform landscape, life, and individual alike. He speaks of this relentless energy through several figures—including those of Faust, Marx, Baudelaire, Robert Moses, and Jane Jacobs—to draw bridges between their worlds and times through the transformative energies they hold. He writes:

What is distinctive and remarkable about the voice that Marx and Nietzsche share is not only its breathless pace, it vibrant energy, its imaginative richness, but also its fast and drastic shifts in tone and inflection, its readiness to turn on itself into a great range of harmonic and dissonant voices, and to stretch itself beyond its capacities into an endlessly wider range, to express and grasp a world where everything is pregnant with the contrary and ‘all that is solid melts into thin air’. [Berman 1982:23]

I cannot help but think of Berman and Marx’s words as I watch the tops of skyscrapers under construction dissolve into the smog that permeates the Gurgaon air. Indeed the breathless pace of construction, the dissonance of cultures and attitudes, the potentials these times hold, and the spirited energies of those who live and work in Gurgaon reverberate with the creative energies of change. Conflict, contestation, ephemerality, the multiplicities of voices and cultures, erasure, and anger are omnipresent characteristics of life and times in Gurgaon and mark its creative energies. These “creative energies” (Berman 1982:24), “creative power” (Berman 1982:160), “creative spirits” (Berman 1982:75) accompany and enable times of transformation. The state of constant under construction opens new opportunities, creates new mixes of people, and
generates a political economic potential energy that many take hold of. At the same time this transformative state is ripe with conflict, strife, and disillusionment. Creativity, and its rise as a discourse, its use as a practice, and its understanding as a form of self identification serves to understand a time of transformation and a means to critique the nature of these changes themselves.

**Creative Temporalities**

To begin a project we must excavate, dig down into the earth to remove soil and lay foundations. Construction activity usually begins by digging deep into the land, burrowing until you create a stable bedrock that can support what you intend to build. Construction work uncovers a layered history through the sedimented layers of soil it excavates. It understands history through the land of the past and disrupts it as it transforms the land. Excavation work unearths the ghosts, both literal and metaphorical, of times past. Through the destruction and disturbance of spaces, construction uncovers local ghosts, demons, and spirits: they form critics of neglect and decay in the spaces that they have inhabited and express unhappiness about the changes to come. Construction draws locals and outsiders into the site into a tension-filled mix. Ethnic, religious, and geographic backgrounds mix as workers stream in from across the country. History works its way into construction through their bodies as well.

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19 Within the dissertation I use the metaphor of sedimentation as derived through Donald Moore’s (2005) analysis of historical, discursive, and material micro practices (2005:12) that layer or sediment into a place. Sedimentation, through it archaeological metaphor, refers to forms of power, practices, and resources that are encoded into a place through its history (2005:2).
If the spatiality of Gurgaon is marked by continuous transformation: history mediates the modes through which this transformation takes place and is experienced. Edward Soja, reminds us of this through his attentiveness to spatio-temporality, his urging to draw spaces into the historical materialisms of modernism (2011:73) and by extension time into the space of Gurgaon. Here, I think through temporality and the kinds of creativities it enables.

This land, in its recent pasts, saw periods of great transformation. Each period is mired by conflict, and contestation. Each is accompanied, not inconsequentially, but necessarily, by equally violent urban and spatial restructuring of Gurgaon and NCR more broadly. 1947, 1971, 1975, 1984, and 1991/2 stood out as years marked by ethnic, religious, economic, and state-led violence that radically altered city-space.

1947 brought an onslaught of refugees into NCR as the partition of India and Pakistan turned into one of the world’s most violent, ethnic conflicts. NCR registered a population increase from 2.5 lakh in 1911 to 14.5 lakh in 1951 (National Capital Region Planning Board 1999), a growth strongly aided by the influx of Punjabi Hindus who flocked to the city from Pakistan. This bloody war claimed a million lives (Butalia 2000), and was accompanied by large-scale pillaging, killing, and rape. Trains of dead bodies arrived into the capital and those who survived brought very little with them.

The loss and anger of this event carries into an independent NCR as well. Emergency rule in the late seventies brought mass sterilizations, forced resettlements, a loss of rights and freedom of speech, and wide-scale demolitions of areas of the city. The riots of 1984 and then 1992 first burnt down the homes of Sikhs and then Muslims.

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20 Tarlo (2003) gives a detailed account of the emergency and traces the unfolding of urban space, experience of the marginalized, as well as state and bureaucratic processes in relationship to the emergency.
The liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991/2, and the forms of city space and life it brings, mix with the transformations, violence, and social restructurings of time pasts. Together they all headily mix and descend into the everyday in contemporary NCR (Das 2007:221).

Space and the architectures in NCR formed the arsenal for these violent changes. Numerous citadels were built, torn down, and rebuilt as kings and dynasties fought over the control of this space. The multiple rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, and the British all built upon this land, launching bloody battles to claim it. They destroyed and rebuilt this capital and built citadels across its plains. The city drew masons from across the Indo-Gangetic belt. These builders labored night and day to build the city into the space it is today. Historic forms of labor move into the present through the familial networks and skilling they sustained. Temporality, kinship, network, and skill intermix within the processes of building construction.

And as the citadels crumble into archeological remains, which dot the landscapes of NCR’s streets, came the new citadels of colonial rule. The parliamentary capital of a new India, a baroque radiating star crossed plan that today forms the seat of India’s warring parliamentary parties. New housing colonies arose as refugee populations settled into the city only to become gated, middle-class citadel-like spaces in the more recent past. 1947 also brought new industrial estates as the traders of Lahore set up shop. The seventies saw city space transformed through the resettlement of the urban poor. This

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21 Ganapathy explains this history: “When Giyasuddin announced plans for the building of a new capital at Tugluqabad, he needed all the workmen he could find including those who were working on the saint’s project of building a tank to collect rainwater near his khankah in Ghiyaspur. The sultan’s order took preference, but the workmen returned at night to continue building the tank by the light of the oil lamps. This infuriated Giyasuddin who put an end to the sale of oil. The story goes that Nizamuddin then ordered the workers to use water from the tank instead and it worked equally well” (Ganapathy 2009).
22 Caldeira (2000) and Low (2003) are good examples of an analysis of gentrification and gated enclosures.
wave of violent uprooting continues even today. The city expands through a neoliberal mode of economic change, amidst cultural and political turmoil. The kings of yesteryear rest in tombs while the developer and politician still build new forms of citadels in NCR.

The patterns of violence, spatial restructuring, dispossession, and displacement creatively echo into the present through the workings of building construction. A history of kin relations, migration, dispossession, destruction, and creation informs the growth of NCR. It embeds into the bodies of its citizens and those who migrate in and out of its boundaries through time. These forms of violence, disruption, as well as familial and spatial formations, are creatively deployed within building construction: be it in the descendants of laborers who flock to the city, the kin networks that mobilize to create its development, or the violent strategies through which construction activity deploys itself. The actions, spaces, and pathways of yesteryear echo into and affect the present.

Since the late eighties, Gurgaon saw a tidal wave of privatized real estate development. An aggressive real estate and construction industry grew Gurgaon into a series of enclaves. Terms such as “tallest”, “biggest”, “modern,” and “luxury” mark the actions of the industry. Gated apartment complexes, malls with guarded gates, cyber cities, and special economic zones become the citadels of this era. It is here that the figure of the private developer emerges as the new sovereign of urban space in Gurgaon.

K.P. Singh, the director of Delhi Land and Finance Company (DLF), is oft credited with spearheading the urban growth of Gurgaon. Several envy and admire Singh for recognizing that the cantonment town of Gurgaon was a viable location to build in far

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23 Perez (2011) argues that the action of privatized development create forms of “privatized sovereignty” in Bogota.
before office and residential space became scarce in New Delhi. Singh began gathering parcels of land from farmers in the early seventies to trigger the Gurgaon real estate race.

A localized history of state-led development colluded and collided with the actions of real estate developers to promote the growth of Gurgaon. In 1970 the Maruti-Suzuki car plant became India’s first car manufacturing plant. The presence the plant created a range of ancillary businesses and manufacturing companies and encouraged car companies to set up shop in India\textsuperscript{24}.

The Japan led funding agencies of JAICA and JAICO—attracted by their success with Maruti-Suzuki and interested in the investment opportunity development in NCR provided—invested heavily in the planning and infrastructure of the region in the eighties and nineties. Their collaboration yielded an industrial area as well as the Delhi Metro project. In the early two thousands, the government of the state of Haryana, in which Gurgaon sits, repealed of land ceiling laws for building construction activity in Gurgaon. This is rumored to be due to political alliances with K.P Singh\textsuperscript{25} (Searle 2009:30). The proximity to the international airport and a number of low taxation incentives drew multi-national companies to Gurgaon. Since the nineties Gurgaon’s landscape transformed in reaction to India’s structural readjustments, developers strove to remake it as a multi-national and middle class space. Developers such as Unitech, Emaar-MGF, 3C, and several others began building their mega structures on the ground: the pea fields of Gurgaon transformed into real estate citadels. The histories of economic growth were deployed into the formations of the modern citadels of Gurgaon.

\textsuperscript{24} This came largely after 1992. Gurgaon is now a big hub for both Mercedes and Hyundai

\textsuperscript{25} This is an active rumor the veracity of these claims is still under question.
Time plays out on an individual scale as well. A mass of workers grew this industry. They came from villages and cities in North India, cities across the world, from small towns, and forested lands. The industry drew the most educated and the most deprived drawing their labor together into the exploitative economies of real estate. Building construction in its actions and navigations unearths their pasts. It draws wounds, remembrance, familial relations, and historical geographies into the present through the actions and acts of the individuals who build.

Freud speaks of this temporal relationship of creative acts in his work on creative writers. In describing the process of who makes a creative writer, he conjures the idea of an individual who mediates between the realm of past, present, and future through his creative practice. The writer, Freud writes, “creates a world of fantasy which he takes very seriously—that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality” (Freud 1908:25). Fantasy and reality meld within the creative writing process as it blends different spaces and times together to create the world of text:

> A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience … from which there now proceeds a wish which finds it fulfillment in the creative work. [Freud 1908:27]

What temporalities do individuals in building construction draw into Gurgaon’s present? What are their dreams and desires and how do they situate themselves with their pasts? Creative actions give us a different reading of temporality and history as that which infuses the present in a non-linear and unpredictable way. Transformations of times past seep into the material and social landscape of NCR. The destructive powers and creative potentials embedded into historic periods of change feed into the present
through these social and material landscapes. The landowning population of the Ahirs, the entrepreneur-refugee from Pakistan, the bureaucratic government officer from New Delhi, the history of laborers who migrated back and forth to build its citadels, and the waves of multinational capital neo-liberalism brought, mix together to drive the spatial and material transformations of Gurgaon present.

The past draws into the actions and intentions of workers in construction through devices of nostalgia, remembrance of childhoods, senses of loss, and belief in their own successes to name a few. The past inhabits bodies through fragile bones created from years of nutritional deprivation, the skills they possess, and the language on their tongues. The future ties oddly with this past in the fantasy of what will be achieved or a desire for success. The present is a site of creative negotiation of these juxtaposed temporalities and spaces. Creativity ties to a sense of wish fulfillment for the future, born out of a past we construct, and melds times and spaces to infuse into the context of building in NCR.

Construction activity emerges as navigating between a set of desires, aspirations, and wishes that accompany the rapid economic and urban growth of NCR today; a mediation through the past, and the drawing together of the routes and roots (Clifford 1997) that have brought all to NCR’s sandy construction sites.

Time is thus deployed creatively at myriad scales. A larger history of violence, migration, and spatial restructuring is deployed in an understanding of a violent and angry environment today. The temporalities of migration and dispossession mix into the bodies of workers and inform their activities. Past, present, and future are sites that individuals navigate through a terrain of desires, despairs, and deprivations.

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26 Donald Moore (2005) writes of this through his development on the Deleuzian idea of assemblage. He argues that the landscape forms “articulated assemblages” that voice the histories and violence that structure the present in Zimbabwe.
Simultaneously, temporal economic and development circuits are creatively captured and deployed to further capitalist accumulation. History is drawn tactically into the processes of construction: its produces land, body and building. Temporality becomes simultaneously scalar, phenomenal, and political economic.

**Disjunctive Social and Spatial Landscapes**

Construction activity is heterogeneous. The ephemeral state of building construction creates and melds variegated spaces, socialities, attitudes, and emotions. Building construction creates a disjunctive and patchwork landscape of spaces, which through their very heterogeneity produce social and spatial friction. The ephemerality of the environment—the changing and shifting landscapes—enables individuals to change within it but also masks the political processes of change. It draws together seemingly oppositional worlds. It is at once empowering and emotionally disabling. Spatial and social disjunctiveness is a creative state.

Sikanderpur metro station, the platform upon which I stood, is a prominent metro station in Gurgaon. The area that surrounds it forms an example of the city’s disjunctive spaces created through ongoing processes of construction (Figures 1.4 a, b). The elevated train station is part of the larger Delhi Metro system project and was completed five years ago. Sikanderpur metro station is an important node in this network as it links to Gurgaon’s business hub, Cyber City. Disembark at the station, walk down to the street, and you find yourself surrounded by the familiar yellow “Delhi Metro Under Construction” barricades that now punctuate the lives of those living in NCR for over a
Figure 1.4a: Disjunctive spaces of Sikandarpur 1. Photograph by author.
Figure 1.4b: Disjunctive spaces of Sikanderpur 2. Photograph by author.
decade. A new station for the Gurgaon metro is under construction: when completed the two stations will link together and form a transportation hub for commuters from Delhi and Gurgaon. A series of metal, scaffolding frames hold up newly cast cement slabs. The gaps between the plywood drip water onto the pedestrian traffic below. In the distance we can see the glinting of multinational logos from the tops of glass boxes: Tetrapak, KPMG, and India Bulls hail us from afar. Around the corner from this hi-tech hub sits an empty plot turned into an urban slum where the waste of Gurgaon is spread out on the ground and sorted for recycling. Low-rise shacks made of inferior quality bricks and topped with aluminum and tarp roofs form rows of homes for the recyclers who salvage the city’s trash. Move across the highway and a fish and meat market occupies the station’s immediate periphery. The space reeks of dried blood and feathers. This eastern side holds residential areas and you can walk through a village full of metal fabricators, hard at work building gates, doorways, and other furniture for apartments under construction. Here we see old village homes demolished to make room for the three and four storied vertical dorms to house migrant workers. Four storied dormitory structures; dressed in yellow, pink, and blue pastel paint, rise from what used to be village lanes. Inside the villages the roads give way to mud and slush as the asphalt disappears in parts and emerges back again.

On the other side of the station sits Sikandarpur chowk (square). This space sees mobs of temporary construction workers who hold the tools of their trade and wait eagerly for day hires. Onwards lie the gated housing complexes with ornate bungalows under construction. The colonies (as they are called) emanate with the sound of children practicing pianos. Move a little further down and on the outskirts we see Gurgaon
farmers cultivate local crops in small, one-acre fields. In it they raise and milk oxen for the love of fresh milk that forms a staple of the local diet. Outside of their boundary wall stretch fields cultivated by rural migrants hired from the hinterlands of India. These fields, sold to private developers years ago, stand waiting for construction activity, but continue to be tilled until work commences. Move out of Gurgaon into the hills that surround it, and the lay of this land under transformation expands before you: Green forests, whose animal and bird population dwindles, lakes that dry up with the shrinking water table, housing complexes built in robotic arrays, large-scale factory sheds, strange office complexes in angular designs, villages, temples, fields, mosques, construction sites, migrant camps, and non functioning sewage treatment plants. All characterize the changing spatial and social landscapes of Gurgaon.

Urban transformation is at once material, spatial, social, and individual. In the fallen hero of Faust, Marshal Berman etches this co-constitution:

The only way for modern man to transform himself, Faust and we will find out, is by radically transforming the whole physical and social and moral world he lives in. Goethe’s hero is heroic by virtue of liberating tremendous repressed human energies, not only in himself but in all those he touches, and eventually in the whole society around him. But the development he initiates—intellectual, moral, economic, social—turn out to be at great human costs. This is the meaning of Faust’s’ relationship with the devil: human powers can be developed only through what Marx called ‘the powers of the underworld,’ dark and fearful energies that may erupt with a horrible force beyond all human control… the tragedy of development27. [Berman 1982:40]

In his evocation of the creative energies of construction, Berman reminds of the fact that it conjoins the moral, economic, social, and intellectual. It draws together space, and sociality and reworks them unleashing a creative energy but also a potential energy

27 Berman here, perhaps, is also engaging with a Freudian framework on repression and uniting it with a Marxist critique of Political Economy.
of destruction. A surreal juxtaposition of contradictory individuals makes Gurgaon a violent and contradictory space—gunmen and god men, middle-class software engineers and Korean human resource managers, restaurant workers from underdeveloped areas of India and architects from Los Angeles—all carry this city in different ways. In village spaces we see rich farming communities who adhere to strict caste hierarchies and gendered divisions of labor. Within the villages, local women keep their heads covered as they pass their elders. Their daughters who take the train from Sikandarpur to university in North Delhi wear jeans and text young men on their cell phones. In the hills sit the temples of god men and gurus guarded ferociously by spirits and villagers alike. On one side of Sikandarpur sit the homes of affluent individuals from Delhi, sipping their whisky, and waiting for their organic rice and dal (lentils). On the other side Cyber City’s commercial hub sees young men and women in contemporary office wear struggling to make a living and pay for an expensive Delhi life. Lower class rural migrants from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, and Bihar face a stronger struggle to find houses and jobs and to eke out a living in Gurgaon. Each space and neighborhood forms the site for the clash and contestation of all their values. This a space where the differential material and immaterial collide and reflect each other, where both place and processes are being creatively reworked through the multiplicity of histories and geographies that the differential spaces and the diverse individuals who occupy it encode. Spatial and social disjunctiveness creates the potential energy of change.
Construction work is a production chain and brings together myriad forms of labor to produce urban environments. Engineers and managers, consultants and investment bankers, tribal labor and uneducated workers, men and women, Hindus and Muslims, all contribute some form of labor to construction. Their work is driven by different desires and their creative actions deployed for different intent. Construction sites demonstrate individual and collective creativity in the labor of construction.

It is at a construction site at the edge of Gurgaon, on a blazing June afternoon, that Jitendraji the site contractor and I stand atop a heap of red mud. The blazing sun is merciless. Deep in the construction pit, on this radiating summer’s day, I am reminded of hell, as the walls, floor and steel bars around us absorb and disperse the heat of the sun. Jitendraji and I are surrounded by busy construction activity stepped up in intensity due to his authoritative presence. Behind us, a heavy, yellow roller with a giant, metal drum compacts the mud floor. The young worker atop it guides it back and forth to compact the earth underneath. On our right a group of young men struggle with a concrete pipe that spews concrete into a footing for a column. I hear the contractors shout at them, instructing them to run with their shovels, and move pipes, in order to make an even foundation. A group of workers set the wooden scaffolding on a column behind us. They climb up the scaffolding and check vertical plumb lines. Another young man artfully re-jigs the vertical structure in order to maintain plumb. Jitendraji surveys the area with a silent air. He is a man of few words but quips as he sees the young man work. “In construction you have 5% engineering, 95% jugaad.”
For those of us who live and do research in North India, jugaad is a word dropped into conversation, so much so, that you barely notice its use. It refers to an ethic of sorts through which individuals mediate everyday life. In 2011 Kanu Agrawal brought jugaad into academic circles through an architectural exhibition entitled “Jugaad Urbanism” (Agrawal 2011). Here he celebrated jugaad as an entrepreneurial and deeply creative practice that produced solutions in difficult situations and gave rise to the distinct urbanism that we identify with Indian cities. Through time it has come to be understood as “shrewd improvisations” (Craig 2014), quick fixes, makeshift solutions, creative strategies, modes of melding and morphing the moral realm (Jauregui 2014). Jugaad evades definition but proliferates in local discourse. What is interesting within the localized narrations of jugaad, is the creative energies encoded in ideas of jugaad, but also the ownership and identification of a variety of classes with a jugaad way of life.

“We people are good at jugaad,” Shailendraji says, as he compares construction work in India and America. He boldly claims jugaad for India, as we walk across the Whistling Woods construction site. Shailendraji is a site supervisor with no official training in construction except for his thirty-four years working and supervising construction sites. Today he gives me a guided tour of the site. I ask him the meaning of the term when he brings it up:

Jugaad means, who does jugaad, what he means by that is, that given the conditions at that time, the conditions at the place, keeping those I mind, keeping those conditions in front of you, and considering them. Whatever thing we have available to us, with those things, you achieve the purpose (the solution). That is what we call jugaad. For example, you need to lift some goods on site. There are two or three pieces of wood around and some rope. There is no scaffolding. Or the scaffolding is a hundred, two hundred kilometers away, or the costing is too much. What do people do here? They will apply their mind, take four pieces of
wood, tie them together, get another person; they attach the wood, climb it, and drop the goods up. They will not deny you. The Indian worker will not deny you. He will not say that bring me some scaffolding or I will fall and hurt myself. He will do it.

As we walk across the site, Shailendraji continues my lesson in jugaad by giving me examples. As we climb to the first floor of the building he points at a grating. “Look at this, this is jugaad”. I ask why? “There should be a scaffolding here on all sides, instead (he pauses dramatically) they have made a grate with [metal] scraps. That is what we call jugaad.” He stretches out the aaas of jugaad in a dramatic fashion “jugaaaaaad.”

On the next landing he points at a blue barrel cut open and used as a water drum. “They turned a chemical tub into a water storage drum, jugaaaaaad.” As we head to the upper story Shailendraji takes me to the edge of the building and shows me a group of apartment towers in the distance. He points to an array of trucks loaded with cars from a nearby car factory. “Look at that, corporate jugaad, the trucks should have two more tires (to support the weight of cars), they should be fined, THAT is corporate jugaad. Have you seen those flatbeds with a motor and belt on them?” I shake my head in confusion. “You see the sugar cane juice guy and the motor he uses to run his grinder, have you seen it on trucks?” I shake my head again. I will show it to you,” he says.

Several ideas of jugaad emerge in Shailendraji and my conversation. A locale, a set of constraints, an inventiveness, and problem solving capacity are all encompassed in ideas of jugaad. At the same time, there is an apparent makeshiftness, a circumvention of proper protocol, an illegality of action, a danger, coercive tactics, need, inequality, and a struggle to survive (Figure 1.5). Jugaad occupies an ambiguous ethical terrain but also voices the tensions between creation and destruction encoded into the politics of construction. This mode of solution seeking for me evokes, but does not encompass, the
Figure 1.5: Transportation jugaad. Photograph by author.
creative forces seen in Gurgaon, particularly amongst those working within the construction industry in times of rapid urbanization in India. Simultaneously, it speaks to the perils of the very creative energies that push us into dangerous conditions as we struggle to survive.

In his outline of a theory of practices Michel de Certeau (1988) attempts to collapse the “binary set [of] production and consumption” through a study of creative practices (de Certeau 1988: xxii), such as walking, cooking, and reading. He introduces the two forms of practices: strategies and tactics. The former are “possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” and the latter belong “to the other” (xix). De Certeau argues that practices are simultaneously exercises in meaning making, a mode through which memory is mediated and produced, and are involved in the production and consumption of space (e.g. 1988:101-102). Taking from de Certeau, within my work, I understand the varied forms of labor in the building construction industry as situated in the spectrum of practices from strategies to tactics. It is through the multitude forms of labor that power; improvisation, production, and consumption of city space and life, as well as memory, desire, and survival are mediated.

A carefully demarcated and policed space of ten acres, Whistling Woods is a product of several forms and classes of labor, each innovative and improvisational in their own right. The mega structure of concrete, steel and glass emerges from the intertwined labor of a number of individuals encompassed within and beyond its compound walls. The team of directors at Webuild Developers envisioned the development of this site. They finance and manage the design, construction, marketing,
and sales of this project. Planners and politicians of the state of Haryana, however, suggested the project. The government officials proposed a new phase of planned development and released vacant land in an existing industrial and manufacturing area to Webuild. The opportunity offered by a new master plan was not lost on Webuild. They created a partnership, a corporate jugaad of sorts, roping in an international investment fund run by a relative and a local landowner. All three groups came together in a joint venture to kick-start the Whistling Woods project. Webuild hired an architectural firm and a project management consultant. The directors describe the early days of the company as filled with energy and enthusiasm. The developers, architects, consultants, and project managers pushed themselves to think laterally to create a distinct advertising strategy, a new financial plan, and a green design. The creative labor of these upper and middle class individuals melded together to form visions of what new city space might look like and how it should function. Their forms of labor included financial and design visions, financial and construction risk taking, a gathering together of social, symbolic, and material capital and mixing it all into an utopic vision of the future urban area. Their advertisements glistened along the streets of New Delhi “Think Ahead,” “Join a Global Network,” “the world’s best office development,” said the shimmering slogans and their collective aspirations.

These sparkling images were carried onto the ground by an army of engineers and planners. Several consultants, material suppliers, and contractors joined the planning and design of the project. These included: a foreign architect to build the “signature building,” electrical and plumbing consultants, a structural engineer, an air-conditioning consultant, fire-fighting consultants, and Information Technology consultants. Material suppliers and
contractors measured, calculated, and planned construction times and costs and aided these industry experts. A mass of middle-class and lower middle class individuals from cities and small towns became the mid level infrastructure for consulting companies and contractors. Drawings, expense sheets, and schedules are their craft. They bend, calculate, wrap, measure, and enumerate to create the DNA of architecture, as they struggle to give it life. Their technological skill becomes the mode through which they stretch their small town lives into big city dreams. Through the warp and weft of tabulated columns of plumbing pipeline widths and the curving diagrams of high-tension cords they build their own futures and lives.

The labor of consultants, architects, developers, engineers, material suppliers, and contractors feeds into a variety of construction sites. It is within these spaces that images and drawings materialize through the rhythmic, everyday actions of workers. One of NCR’s largest contracting firms — Gopi Contractors—coordinates and runs all the civil work28 for Whistling Woods. A parallel project management firm supervises their work. They coordinate between the different consultants, check bills, ensure the timeline of the project was met, and do quantity and quality checks, trying to ensure a homeostatic balance of work activity through cajoling, supervision, screams, and threats. A complex ecology of individuals work with the civil contractor as different forms of work are subcontracted out: steelwork, carpentry, labor, special steel work, excavation, electricians, plumbers, and material supply workers form subgroups on site. Each has a small team with them and mediate between site supervisors and their laborers. Each tries to maximize profit and secure work in the quickest possible ways. Learning, negotiating,

28 Civil work for the site entails building the entire skeleton for the building: this includes all the cement, concrete, and steel work.
building networks, arguments, and evasion are everyday occurrences during their average day.

Jitendraji, the chief contractor on site, manages all civil contracting work for Gopi Contractors. He etches his chain of command and site organization. His team includes teams of engineers, foremen, skilled, and unskilled labor.

We have 300 labor and … we have about twenty to thirty working points: for e.g. the first basement, the third basement, the thirteenth floor [which] is done now. … We also have a chain. We have a supervisor and a foreman. Then tower wise we have an engineer. Then we have a manager. … Some one is in this corner, somebody in the other corner … in one tower we have fifty laborers and there are only two staff members. So everyday I make one or two rounds to the towers. And we discuss what do we have to do tomorrow morning? We do the planning in the evening. We plan, and in the morning, the timekeeper, the labor gathers at one point in the morning, and depending on the program we had the last morning, depending on that, they divide the work.

Everyday I move through the phases I, II, and III, shadowing men and women at work, sitting on bags of cements and broken bricks as they repeat their tasks, and standing by them as they cut, scrape, bind, dig and stack. There are individual ecologies within each of the “points” Jitendraji mentions. I discover new ones everyday. Each has its own atmospherics and inhabitants. On the terrace of the tower under construction sit a team of carpenters, steel workers, and specialized steel workers, supervised by the tower engineer and foremen. They perch high above the ground atop bars of steel pushing the building upward. They are exposed to the strong light and winds and the barren landscape around, they swing, shift, and balance in the open winds. In the basement of the concrete shells are teams of electricians and air-conditioning specialists. Together they weld ducts together and run wires through concrete cores. Here the sparks of welding torches fly
through the darkness, lit in spots by halogen lamps. Water drips from the freshly cast concrete slabs and metal dust covers the ground. In an unfinished pit a new basement rises as teams run excavators and compacters through the hardened soil. On top of a finished terrace sit teams installing water tanks: water floods their floors and soaks into their clothes, and dampness lingers in the air around. Inside phase I teams of interior carpenters lay glass, painters finish ceilings and walls, outside the building sit masons laying tile and stones upon which cars will drive. Each zone varies in light quality from dark, damp, and dinghy to white hot. Metal jungles of scaffolding form some teams everyday while others drift in clouds of white dust as they sand and smooth paint over the concrete walls.

It is hard to call a repeat act of welding or tying steel to steel as creative but the pathways to these acts permeate with creative action and intent. On site we see young men “learn by seeing” (dekh ke seekhna), pressing and prodding foremen and contractors into teaching them skills, begging and cajoling a contractor to teach them how to read plans. In these every days we see contractors pressing bribes into engineer’s palms, forging friendships and socialities, in order to acquire work and profit. Creativity expresses itself in the young men and women who leave home to make an extra buck, or in the actions of parents who forage for work and leave the village to earn money for the education of their child. It is through these actions that creative labor melds together rural and urban landscapes and ties nostalgia, memory, and love into the walls of urban NCR. Their actions and intents infuse the construction site like the muggy, mildly acerbic, smell of cement.

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29 This is similar to “stealing with your eyes” described in Herzfeld (2004:131) but here it often involves more active mentoring relationship between the person seeing and the one doing.
In his quest to open up the category of craftsmanship into contemporary forms of work such as laboratory life and programming, Richard Sennet argues that the “modern era is considered a skills economy” (2008:37). Skill he argues is not mere “trained practice” but an open relation “between problem solving and problem finding” (2008:38). It is rhythmic and open as a practice where we set up a repeat rhythm of solving and opening up (2008:38). This rhythmic problem solving and strategy of exploration is accompanied by the construction of tacit knowledge. Here repeat rhythm embeds and converts “information and practices into tacit knowledge”. Leading to a culture formed around skills. (2008:107). Skill and work activity thus becomes a site of problem solving, derived from improvisational and creative working strategies, which continuously encode both knowledge and critique of labor and life into the individual who labors. Knowledge physical, spatial, and temporal is encoded into the body and morphed through the repeat rhythm of work.

As I stand beside workers on sites and sit besides workers in offices they speak not only of acts of building but familial and social ties. I hear stories of times in the villages, of holidays and childhoods, of a different temporality and rhythm than the one that structures life around us. There are visions of life styles, dreams, wants that emerge from the homes and offices they build. These sediment into material form: the shop in the village; holidays by a swimming pool; golfing with friends; “jeans-pants” for your kids; or travels through Europe. In work they speak of the pathways that lead them to this site. The projects they worked in and their experiences there. As they work they meld these temporalities and geographies of their lives through their labor. Through work they posit a site of action for the present and spectrum of possibilities for the future, working
produces knowledge and negotiation of their lives and loves. The labor of producing architecture and the atmospherics they are encompassed in are themselves a mode of political and social critique and a form of negotiation.

Creative labor stands, however, not only as a process of negotiation, but also as a generator of value. This makes creative actions deeply political and embeds them in a differential matrix of power. Through this labor becomes not only a tool of economic production but also of individual expression, survival, and experience.

It is through creative labor of building construction that loves, desires, and future fantasies come to be intertwined with the political economy of real estate. The phantasmagorical nature of the virulent real estate industry and the highly charged atmospheres it creates are navigated through creative practices of a variety of individuals in the industry. These in turn are generative of the urban experience and landscape of Gurgaon. It is through the actions of various forms of labor that loss, longing, anger, pain, desire, and fantasy become the bedfellows of neoliberal forces of development in NCR. It is this fervor and fever that both emerges from and generates creativity that infuses this text. I speak of the euphoria and imaginative potentials of creativity that political economy brings, but reminds us that these creative energies are singed with a narrative of failure, loss, and mired in the harsh reality of the always already dystopic present.

Creative labor within the construction industry thus highlights the constellations of spatio-temporal imaginings and contestations within urban development politics, but articulates them amongst a variety of classed individuals. At the same time it demands an attention to the affective and emotive qualities that are intertwined within capitalist processes of development. Creativity as a form of labor and as a mode of analysis etches
how emotions intertwine with the political economy of neo-liberal development. It is through the laboring process that phenomenological production and political economic work together to produce the specificities of urban life and political economy of NCR.

**Creative Development: creativity and the failing state**

In Gurgaon, as in most urban spaces, construction work is governed and regulated through a variety of local and national state authorities. Construction activity in Gurgaon, and NCR more broadly, falls under the jurisdiction of and is influenced by several governmental authorities including: The State and National Urban Development Ministries and their heads, Urban Development Authorities (such as the Haryana Urban Development Authority in Gurgaon), Town and Country Planning Offices (TCPO), Labor Ministries, Fire, Water, and Sewerage, and Drainage bureaus, Ministry of Defense (in some cases), Aviation departments (for areas near airports), the Archeological Survey of India (for construction work close to archeological sites), the list goes on and on.

Creative labor and creative political economy in the real estate and construction industry mediates a relationship with state actors and produces local understandings and discourse on and of the state. It does so through the rhetoric of urban development.

Mr. Kumar, the site supervisor and chief engineer for Whistling Woods, and I drive down to site together. Everyday we meet at Sikandarpur station and take what is a forty-five minute to hour-and-a-half long drive to the construction site. As we drive out

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30 Increasingly Chief Ministers of states in India are choosing to be the head of the Urban Development Ministry as well. The post is a very financially lucrative one.

31 Whistling Woods is a hard site to access through public transport. Mr. Kumar and I travelled the same route and he offered to pick me up. This fast became a routine and also served as his way of keeping an eye on my actions on a site that he was in charge of.
of Gurgaon he often points out different areas to me. On one of our first travels together he navigates through the central spine of Gurgaon, the National Highway Eight. He points out new and old housing colonies on either side. “On your left there is the old development, on your right the new development.” I am confused as to the use of the term development to point to a housing colony and ask him to clarify. The term development, in Gurgaon, I am told, is a word associated with the work of real estate developers. It is used to describe housing and commercial real estate under production and even a real estate initiative. At the same time it also appears as a way to comment on the state of affairs of the built environment and a commentary on its infrastructure. The word appears everywhere. It is dropped easily into conversation and forms ways of understanding and relating to the spaces we occupy:

“Development is going on here”
“The people of Delhi have put pressure for development.”
“He was the minister of urban development … they shifted him to minster of tribal development.” “They were supposed to have public participation in the development plan.”
“You change minds you change development.”
“Swamiji is very knowledgeable about development.”
“This is a major development so the quality of construction will be good”
“The development team.”
“Industrial development is in the hands of HUDA.”
“Design development and construction.”
“He tells me the engineer is in charge of infrastructural development.”

In 1999 the Government of India officially created the Ministry of Urban Development by combining its urban housing and urban planning ministries at state and national levels (Ministry of Urban Development 2015). The new institutional bodies were to govern and plan for the growth and regulation of urban areas under their jurisdiction. This governing move took place at a time where urban areas in India saw a spike in their

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32 In the era of urban growth in India these ministries were soon to be the most coveted portfolios as the most money was to be made through the control urbanizable space.
growth and were accompanied by the rapid financialization of land and the rise of real
estate speculation. These forces combined to turn Urban Development ministries into the
most powerful, coveted, and financially lucrative of governmental positions.

The most significant document produced by each local ministry is a
“Development Plan” (DP). The DP is a master plan that announces new areas for
urbanization, proposed highways, other road and rail networks, and marks the land use
regulation for different parts of the city. It also marks the boundaries of the urban area
and land that might be purchased, acquired, and developed. This development vision of
the city is a site of continuous articulation and contestation from those who both govern
and execute it as well as those who are affected and entwined within it (as seen in
Chapter Two).

As the strength of the development plan grew in tandem grew the work of
developers and real estate development in NCR. Developers, originally and ironically
called colonizers, due to their building of housing colonies, now remarket themselves as
real estate developers. Development became a key word for the provision of adequate
services, a vision of urbanization, organized growth pattern, a transformation of unbuilt
land to built up land, and became embroiled in the politics of land acquisition and
building construction. Construction activity and development work in tandem.

Development, as Escobar (1995) traces, has a longer history rooted to colonial
and post colonial governing practices. India forms a peculiar example within this context
as its population, geographic location, and national economic values continuously
interpellate the country as a key site of global development intervention: be it colonial,

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33 Chief Ministers of State are often said to hold on to the Urban Development Ministry and place
themselves as head of the ministry. See Maharashtra for example.
institutional, or privatized. India’s positionality in “global hierarchies of value” (Herzfeld 2004) comes to be navigated and produced through historical discussions and actions around the country’s development. Development as a rhetoric of colonial rule focused attention on systems of education, infrastructure (train, electricity, and roads), and city planning and governance within the context of British India. Within the context of the postcolonial socialist state larger World Bank and Ford Foundation led schemes intervened in critical areas such as food grain production, city planning, and industrial development.

India’s neo-liberal moment brings a large-scale emphasis on urban development as a key sector of private intervention. This emphasis also emerges in tandem with a discourse on the ineffectuality of Indian governmentality. In recent years critiques of the corrupt nature of Indian governmentality, the unwieldy and expansive hierarchical structure, and the high levels of bureaucracy have come from the media, professionals, and academia alike. This ineffectuality is posited in contradistinction to the entrepreneurship and successes of private operators in India. Here again we see a reverberation of the age-old rhetoric that the Indian state cannot cope with its populations itself and marks a return of a new kind “angrezi-raj” (British rule).

It is within this larger discourse of a failing, corrupt, and inept state that two understandings of creativity (as defined by Shailendraji) present themselves: the idea of individual jugaad or entrepreneurism and corporate jugaad or the dynamism of privatized corporations. Creative actions become substitutes for or fill in the gaps created by the ineptness of state development actions and are celebrated as the way forward for an

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34 See Goswami (2004) and Bear (2007) for discussion on colonial infrastructure.
emerging India. It is amidst this rush of change, dynamism, and excitement of new forces emerging in India that creativity marks the lack and failure of state development action. Creativity makes up for missing state action in key sectors such as education, skilling, job creation, and protection from dispossession. *Jugaad* instead emerges as a tactic of survival where state intervention has failed. The idea of rapid development, increasing entrepreneurism, and the celebration of India’s emerging moment simultaneously create the aura of an elusive and inept state. We come to believe India grows not because of its government but *despite it*.

It is under this curtain of a seemingly increasingly ephemeral state that creative capitalist action grows stronger. It does so in tandem with state actors through selective state action and deliberate neglect. Here we see the rise of political heads of state as key backers of developers or strongly related to the chief executive offers of real estate companies. It is common to hear X Company has Y’s backing or this is started by Z minister’s son. This leads to private interests working their way into state development and planning initiatives. At the same time individuals who control regulatory practices and permissions look the other way, either due to financial incentives offered or asked for or due to political pressure. The state too acts creatively to intervene, block, and plan according to the interests of the individuals who control state decisions and their hierarchies in the governance structure. A creative state emerges that masks its privatized actions under the umbrella of an entrepreneurial India.

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35 Here I am referencing de Certeau’s tactics as a set of practices used by the “weak” that serve to “manipulate events” on a small scale (1988:xix).
36 This is a common quote in the industry.
37 Ferguson marks this as a process of “etatization” (1990).
Capitalist action too thrives and derives from this entrepreneurism. It melds with state actors through an increasing demand for private intervention in public action. Whilst a dominant discourse of state failure rises to greet the everyday citizen: capitalism and state power entangle to produce new forms of violence in the name of entrepreneurism, innovation, and creative action. *Jugaad* is celebrated as the creative energy of a new India. Creative development reminds us that both state actors and individuals on the side of big capital enact creative practices to divide, rule, govern, and emplace. Their inventive energies are often used to exploit, marginalize, and co-opt. They are strategic tools of power and manipulation. Creative development is an examination of how creative energies not only of individuals, but also of governmentality and capitalism, collide together to produce inequalities in urban space and experience in NCR.

**Creative Destruction**

*The aim of all these communities is survival; i.e. reproduction of the individuals who compose it as proprietors, i.e. in the same objective mode of existence as forms the relation among the members and at the same time therefore the commune itself. This reproduction, however, is at the same time necessarily new production and destruction of the old form.* [Marx 1857:431]

To construct is also to destroy. Inscribed into the act of constructing new buildings that rise on old agricultural fields is an act of erasure and destruction of an

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38 Here I take from three authors, Tsing (2005), Escobar (1995) and Mitchell (1988) in their discussions of the violence of development action. Development actions also act as sites of difference and mobilization enabling forms of action and political mobilization on the ground (Tsing 2005). At the same time the visions encoded into development narratives, carry within them the ability to not only to reshape individuals on the ground but also to act as forms of violence (Escobar 1995).

39 Development is also deeply spatio-temporal. Development, as anthropologist Howard Smith (2008) argues traces “actions on the ground as they work to transform the present, a process that also always involves envisioning and modeling the future based on conflicted and contradictory understandings of the past and other places” (2008:4).
existing spatial configuration. Construction activity is a constant navigation, a negotiation between the tensions of creation and destruction. The figure of the individual, the communities she inserts herself into, the spaces and material environments that she works and lives amongst are all hinged between the twinned forces of creation and destruction in Gurgaon.

Neelkanth Sir and I sit on a bench in an urban park in Gurgaon one evening. The sun has turned the sky a deep purple and the park is mired in shadows. We sit on a bench near a paved walkway and are surrounded by children playing, men and women walking, and young couples reveling in the anonymity dusk provides. We are surrounded by noise. The din of birds chirping reaches orchestral heights and merges with the sounds of children laughing, screaming, and running. The noise of traffic outside the park wafts into our conversations. Neelkanth Sir, or Sir as I called him, is a retired planner, who worked for a number of years developing master plans for Gurgaon. He adopted me as his mentee early in my fieldwork. He belongs to a local farming family and is intertwined in the multiple social worlds of this city, the technocratic worlds of planners and developers, the familial activities and economies of village life, the educated middle class that his children form, teaching young students, and giving legal advice. Over my months of fieldwork we have come to know each other well, as friends, companions in a curiosity for the urban, and mentor and mentee.

I sit next to him on the bench this evening curious about the customs and traditions that structured his childhood. He speaks of the villages of Gurgaon where drums played at festivals and young women prayed annually at the now disappearing lakes and tanks. I have heard his wife and women in his family sing the songs of
celebration late into the night, accompanied by the drum, and understand the slice of village life that still nestles into corners of Gurgaon that he describes.

After my questions subside, we switch into a more informal discussion on our lives at the moment. Although he is retired, Neelkanth Sir works with his local village council. He has several ongoing projects including a public interest litigation to claim village forestland back for the village, the construction of a primary school, a reforestation drive, and water-harvesting program. His list goes on and on. His spiritual leader wants him to leave Gurgaon and live with him in Kurukshetra (a town nearby). Neelkanth Sir tells me he wants to go but is torn. He does not want to let go of the projects here. “What should I do, I try very hard, but this passion (fitoor) for development just does not leave me.”

Fitoor, like jugaad, is a hard word to translate. It evokes madness, an obsession, of being possessed by something beyond you. Of being possessed so badly that it destroys. All though I could not see his face, the student in me understood Neelkanth Sir’s possessive fervor, this madness towards a development goal that he expressed. The developers I worked with and their teams expressed this fervor and passion, the engineer who ran the construction sites, the young masons who strove to survive and loved to roam, and the site supervisors who ran both farms and sites. It coursed through the veins of individuals who sought to move ahead and survive within the harsh space of the construction industry. The degrees and intents of this energy differed amongst individuals and at different times. There were those who felt indifferent and those who felt left behind. But a fitoor for development of one’s own economic status or life seems to be
encoded in the obsession of building construction around us, marked by a real fear of an inability to survive.

Berman\textsuperscript{40} explores a resonant fitoor for development through the figures of Faust, Goethe’s fallen hero, and Robert Moses the acclaimed planner who reshapes the geography of New York City. For him these individuals mark the condensation of self-development, economic development, and urban development into each other. He writes of Faust and construction sites:

Suddenly the landscape around him metamorphoses into a site. He outlines great reclamation projects to harness the sea for human purposes: man-made harbors and canals that can move ships full of goods and men; dams for large-scale irrigation; green fields and forests: pastures and gardens, a vast and intensive agriculture; waterpower to attract and support emerging industries; thriving settlements, new towns and cities to come … Faust is transforming himself into a new kind of man, to suit himself to a new occupation. In his new work, he will work out some of the most creative and some of the most destructive potentialities of modern life he will be the consummate wrecker and creator, the dark and deeply ambiguous figure that our age has come to call “the developer”.

[Berman 1982:62-63]

The seductiveness of times of great change is that they encode a double bind. They act as moments of great creativity, social transformation, and liberation where desire, promise, aspiration, and happiness form a heady promissory mix. Simultaneously they are encoded with violence, despair, and disappointment. The “worst terrors of the global economy” are articulated against “the possibilities of new emergent forms of social relations” (Tsing 2005:270). They form economies of production and progress but

\textsuperscript{40} Berman’s project is one of demonstrating how the zeitgeist of modernity is present within varying periods of time. I am less interested in the trope of modernity or post modernity—which individuals like Harvey (1990) also try and collapse—but more interested in the historic and local economic and political conditions within Gurgaon at the moment. In the Western sense of modernity, this area was “modernized” years ago through heavy electrification and water supply projects in the seventies.
also of closure, difference, and violence (Escobar 1995:214). It is within the liminal space between these two markers of creation and destruction that material, moral, and social worlds in NCR fluctuate.

In 1943 Joseph Schumpeter identified an “impulse that sets the capitalist engine in motion” (2003:82) he identified this as “a mutation … that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one” (2003:83). This “process of creative destruction” in Schumpeter’s argument is a system present within capitalism. Geographer David Harvey extends Schumpeter’s findings into the twenty-first century arguing that it is neo-liberalism, as an economic strategy, that thrives on the processes of creative destruction. Harvey believes that globalized, neoliberal economic models carry with them “brutal experiments with creative destruction” that are then modeled into policies for global intervention (2006:147). He gives the example of the restructuring of the Chilean economy in tandem with the Pinochet regime as an exemplary model of the coercive nature through which neoliberalism as both an economic and political strategy operates (2006:148).

Within my work, the economic system meets its phenomenological teammate. Gurgaon’s construction activity places the city, its heterogeneous spaces, and citizens in a tension filled sensorial experience of creative destruction. This sensoriality is fundamental to the workings of capital acting not only as an arm of the economic system but acting as the site of its transformation. Here emotions such desire, anger, struggle to survive, turmoil, and confusion are constructed sensorially through the working of real estate economics: through acts such as building luxury homes, advertisements, securing work, and perpetuating economic instability. The power of these sensoriums is that they
map into real emotions intertwining the human being into the capitalist system in more rigorous ways (as Chapter Five explains). Creative destruction is a political economic, phenomenological, and multi-scalar action.

If creation and creativity can be read as a set of productive value-making labors, embedded with intense energy, euphoria, speediness, and great passion. Then, at the same time, creative processes and acts are accompanied by violence and a loss: the destruction of space, a past, a value, commodity, or human bodies. Creativity is read as a dialectical process where self, object, and space are transformed through the everyday labors of workers related to the construction industry. Value fluctuates through creative exercise. Simultaneously, the limit of creativity and its ability to destroy the present, and the individual herself, looms over our heads. Capital’s agents are the most creative of us all. The dialectic of creation and destruction in the construction industry creates high degrees of inequality. Rewarding those who manage to be perpetually creative but gradually or speedily marginalizing those who pause in their sets of creative action. Creativity articulates a deep hierarchy and an ability to annihilate. This dialectic of production and loss, creation and destruction, leaves self, space, and city with a sense of urbanism that breeds discontent.
II

*Drawing dreams on shifting sands: plans, drawings, diagrams, and the growth of NCR.*

_National Capital Region_

The National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) rests inside the India Habitat Center (IHC), a monolithic, brick structure located in the tree-lined Lodi-garden-area in New Delhi, National Capital Region (NCR). This institutional and government area holds a series of monumental buildings including the World Wildlife Fund, Max Mueller Headquarters, and the India International Cultural Center. Neelkanth Sir, a senior planner in the Gurgaon town planning department, and I visit the NCRPB office one summer afternoon. The two of us walk briskly towards the building from the metro station as a dust storm (*aandhi*) kicks in. The trees above us shake with vigor and we can hear windows and doors slam accompanied by the rattle of sands shifting and a gaggle of people yelling, sounds I have learnt to associate with a NCR summer.

Sir and I head to NCRPB to find information for the regional plan for NCR. We both share a passion and interest in plans. As a planner and geographer he learnt to decipher the city and urban regions he grew up in from the contour lines and maps that his staff planned with. He often speaks of the translation of statistical information into lines on a plan and it ability to enact real world change in an ardent manner. My architecture and urban design days inculcate me with a love and respect for the time, energy, affection, and attention that drawings demand, the visions encoded into them and ties they create between the people they circulate amongst.
The building construction industry has grown increasingly organized in the years since Neelkanth Sir began work and I practiced architecture. Where once architects drew rough diagrams on site, or gave instructions to builders as they worked, now come an elaborate hierarchy of drawings and stages at which they are issued. The worlds of building construction are increasingly marked and structured by drawings. The pieces of paper with their fine lines infiltrate our everyday. Drawings move from planners’ offices and architect studios, to developers’ cabins and onto construction sites. They are visible in small government (tehsil) offices, in schools, colonies, and parks. Plans, drawings, diagrams, maps of the areas we build and occupy are painted on to road signs, drafted onto computers, printed into brochures, and even inscribed onto the earth. Deriving from our passion for plans, within this chapter, I write of drawings of and for NCR and the possibilities and predicaments they lead us into.

A line, Ingold reminds us, is “nothing less than life itself” (2007:1). In its leap from a page or paper it inscribes movement, affect, observation, and translation into a complete unity (2007:1-10). Boundaries and borders, fences and frames, openings and circuits begin their destinies as lines. Through the intermeshing of lines rises a representation of space: the utopic space of planners and dreamers alike in which we build the ideal worlds that we might occupy. Within them they encode relationships of time and space.

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41 Here I refer to Lefebvre’s distinction between three forms of produced space: that of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. He presents spatial practice as a space “dialectically produced through social performance (1991:38); representations of space as the space produced by “planners, urbanists, technocratic sub dividers, and social engineers” (1991:38); and representational space as a space “lived through its associated symbols and images… passively experienced” (1991:29). While this chapter reveals how plans and drawings are actually a product of all three, the sentence above refers to the popular imagery of drawings as representations of space.

42 De Certeau (1988) distinguishes between the tour and map as two forms of drawings: the former narrativizes and produces temporal routes; the latter spatializes and orders (1988:119-121).
rationalized vision and imbued with totalitarian power (as argued in Holston 1989, Rabinow 1995).

The power of lines is great and the power of making and drawing lines available only to the select few. They are claimed and contested and the claiming in itself brings great transformations of power and position. Each line drawn and each line erased has effects on the lives of many. Within them are united aspirations, wants, needs, and a struggle for survival. Lines are inherently social. Within this chapter, I move from the center of NCR, moving through the urban region in a scalar fashion, outward to a construction site on its periphery. I draw together the different kinds of individuals who affect and are affected by plans, intermeshing their lives with the very lines that govern them. Lines, I argue, mediate affects and the workings of the powers of industrial political economy. The sociality, potentiality, and problems of lines, remind us that lines, like lives, are always shifting.43

The Lodi Garden area, which Neelkanth Sir and I walk through, is named after the parks surrounding the tombs of kings of the Lodi Dynasty. They governed Delhi in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The lush, green gardens, full of swallows on trees with intricately ornate tombs, are located in roughly the center of New Delhi. It is an area of affluent bungalows and spacious government housing. To the North of this area sits the stellar patterned Capitol Complex of India designed in the nineteen thirties in a similar baroque style as Washington D.C (Figure 2.1). North of the Capitol extends old-style government housing and elegant bungalows: white, with fluted Ionic columns, and green lawns upon which peacocks roam. These majestic structures gradually give way into the

43The metaphors of shifting, melding, erasing are introduced to speak of the different ways in which plans for NCR are made and transformed.
cluttered and narrow Indian trade areas. A densely populated old Delhi with narrow streets overflowing with jewelry, clothes and food stalls dominates the north. These fade into the large sprawling university grounds that are surrounded by a sea of lower middle-class housing. It is here we see three-storied apartment blocks, sardined together, around small colony gardens, in lanes full of parked cars. To the south of Lodi gardens sit a ring of upper, middle-class housing and large bungalow plots. To the west of these bungalows extends the diplomatic enclave, that dissolve into middle-class colonies and finally into the Delhi Development Authority developed suburbs of Dwarka and Rohini.

When the NCRPB was established in 1985, the area I describe was considered to be the limits of the National Capital Region. Today the region far exceeds these bounds. On the east of Lodi Gardens runs the river Yamuna. Its winding path demarcates the boundary between the Union Territory of Delhi and its biggest city-suburb NOIDA (New Okhla Industrial Development Authority). Vegetable fields and rushes intertwine with illegal development on the Yamuna floodplain, and lead you into the state of Uttar Pradesh and the city of NOIDA. In NOIDA gridded roads, already overloaded with traffic, form the boundaries for large–scale housing complexes and commercial districts. A sleek new expressway, to the east of the area, leads us to Greater NOIDA, a green, golf

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44 For a deeper commentary on NCR’s colonial spatial history and development see Patel and Hassan 2013.
course-centered suburb that is fast becoming an investment opportunity. In the north sits Ghaziabad—a once industrial hub and holding one of India’s biggest distilleries. It too grows at a breakneck pace.

South of Dwarka and NOIDA nestles the state of Haryana. Haryana houses the NCR city-suburbs of Faridabad and Gurgaon. Faridabad, the second largest city in Haryana, plays neglected second cousin to glitzy Gurgaon on its West. The bungalows and industrial estates of this once dominant industrial town are encircled by a series of

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45 The Maruti-Suzuki car plant in Gurgaon is rumored to be named after the daughter—Maruti—of the owner of the Ghaziabad distillery. The family is closely aligned with the Congress Party,
new housing complexes, designed to house those who cannot afford homes in New Delhi. Gurgaon lies to Faridabad’s East and New Delhi’s South East periphery. Separated from New Delhi by a protected forest range, the city is a multinational hub with all the problems characteristic of a rapidly urbanized, sleepy town. The highway out of Gurgaon extends into the area developers call New Gurgaon, a vast open plain of sandy land upon which tower cranes building housing complexes swirl.

Neelkanth Sir and I wind our way up a dinghy staircase to the NCRPB’s office. The NCRPB is a special planning body created in response to the awareness that Delhi metropolitan area—India’s National Capital grows aggressively and unplanned. The capital’s urban region comes to encompass four cities, three states, and a Union Territory. The relentless pace of real estate construction and speculation promised to push its boundaries even further in the coming years, to include the state of Rajasthan just a few miles away from Gurgaon. NCRPB was founded as a central governing body that would master plan the entire region to ensure coordinated and planned growth. I come here with Neelkanth Sir interested in their activities.

Sir and I make enquires within the office and are shown to a master planner’s cabin. He does not look too pleased to see us but welcomes us anyway. As we make small talk with him: my attention draws to the master plan hanging on the wall to my left. It is an intricate drawing (Figure 2.2). Printed on shiny card paper and framed in cheap plastic, the plan glistens with the promise of urban utopia. I stare at the various signs and symbols, the dots and dashes, and black spots on the plan. An intricate GIS map formed the base. Amoebic red areas marked existing urbanized land. Land that could be converted from agricultural to urban was marked yellow. I marveled at the fact that
almost 60% of the land on the map was slotted for urbanization, and hence, development and construction.

I was mesmerized. The eight suburban areas around Delhi were marked with black dots. Dashed lines, representing a regional rapid transport system, extended from each suburb center to merge into a rapid transportation ring around Delhi’s central business district. An orbital road corridor ran around the entire city and shot bold sunray-like highways down into all eight suburbs. Fingers of protected forest areas and agricultural areas wound gingerly through the proposed transportation corridors. The forestlands were shaded in two shades of green in a delicate hatch pattern. The promise of a verdant, well functioning, and efficient mega-city throbbed through the veins of the plan46.

I half listened to Mr. Sahni describe the plan:

This regional master plan for 2021 was notified in 2005. It encompasses over 33000 square kilometers of the tri state National Capital Region. It has an inner road corridor, [and] an outer corridor. Its trade complexes are integrated with the suburban railways system, and [it] has eight rail corridors feeding the city.

He droned on about the achievements of the NCRPB. In the two-hour-long meeting, Mr. Sahni narrates the trials and tribulations of putting together the plan. What is unsaid but understood by the three of us is that this plan will never come to be. The region does not have the money to construct the infrastructure that this plan promises nor do the various stakeholders agree upon it. High levels of corruption also ensure that it is impossible to match the vision of the plan and the realities on the ground.

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46 Master plans are responsible for allocating the boundary of an urban area, demarcating the functions or land use for all the spaces within this boundary. They propose new transportation systems, allot space for public utilities and recreation, and ensure even distribution of housing, commercial, industrial, and governmental land use, and other demarcations.
This plan and the figure of the man who drew it—the planner—stand dominant in academic discussions of the ways in which urban areas unfold. The power plans wield and the authoritarian vision they have of the world, their ability to discipline and shape our bodies, and erase life, as we know it, is a knowledge that most dispossessed hold. Neelkanth Sir and Mr. Sahni feel otherwise. They share a frustrated conversation and an almost lackluster engagement with the plan that they should be proud of making. They talk about planners leaving the public sector to join the private sector. Constant reshuffles and the exercise of political authority on their work and lives left them both feeling frustrated and incapacitated. Planners are the figural heads of the urban world. Another planner, Mr. Gupta, explains:

We do not plan. The plan is sent to us, already made. We just outline it. All we do is patch-up work. Fix this thing, fix that thing.

[Mr. Gupta rubs his fingers together in the air to indicate money]

The politicians do what they want. Every day I wait for a phone call. That I will get my orders [to pack up and leave]… Look at the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor plan. The plan has not been passed yet and already politicians own all the property on all its sides!

Regional and city master plans in NCR wield incredible power and promise. As the planner described, however, they tend to be figural, utopist, and deceptive. Master plans are produced with an inherent fallacy, a collective knowledge, that they will never be realized as planned. Simultaneously, it is the act of making and drawing that is tied to power and profit, promising prosperity to those who draw and control them and deprivations to those who cannot exact their control. As drawings are made lines come to be bent, erased, and redrawn through territories of political interest. The making of a plan becomes an intimate and intricate exercise in the contestations and collaborations of
political and capitalist power. The lines warp and meld into areas where they were not meant to be, erase zones, and fold into others. In the making of these plans lie clues to the pathways of power that control the capital city of India.

The NCRPB plan holds these secrets and shines with the histories of power encoded into its lines. In the past twenty years there have been eight master plans\(^\text{47}\) for Gurgaon and NCR each drawn up by successive governments; each opening up new land for development; each promising a well-planned and fully-functional urban area\(^\text{48}\). Every plan, as Neelkanth Sir often decries, were really about control over land conversion and development. The yellow, urbanizable area on the map beams down upon the three of us in the NCRPB office. It shines the color of gold.

It is a privilege to draw, as it is a privilege to create. Drawing, like writing or building, encodes the ability to enact social transformation and is an intimate articulation of the relationship between the individual who draws and the social world they draw in and for. At the same time drawing acts as a mode through which we position ourselves and attempt to capture the webs of power within which we are all enmeshed. Through drawing we reshape our positionality. The rising numbers of middlemen in Gurgaon who draw lines in the sand to change the destinies of its population show us the tactics through which entrepreneurial individuals capture the capacity to redraw. They form part of a

\(^{47}\) See Figure 2.3, I count seven proper plans for NCR and Gurgaon but several changes were made in the interim.

\(^{48}\) See Figure 2.3 for the number of plans and changes upon land that encompasses Gurgaon since 1981. The table also shows the number of plans and jurisdictional bodies that lay claim to the development of the same space. Also notable is the fact that the plans change as soon as a change in government takes place.
network of individuals – planners, politicians, farmers, and developers—who work to reshape these lines.

My favorite part of Gurgaon region lies within this yellow “urbanizable” area of the NCRPB regional master plan. It is the agricultural lands slotted for urban development. These fields of millet and wheat sit at the edge of the Thar Desert. The fertile fields are a photosynthetic green\(^{49}\). Fruit trees, ornamented with the nests of weaverbirds; demarcate one field from the next. Small brick rooms for caretakers of crops—\textit{dhaanis}—lie interspersed amongst them (Figure 2.4).

\(^{49}\) The 1970’s saw a major tube well drive in Haryana and year round farming is a legacy of this drive. Ironically it is tube wells dug by construction sites and illegal tube wells by residents in Gurgaon that now suck the water table dry.
It is here that older generations of women farm in their brightly colored *theels*: large skirted and tight-topped outfits worn in contrasting colors of the desert (Figure 2.5). Some sit at the thresholds of homes smoking hookah from mirror and bead embellished pipes. Neelkanth Sir’s wife and sisters-in-law dress me in a *theel* one day and laugh wildly as I struggle to hide my exposed mid riff. They advise me on how to coordinate the outfit. Pair a pink petticoat with light green *dupatta* or a red with a deep blue. This yellow will look good with a parrot green. Contrast the colors they explain to me. The handcrafted, long *dupatta* or scarf drapes over my head and down my back. They pleat it and tuck it into my waist. It is individually designed with mirrors and embroidery by Sir’s sister-in-law. I have always wanted one and am mesmerized by how the *dupattas* shimmer and contrast with their surroundings as I watch older women walk through the green fields.

Figure 2.4: Farmlands on periphery of Gurgaon. Photograph by author.
Later Neelkanth Sir and I drive through these fields one afternoon headed to meet his nephew—Narendra. “There are your friends,” he jokes. Two younger women in more modern salwar kameez outfits wave to me. Their head and faces are fully covered by the draped dupatta, their backs partially turned to us, to acknowledge Neelkanth Sir’s presence as a village elder. I still recognize them as the two sisters-in-law who live next to Narendra’s house.

Narendra is Sir’s adopted nephew. His house sits in the middle of fields on a road so sandy that it has dunes. A giant buffalo guards the courtyard of his house and his four-year-old young son comes out to help guide me past it. There are khats, beds made of coir, in the shaded, sand-filled courtyard. Sir and Narendra sit on the khat and adjacent plastic chairs as Narendra’s wife makes some tea in the shade of their two-room house. Protocol
requires that she never show her face to Neelkanth Sir, so I go inside to greet her. Her
two-year-old crawls around us and gives me a wildly naughty grin.

The regional master plan has allocated the area we sit in as agricultural. It has
zigzagged rail and road routes around it, hoping that the produce and grain from this
region will be trucked to Delhi at rapid speeds to feed the city’s masses. I head out with
some chai for Sir to see Narendra and him in deep conversation.

“If you know anyone for this let me know.” Narendra talks to Sir, he picks up a
twig, and starts drawing lines in the sand. I realize they are talking about property
Narendra intends to sell. He neatly etches an L-shaped block as he speaks. “This is near
the school. This is the road. This piece is on the road. Then the rest is at the back.” He
points at sides with the twig. “There is a seven kilometer road here.” He draws two lines
to depict the road along the plot. “They are asking for one-twenty-five’ (roughly two
hundred thousand dollars). I Neelkanth Sir looks at me, raises his eyebrows: “this is for
one acre, there are ten!” He turns to Narendra, “Whose is this land?” Narendra tells us
that this land belongs to three different people. “The fields were sold a long time ago,” he
says responding to my query about whether the sellers are farmers.

Narendra points the twig to the far right and draws slow strokes through the sand.
“This part is for sale. If you cut the plot into ten pieces you can make ten farmhouses.”
He asks Sir if he knows anyone who wants to buy and looks at me slowly as well. “On
which side of the highway is this?” I ask, knowing well that land on this side of the
highway is marked as agricultural and land on the other side of the highway was slotted
for urban development. “This side,” says Narendra, “but not to worry, that is not a
problem,” Narendra replies.
Later Sir tells me that “they call him (Narendra) *patwari* jokingly in the village, because he wanders here and there. Since he was a kid he buys from someone sells to another.”

I go back indoors to sit with Narendra’s wife. Her elder son runs in demanding tea and she pours him some in a delicate, ceramic teacup. He drinks it holding it with both hands. She tells me wistfully that he will soon be sent away. The schools here are no good and so they plan to send him to a good boarding school. At least I will have this younger one for a few more years, she tells me, picking up her younger son. She draws the *dupatta* over her head as she walks me out into the courtyard. As we pass their scooter she tilts her head and whispers: they are planning to buy a car. Their family of four need not cram onto the scooter Narendra owned anymore.

Mr. Sahni’s master plans for NCR and Gurgaon have had several effects on the ground. Their production and circulation led to property speculation across the region and brings prosperity and upward mobility for entrepreneurial individuals like Narendra. Several locals make a good living consolidating, flipping, and brokering land deals. They act as middlemen for developers scouring the region. An old, uneducated farmer, his white pajamas yellow and stained with cow dung, hops onto a scooter as he rattles of a list of the million-dollar properties he owns. In his village, hidden in the alleyways behind the redeveloped bungalows with kitschy gates live the tailors and potters, lower castes deprived both of original land rights and a stake in Gurgaon’s sky-rocketing land prices. Making pots to keep water cool in summer, or lamps for Diwali celebrations, they haggle with the landowners around them for five cents more on the goods they craft. The shifting lines of time worked their way around the already dispossessed.
The dreams we draw and the desires we construct for our futures are not unlike the plans that draw NCR. Etched into the literal or metaphorical sands of Gurgaon, plans are highly utopic and dream-like imaginaries. They shift and transform with time and real-world circumstances. The hegemonic practices of capitalist developers, the overwhelming number of stakeholders, and the practices of everyday life morph, destroy, and manipulate the plan. Often they expose the fallacy of the plan itself and its capacity to be captured by many. Fortunes are made and unmade, relationships consolidated and broken. The imagination of the plan and informal drawings it breeds move through the mud and landscape, from one farm property to the other, in and out of the houses of various headmen, planners, and politicians. Plotlines are erased and redrawn. Plans and drawings, men and their futures, are made and unmade in the politics of a developing NCR. Money and power entangle with plans as their lines shift like the sand dunes they are drawn upon.

**New Gurgaon**

The area around Narendra’s village and the property he trades in fall under the umbrella of “New Gurgaon”. New Gurgaon is the marketing name given to Virgaon village and its surrounding areas. This area is thirty minutes away from Gurgaon and separated from it by a tollbooth. Virgaon’s claim to fame is an industrial area built with Japanese collaboration in 1989. The car manufacturing company Maruti has a large plant

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50 Name changed but it is hard to hide the identity of this village.
there and several commercial offices spaces are under construction in the largely car-
industry-dominant area. Across the highway sits the village.

The last census conducted by the Government of India states that Virgaon village
had 3000 residents. Locals claim that the village houses over thirty thousand people. A
visitor to the village is inclined to believe them. A number of older homes stand
demolished and have been rebuilt into dormitory buildings to house migrant workers by
the dozens. Six men sleep side by side in a twenty-seven square foot room. The growth is
attributed to these dormitories constructed for migrant workers and their families.
Migrant workers appear in Gurgaon and Virgaon in hordes. They work in the factories
and construction sites in and around Virgaon, drive rickshaws, and work as service staff
in restaurants and cleaning crews in malls.

The number of new residents overwhelms Virgaon village. The narrow, village
lanes are flanked by ornate houses and three-four storey dormitory blocks. Garbage piles
in the street. Pools of rancid water mull in corners radiating with the threat of malaria.
The area lies outside the municipal council Jurisdiction and falls under the jurisdiction of
Virgaon’s governing council. The villagers are said not to care as well. Their farmlands
were sold years ago and they now sit on cash and new landholdings as they await the next
land-rush. They build lavish bungalows where their ancestral homes used to be. New
Gurgaon grows outside the boundary of the village settlement (lal dora51), its mega
structures towering over the village space, powered by the masses within it.

51 “In order to restrict the expansion of the villages displacing agricultural lands, the prevalent norms since
imperial times, defined a lal dora (literally a red line) as the boundary of the village. This usually coincided
with a phirni (a circulatory road). Within the lal dora, the land was earmarked as either
abadi deh, i.e. privately owned parcels of land where residential/commercial establishments can be
constructed, or as shamlat deh, which was collectively owned land for community activities” (Ojha
2011:7).
I visit a real estate fair that celebrates New Gurgaon. It is held in one of the large-scale exhibition centers in the heart of New Delhi and boasts of the vast institutional and cultural space only a national capital can afford. A large parking lot holds a surprising number of white compact cars, icons of India’s new growing middle class. The exhibition center is an exposed concrete, brutalist structure with a shadowy and musty interior. Large metal, freestanding fans try to propel the fast-failing and leaky air-conditioning into the expansive depths of the building. A frayed red carpet frolics up and down under our feet hiding the uneven, bare, cement floor. A number of partitions divide the open space into small booths. Women and men in trousers and formal pastel shirts set up brochures, stack questionnaires, and pin up large-scale print outs. On them beautiful skyscrapers soar to new heights in front of crepuscular skies that even Michelangelo would be in awe of.

I meander through the stalls, staring at the images, only to be lured in by a “consultant” determined to land a new client. I told him I was interested in Gurgaon and he pulls a plan out. I was soon to see this plan at all the stalls when I referenced Gurgaon (Figure 2.6). The plan was a not-so-bright cousin of the NCRPB plan. A yellow-nude color filled most of the city of Gurgaon depicting its urban areas. A slightly darker beige etched the various gridded sectors of Gurgaon into the yellow-nude color. The plotted sectors of Gurgaon were neatly numbered in the same beige. A series of thick, dark-grey lines depicted existing roads and highways. Black lettering labeled the railway station, town center, and major highways. Red dots depicted proposed metro stations that will take years to be built. Red lines also held the promise of new roads to come. A green
patch stood out proclaiming the building site. The consultant explained to me that there were essentially three areas in Gurgaon: the town of Gurgaon, the area between the two highways, and New Gurgaon. If you wanted to buy property it was New Gurgaon where all the planning and construction was happening.

The apartments are only three km from Gurgaon, there is a new bypass being built from sector 70a. IMT is there but it is far away, it is past the second toll naka but that will be moved. The boundary of Gurgaon is shifting to include this.

The consultant suggested that I would like a house in a housing complex known as Beautiful Sunrise. He opened a printed brochure and showed me elegant, tall, white buildings (Figure 2.7). “Each is oriented differently so that no building looks into the other,” he said. “They are each named after a different natural concept. There is a lot of green space around.” When I enquired about the construction phase he said that Beautiful Sunrise already had a ground floor slab while the other project – Gurgaon VV—had eight floor slabs built already.

New Gurgaon is a good place for you, ma’am. You can get a flat now for 70 lakhs, but if you invest in new development you can have it at 69 lakhs with a car park. Plus these are new flats and new developments. The current ones are [sic] gotten old.

Real estate fairs such as these are a common occurrence in NCR and other metropolitan areas in India. Throngs of couples, young and old, circulate these spaces looking for first-time homes, retirement homes, or investment properties. While the rising property prices in the region have pleased investors a large number of scams, delayed construction, and badly constructed buildings have frustrated buyers.
Figure 2.6: Marketing Diagram for New Gurgaon. Source DLF India Ltd. <www.dlfindia.in>. Accessed April 5 2015. Internet Document.

Figure 2.7: Sample marketing image for residential towers in New Gurgaon. Source: <indianrealestatemarket.com>. Accessed April 5 2015. Internet Document.
As I visit the real estate fair a battle over farmlands in Greater NOIDA unfolds. Various groups of farmers including the Bharitya Kisan Union (Indian Farmer’s Association) conduct sit ins and block highways. They are protesting unfair compensation for government-led acquisition of their farmlands. NOIDA, unlike Gurgaon, is known for its government led development. The local state government acquires land at low rates and then sells it to create industrial and real estate properties. Several real estate projects in Greater NOIDA are halted or declared illegal leaving buyers furious at the money they lost. Gautam is one of these buyers.

Gautam is a young architect with far more humble ambitions than Narendra. In the past ten years, he watched friends join the real estate rush and switch jobs from smaller architectural firms into developer-led firms. He clung to the small, well known, craft-focused practice he worked with. For this choice he earned far less money than his contemporaries. Gautam grew up in different parts of North India and finally came to live in Delhi twenty years ago. An avid car enthusiast he reviews new makes of cars but does not really have the money to upgrade his own. When I first meet him he talks about a property he has bought in Greater NOIDA. Gautam saved money and along with his father floated a loan to invest in a three-bedroom house. This was to be the family’s first permanent home. He chose it because he trusted the developer and the apartments were well designed. The apartment is a two-hour commute from his current office but it was all he could afford.

We visit the house of Gautam’s friend, an architect who now works for a multinational lighting contractor. He bought a house in NOIDA and is showing Gautam the new property. The friend’s three-year-old daughter runs around the house and his
wife proudly moves through the two-bedroom apartment on the first floor of a two-storied bungalow in a small plotted neighborhood. Gautam’s friend bought this property by leveraging a loan and flipping a small investment he had made on an un-built flat in Virgaon area. He sold that before the property was even constructed to fund this house for his family. That was good investment he tells Gautam and me.

Later Gautam drives me up to the property he put money in. An empty plot sits where his apartment should be. There is a stay order against construction in the region following farmer protests. In the meantime his family squeezes into a one-bedroom apartment in a Delhi village where he sleeps in the living room. Every few months we drive by to check on the status of the building only to see an empty plot of land in the middle of nowhere, waiting, for the courts, farmers, and builders to agree.

Marketing plans are like mirages. Documents designed to both seduce and deceive. They promise oasis of happy living in the sand dunes of Gurgaon. Unlike master plans they are not set up to fail, or not morphed or transformed as they are constructed, but are designed to befuddle and evaporate. How do you capture and create these mirages? Who succeeds in holding onto these and in whose hands do they disintegrate? Drawings here are illusive, promissory documents, that bear the potential energy of the future. Capturing and claiming the promises they bear is a precarious exercise.

If lines are imbued with affect (Ingold 2011:17) then plans are the sites of struggle and strife. They are where dreams and desires are nourished and betrayed. Within their lines they hold the promise of stability and financial independence. They represent spaces that we want to nest in and the lives that we want to lead. The power of these mirages is strong but their promise weak. It leaves several grasping in the air cheated by the
promises that produced a different reality. The desert winds take away as much as they leave.

Construction Sites

Upon what once used to be farmlands in Virgaon is now a series of massive construction sites. Metal fences surround these construction sites. The fences are mounted with images of the buildings to come. The name and logo of developers festoon the perimeters of the property announcing their presence and advertising their product. Each gate is guarded with a small guardhouse and security personnel in uniforms. Tall tower cranes within the properties announce the commencement of construction in some. Steel bars and concrete columns peek out from behind the fences in others. You see multiple buildings rise from more advanced sites. They stand bare bones with their slabs and columns exposed to the elements. Other properties are less conspicuous with barbed-wire fences marking their territories. Farmers still farm in them awaiting the commencement of construction. Occasionally migrant herd eds, who move cattle across the state, will set up overnight camp in barren plots.

Webuild developers are building in Virgaon on a giant, ten-hectare plot. I watch one of their architects work on building plans (Figure 2.8). A flat screen computer is mounted at his workstation. The screen is dark black. Red, blue, green, and yellow neon lines crisscross the screen, nesting into each other in L-shaped outlines. A row of buttons line-up on the right-hand-side of the computer screen, their function indicated by a series

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Developers envelop all their fences with computer-generated images of to be built buildings, their interior spaces, and their recreational areas. See Brosius (2014) for a greater discussion of these images.
of icons: curves, straight lines, fillet, angle, circle, rectangle, and arch. The architect zooms in and out focusing on a micro-detail of a wall in plan and then zooms back out as he pastes the micro detail into a number of sites along the wall. Selecting all, he mirrors the entire building and two buildings are born. The building grows and multiplies through the technologies on the screen. A new relationship to drawings emerges, as individuals zoom into areas and then zoom out to see the whole, work on drawings together, and replicate and move elements across buildings and sites, the very nature and shape of buildings changes in response.

The introduction of digital technology into the Indian construction sector allowed for the speed of drawings and construction to increase rapidly. This occurred through the ability to quickly create and transmit them. “Before we had to hand deliver drawings to site. Now if I need a correction I just call and they send it via email” Neel, a site architect explains to me. He adds, “Technology has made new kinds of designs possible. Before we were limited by what we could draw—now look at all the forms.” Digital drawings also enabled new collaborations and expanded the geographic reach of teams:

Before you were restricted to working within your city limits in order to get best pool of services within capable distance. But now for example we are doing a project … in Manali, the lead architects are BHB based out of the US, they have a coordinating architect based out of Bangalore, the services consultant based out of Delhi, the project is in Manali, we are based in Delhi. But by virtue of the fact that we can reach out to a larger pool of talent both on the creative and services side, I think it is a sea change.

53 New software opened the possibility of various shapes and forms for architecture. Architects begin to work in fluid forms and strange shapes, within the Indian context these forms are highly regulated by governmental norms as well as financial constraints (Dharia Forthcoming).
Drawings now zoom across the Internet and shuffle between various parties. Consultants, engineers, and contractors comment and reshape them. They move back and forth from site to office as construction activity commences.

There are several stages and kinds of drawings. Conceptual design drawings are the first. Placed on a site plan of the proposed property and pitched to the client through a series of three-dimensional, rendered images which often make their way onto promotional brochures and posters. A set of municipal drawings is made on the basis of these and is circulated through government offices for permission. Next, come the design development drawings where each building on the site is carefully detailed out. It is here that sizes of rooms, heights, and other spatial requirements are calculated, the functions of the rooms fixed, and the design imaginaries of the architects detailed. These development drawings move to the structural consultants who calculate where and how building loads will transfer, the kinds of structural elements, and their sizes. Plans for the structural work are made. Architects redraw building plans according to the specified structural plan and send the drawings to various service consultants. Each consultant supplies information and drawings which the architects coordinates and compiles, to ensure that there is no conflict as well as to ensure the requirements are met within each construction phase.
As I speak with the service consultant, his staff details the electrical conduits and wires within the structure. They calculate the size of the generator and the mains that the electrical system for the building will require. The architects will check that the room allotted for the generator and the mains is the right size and position for the building. As the floors and walls are cast they will have to design the right duct sizes, not only for the electrical conduits, but also for the plumbing, air-conditioning, and information technology conduits as well. As the slabs are cast, electric conduits will be laid in them and outlets will be left open. These are marked in construction drawings as well (Figure 2.9).

The processes of construction involves several parties: service consultants, structural engineers, landscape architects, clients, architects, on-site teams, civil work contractors, special work contractors, service contractors, and master builders. Every
stage and processes has a fixed set of drawings that are produced by collaborations between them.

In reality there is no fixed path that the production of drawings follows. They ricochet back and forth with the whims and fancies of clients, surprises on site, ineffectiveness of various parties, and errors. An architect describes how a client decided to change the function of the building whilst it was being constructed. “All the plans had to be redrawn and everything recalculated. It was a nightmare.” Another describes discovering an incorrect site plan after their design development phase. “Half our buildings were in water [the location of a pond was marked incorrectly]—we had to redesign everything.”

As brokers like Narendra trade and flip land, developers try to acquire and consolidate property. Plot lines shift with political collaborations and site drawings are at their mercy. The lines of building are erased and redrawn with government permissions, changing markets, demands of developers, lack of consumers, skills of contractors, penny pinching of builders, and other constraints. These whims, fancies, politics, and dramas “transform the projects in such a significant way that you have no idea how it came about.” Lines move from person to person warping, wefting, bending, and breaking until you cannot recognize them any more. Becoming, as the consultant describes: “Just like the game of Chinese whispers.” What was once drawn is not what will be built. The line, like the initial utterance in a childhood game, in the processes of construction, unfolds into a reality far different from is original.
As the construction industry formalizes the emphasis on drawings increases.

Construction through on site supervision and guidance takes place less and less in formal projects and is replaced by a strong reliance on drawings.

You know *aaj kal* (these days) these young architects in offices—they do not think—they just keep producing drawings one after the other. No one takes accountability. Only the people who do the checking in the end—end up taking accountability…. the clients are only interested in getting stacks of drawings—you know *4” ka set chaihye* (they want 4 inch sets of drawings) … He (the client) is like—*yeh sab accha hai lekin thappi bhi de do* (this is all good but also give me a stack). So I printed out the drawings on 200 gsm. [thick card paper] and gave it to him. They want 4”, 2.5” reports that is all.

Drawings become construction industry currency. Protecting those who are held responsible. They are drawn and redrawn and tiny changes are made on them and recorded like a good bureaucratic practice. Contractors often play an important role in these changes, arguing when things cannot be done or by insisting on more money for changes. Changes in drawings, timely delivery of drawings, accuracy of drawings, and adhering to the drawings are the site of many a battle. An agitated site engineer rattles off to me:

These two girls! The work has stopped at site and their drawings are just not finishing up! … The drawings have so many mistakes. Shreelal shows them the mistakes, because he is a nice contractor. If I were the contractor instead of him, I would just go ahead and construct as per drawings. Then I would see what they would do! They are the type to suck the blood out of contractors. This design here, add bamboo there. Increasing costs everywhere. Because this takes a lot more time no?

Drawings serve as the material manifestation of instructions, orders, and building specifications. They encode the material qualities and spatiality of the buildings to be

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54 See Hull (2014) for discussion on Weberian authority and files (also explained on page 109).
built. They are stamped with instructions: ‘for construction’, ‘not for construction’, ‘revision number xx’, ‘service plan’. A plethora of dimensions, labels, details of materials to be used, quality and quantity of materials, service conduits, grid lines, and other information are etched onto them. The plans generally in a large paper format are neatly folded in an accordion like manner. Key individuals at site will be seen clutching these to their chests.

Alibhai is one such individual. He is a civil engineer in charge of ‘lay-outing’ on site. Along with Veer, a charismatic young mason, he acts as the first wave of people on site marking off the space for columns and walls, placing what is known as a ‘starter’ upon which all columns, walls, elevator shafts and floor plates will be built. The two strike a distinct team. Alibhai is slim and always seems to have a slight hunch. It is as though he is constantly pouring over a drawing. He is from the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh where his two children and wife live in their village home with his parents. Whenever I meet him he quizzes me on geometry and chuckles to himself when I cannot answer it. He and Veer stand in the harsh heat the entire day marking out the architect’s drawing. He tells me his secret to not getting sunstroke is a medication from a local Ayurveda clinic. He encourages me to try it.

Of all the masons on site Veer is the most charismatic. He charms women and men alike as he strolls through the site in a macho way. “I saw you stealthily eating that mango hun. Behind over there hun. Don’t lie hun,” he teases a woman laborer and she hides her face and giggles. Another time he grabs my voice recorder and heads to his contractor. “Yes, yes, tell us how do you do shuttering for a footing?” he asks him holding up the voice recorder and chuckling.
Alibhai and Veer’s conversations are usually a series of numbers and the two of them pour over the plans at intervals. Alibhai carries a calculator in his hand and Veer a *khurni*, an almond-shaped scraper used to mix concrete. Alibhai opens up the plan and Veer stares at it. The two of them point at numbers rushing to calculate angles and lengths from the existing markers on site. Veer stands at a distance holding a white pole. Alibhai looks through the Total Station machine asking him to move a little left and a little more until he get the right angles. Veer draws an x at the point. As Alibhai calls out numbers Veer runs a tape across the concrete floor and draws a white line along it with lime. He marks the measurement four point seven five meters along the line. He then moves to another column and waits for bhai’s calculations.

I am in charge of the right position of the building. Layout means drawing marks. We make marks. The drawing and the measurements in it, that drawing is marked on the ground, on a plane, either using total station, or tape, or red string, [We] have to keep a watch.

Alibhai and Veer are a team but Alibhai is the educated, civil engineer with a degree in surveying. Veer occupies the highest ranks of masons, the layout mason on site is known to be the most well paid but also the most intelligent and trusted. A layout mason’s daily access to and interaction with drawings enables him to eventually master deciphering them.

“It is the construction industry’ dirty little secret –most laborers are illiterate – can they read your drawings? Drawings are just to cover your butt?” An irate foreign architect lashes out at the construction industry at a conference. He is right, to be able to read a drawing you need to be able to read English, and most laborers can barely read Hindi. The gap between offices and constructions sites is a social divide. It is through this
gap that lines and drawings leap in giant acts of faith; where the Chinese whispers distort in the gaggle of languages that forms society in India.

On site teaching a laborer how to read drawings is giving them a leg up into contracting work and a better future. Veer comes from a family of laborers but he openly says he is tired of masonry work. He would love to quit the industry and open a shop. Veer’s dream is unlikely to occur as construction work often traps workers into construction for life. Deciphering drawings with Alibhai, however, is very likely to take Veer into small-scale contracting work and the ability to lead his own team.

Chinese whispers of building lines often unfold strangely onto the ground. The lines so clear and precise on a computer screen are shaky and unsteady as they lie on the ground. The layout for the building we stand in front off went horribly wrong. The entire building is tilted towards its south side. It is not in plumb and the columns are not exactly over each other. The windows cannot hang upon them. The entire architect’s office is livid. The drawing was built-up wrong. Only time will tell how Veer and Alibhai’s shaky efforts unfold.

The Chinese whispers of drawing production remind us of the sociality of drawings. The groups they move through and the people they bind together. These lines stoke anger and fear, regret and responsibility, money and mobility. They promise better futures for those who master them and anger against those who fall between them. They are the currency of the industry that marks the value of individuals. It is however their very ephemerality and transmutability that makes them profoundly social. The interpretive gaps that lines create work class, education, and power inequalities and
hierarchies. Lines connect individuals and through their movement from paper to planes intertwine the destinies of several.

The Webuild construction site has three separate areas: a large excavated pit where the basement of the entire complex will rest, an almost-completed building that forms the first phase of the project, and a tower block currently under construction. Groups of contractors and laborers swarm across the site working on particular tasks. Although in apparent disarray the construction site has demarcated zones and tasks. Floor plates, staircases, basements pits, shafts, towers, roofs form the geography of the construction site. Everyday you receive orders: so and so and his team will work on x task on the third floor plate in tower A. Where is XYZ? He is on the roof of building E. Paths around the site close and open as walls and scaffolding go up, cement hardens, and pits are dug. The heat of steel bars radiates certain areas and the coolness of water-cured concrete humidifies others.

I meet Bittuji on the terrace of phase I 55. He carefully lays China Mosaic on the terrace floor in a pattern set by the architects. He takes a rejected ceramic tile. Breaks it with a plier with a swift beat in the center of the tile and shatters it into shards. He arranges these on thin slurry of cement. He makes sure that the gaps between tiles are kept to minimum. A sea of mosaic unfolds as he works. His thumb and index finger are covered with plastic fingers cut from a yellow glove. The yellow fingers prevent the sharp edges of the tile from cutting his fingers. He clips a tile from time to time to match the edges with the shards laid on the ground. I watch him as he adds specks of yellow every few centimeters. They feel like speckles of sunlight in the white mosaic.

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55 I met Bittuji on the smaller site, but draw him into this narrative to demonstrate the power of lines. All other details remain the same.
I awkwardly sit beside Bittuji to learn how tiling works. Bittuji is a long-term migrant to NCR. He came here almost twelve years ago and lives in a slum on the outskirts of New Delhi. His wife moved in with him after they got married but they do not have any children. On days when he is not around his companions tell me it is because he takes his wife to the doctor. A large amount of his income is spent on doctor’s visits to diagnose the cause of their infertility. The rest he is saving up for a house.

As he lays mosaic Bittuji likes to talk about his village. As we talk, the white spaces of the tile fill with the landscapes of his home: the fields with water pumps that pump water into them, the eighteen acres of land they used to own, the pond where he once saw a ghost and the routes he used to move down when he was a boy.

One day he tells me that he will go home in March. This time he wants to stay longer. He wants to build a permanent home in place of a more temporary structure that is his village home. He takes his khurni and scrapes at the cement-sand mixture upon which he rests his tiles. He draws a rectangle. He explains the plan of the house to me. This is the plot. He draws another rectangle. There is a courtyard (aangan). There is a kitchen at the back. I will make two rooms. He draws a square in one corner and two rectangular rooms facing it. He is going to make it of brick, cement, and steel. I ask him how he knows how to bind steel.

I learnt by staying here. What is he doing? How is he doing it? I understood a little then I would go and ask the doer. If the mason is nice then he will tell me this is why we do this. Some do not want to tell. Then I just look from afar and I learn like that. This is the way the plinth gets done, then the steel, [and] then the roof.

Bittuji confirms what other masons on site have already told me. He tells me his wife and he are having trouble conceiving. He keeps taking leave to go see the doctor
with her. Meanwhile he wants to finish the house. As we sit, an architect comes in and screams. “Who told you to put yellow? Take out all the yellow. I am not paying you to use your mind.” Bittuji hastens to remove the yellow. He pours cement slurry across the diagram he drew. Gradually covering it with broken tile (Figure 2.9).

Bittuji reminds us that plans do not only occupy and circulate in the realm of the professional but they seep deeply into people’s life. They empower individuals with new tasks and visions. Drawings come to inhabit impromptu sketches of plot sizes and gnarled visions of future homes. They infiltrate clumsily into the everyday. There are drawings made on walls and hurriedly scribbled on notepad paper. Quick sketches of the spaces and sites which we hope to occupy and build. Some, like Bittuji’s sketch in the slurry, are quickly erased, but others linger and emerge through the process of time. Drawings for the future, drawing into the future, drawings are often plans for a better life.

Figure 2.9: Sketches of home in the sand by Malda Laborer. Photograph by author.
Drawing Dreams on Shifting Sands

Neelkanth Sir and I continue our pursuit of master plans. We hunt for the older-master plans of Gurgaon. I tell him I do not have the 1991 and 2001 plans and he immediately decides to rectify the situation. He and I head to the Town and Country Planning Office to look for them. As we walk into the drawing division, a woman greets Sir. She is a junior of his. Sir in his blunt, sarcastic style quips sardonically.

Oh, You are here now.
Yes sir, I am posted here now—in the drawing wing.
OK—That is good.

A bunch of men come up and greet him. “Namaste Sir, how are you?” They touch his feet lightly. Only half-bending. “Is Mr. Chowdhary here?” “No Sir he is on holiday.” Sir turns to the woman. “OK you are in the drawing department, you give us some drawings.” The woman looks mortified. “Sir, come, come please sit down.” Neelkanth Sir and I walk towards the room she points towards. We enter an empty conference room and turn around to speak with her. When we turn around we realize that all the planners are gone. He goes back into the earlier room and returns. “They all disappeared!” He laughs. We go back looking for the planners, and find them sitting in a different room. We ask them if they have the master plans. They hem and haw. “We are also looking for them sir. We have put in a request at the headquarters in Chandigarh but no one can find them.” The plans are gone.

56 The destruction of plans and documents related to urban planning practices is common in Government of India offices as modes through which proof of corruption and responsibility of action may be erased. A
As we step outside, the aandhi rages in Gurgaon. The atmosphere turns murky. We cover our faces. Sand moves quickly onto pavements and properties blurring the lines demarcated by the built environment, shifting, erasing, and evaporating the boundaries we try so hard to define.

In NCR plans merge into the everyday, transform into diagrams and sketches that subvert, erase, and transform drawings. Through this they simultaneously expose the fallacy of the document but also reiterate its importance in the governance and production of our everyday lives. Drawings contain power but this power can be captured and used in a myriad ways. Drawings are crafted artifacts, endowed with meaning and dripping with affective demands its users, makers, and readers bestow upon it. The undoing of plans and the unmaking of plans mirrors the modes through which we make and unmake our lives in the struggle to survive at the edge of the desert. The bending lines of plans and their descent into our everyday lives speak of power and emotions of urbanizing India today.

In his study of Pakistani plans and documents of urban production, Matthew Hull speaks of plans as bureaucratic documents (Hull 2014:21). He argues that they form a range of “semiotic technologies” (2014:27). For him, “Semiotic technologies are material means for producing, interpreting, and regulating significance for particular ends” (2014:27). Documents and related artifacts such as files, he argues, do shape relations, but also their own functions and deployments (2014:27). Their circulation allows for a “multiparty interaction” that distributes ideology and agency across several functionaries (2014:27). The plans, drawings, and diagrams I depict work to transform the lives of similar case is when an “accidental” fire burnt down the office of the urban planning department of the Maharashtra state government in Mumbai.
those whose worlds they occupy and through that are transformed themselves, but their states move from material to immaterial, from imagined and articulated, to built and destroyed. It is the very play of this immateriality and materiality that marks the affective relations that lines of power draw.

Like the restless desert winds that sift the sand of Gurgaon, the lines of drawings are both material and ephemeral. While the permanence of paper and record belie against this ability of lines to transform, I have depicted the modes through which they evaporate off this paper and mutate into new forms. The sociality through which these lines are drawn makes them inherently ephemeral and transmutable. This ephemerality however is deeply political. It is the very mystery surrounding these lines the opacity of environment and the murkiness of knowledge of its transformation that produce the politics of ephemerality. Ephemerality is produced in order to blur the political workings of diagrams. It is the cloak that forms a coded knowledge that several in the industry learn to share and manipulate. Through this political intentionality ephemerality becomes a powerful affective tool. In its processes of mystification it raises hopes and aspiration. These buffet against each other, often crashing and colliding, in the crazy transformative winds of Gurgaon. Lines in Gurgaon may be mirage-like, but the political effects and affects they encode remain.
III

‘All that is solid melts into thin air’: the twinned character of money and the splintering of value in NCR.

“You know where there is black money, there will always be rats.”

Mr. Kumar, a civil engineer working in India’s National Capital Region (NCR), describes the illegal circulation of money in NCR’s construction industry to me as we drive home together one evening. He pauses for dramatic effect and grins his charismatic wide smile: “they are attracted to the smell of the notes”. My eyes widen. The at-once grimy and pungent smell of rupee notes wafts up to me from my childhood. I get a filmic flashback of villains exchanging thick wads of cash in unfinished, cement towers. The figure of the rat—the underground creature of grime and filth—metaphorically merges with individuals who chase black money: the human-rats who love to wallow in the filth that black money perpetuates.

Black money, in the Indian context, refers to illegal reserves of cash exchanged and accumulated to avoid taxation. Black money is also money gotten through illegal means or bribes. In 2012 anti-corruption protests across India brought concerns over black money to the national forefront. Activists, such as Arun Kejriwal, drew lists of black money accrued by prominent politicians and accused them of bleeding the common man dry. Mass public protests ensued. Speculation about the amount of money the country hoards ran rampant and the government ordered an investigation into illegal reserves held by Indians in India and abroad. A report published by Economic Weekly in
December that year claimed that India has the fifth-largest reserve of black money in the world (Indian Express 2013). The reserve, it is believed, amounts to a shocking 75% of its GDP (Mehra 2014). Newspapers claimed that Indians hoarded 1.4 trillion dollars of unaccounted cash in Swiss bank accounts (Ministry of Finance 2012). My fieldwork in the National Capital Region’s (NCR) real estate and construction industry—an industry strongly linked to the production and circulation of black money in India and abroad—occurred in the time of this corruption outcry.

Money, both black and white (as money involved in formal transactions is known), forms the structuring principle of everyday life in NCR’s real estate and construction industry. Money and its networks of circulation govern its daily functioning. Money in all its lightness moves through credit cards and bank checks. Its only material register can be the changing numbers of the stock exchange or the documents that encode the moments of transaction. It can be both ephemeral and weighted. In its heaviness money emerges in wads of cash as they circulate with manic speed across the city’s newly constructed highways. They hide in suitcases and car trunks. Money dangles from bus windows and sneaks under officials’ desks, moves from homes to offices and from offices to homes. It percolates across state and national boundaries but then returns to its locale again. I attempt to trace this mystical, mirage-like movement of money in the real estate sector in NCR, the material states it occupies and moves between, and what the transformations in states emphasizes about the transformation in value. I move, as money inevitably does, beyond NCR’s boundaries and back.
Two circuits of cash for one Gurgaon

Mr. Kumar and I are driving home from his worksite—Whistling Wood—a 1.6 million square feet\textsuperscript{57} large, commercial construction project on the outskirts of Gurgaon, a city-suburb in NCR. We sit in his generic, white car and join masses of upper-middle and middle-class Indians as they wind their way back home after a long day’s work. The Sai Baba\textsuperscript{58} idol on the dashboard watches over us benevolently as Mr. Kumar swerves in a cowboy-esque fashion through the evening’s aggressive traffic. We drive out of the gridded, neatly plotted industrial sector he works in and onto rough roads surrounded by deliciously golden-brown fields. It is harvesting season. Stacks of wheat glint like gold on the dark-brown, alluvial soil of the agricultural landscape that surrounds us. A sepia-tinted geography of fields, thorny bushes, and occasional cattle unfolds before me. Fertile farmlands sprawl in every direction and extend into the distance. I stare happily into the large expanses. Arrays of skyscrapers occasionally block my gaze and remind me that this is a fast-urbanizing area. They emerge in clusters at regular intervals amongst the fields. The skyscrapers sit incongruously within this agricultural-scape. Their exposed, metal insides mark varied stages of construction. I see signs for new residential communities scattered around a lone road that stretches into nowhere. There are no buildings, only flags acting as placeholders for new urban areas to come.

India’s debt crisis in the late eighties resulted in its World Bank-led stage-wise, structural adjustments in 1991-2. This led to the opening of the Indian economy\textsuperscript{59} and is

\textsuperscript{57} This area is the total built up area after construction.
\textsuperscript{58} Sai Baba is a popular saint in India.
\textsuperscript{59} Key factors in this structural readjustments was an emphasis on imports for luxury goods and machines, the deregulation of most industries except for nine essential ones such as energy, and the enabling of foreign investment (Chandrasekhar, Ghosh: 2006)
understood as the founding moment of neoliberal economic growth for India. When Mr. Kumar began work in the late eighties Gurgaon was a “jungle”. In the nineties, he describes, bungalow plots and the first housing colonies appeared in Gurgaon. Land prices in Gurgaon began to gradually escalate as New Delhi’s strictly controlled development drove people looking for homes out of the city. New Delhi’s existing universities, governmental offices, and cultural centers drew masses from North India into the region. In the years between 2001-2012 over three hundred multi-national companies opened up shop in Gurgaon (Gurgaon Workers News 2013). As professionals and students populated the area the ability to own and rent became a lucrative enterprise. My landlord for example, owned eight different apartments across the area and rented them to students, professionals, and expats. A property ownership mania had gripped the urban-middle class in Delhi. “The returns on land investment in India are incredible … why would we invest in anything else?”

As I moved through apartments, offices, farms, and fields of Gurgaon I was asked if I would like to buy property. Mr. Kumar and other well-wishers advised me to invest. “Place your money in property and it will bear fruit of gold.” An obsession with land came to outweigh a historic Indian obsession with gold. India, the world’s largest consumer of gold (Sreenivasan 2012) newspaper reports declared, shouts a new slogan, “buy land instead” (Seth 2013). Individuals within the region were responding to this battle call. The professor I consulted at the local university invested in a small shop in Gurgaon from which she generated rental income. Farmers who sold their land to developers bought land further down. And as an advertisement at a new housing project declared “investors include … endowment fund of a top US University”. Property prices
in Gurgaon quadrupled in seven years\textsuperscript{60} (Donthi 2014). There were stars in everyone’s eyes.

It was not governmental initiative but a privatized real estate developer lobby that spearheaded this speculation. Mr. Kumar is a site engineer employed at one such real estate developer in NCR — Webuild Developers\textsuperscript{61}. He manages their Whistling Woods construction site. He talks to me about how people on construction sites are tougher than office folk. “They work nine to five, we work eight to seven. We stand all day in the heat and dust. They sit in air-conditioned offices. They would not survive here one day.”

The head office of Webuild Developers encodes this atmospheric difference. It is located in a business-district full of glass and steel towers built to house and attract multinational firms. As I walk though the marbled lobby with a dark, wooden desk and a glass-lined atrium I am confused about which country I am in. A uniformed man behind me silently wipes the NCR mud that I tracked in with my dusty sandals. The muddy memory of the construction site is erased under his mop. The heat of the site dissipates under the cool of the marble that surrounds me. Mr. Reddy, the Chief Financial Officer of Webuild, awaits my arrival in his air-conditioned office replete with tasteful art on the walls. Mr. Reddy is a light-eyed, slightly balding man. He cuts an elegant and distinguished character in seeming opposition to the tirade he launches on the conservatism of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The RBI, according to him, is the “jailor” of India’s growth potential. His primary grouse is the blanket ban on loans to fund the purchase of land.

\textsuperscript{60}“On the back of this speculation, the cost of residential property has tripled or quadrupled. For example, the high-end DLF Icon went from Rs. 2,800 per square foot in 2005 to Rs. 15,000 per square foot in January 2012; a more affordable project, Orchid Petals, went from Rs. 1,800 per square foot to Rs. 8,750. The cost of developable land in Gurgaon also skyrocketed over the past decade, from Rs. 14,000 per square yard to Rs. 80,000” (Donthi 2014).

\textsuperscript{61}Name of company is changed to protect identity.
The banks don’t actually fund land. Now the basic logic being that it will lead to speculation. A lot of people with money, chasing few pieces of land, and then there is the fear that inflation. Now what that does is because there is no formal access to land finance that people resort to all informal finance.

The Reserve Bank Of India, India’s financial regulator and watchdog has a historically stringent stance on land.\(^{62}\) Developers describe it as an “overly bureaucratic organization” and blame it for “inhibiting the country’s growth potential”. “The RBI only acts retroactively”, explained the CFO to me. I reminded him that the cautious ways of the RBI were largely credited for the fact that the Indian real estate market did not collapse in 2008 when the US economy crashed. He argues back at me unconvinced “but where there are genuine requirements—I think the banks should actually make the decision. They should have some kind of safeguards.”

Developers in NCR multiplied, as real estate became a lucrative industry. What felt like everyone was looking for an opportunity to acquire land, build something, and flip it. But several needed to buy land. The RBI stood between developers and their profits. Solutions arose quickly. Formal and informal strategies to buy land were set up. The formal path involved establishing a joint venture between the landowner and developer allowing the landowner a defined share of profits. Some developers paid landowners a token amount with the promise of a tiered payment structure. This strategy, Mr. Reddy tells me, is seen as unfair to the developer. “We do all the work in developing, the farmer is just sitting on the land, why should they benefit?”

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\(^{62}\) As Sassen writes “global economic activities are not hyper mobile and are, indeed deeply embedded in place” (Sassen 2001:31). This is an example where financial processes are governed by the territoriality they rest in. “Place and work process” thus becomes integral “in the analysis of economic globalization” (Sassen 2001:31)
Developers attempt to raise capital to pay off farmers at the outset of the project in order to maximize their profit. Here informal alliances emerge. Large-scale developers often began their empires in black money heavy industries such as cement or alcohol. They moved their money into land to launder and stabilize it. Individuals with large amounts of black money from other sources including jewelers, tradesmen, and industrial barons began to fund small-scale developers. Politicians, with banks of black money from bribes and control of land-use regulation, became key financers of real estate in their respective regions.

These strategies, Mr. Reddy explains, have material effects. The high rates of interest, the pressure to maximize the profits from the land, and the lack of bank loans are cited as reasons why affordable housing is hard to make. Developers shift to the “luxury housing” segment to maximize profit. This pushes those who cannot afford to buy homes into the informal settlements or rental cycles. This in turn spurs property for the sake of investment and gives rise to speculative construction.

The urban development of Gurgaon resonates with this narrative of financialization of land. The history of urban development in the region is a history of piecemeal acquisition and purchase of farmland from a number of villages and the development of these farmlands into neighborhoods and gated communities. The shapes of gated communities emerge from the plotlines of farms. The original village settlements, homes of farmers, guarded by a no-development regulation, still remain nestled betwixt these mega-structures. The villages lie outside the jurisdiction of the city government and are governed by local village governments. Makeshift three to four storey homes cluster

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63 Financialization of land is embedded in a set of economic practices that move from industry and agriculture to speculative dealings in land.
amidst narrow lanes and flowing sewage in these “heterotopias” (Foucault 1984). These spaces become the zones where people and processes excluded from the city come to rest. Cranes and construction equipment surround the ramshackle villages and build a middle-class city space around them.

All this construction activity has links to black money and the informal financial sector:

Typically banks have margins: you need to put in so much before we will release our finances. Typically the requirement is 40% … at any stage the bearer’s folder should not be more than 60%. … But they include customer money in that 40%... Unfortunately if the customers don’t come forward, then I will have to go to the moneylenders, the informal sector. That becomes the issue. … The rates of interest are pretty high. I pay 14.5 percent. … The market rate of borrowing if I go to a moneylender is as high as 24%, but you are really desperate you pay as high as 36%. Most of the large developers are, have, financing from politicians. One developer is associated with X politicians. There are people like XXX they say that he’s got Dubai money64. So there are these alliances. That money may not be clean money, but it actually serves the purpose, because otherwise these guys cannot finance anything at the scale at which they are doing.

There is logic behind the high rate of black money invested in real estate. India’s hoarding of cash demands the growth of real estate. The amount of money required can only be matched, as Mr. Reddy argues, by illegal reserves. White money, he argues, cannot meet its demands.

The financial ledgers, the tabulated columns, the numbers on them, mark a false promise. The lithe numbers and cumulated papers hide more than they display. This lightness masks great weight. Land transaction in Gurgaon demands the necessity of

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64 By Dubai money he is referring to select mafia members who control Indian mafia circuits from Dubai. Their rise in power is linked to Mumbai’s property boom in the early nineties and drug trade between India and the Middle East.
black money. Actual land values do not match their official, on-paper values. Tracts of land are placed under select rates known as “circle rates” that are the official prices of land in those areas. These are the prices upon which property taxes are based. The actual land prices in Gurgaon are three times more than their official “circle rates”. Land is bought for almost three times its official price and the transaction for the unofficial component is in cash so that it does not appear on the books. Individuals with extra black money thus invest in property consolidating their cash into land and property holdings. The myth of the unidirectional mass flow of money from the West to the developing world also stands questioned. Years of political bribery, money from drug and mafia wars, cash hoards from historic business households dealing only in cash find a new source to invest in. Money buries itself into the NCR soil drawing politicians, developers, and premier citizens into its web. Gurgaon exemplifies this web.

Two circuits of money emerge in Gurgaon, united at the hip. Both moving surreptitiously and creatively; transforming from on into the other in magical ways. The twinned arms of legality and illegality: one circulating invisible and quickly through the world’s circuits of finance. It balances in ledgers and moves through complex algorithms, through which it bends and balances from one sector into another, from one individuals account into another’s. The other, the weighty cash that binds with land, moves into suitcases and cars, and attaches its smell into your hands. These twins of white and black money drive each other in an endless pursuit for profit, switching in and out of their material states. Seemingly overnight they spin Gurgaon, the city of gold.
**City of Gold**

Vanderlint, who fancies that the prices of commodities in a country are determined by the quantity of gold and silver to be found in it, asks himself why Indian commodities are so cheap. Answer: Because the Hindus bury their money. From 1602 to 1734, he remarks, they buried 150 millions of pounds sterling of silver, which originally came from America to Europe. In the 10 years from 1856 to 1866, England exported to India and China £120,000,000 in silver, which had been received in exchange for Australian gold. Most of the silver exported to China makes its way to India. Marx

If it were once gold and silver, now it is black money that has seeped into the Gurgaon soil. There is a deep history of the relationship between black money and the development of urban Gurgaon. In the late 1970’s India’s first car manufacturing company Maruti-Suzuki established itself in Gurgaon and kick started the city’s rapid urban growth. The Indo-Japanese car plant arrived in Gurgaon owing to the close relationship between the Chief Minister of Haryana and the then minister in charge of urban areas, Sanjay Gandhi. Sanjay Gandhi was also the son of India’s prime minister: Indira Gandhi. When he died in 1984 she is rumored to have removed a watch from his hand engraved with number for the Swiss-bank account that held their black money. At that metaphorical founding moment, a relationship of dynastic politics, political and social nexuses, and untraceable movements of money came to be eternally linked with the growth of Gurgaon.

Privatized development followed the factory and housing complexes set up by Maruti-Suzuki. The Delhi Land and Finance Company (DLF) led the first wave of privatized development. In the late seventies it bought parcels of land from farmers who

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65 An informant in the field told me this story: the veracity of the statement is unknown.
were often paid in cash. The CEO of DLF is rumored to have met Sanjay Gandhi in a road accident where he convinced him to change a land ceiling act in Gurgaon allowing developers to accumulate large parcels of land to build on\textsuperscript{66}. The veracity of this meeting is argued about. Nevertheless greasing politicians’ palms accompanied large conversions of agricultural land as developers aggressively built further and further outwards each year. Myths about bribes and political alliances facilitating the acquisition and change of land use—from agricultural to residential and commercial land use—circulate in Gurgaon. It is an open secret that black money oiled transactions of urban development in Gurgaon, building it out in a haphazard way. The result was a patchwork, disjunctive urbanism.

Everyday at sunset Mr. Kumar and I drive past the fields into Gurgaon’s peculiar urbanscape on our way home. Our car passes a higgledy-piggledy mess of factories, shanties, urban farms, skyscrapers, and malls. We turn onto the National Highway Eight leading towards New Delhi. It is lined with alcohol stores (theka-sharab) and roadside food shacks. The shacks have strings of shiny neon lights to attract customers. A short cut to avoid traffic takes us through sleepy neighborhoods of two-storied bungalows; part kitschy and covered with a layer of dust. These humbler homes occupy the west of Gurgaon and surround the original town of Gurgaon with its small by-lanes. We drive past gated communities with large apartment blocks and parks also coated with dust. Industrial neighborhoods full of small-scale industries appear. Pockets of dirt, open gutters, and roadside shanties are omnipresent. We make our way back to the highway. Markets open onto the road with shops that sell a variety of industrial and building equipment. Looking down narrow alleys and I can see villages turned into slums and

\textsuperscript{66} This is a repeated statement that has made its way into academic work (Searle 2010). Planners do not confirm the changes in the land ceiling act that these accounts depict, so its veracity needs to be confirmed.
shanty towns hidden from the mind’s eye. The highway beckons with its strip malls topped by an enclave of swanky office blocks. I see the Mercedes sign glint to me in the now deeply purple sky. Brick-lined and yellow-painted government offices whiz by as the car picks up speed. All interspersed by large plots of vacant land.

Money invested into property in Gurgaon does a series of magic tricks. It appears, disappears, and reappears. It moves in and out of records, bends its way through the books of several make-believe companies, and limbos past credit and debit columns. These magical acts multiplied in 2005. This was the year that the Reserve Bank of India opened its real estate market to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This move allowed foreign investors to construct projects in collaboration with local companies. The years post 2005 saw a number of offshore, hedge funds investing in Indian real estate emerge in tax-free havens such as Singapore and Mauritius.

In September 2012, I talk with an investment banker who tells me that most of these hedge funds are composed of black money making its way back to India. “It is common knowledge that most of the foreign direct investment in real estate comes through hawala,” he states matter-of-factly. Hawala, a term originating from financial transactions of West African traders is the movement of money across countries without actually moving it. You hand a certain sum to a local agent in the country where you reside and your relatives are given money by the agent’s network in the country of your choice. In India, hawala is connected to the illegal smuggling of drugs and gold bricks among other activities. You want to transfer a million rupees to a hedge fund in Mauritius. You pay an agent the million rupees. He smuggles drugs across the border and gets paid a

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67 RBI Press note 2 dated 3rd March 2005 details the exact terms of this investment (RBI 2005).
million rupees at the other end. In an intricate series of transactions money turns into white gold, or gold bricks, and back again into cash and then melts into the comfort of a legitimized bank account making its way back to India where it is embedded into the land\textsuperscript{68}.

Money, whether black or white, moves along the similar pathways and is embedded in historic routes of trade and financial transfers. Mauritius and Singapore are connected to India through Indian trading communities who established themselves through longer Indian Ocean trade routes (Ho 2004). Dubai and Doha are also spaces geographically connected to the country through ancient trade routes, and in more recent history, smuggling and drug trade ties, and now building construction. The crash of the Middle-East real estate market saw developers such as Emaar mobilize along existing ties between countries. Today Emaar is one of the largest developers in Gurgaon. Companies and capital entered NCR through historic transnational, regional networks\textsuperscript{69}. These routes brought money both laundered and legal into India: black and white money move in the same circuits transferring in and out of states and States as they move.

The developer nexus works relentlessly to expand the boundaries of Gurgaon. Black money dominates. The construction industry and its hold on property demand, produce, and circulate black money. Bribes perpetuate its urban development. Black money is aggressively generated and land is flipped continuously. Black money is born from the soil and laundered back into the land. It buries into the land. Money earned from

\textsuperscript{68} This is not to say that property is the only site for money laundering in India: Bollywood and natural resource industries have historically been money laundering sites. What is interesting with respect to property is its connection to urban form and life as well as its effects on a large bank of urban citizens in comparison to other sites of money laundering.

\textsuperscript{69} See Engseng Ho (2004) for a detailed discussion on trade links between India, the Middle East, and South East Asia.
corrupt transactions is invested into Gurgaon and spurs its growth. Property becomes money and money becomes property. The city grows, spreads, and sprawls through black money.

Black money and the property industry are co-dependent. Without one the other would collapse. Simply put. If my apartment costs 30 lakh and I paid 20 white and 10 black. Tomorrow if I go to sell it in white I can only get the money on the 20 value not on the ten. Everyone who makes black invests it in the property market ... we cannot all afford Swiss bank accounts. Black money picked up by builders too needs to be invested into new places. It is all a continuous cycle, if Hazare 70 is successful and the Janlokpal successful too, if we begin to weed corruption out, and with it weed black money out, what becomes of the property market?

Black money comes to sediment in the soil of Gurgaon through the history of its development. It creates the solidity of the foundations upon which the city rose and continues to rise. The movement of black money into land and space creates a vicious circle of property development. Black money produces the built environment but also emerges through the processes of construction. Black money in Gurgaon builds an underground terrain71 of cash, an over ground material terrain, and a terrain of social and moral relationships through its circulation. I detail ways through which black money moves and the socialities it perpetuates.

As money in the form of cash, global, regional, and local capital, and gold circulates through the muddied and muddled streets of NCR it constructs socialities of its own. It builds its own hierarchies of power, emphasizes locale, and intertwines us within a strangely moral sphere of capitalist desire. I etch the social eddies that form around

70 Hazare is an anti-corruption activist demanding reforms in the Lokpal bill that established guidelines for a committee and complaints on corruption. Hazare proposed an alternate bill called the Janlokpal.
creative acts of exchanging and producing black money within the different stages of building construction. These lead to a distinct physical and emotional sense of locale.

**Building Gurgaon through black money**

The buying of land to build on is one of the first acts of building construction. Up to two-thirds of the land price is paid in cash. This serves to convert black money into a formal and fixed investment and embeds it into the soil. As the area develops owners flip property and it is often consolidated with specific developers. The location of rail, road corridors, and other forms of infrastructural development are linked to land prices. Developers often pay bribes to politicians and bureaucrats to change the location of infrastructural projects or enter into partnerships with them.

In 2012, one of the biggest current news scandals was the alleged land dealing linking Robert Vadra\(^{72}\), son-in-law of India’s political first family, to Gurgaon’s largest land developer. Activists claimed that Vadra made over 60 million dollars in 2012 alone through land deals in Gurgaon. They claimed that he received benefits from the largest property developer in India’s National Capital Region: Delhi Land and Finance Company. Newspapers reported that Vadra’s deals involved creating multiple construction and property development companies that exchanged and paid for fictitious services, flipping land, changing land uses, and obtaining ‘interest-free loans’ from real estate companies that were never repaid (e.g. Kaul 2012, Agarwal 2012). Political friendships and power are built through land deals and money laundering in Gurgaon. Nexuses of developers

\(^{72}\) This is the same family as Sanjay Gandhi reemphasizing the role of dynastic politics.
and politicians drive building construction. The power of privatized capital and the power of the state combine together through transactions of cash.\footnote{One might argue that Indian state here becomes a model of “etatization” (Ferguson 1990): where select state actors begin to act as privatized, corporate actors. Through this they act in their own interest rather than that of their official post.}

Circuits of black money draw several players, small to big, into their powerful movements. Ram, a young site supervisor, talks to me about his encounters with black money. He is young, ambitious, and bold. A savvy individual, Ram, comes from a powerful land-owning family in Uttar Pradesh. On site one day he is restless and preoccupied. I ask him what the matter is. The problem is with some land he bought on the outskirts of Gurgaon. The previous owner sold Ram the land directly but did not “consult” the local goon or ‘\textit{bhai}’ when he sold the land. The goon was incensed that he had not gotten a payment from the transaction of the land and began illegally leasing it to a local shopkeeper as revenge. Ram is worried as occupation of land eventually allows people a claim to it. He could not go to the police as they were good friends with the goon and there was no point in getting locked into a court case. He knew that the goon would make trouble for him in all kinds of ways if he did so. He asked the original owner to pay the goon. “It is not my problem,” he tells me. This weft and warp of power and money builds the fabric of NCR. Friends and foes are made and unmade. Social networks matter. Individuals struggle to find their own ground. Local power, alliances, will, and grounded knowledge control the ways in which capital touches the ground.

Almost everyone in construction is inextricably linked to circuits of black money. Money exchanges hands at all levels of staff for favors big and small. The process of building construction involves large amount of cash payments, made in order to evade service and other taxes. Material companies pay architects to recommend the materials.
they supply. Laborers pay bribes to get jobs and small contracts. Contractors bribe to secure larger contracts. They pay bribes to house workers, bribes to transport material, bribes to security to pilfer materials. Later they bribe site supervisors into overlooking inferior qualities of materials. Bribes are part of Gurgaon’s everyday; so much so that they are referred to as “suvidha sulkh” or facilitation tax\textsuperscript{74}.

In March 2013, I sit at a construction site and chat with a group of contractors over their experiences in building construction; they chuckle with great pride as they narrate ways in which they illegally made money:

Shreelal: On that site we made sure we got all our money’s worth. We brought 125 pieces of scaffolding and while going we took away 150. On that site it was ‘take as much as you want.’ Put a pot of clarified butter (euphemism for bribe) in front of the engineer and he would say ‘let me sign that’. He signed it. I have also taken things. I sent broken pipes to site and took away brand new ones.

Jai: Yes when we put up the steel meshes for scaffolding … we took away all new ones. We had provided bamboo ones and when we took them we took away steel ones: that too so long [he gestures] of three-three meters each.

Shreelal: “We put number two bricks [inferior quality]. They were not going to get passed. They had a material-testing lab. I went and asked them straight—how much do you want? He said 5000 rupees. I told him please adjust that to 100-200 rupees.

Jai: Yes, You sent me there—I had to give them 700 rupees out of my own pocket, only then he agreed.”

Shreelal: He approved 1.5 lakh bricks. He was one of our men. He said that he needed to reject at least half a truck (to make it look like he was doing his job). I said OK. He would send the truck back. I would go to the gate and put some money down (in front of the guard) and say the engineer signed this. The guard used to sign the release sheet (and take the truck in). “

Jai: (laughs) Once our truck went in—it never came out.

Shreelal and Jai’s bragging describes the pride through which contractors squeeze money and cut costs. Their conversation describes the tip of the iceberg of tactics of

\textsuperscript{74} Other commonly used terms for bribes include spending money (karcha paani), add weight (wajan), tea-coffee (chai pani), and sweets for my children (bacchon ki mithai). Each has a social register or a facilitation register.
manipulating and generating money in the process of building construction. They describe magical acts through which inferior quality real estate is constructed and the systematic and casual ways in which bribes and black money produce this inferior construction. It also demonstrates the nonchalance and matter-of-fact mannerisms that accompany the giving and taking of bribes.

As the bragging contractors described black money has a strong social register: you make friends as you give bribes. The people involved in illegal, financial transactions become “your people.” Black money transactions involve a great deal of trust, as there is no paperwork or legal structure to protect you. You do not see where your money goes, there are no receipts and no records—giving a bribe is an act of faith. It creates strong bonds, often violent, between the bribe givers and takers. These sites of exchange produce community, lines of trust, and accolades within the workspace.

As the project progresses systematic bribes are given to government officials within the 20-odd departments that need to sign off on a construction project from its start to finish. Often officials are bribed to overlook building violations and speed up paperwork. As a site supervisor Mr. Kumar circulates in and out of government offices. He is used to asking them how much they want and bargaining them down. Just last week, the inspector came to check standards for the building. As the site supervisor Mr. Kumar showed the inspector around. Later, I asked him how the meeting went?

They are asking for 12,00,000 rupees for the no-objection certificate so that we can continue work… they will only give the certificate if we meet the standards, of course. They do their job but they also want the money. I bargained them down to 1,00,000 but they cannot do it for any less. The money is going to their HOD [Head Of Department] too.

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75 The kind of inspector is deliberately obscured so as not to act as proof of departmental corruption in Gurgaon. The quote is also slightly altered to obscure the department.
Bribery and corruption also become a powerful of way conceptualizing and relating to the state. The state is understood through the register of being corrupt (Gupta 2012). Systems of bribery, amongst bureaucrats and government officials, are said to be hyper organized in Gurgaon. The bribe is evenly distributed across the ranks and a percentage designated for everyone from peon to politician. It is rumored that you never pay just one person but the entire hierarchy of permission-givers. For Mr. Kumar, these bribes act as facilitation fees, ways of getting work done faster and getting better service. Bribes serve as incentive to move your application up faster in an overloaded government system. But several other values emerge through transactions such as these as well, Maansinghji, an official in the town-planning department, articulates one.

I meet Maansinghji in Gurgaon’s Town and Country Planning Office (TCPO). Everyone in the department tells me that I should talk with him. “All the stories of the mafia… which everyone refuses to tell… he will tell you those stories…” They all laugh. Maansinghji almost runs into the office in his enthusiasm to talk to me. He is eager and excited and launches into a description of the corruption levels amongst the politicians. As I listen I draw him into telling me stories of his own life. Maansinghji speaks ardently and directly. He pauses comically for drama. I chuckle over things he says as I record his life history. He intersperses it with tales of corruption. Post the interview, as I turn to leave, we walk out of the office together and he turns to me:

You think corruption is wrong… corruption is not wrong. Look at this phone (he holds up a fancy smart phone). Where will all this come from? All these big-big people keep eating all the money and we should do nothing? All the money in this country has gone into the pockets of the rich—how will my children go anywhere in life? The children of lesser people, how will they move ahead in life? Through corruption.
The staff around us nods valiantly in agreement.

For individuals such as Maansinghji corruption is an equalizer of fortune. He recognizes the extreme disparity of economic growth in India and for him bribe-taking serves as a mechanism of social advancement and equalization. It does not have a negative connotation and is considered a right. What is evident in these interactions is the shift in the moral valence of corruption. It is no longer “bad” to be corrupt but is a basic right, an act of trust, a service fee, or an incentive to do your job well, and a means of class ascendancy. As the private sector around the TCPO promises a plush lifestyle, governmental employees believed that they have been left behind. Corruption and state apparatuses grew more aggressive in tandem with the real estate boom in Gurgaon.

In the final stages of construction, real estate brokers flip property for three to ten times the amount. Property buyers pay large amounts in cash to secure space. Mr. Kumar, a salaried employee for most of his life narrated to me the ways in which he created black money when he bought the apartment he lives in. He withdrew money everyday from an ATM machine for over three months to create three lakh rupees in cash. A large sum for the time it was bought in. A system of bribes accompanies the buying and registration process as well.

Black money does not circulate in the construction industry alone but moves in and out of this and other industries. A week before I leave New Delhi, a developer describes how developers are now investing in the power industry as a way of securing electricity for their properties. They are moving away from construction to the next big thing: natural resources and energy. They are taking their black money with them.
Black money moves between a variety of industries and knits them together to construct a constellation of black money networks. Ponty Chadha serves as an example of these networks. Known as the liquor baron of North India for his monopoly on alcohol outlets in the tri-state area, Ponty Chadha moved into property development in the early 2000s. In 2012 the basement of a mall he built is found lined with over twenty million dollars of cash in rupees (Hindustan Times 2012). The origins of this money are unknown. In October 2012 he and his brother shoot at each other over a dispute over their farmhouse property on the outskirts of Gurgaon. They both die in hospital and government officials who were present in the shoot-out abscond. The encounter is a harsh reminder of the violence and dangerous liaisons omnipresent in black money exchanges. Black money is not for the faint hearted.

The same week that Ponty Chadha and his brother killed each other; I was invited to visit the home and spiritual complex of a religious leader. I sit in a luxury SUV and we drive down the newly constructed Delhi-Agra highway, past the spanking new F1 racetrack and its accompanying housing complexes. Soon, I realize that I am sitting in a car with a planner, a civil engineer who builds factories for a major car industry, a well-known plumbing contractor who has deep ties with political parties, and a civil engineer who owns his own contracting company. All men in their late fifties and sixties, the latter three are disciples of the religious leader or ‘sarkar’ we are going to meet. When we arrive at the religious site the planner and I are taken to receive our blessings from the religious leader. We are here to give advice on the construction of a large-scale temple project that spans over 50 acres. It is entirely funded by the disciples. The plumbing contractor is instrumental in this land deal and will pay a large amount for the
construction of this temple complex. I am baffled at the scale and size of this giant temple in the middle of nowhere and amazed at the amounts of cash heaped by the disciples into its construction. This resonates with the rumors of vans full of cash and gold bricks that most major spiritual sites in India receive as donations (The Hindu 2014). In this case black money moves out of the capitalist sphere into the spiritual. The value of this exchange of black money is about building moral credit and washing away sins. It is about investing in and creating a larger spiritual community but also of building and locating it into the land. Spirituality places its calming hand onto the back of capital.

Black and white money conjoin, they spiral and flow together, and churn in and out of NCR’s land. Even the most professional of companies do not rest outside their circuit. An architect describes how the company he works for markets itself as a ‘clean company’ that deals in white transactions. The company prides itself in delivering a quality product and not cheating its buyers. It is well known that land in Gurgaon cannot be bought without black money and permissions to build are not given without bribes: I ask him how they handle that? The company, like several others, who try and run clean, “global” practices, subcontracts land acquisition and permissions to companies that call themselves “liaisoning agents”. The agents charge them a lump sum in ‘fees’ that are distributed in cash across the necessary individuals and offices. In similar ways they often “overpay” or ask their contracting companies to add fictitious work to be paid for into their monthly bills. The contracting company that deals a lot in cash (as it works with laborers without bank accounts) returns this overpayment in cash. Numbers become like mirages marking a practices that are erased and unspoken of. Terms such as liaising fee, licensing fee, labor fee, and other mysterious payment categories appear in budgets and
contracts, markers of money that will turn into cash and disappear down a chain of people. People feign blindness and not knowing becomes an important trope.

It is nearly impossible to trace the cycles and states of money as it moves from property to drugs to alcohol to doctored account books from politicians, to industrialists, to middlemen, and mafia. What can be spoken about and understood is the continuously shifting states it occupies, the solid forms it takes from land, to bills to heroin, gold, and alcohol, the ephemerally of its numerical and accounted side, and the circulation they produce across the world and back into India’s boundaries again. This cyclical movement has spurred investments speculation and driven the size and scale of NCR pushing its boundaries further and further, enhancing sprawl as it opens it borders to welcome black money coming home. Simultaneously, it acts as a site of social relations. Money moves along fraternal and patriarchal alliances. It deploys itself along familial and friendship networks but also serves to construct new ones. It cements friendships and consolidates ties. It allows social mobility and acts as a critique of political leadership. It even improves relations with God.

Black money is systemic to the real estate industry in Gurgaon. It grew with the city of Gurgaon and grew the city of Gurgaon. The circulation of money and its changing material states unites multiple geographies and individuals together. Money draws together a variety of industries and economies tying them to the politics of construction. Through its circuitous movement it creates locale, builds affluence, constructs hierarchies of power, and draws global and national economies into the urban development of Gurgaon. Through these circuits money creates a distinct material, moral, spiritual, and political terrain.
In Gurgaon the Janus character of money also creates specific forms of urban space and architecture. The circulation and consumption of black money propels property speculation and creates vast banks of empty apartments. It drives urban sprawl into areas where infrastructure is limited or entirely unplanned: no roads, no water, and no sewers. It sets up improperly designed and constructed buildings, which are built with inferior quality materials. Simultaneously, black money sets the codes for interaction, defines working practices, and builds friendships. It helps construct social relationships of the construction industry. It becomes the viscosity through which people are bound together. It creates friends, sends kids to college, and allows for upward mobility. It speeds up the processes of certain forms of development and impairs others. Money generates violence and coercive tactics and creates contested fields of ownership and morality. It builds differential set of ethics, creates material opulence, and generates unrest and anxiety. Money controls and settles into the spaces we occupy and whispers into our ears as we sleep at night. The secrets of money bind us all.

**The senoriums of circulation**

“Under the ideal measure of values there lurks the hard cash.”

Marx

The three contractors, after jostling over who swindled the most money from the last project they worked on, begin to tell me ghost stories. I am enthralled as they compete with each other to entertain me. Each regaling me with stories they know. The sun sets on the construction site and the only light is a naked bulb behind Shankarji. I see
outlines of trees and steel bars in the dimness of twilight and I am more than a little frightened as they narrate their tales:

Shankarji: there was this holy man in this village. He used to walk on water: on the Ganges. His home was by the water. People used to see him walking on water. It was like there was no water, but it was a road.
Shreelal: That is nothing. There was this man in our village. He went to the village temple and prayed for six years. If you saw him at night, you would see that his limbs are in different pieces, all apart, and hanging on the tree. If anyone saw him, they would faint.
Shankarji (continuing his story): That man, we could see his head and his hands, but his torso, we could never see that. Here (he points at his torso with his hands) there was only a cloth tied here. We used to see him on the shore of the Ganges.

There are several stories of ghosts narrated to me during my fieldwork on construction sites. The stories were never about an urban experience but inevitably always set in a rural background, an empty natural space, an isolated construction site, or a temple. What is striking amongst these narratives is that they all involve dismemberment or disembodiment. Experiences of ghosts, disconnected limbs, disassociated bodies are oft spoken of as markers of economic transitions and revealing of the anxiety of these transitions (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Moore 2005). For me, these stories have more of a metaphorical value and help connect the construction of urban space, the sensory experiences within NCR to the circuits of money that produce it.

Money is a key force behind the rapid urbanization of Gurgaon, NCR. The speed at which it circulates and the magical states it occupies metaphorically relate to the story of limbs appearing and disappearing. Just like the parts moving around the tree, money too appears in new configurations everyday. It is magical. At times solid and then, just
like that, it disappears into thin air. Black money manifests at times in parts, sometimes in the whole, changing places and spaces, to perpetuate urban sprawl.  

Similar to the bodies of holy men narrated to me urban environments of Gurgaon are never fully complete. There is always something missing. Vast tracts of empty space and unoccupied plots exist in the city like missing torsos of a body. There is empty space in between. More often than not it resembles random buildings dropped into a landscape like the holy man’s limbs on a tree. The urbanism that black money generates is in parts and radically missing its essential components. Gurgaon reads as incomplete: the city is dismembered and discombobulated.

If the social life of money, as a commodity, its ability to be moved into property, architecture, gold, or energy, articulates the “regimes of value” (Appadurai 1986) that money is embedded in, then black money enables the masking and discombobulating process of value. The twinning of black and white money ensures that there are a number of values ascribed to the same property: black market prices, circle rates, partial payments, bribes, and under the table money. The value of services and property splinters into a multiplicity of values aided by the workings of black money. The documented numerical paper value, stands as fallacy. Knowledge of the former is privileged and transient. Black money splits and disjoints value and mystifies it even further.

For anthropologists Nakassis and Searle value is not merely economic but is a heterogeneous concept (2013). Values, they argue, can be “economic, ritual, aesthetic,

[A]ccording to architect Fredrick R. Gurgaon will be completely rebuilt in a couple of years from now, or will become a ghost city. It is already ‘drowning’ in chaos, mostly due to the fact that Gurgaon consists mainly of privatized land, acquired by private developers such as DLF, one of the largest real estate developers in India. Unlike NOIDA, says Fredrick, Gurgaon has not been planned for a sustainable future. Instead it was put together haphazardly in a patchwork way, without an overall vision in profit-oriented manner. Investors and developers consciously banked on profits over a short time span, and promoted the vision of an exhaustive lifestyle for the elite” (Brosius 2010:55).
ethical” and come to be articulated to each other, enmeshed and entangled, and thereby
cought up” in the “transformations ushered in by liberalization” (2013:170). The
increased circulation of black money within NCR’s real estate and construction industry transforms emotional, economic, social, moral, and aesthetic values in NCR. As money buries into the soil and architecture of Gurgaon it generates values as disjunctive and
discomposited as the land.

The stories narrated to me evoke the veritable scramble on the parts of individuals to claim more and more within the spiraling transnational circuit of money. Disjunctive urban development gives rise to anxieties over survival. Moral and social values change as everyone struggles to advance. Relations are made and unmade, conceptions of spiritual and moral switch, power and violence works in mysterious ways. The changing moral and social terrains relate to the changing cityscapes. They are both reactions to forms of accumulation. They are both tied to the magic tricks of money: growing, under transition, piecemeal, disjointed, and incomplete.

I demonstrated how the twinned circulation of black and white money in Gurgaon produces a specific kind of environment that has its own distinct phenomenology. A system of valences of material environment, anxiety, opulence, and constellations of trust are constructed through the circulation of money. These are continuously made and unmade as money circulates. Aggressive desires for social mobility accompany aggressive spread of urban development both often failing in the goals they promised. This creates a space of gaps and ghosts. It creates terrains of disjunctive development. National, regional, and transnational flows of money have flowed through and seeped into the soil of Gurgaon sprouting a terrain of incomplete material environments, and
aspirational and turbulent emotional-scapes, a turbulent reality of morality and class struggle, and splintering of values emerges as individuals run unequal races in NCR.
IV

All this rhythm makes so much noise: Machines, men, and the aesthetic potentialities of speed

How fast does a Gurgaon grow?

The whistle to commence work on the Whistling Woods construction site blows at eight am. This simultaneously shrill and dull sound, sounds across the entire 10-acre construction site. The sound bounces through the different spaces of the project: the almost complete building block that forms the first phase, the second phase which is the tall tower at the tail end of the site, and the large pit just commencing construction that is the third phase of construction. Workers gather at the gate, registering their attendance, and gather instructions on their tasks for the day.

The diesel generators are turned on. The acidic, black fumes of diesel and the steady, steam-engine-like chuga chuga sound fills the construction site. Machines begin to switch on as workers get to their individual stations: the screech of the drill, the thumps of the concrete pump; the braking and reversing of hydraulic lifts as they drag and drop stones from spot to spot, and the gentle rumble of the cement mixer join the steady beats of the diesel generator. Their sounds encompass the spaces around us. The noise enters the concrete slabs and columns, seeps into the ground, and filters into our bodies. Land, body, and building move to the beats of this mechanical orchestra.
The beats on the Whistling Woods construction site resonate with the rhythms of a number of construction sites around it. The sounds of the mechanical beasts across numerous construction sites, in the vicinity, cascade into the atmosphere. The air saturates with their rhythms. Together the sounds mark the transformation of farms and wastelands into commercial office blocks and homes. They mark the retreat of the forest and upward and outward ascent of Gurgaon’s urban jungle. Farms and forests grow into factories and malls.

“When I first started working I was offered a job in Gurgaon. It was only jungle. I got so scared. I ran off.”

In 1992 Mr. Kumar began work as a civil engineer in India’s National Capital Region, (NCR). The town of Gurgaon was expanding into the snake and leopard filled kikar\(^77\) jungles that surrounded it. Workers trooped into the many construction sites sprouting in the region beating away snakes and excavating stones as they transformed the land from wilderness into homes. A few ran away afraid of the beasts, both real and supernatural, who grew upset and angry as their territory was stoked. Many stayed on building each sector of Gurgaon at a slow and steady pace. A metropolis appeared from the sleepy town at the edge of India’s capital city.

Twenty years later, the scenario is entirely different. Gurgaon development exceeded both public and private expectation. The population of the city increased by between 68-75 percent in the past two decades (Debroy and Bhandari 2009:23, Dhonti 2014), its land prices rose over almost four hundred percent in seven years (Dhonti 2014), and the footprint of the region quadrupled in four decades (Tauenbock 2008:78). In 2011

\(^{77}\) Kikar is a thorny tree of the acacia family. It is weed like, and forms the dominant vegetation of wilderness in the area.
NCR was the world’s fastest growing urban region (PRB 2011). Jim Yeardley, the New York Times’ India correspondent opened the paper’s India focus with a seductive description of Gurgaon’s growth:

“In this city that barely existed two decades ago, there are 26 shopping malls, seven golf courses and luxury shops selling Chanel and Louis Vuitton. Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs shimmer in automobile showrooms. Apartment towers are sprouting like concrete weeds, and a futuristic commercial hub called Cyber City houses many of the world’s most respected corporations. [Yeardley 2011]

Yeardley’s description of a booming Gurgaon appears at the tail end of a continuous discourse on India’s growth potential: “An India shining,” “an emerging India,” “cities sprouting,” “expanding,” “growing,” crawling, and climbing. I lived in NCR in 2012. Two decades after India’s neoliberal reforms. Two decades after my father locked us into our house for eleven days as ethnic violence spilled through the country and two decades after cable television and Coca Cola made their appearances in India. In these twenty years the face of Gurgaon has changed from pea fields my grandparents visited and the jungle that Mr. Kumar worked in to a thriving metropolis. Twenty years later as I study India’s fast growing industry (Springfield 2014), in India’s fastest growing urban region (PRB 2011), in the world’s fastest growing markets (Bellman 2015), I pause, for a minute or two, to think slowly of speed.

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78 1991/2 as I described in the introduction were years where structural readjustment opened the door for foreign investment in India as well as saw some of the bloodiest ethnic violence in India since partition.
India’s annual budget in every year since Independence earmarked a growing number of funds for infrastructural development. Part and parcel of the larger Nehruvian nationalist project the aim of this allotment was to build factories, railroads, hydroelectric projects, and industrialized agriculture that would propel India from developing to developed. India’s first prime minister—Nehru’s—industrializing mission led the establishment of major steel manufacturing plants in North India as well as the construction of the new capital of a divided Punjab. The number and scale of cement factories expanded as the young nation embarked on building dams and industries as well as cities. These growth sectors formed the primary attractors of mechanical equipment in the early years of Independence.

India’s green revolution in Punjab and Gurgaon’s home state Haryana took place in the 1970’s. A Ford Foundation aided program, the Green Revolution, targeted agricultural practices in the region and aimed to enhance food grain production. The program brought machines: tractors, earthmovers, and excavators to the region. J.C. Bromley (JCB) set up its largest manufacturing plant in Haryana in 1979 and brought excavators to the country. Bombay’s rapid urban growth in the early 1990’s demanded construction technologies that sped up work and increased the quality of architecture. The first commercial Ready Mix Concrete (RMC) plant opened there in 1994. In response, Bombay’s closest city, Pune, emerged as a major manufacturing hub for construction

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79 Annual economic surveys in the Union Budget of India steadily demanded an increase in the budget for infrastructural development and construction in the years between 2002 and 2011. The allocation went from 3.7 percent of the national GDP in 2002-3 to almost nine percent of the GDP in 2012 (Ministry of Finance 2002-2011).
related equipment. Within the field of public infrastructural construction, Prime Minister Vajpayee initiated a national highway-building project in 2001. This massive roadways project opened doorways for the import and manufacture of specialized road construction and concreting equipment. This made its way into mainstream real estate construction as well\(^{80}\). Indeed by the early 2000s most of the large construction companies such as L&T, Skanska, and PCL established a presence in India, were manufacturing construction equipment, and acting as contractors for large-scale construction projects. As western construction markets collapsed in 2008, machine manufacturers worked aggressively to expand their company footprints marketing their expertise and competing to claim the Indian market. J C Bromley India (JCB) explains their company history (Figure 4.1):

In 2008, JCB Heavy Products opens a new £43 million factory, followed in 2009 by a £40 million investment in India to create the world's biggest backhoe loader factory. Today, we are India's market leader for construction equipment with one in every two construction machines sold in the country made by JCB. [J. C. Bamford Excavators Ltd. 2012-2014]

As machine manufacturers set up shop in India, the Government of India continued to increase its spending on infrastructural development and construction by floating a number of new highway, urban, and industrial projects. This steadily supported the spread of construction machines. By 2013 India was a center of construction equipment manufacture and was exporting equipment to Africa and the Middle East transforming the nature of urban expansion in the country (Business Standard 2013).

For New Delhi, National Capital Region (NCR), in which Gurgaon sits, 2003 acted as the watershed year for construction equipment. It was then that New Delhi won the

\(^{80}\) Several informants reiterate that road construction technology is responsible for the changing technologies of construction, as the cost, volume, and modularity of construction serves as optimal for machine-led production.
Figure 4.1: JCB Excavator at work. Photograph by author.
bid to house the 2010 Commonwealth games and began construction work for the Delhi Metro. Construction companies from across the globe arrived in waves as real estate activity in the west slowed in the years preceding 2008. Kishwar a young civil engineer describes the atmosphere to me:

One thing is that they [the Delhi government] only had four years. Companies in India, they cannot work with that speed. That is why they hired foreign companies. ... They had big machines and different technologies. Indian firms looked at this and they also learnt. Multinational companies also entered [the Indian construction scenario].

The Commonwealth games saw an influx of multinational construction and material supply companies into NCR. The degree of construction activity attracted thousands. It is estimated that over 400,000 contract workers moved to New Delhi in the years preceding the games (Herman 2010). Collaborations struck between foreign and local companies increased transmission of knowledge. More importantly, they increased the visibility of construction equipment and decreased their cost. This coincided with the land boom and expansion of Gurgaon. A silent, but cacophonic, coup took place in the construction industry, but through a changing city space of NCR in general. The years between 2000 and 2010 saw the rise of a different mechanical landscape.

**Speed, rhythm, and noise**

“Technology changed everything. The buildings that took four or five years to build … we finish them in one year. The biggest difference is this.”

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81 I describe this mechanical landscape in the first chapter as well.
Dhiren, a young mechanical engineer from New Delhi, and I sat in his dank office on the Whistling Woods construction site. Built by Webuild developers, this multi-million dollar office project spanned ten acres and promised to create 1.6 million square feet of sustainable office and commercial space. The project was the young development firm’s first. Advertised as a “green” office space the complex promised healthy living for those who worked in it. There was no green for Dhiren and me. All that we were surrounded by was grey: the cement coated walls; the rusting grey metal desks; corrugated iron sheets that formed makeshift office walls; the large grey fan that cooled us. Even the tube-lights spread a grey light glistening of the grey rings that our chai cups left behind. The only colorful punctuation was a large psychedelic poster of Lord Shiva—Hindu God of destruction—on the wall. Angry Shiva glinted in Technicolor as Dhiren explained the machines on site and their use:

We have batching plant, the mixers, that is (for) concrete, our product, that we bring to site. We have pump that discharges (the concrete) from one place to, say from down level to top level. That is, it is (a) totally mechanized form … what (the) labor used to do first. With this we need less manpower and less time. There is more efficiency.

Then we have tower crane for lifting purpose. All the work used to be manual; there was a chance for accidents. One man would lift 50 kilos. He would take 10-20 minutes. That a tower crane lifts now within seconds. The building is completed very fast … and cutting machine for reinforcement (steel) cutting. First men used to manually cut this, with his hand, you know, with that it took a lot of time, there was a fear of getting hurt. Now we have a (steel) bar, put a cutting blade on that … it is safe, there is a lot of efficiency and also accuracy.

82 The investors announced an investment of fifty million dollars in Webuild, to help them build three of their projects including Whistling Woods. The exact cost of construction remains unknown as the project is still ongoing.
The tower crane, RMC mixer, concrete pump, the elevator, the JCB and Komatsu excavators, the compactor, electric drill, roller, cutter, welding machine, the list goes on and on. Turn them on and the construction site reverberates with noise. The day is punctuated by the harsh rapping sounds of pneumatic drills, the crashing of steel bars, and the hum of blowtorches as they weld steel to steel. The diesel generator hums setting a pitch for this veritable orchestra. Shouts and screams accompany the work. The JCB and Komatsu make thump and thud noises in addition to the gentle purring of their powerful engines. A steel cutter makes a shrill teeth-grinding sound as it cuts the thick steel bars in half. A crash ensues as materials fall from the third floor. Barricades and steel beams, earthmovers and trucks of steel, multi-hooked hydra machines, tractors, flatbed trucks, and concrete-casting machines occupy the city-spaces around us. Metallic scaffolding cages rise upwards around buildings and across major roads as the Delhi metro and other projects cage city space. The city transforms at a seeming breakneck speed.

In *The Conditions of Postmodernity* David Harvey (1990) ponders upon the aesthetic dimensions of speed. Building upon art and architectural theory and western philosophy, Harvey masterfully narrates how the new techniques and economies (such as outsourcing) of postmodernity create compression in space-time, that is the time it takes to communicate and move things across distances reduces and makes the world feel smaller and faster. A “space-time compression” thus speeds-up the pace of life (Harvey 1990:240). This acceleration, Harvey believes, is the key marker and aesthetic of Postmodernity. Machines and technologies play an integral role in this space-time warp
as they enable a reduction in the times of communication and the distances between people, and in effect produce the aesthetic dimensions of speed.

Standing in the cacophonous crescendos that are life on a construction site is a marker of the realization that speed is accompanied by many aesthetic devices. Machines not only speed up things but also transform the rhythms, tempos, and noises on construction sites. The beat of machines, their combined noise, the rhythms of work they create all meld together with the regimes of speed. In this chapter, I think through speed but in relationship to rhythm and noise. It is these two accomplices of speed, I argue, that work to transform life in NCR. They change the codes of conduct, the ethics, practices, and operations of work, the rhythms and speeds through which we move and make our self. They transform our idea of what good construction is and what the urban environment is read as. They form the beats of our everyday life and spur protest and change. Speed cannot be understood without rhythm and noise.

*Of men and machines*

Construction activity for Whistling Woods began with excavating the existing ground. When I arrived at the Whistling Woods construction site a giant 180-meter by 200-meter pit was already in place and the Komatsu\(^83\) was hard at work expanding it. The Komatsu is a tank-like machine. Two metallic belts with horizontal treads rotate parallel to each other and form its wheels. This creates a massive base that enables the Komatsu to climb near vertical surfaces and uneven terrains with a practiced ease. Perched on top of the platform is the dusty, ochre operator’s box. This box rotates 360 degrees allowing

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\(^{83}\) While Komatsu is a brand name of a construction equipment manufacturer: on site the excavator was referred to as “the Komatsu”.

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the driver to move sideways, front, backward, or any direction he wants in an arachnid fashion. An extra-long arm emerges out of this enclosure. It is thrice the length of the base and has a scoop at the end. The scoop scrapes at the sides of the pit. The words KOMATSU are emblazoned on the arm. The Komatsu belongs to a local Haryanvi contractor. I awkwardly attempt to strike a conversation with him:

Namita: This digging work—are you the one getting it done?  
Chandubhai: No, the site needs to be finished up fast so I gave it to a friend. We do that. If I have extra work I give it to him and if he has extra work he gives it to me.  
N: The Komatsu is a fun machine to watch.  
C: It does the work of twenty men, that machine.  
N: How much does it cost?  
C: The JCB cost 25 lakhs, the Komatsu 35 lakh84, Nowadays you can buy them all on installment. Look at that. The work she is doing. Twenty men will take seven days to do that. . . Nowadays whichever man has a little money, he buys a machine and becomes a contractor. Competition has increased so much.

He pauses and we watch the machine move back and forth. The Komatsu has meticulously dug this massive pit. It will be a car-parking basement. The Komatsu machine works quickly scooping out the soil from the pit and dumping it into the trucks waiting by it. It fills almost twenty trucks with mud that day. The walls of the pit are scarred with the tooth marks of its scoop. They resemble a Van Gogh painting with the scoop’s aggressive brushstrokes. The layers of soil consolidated into this land stand exposed in the deep walls dug. Each stratum gleams in a different hue of yellow and brown in the evening light.

The Komatsu’s acts remind me of the histories of this land. The potentials, politics, and people who lie nested in this amber soil. Gurgaon political history is strong and its state government stable. This formed the bedrock for its fast-paced development.

84 A lakh is 100,000 rupees, a little more than 2000 dollars.
The state is the stronghold of the Congress political party. The same party that governs the center and that opened up India’s economy. Money and favors make their way to Gurgaon’s soil through political favors. Corporations are encouraged to invest and the state government enabled through national level funding. This soil is steeped in political power and alliances.

Simultaneously, construction activity is enabled through the power of local networks. The patwaris (land revenue officers) and brokers who know the lay of the land and trade and barter land parcels, contractors who set up shop, and developers and architects who work the region. Construction activity is the domain of those who can dig through the social terrain speedily.

Excavation work, for example, is the domain of local Haryanvi villagers. It involves the excavation and transport of soil but also is a soil supply business for foundations that need to be covered once cast. Soil is the realm of the local villager. I ask Mr. Kumar, the chief engineer of Whistling Woods, why this is so?

[Because] it is a simple job. They cannot even calculate the amount they dig. They simply count the trucks. We have an excavation guy on site. He is only 5th standard [grade] pass. Cannot read or write. He has five JCBs, two Komatsus, and 15-20 trucks. I called him the other day and said ‘I haven’t seen you in several days. He said to me ‘ I got whatever money I needed from your site’. That is their mentality. How much does it cost to dig, labor, and then how much will go in my pocket and after that he is not interested.

Construction speeds up activity but speed also breaks things up and divides. It is infinitely hierarchical and creates a division between locals and migrants. Speed affects individuals differentially. The Komatsu’s occupation of the land is accompanied by an influx of migrants, of all classes, who build. Developers like to rotate their staff and

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85 At the time of fieldwork, this was the case. Now a new party occupies both the central government and the state legislature.
crews in order to keep them destabilized. Contract hires grow increasingly common and long-term employment decreases. Movement and speed break the potentiality of labor unions.

The industry also discourages local hires. They do not want people with political connections and local ties that can be mobilized\(^\text{86}\). Locals prosper through land trades and machine supplies. But machines do not come cheap. It takes money to tap into the speeds of urban development. The history of land repeats itself. Those who owned land, sold it, got rich, and moved forward. In the gullies of the villages that the construction sites do not see sit those whose access to speed is somewhat less defined: the lower castes who had no ownership or access to land.

The Komatsu is a reminder of history and locale. As a machine it brings the remembrance that speed needs land and infrastructure. In the case of building construction it needs an army and a network. It is the local Haryanvis who through their political connections, their knowledge of the land, and their ability to transform with changing times that have enabled the speed at which this land is built. As they do so speed has also differentiated and divided them from those they live and work amongst.

I. The Ready Mix Concrete Mixer (RMC)

II.

The Whistling Woods construction site sits at the edge of Gurgaon. Behind it extend plains of farmlands and forest clad hills. The Ready Mix Concrete (RMC)

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\(^{86}\) Maruti Manesar factory became a site where tension between locals and migrants was articulated. In 2012 locals were accused of arson and killing a human resource manager. It was the year I did fieldwork in the area. This was also mobilized into an explanation of “why we do not wish to hire locals, as they are trouble and more interested in politics than work”.

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batching plant stands between the project and the plains (Figure 4.2). The plant is actually a mountain. Raised three storeys high this machine is fronted by a giant tricolor mound of sand and gravel: grey, brown, and yellow. They form three conical stripes. Atop the heap sits a funnel-shaped tank of water and a control cabin. An order for concrete is put in.

The strength of the cement, the amount of aggregate and sand required, and the amount of water to add is calculated according to the structural strength required, the humidity and temperature, and the speed of curing required. At the bottom of the heap a number of workers run back and forth pouring cement sacks into a trough below. The trough dumps the cement into a circular drum. A mechanized scoop draws sand from the heap into a trough and weighs it. The sand is then dropped into the circular drum. Press a number of buttons and in a precise five minutes the drum mixes together the right amount of cement, sand, gravel, and water to produce the perfect aggregate. A perfect mix is born.

Figure 4.2: The Ready Mix Concrete Mixer. Photograph by author.
Webuild the development company behind the Whistling Woods construction project was also born out of the right mix. The development firm started in 2008 in a small basement office in New Delhi. The team of eight men, ages ranging from early thirties to early forties, developed from alliances already set in place. The managing director Mohan ran a mid size architectural firm. His brother, an investment banker abroad, decided to start an investment fund in 2007. Together they ventured into building construction and development. Mohan drew people together from previous offices he has worked in: his juniors, his former boss, and his friends. This small team had 50 million dollars and “a dream”. “We just ran with it”. Construction work for their first project—Whistling Woods office and shopping complex—commenced in 2008. Four years later, Webuild runs twelve mega projects, has an in house staff of eighty, and has million dollars worth of investments across NCR.

The initial team at Webuild speaks of those times as heady times. There was a high volume of work and they hardly slept, but were drawn together to produce something bigger than themselves. The company and their lives gained momentum. They bought new cars, took trips to Europe, and moved into a swanky new office space. They expanded the business and churned out new projects.

Webuild’s story points towards the mixes and combinations that sped urban development in Gurgaon. A number of societal constellations drew together to enable this incredible spectacle of speed: a dominant cement and steel lobby\textsuperscript{87}; a history of farming communities and developers who were ‘sons of the soil’; family lineages of metal workers, carpenters, steelworkers and masons who drew more into their folds as

\textsuperscript{87} The Nehruvian era placed emphasis on industrial production as well as dam building. This led to the establishment of cement and steel factories as well as utilized dam building and other infrastructural projects to support the factories.
construction work picked up. As Whistling Woods’s chief contractor—Jitendraji—says to me “anybody can work in this industry. We take the leftovers from all of the other industries”. In the years post 2005 several individuals banded together to transform the land of Gurgaon. Speedy configurations of people eager to cash in on the accompanying land and construction boom emerged. Farmers sold their land and invested in construction equipment. Indians in finance industries across the globe moved money back to their home country. Laborers were encouraged to bring their uncles, brothers, and nephews to construction sites. Word of mouth circulated in villages of work in cities. Architects turned developers and foremen turned contractors. The number of civil engineering colleges in small towns increased. Buildings were rapidly built and with it they rebuilt the destinies of several in the construction industry.

This was a moment of mixing, both literal and metaphorical, where international and local expertise, networks of finance, agricultural and industrial histories, labor capacities, and opportunity coalesced together. But unlike the processes of ossification that concrete follows the nature of social, economic, and political aggregates is far more precarious⁸⁸. Human constellations do not stay assembled in machine-like ways. The “impatient capital” that Webuild produces always wants to be moved⁸⁹ (Mehrotra 2011). New alliances will have to be made and new areas developed. A continuous churning, movement, a non-stop-ness of entrepreneurial action is constantly required. Speed serves to drive speed.

⁸⁸ Here I deploy Anne Allison’s (2013) sense of precariousness where she describes individuals and groups being in a “condition of uncertainty” and “rumbling instability” (2013:13) that creates a “sense of being out of place” (2013:14) and a “radically new political subject” (2013:15). I extend this precarity into social forms and social relations for humans and non-humans. Assemblages (Latour 2005) are precarious.

⁸⁹ This aligns with Smith (1991) description of capitalist expansion through the shifting of capital from space to space.
In the past two decades NCR, and India more broadly, was buffeted by the rhetoric of speed. These discourses enable the opening of an economic and physical space. Narrative of fastness and growth are in themselves part of capitalism’s hegemony. Speed is an illusory concept as its very reference forces you to act faster. The discourse propels itself. It acts as an opportunity and creates euphoria. Power manifests in creating and controlling speed, in continuously maintaining and churning speed. Mechanical speed changes the rhythms of construction, speeds up the beats, and demands that human bodies match their rhythms. They create the benchmarks of efficiency and accuracy as individuals struggle to meet them. Speed becomes about being efficient. It is tactical to tap into speed and moving fast needs entrepreneurship and personal drive. We all struggle to keep up with speed.

Speed as an aesthetic that is a factor of capitalism and flexible accumulation produces the effects of movement and smoothness. It creates an accelerated rush, a “volatility and ephemerality,” that reshapes our “thinking, feeling, and doing” (Harvey 1990:285). The “values and virtues of instantaneity” come to govern our worlds (Harvey 1990:286). At the same time it pushes bodies in a dromotological, militarized fashion to organize, be deployed, and deploy: the logics and logistics of war act “as a motor and producer of speed” (Virilio 1977:84). The smoothness, quickness, and militarized qualities speed demands, the relentless movement and drive it creates, belie against the roughness of stone and sand that mix within the RMC drum. Dreams, desires, and men are ground down in the relentless pursuit of speedy lives and the accelerated states they bring.90

90 A critique of the discourse on speed is that it is negligent of the inequality, that is speed is felt differentially across geographies, and some societies and spaces cannot connect to others with equal speed.
Speed is a strange thing. It is dizzying in the moment when you step on that accelerator. Life and the road in front of you hold promise. Optimism reigns along with speed. But speed is not felt the same way everywhere and by everyone. Few move slowly and decelerate. Others are left behind. Then there our times when the fast hurtle out of control. And there is the moment when speed breaks. The differential nature of the material and experiential worlds of speed work against the very utopia speed promises. Speed begins with heady promises but very often ends in disappointment and distress. Speed destroys bodies and relationships but also creates ties that bind. Speed is less of a constant condition but a register that nobody can fully achieve. It is at once a phenomenological discourse, a desire, and a disciplinary apparatus.

II. The concrete casters

It takes several teams and a number of machines to cast cement-concrete into the stone surfaces that form the buildings that we stand on and in. The grumbling Ready Mix Concrete truck carries the mix to site in its octagonal belly. On the roof a team of men await the coarse, velvet slurry. The men stand lightly perched on the mesh of steel bars. The layout mason and supervisor move around the slab checking the right depths, any mistakes will be cast in stone. A team of unskilled laborers—comprising the very young, tribal boys from Malda—awaits the concrete. The men sling ploughs across their shoulders nonchalant with their hips stuck out. They mutter to themselves with the innocence of youth.

(e.g. Larkin 2008, Chattaraj 2010). Speed also enables quick deterioration as it collapses the future into the present (Harvey 1990:292)
The supervisors, engineers, and contractors stand around their bodies tense and straight. They glare at the lack of tension in the Malda men. Organization, timing, and coordination are required in this assemblage of men and machines. Casting windows are brief. Too dry a concrete will leave holes in the slabs and too wet a mix will drip out of the planks that hold its shape. Every minute means more water evaporating, more concrete hardening, and less time to the exothermic reaction that will prompt the concrete to slowly harden and build strength.

A team of Nepali men arrives. They are the masters of the concrete pipe. The men draw the narrow pipes up the building and attach it to a pump below. On the terrace they snake the 8” diameter pipes across the roof to the place where the concrete must fall. They manipulate wrenches and clamps to make and unmake the pipe and wind it across the entire terrace. Efficiently and silently they move about the terrace doing their job.

Down below the RMC grumbles with impatience. Concrete mix is poured into the pump. The concrete falls into the pump in a rough cascade and the powerful pump makes a loud, periodic *thwack* as it propels the aggregate forward. The entire apparatus shudders and shakes. Men surrounding it holler at each other. Instructions fly across the space. The concrete flows out onto the roof pooling around its outlet, moving viscously and lava like into the crevices of the terrace. The Malda men are shoved to work as the contractors yell at them “to the right,” “faster, faster,” “get in there,” and “get over there.” The vibrators are brought out and placed into the concrete blending the mix it into the slab. Quickly and expertly the pipe men make and break the sections of the pump’s pipe to direct the concrete evenly across the slab. The Malda men run about as they shovel the concrete across the space. One drags the vibrator through the mix to destroy air pockets. Behind
them a team of masons work to smoothen the concrete slab, leveling and evening it out. The crowd that watches and screams moves further and further back. The sun is strong upon our heads and backs. The pump grinds to a halt. The masons move in squatting and moving backward as they swish their long aluminum, planar fantis in a horizontal, gliding movement across the slab. They add the final touches to the slab. Everyone stands on the periphery admiring his or her own work. The concrete shines like smooth, grey icing of a job well done (Figures 4.3, 4.4).

Machines bring new forms of knowledge and demand different expertise and skill. Through this they divide and redistribute. They organize workers into groups: skilled, unskilled, manual, technical, pipers, shoveler, fitters, and benders. They organize men hierarchically and differentiate between them.

The beats, techniques, and practices these machines inculcate restructure the ways in which we work and set its pace and tone. It is within their rhythms that we learn to work and move our own bodies. Their presence reminds us to count in numbers: 20 cubic feet per hour, twelve feet per minute, 20 men, and five shovels. Their working drives us to work faster. Their rhythmic efficiency and incredibly loud noise structure everyday worlds on construction sites. It is through the combined rhythms of men and machines that a new slab of concrete is born.
Figure 4.3: Concrete Pump and Pipe. Photograph by author.

Figure 4.4: Finishing the concrete floor. Photograph by author.
III: The tower crane

The iconic machine for building with speed is undoubtedly the tower crane. It extends high above our heads against the brilliant-blue summer sky. The terrace is its realm and it governs all who stand below it. A giant-girded arm and control room perch delicately on a lithe and narrow girded, yellow shaft. The crane works through counterweights and balance. All day long it cuts imaginary arcs in the sky. Wires slither down to the ground and carry equipment upward. The counter weights move back and forth to pulley materials into the sky (Figure 4.5).
Several young men work under the shadow of this crane pitching their bodies back and forth as they tie steel, cut plywood, and distribute concrete (Figure 4.6). Their work is about counterweights and balance too. These men will move up the ranks. Some will learn how to read drawings and make their way up to become foremen. Laborers will learn masonry or electrical work and strive to become skilled professionals. The civil engineers who supervise them hope to be area supervisors, block supervisors, and site in charges. Some may even start contracting on their own.

I repeatedly ask supervisors, foremen, and workers on site about who advances in hierarchy and who does not. Sharifbhai, a steel foreman, best explains the dominant explanation I receive: the story of the *tez* (quick, smart) *ladka* (boy).
Sharifbhai: The person who is a *tez* worker\(^{91}\), everybody wants that boy. The boys who are working with me, the one who is *tez*, the engineer sees him—that this boy is *tez*. Imagine that the foremen is not there, if I am gone, the engineer has an estimate that this boy is *tez*, even if the foremen is not around he will get the work done. … I have a *tez* worker I will show him the drawing and explain, this is the column; this is the footing. The boy will get it done.

Namita: How do we recognize a *tez* boy?

S: There is one boy, a worker. It is like this. We have to explain things to him again and again. We get fed up. Amongst them, I see that this boy is educated. He is *tez*. We only train him. … No matter how much you train an illiterate; we will have to break our heads over him again the next day. We do not have to waste our heads over the *tez* boys. In one line we explain to them and they quickly understand.

*Tez* is derived from *tezi*, the Hindi word for speed. It often stands for bright, intelligent, and means shining like the sun. It can also refer to being crafty and describes crazy winds. The word is versatile but it encodes a dynamism and quickness. Indeed I see several young men who epitomize this *tezi*. They effortlessly charm supervisors and women laborers alike, are called upon to work, and then supervise. An engineer will be found teaching them a thing or two in their free time. The boys are ambitious and incredibly smart. Their mind and bodies epitomize the concept of *tezi* (Figure 4.7).

Munnalal used to be a “*tez ladka*”. He and his cousin Sahil are two young steel workers from Uttar Pradesh. They work together on site where Munnalal has an item work contract\(^{92}\). The contractors love Munnalal because he is incredibly fast. I can see his *tezi* in the manner in which he approaches his work and the faith people put into him. Both Munnalal and Sahil are from rural Uttar Pradesh and come from a long line of steel

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\(^{91}\) He uses the word Hindi word *karigar* (craftsman) for worker. Though there is a slippage here. It indicates that the worker possess a skill but does not necessarily say this is a craft practice.

\(^{92}\) This is one of two preferred contracting systems: item work where you give a person a contract and specific amount of money to finish a certain piece of work, i.e. build a 3’ by 4’ wall that is 6” deep with certain material specifications. This is preferred to hiring under the other contracting system known as day rate. In day rates as workers tend to stretch out work longer to extend the number of days they are paid. They prefer item rates as they are paid better for the same amount of work.
Figure 4.7: Young man showing off his strength. Photograph by author.
workers. I am surprised to learn that his brothers are well-educated and own property in Delhi. He tells me they refused to pay for his education after his father died. That is why he works in steel.

He describes to me how hard it was to set up on his own but he still managed to become a small-scale contractor. His maternal uncle helped him initially. Sahil started the same way but has a different trajectory. He travelled with contracting companies and worked in Dubai, Russia, and Bahrain. Munnalal keeps proudly referring to the fact that Sahil worked in Dubai. Sahil, however, tells me that Munnalal ridicules him by sneering “Dubai return” as he points Sahil’s mistakes out to him. Both however feel Dubai was a better place to work. Sahil comments on his time there.

In Dubai we saved a lot of money. They kept us well. We do not have to pick up the steel ourselves and they did a lot for safety. They do not make you work as much through the day. Everything was great.”

He says he came back because he wanted to work with his brother but he also mentions to me that there is very little work in Dubai at the moment. “I will go back, the company has called me.”

Sahil’s narrations remind us that our lives are caught in the differential measures of speed not only in NCR but also around the globe. Speed works differentially in different spaces. Construction activity at various sites has its own tempo. Sahil and Munnalal’s stories point towards the varying speeds amongst which they strive to survive. As Dubai slows Delhi picks up speed and as Delhi will slow there will be a new space of

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93 This also has to do with the fact that they are both Muslims, who are accepted more within the Dubai community but also because Sahil was lucky to escape the latter days of the Dubai downfall where abuses of migrant workers were rampant.
speed. The measures of time and spatial transformation transform according to the economies of everyday life.

Standing in the orchestral cacophony that is life on a construction site, buried, covered, and occupied by the timed beats of the machines that govern these spaces, I think of rhythm and its connection to speed. If speed, as Harvey (1990) argues, governs the aesthetic regime of our times; then rhythm is its accomplice. Speed is not achieved without an accelerated rhythm. It is only when the rhythms we know of fold into themselves and the gaps between beats narrow that we register times of great speed. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) in writing of rhythm highlight the importance of the gaps between beats, they identify the “milieu” as the creative, prolific space where life stands poised (1980:312-315). Indeed it is within the beats of machines that we improvise, grab, manipulate, and transform the ways our bodies move, the ways our lives unfold, and the ways forward for those we love.

Improvisation in music is about capturing a rhythm but also manipulating a gap. It is about sensing a beat and mastering it. The stories of Webuild, Munnalal, Sharifbhai, and Sahil speak to these tactics of improvisation. Of the process of continuous reshifting, emplacing, and transfiguring of self and action that the changes in capitalist logic and social scenarios demand. “All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to time” (de Certeau 1988:99).

Speed and rhythm together bear creative potentiality. They bear ability to tactically manipulate the present based upon our pasts. To walk and work within these rhythms is to live a life infused with creative action and be part of the chorus of everyday
life. Each individual brings his or her own trajectory and has his or her own speed. The fates of town planners and contractors unite with those of laborers, workers, and developers, each work within the speeds of the economic trajectories they are offered. Each strives to keep up, move on, and not be left behind. Each striving to keep a rhythm that was not their own, striving hard to match a speed that seems to accelerate endlessly as their body grows old⁹⁴.

*And when my body cannot move*

I walk up to the terrace of Whistling Woods one summer afternoon. The space is not the usual bustling site of work but is silent and empty. A few workers mull about but there is no supervising staff. One of the men I know greets me and tells me the crane is broken. I climb up on the plywood platform. He leads me to the spot where the large hook fell from the sky. The strong plywood has come apart with the impact as the line snapped and fell. The hook, hoist, and wires of the crane are carefully wrapped up near it.

I stare up at the still crane and see that it is a major break. “Good fortune it fell here (on the roof). If it had fallen down (to the ground level) it would have taken someone with it”. I remember the women in the camp telling me that somebody had a near miss today. They were probably referring to this incident. “Work will be stopped for at least three or four days, if the crane does not work no steel can be brought up, no work can be done”.

⁹⁴ Das (2007), Fabian (1983), and Herzfeld (2009) remind us that the temporalities expressed by this speed and rhythm are likely to be juxtaposed with a number of other senses of times in the everyday lives of individuals.
When tools, technologies, and machines break we are made aware of their importance in our lives\(^95\). Their very presence in our life structurally alters our world. When machines break it is a time of liberation and leisure. A moment where the speed of work that captures and binds you breaks into a pause. In a world where machines replace men we also forget what it is to do work without machines. We are reluctant to mobilize labor in the old ways again. Indeed laborers too refuse to do the work of machines.

When mechanical worlds break down, however, we are reminded of the many, many ways in which they break bodies. Sharifbhai as he continues his description of the \textit{tez ladka} points to a man his age dragging large steel bars across the site. His back is hunched, and his torn green shirt is muddy and red from the rust on the steel bars he carries back and forth each day. “Look at him, his whole life he will only do helperi (be a helper).” Salim the eternal helper does not look up at Sharifbhai as he and I have this conversation. The man only a few years younger than Sharifbhai is destined to labor in the lowest ranks for the rest of his working life as he carries the weight of steel on his back.

A few days later as I stand on site Salim comes to me. He brings with him a well-dressed young man who, nevertheless, is carrying the tool of the steelworkers trade, a steel bar with a tiny hook at the end that is used to grasp and manipulate steel. “Madam, do you have a job for my nephew, some factory job? This line of work sucks your blood. He can learn how to operate a machine.” I did not have the network to give the young man the social mobility he needed. I knew Salim was asking others as well. He did not have the social capital to succeed.

\(^95\) See Heidegger (1962), Graham (2011), and Latour (1999) for more detailed discussion on how the breaking of tools, infrastructures, and machines respectively reveals human-material relationships and the politics of the same.
Munnalal disappeared from the site one day and did not pick up his cell phone. They said he is probably drunk somewhere. Two days later they find him and he is brought to site looking distinctly hung over. A screaming match ensues as the site contractor chastises Munnalal for the stoppage of work. I am told that Munnalal is very good at his job but likes alcohol too much. Mahaab, a laborer, tells me how Munnalal fell into a pit because he was drunk one night. I sit besides Munnalal one day and he brags to me about how he bought 50 bottles of beer at the last festival. I mention to him how alcohol catches up with your body when you are older. He looks suitably repentant as he tells me. “I do not drink alcohol anymore. Just beer … but this work…you work so hard that you cannot keep your senses. I was awake for 36 hours that day. I just needed the drink.”

The distribution of alcohol as incentive to finish work faster is common practice on construction sites. So is alcohol addiction. Often it is so cold that laborers drink to be able to work and sleep. Machine-like efficiency makes all kinds of demands.

The human machines of building construction, the labor that has undergirded this immense speed have paid for this through their bodies. To work with speed is hard on the body and it spurs addictions and ailments: Sleepless nights, alcohol and tobacco use, over exposure to dust-filled environments, and a willingness to work in sub-optimal conditions in order to get ahead. Like the broken cranes bones deteriorate, lungs fill with dust and diesel, and youth dissipates. The unreliable world of construction equipment, their ability to flare up and destroy, takes many individuals with them. Fire, cuts, falls, slips, and injuries from things falling proliferate. Not everyone can keep up and stay lucky in these mechanical worlds of speed. Many lag behind, fall, and deteriorate.
Technology is changing in Gurgaon. A new project by a famous developer brings a Malaysian construction company that uses MIVAN technology. Monty, an architect friend from my undergraduate days, now working in Singapore, is their chief architect. He explains the technology to me:

The entire structure is cast in concrete. They make aluminum shuttering for all the walls. They cast it (an entire floor) and move upward. Everything is poured in one block with inbuilt frames for doors and windows. It builds fast and quickly upward. We will need less and less labor. Technologies such as these will weed labor out.

Who will go? I think to myself later. All the non-tez people most likely, the ones that inconvenience us the most.

Already so many are gone, most of them are the women who occupied construction sites. As I grew up sites were full of women, carrying mud and mortar on their heads, as their children played in the gravel next to them. The number of women on site is negligible now, a mere five percent if any. I ask why? They used to do all the lifting and carrying: mud, bricks, and plywood. Pulleys, elevators, and cranes replaced them. Activists and non-governmental organizations policing human rights abuses warned of the dangers of children on construction sites. The mothers had to leave too.

The Government of India insisted that crèches must be provided in all labor camps. Not everyone provides them. The speed at which construction moves seems to have churned women out of the mix.

*Speed that does not sync*

In 2013 the newspaper Economic Times publishes an article about India’s real estate slowdown (Singh 2013). It is no longer the decade of exponential price increases.
Developers are unable to sell and lease property and vast amounts of real estate lies unsold. The rupee does a free-fall. In this slowdown I think of temporalities that govern the spaces of NCR. Of the different lives that mingled across classes in India’s construction industry and the rhythms that they produce and negotiate.

After six months of delay the first phase of Whistling Woods reaches completion. The building is ready to be handed over to its occupants. The site engineers celebrate. Before they head for the dinner thrown as a reward, Mr. Kumar the chief engineer tells me that the leasing team walks around looking incredibly stressed. Nobody wants to lease the property. If they cannot find someone to lease this space they will have to start paying the investors rent out of their own pocket. Indeed there is unrest. The head of the leasing and sales team quits. Rumor has it he got into a fight with the director. He leaves hoping to do consultancy work. When I meet him he tells me that there is a lot of work in the pipeline. The unsaid is that there is not much ready to go at the moment.

The temperamentality of the economies of construction have accelerated and slowed down so many different lives. Indeed Munnalal’s cousin, the ‘Dubai return,’ references the downfall of Dubai’s construction boom. Locals like Chandubhai speak of the changed village lifestyles. Monty too moves from Bombay to Singapore to partake in a new urban rhythm. I move from Bombay to Boston and fall into an academic one. As the speeds with which we live our lives switch back and forth we renegotiate and resituate ourselves into different rhythms. Often it is the intermixing of these rhythms the dissonances between them that give rise to anger and discontent.

Barbara Browning uses the term “infectious rhythms” in her analysis of associations made between the AIDS pandemic and African diasporic cultural practices
Her use of African rhythms as an analytic entry point to think through social conflicts applies within this context to think through irregularity and rhythms: rhythms interrupted, structurally altered, or a medley of differing rhythms. The introduction of new machines, the transformation of everyday technologies, and the changing characteristics of bodies produce a multiplicity of rhythms that sit discordantly with each other. It is the dissonance between these rhythms, the dissonance of bodies that refuse to react and move, and the dissonance of a changing political economy that creates the lines of fracture and fear within city space.

*All this rhythm makes so much noise*

On the day of the festival of *Raksha Bandhan*[^96] I made my way to the heart of NCR to the archeological park called Jantar Mantar. The park, once the ancient laboratory of the Rajput King Jaising, is now the ground for public protest in an independent India. There is a rally here today that I intend to visit. I walk hesitantly past swarms of young men wearing the distinctive white cap modeled after India’s first prime minister. A number of people sit on the stage amidst the tight securitized space and I pass through several metal detectors to get to the main arena. Anna Hazare the anti-corruption activist presides on the stage. He fasts to enact changes on an anti-corruption bill[^97].

Kiran Bedi – India’s dynamic, woman police officer is speaking on the microphone. Her speech is punctuated with men whistling, screams, claps and an audience proclaiming loud “*nahin*” (No).

Will we keep being the partners of corruption? NOOOO

[^96]: This is the festival that celebrates the relationship between brother and sister. The sister ties a thread around the brother’s wrist and he promises to protect her.

[^97]: The JanLokpal bill is discussed in the second chapter as well.
Will we keep being a part of lies, harassment, and betrayal (*kapat*)? NOOOOO
Will we keep witnessing women being unsafe? NOOOO
Will we raise our voices against this behavior? YESSSSS

The police whistle in distress, the auto rickshaws outside of the complex honk, and the dominantly male audience yells and screams. The musicians on stage launch into a song as the speech ends. The men and women line up to greet Anna and argue as they jostle for space. The noises of protest fill the space.

NCR is never silent. Even in the darkness of night it is punctuated with the noise of trucks ploughing the city, and a strange, dull hum of a mass of people awake and moving at night. Silence is uncanny and unfamiliar in the South Asian cityscape. Even in death Indians weep, scream, and wail.

Noise, with its qualities of incredible grounded-ness, and absolute encompassment of our daily lives is the marker of NCR’s urbanism. The speeds of construction, but also, economic development, seem to have exacerbated this noise in NCR. It lives in the fast paced cars with powerful engines (Dasgupta 2009), in the loud machines, in the quickness of our yells and protests, and even in the silent anguish of our dreams. Honks and drills, shouts and screams, fill the atmosphere. The city, our lives, and emotions are punctuated with noise, rhythmic and regular, but also, dissonant and discordant.

Anthropologist Brian Larkin (2009) relates the concept of noise to conditions of poverty and inequality in Nigeria. In his studies of media piracy (through cassette and video tapes) he describes noise produced when copied tapes blur and buzz, televisions appear snowy, and loud speakers distort. For Larkin these “distortions” are tied to an ailing media infrastructure that either needs to be constantly repaired or is woefully
inadequate. Noise, or distortion emphasizes the “failure of the Nigerian State to provide the basic infrastructures to everyday life” (2008:239). Noise within the context of building in India’s National Capital Region marks not only infrastructural change, but also the cacophonies of industrial, social, governmental technologies that invade the region. Noise thus presents not only the reshaping of individual lives and everyday worlds but also forms the medium of protest.

As life speeds up and a variety of life rhythms interact and transform an arrhythmic cacophony, a gaggle, and crescendo of noise fills the air in NCR. It becomes the structuring device of everyday life: it controls the movement of bodies, reshapes work and life, and symbolizes the economic capital that labor strives to gain. Simultaneously, noise marks a technological, social, and economic change that marks the exploitation of some bodies and the redundancy of others. Noise marks the ragged and raging beats through which workers attempt to survive in fast-narrowing, competitive machine-led economy. Noise is simultaneously the beat that transforms us, the drum that we must march to, the drill that irks us, and the whistle that propels us into battle. We deploy noise to voice protest and we utilize noise to move ahead. It enables us but it can also destroy and deteriorate us. But we must make noise in order to survive.
The crowning glory of the Whistling Woods project is the tall, sensuous, seventeen-story office tower under construction. The tower occupies the tail end of the site and rises loftily above the rest of the project. It has a gently undulating, half built façade that makes passersby pause. Are the fluid lines real? Or just a sinuous mirage created by the shifting, summer dust storms of Gurgaon? The sweeping façade moves inwards into the elongated, unfinished, concrete ramp that swishes gently upward to the roof. Stairwells spiral upward to the topmost slab under construction and large structural walls divide the floor into neat working zones. The architect’s organic visions extend inside the building into the large, sleek curves of the bare, concrete floor plates. Here space unfolds upon you and extends beyond the eye in an endless grey that is the unfinished floor slab.

The slab is interspersed by the angular shapes of concrete columns and the debris of construction activity: wires, metal pipes, plastic bags, pieces of wood, and broken glass. The slab and walls lie covered with layers of dust that cover the site through the relentless labor of workers and machines. The wall-less floor slabs frames the stark Gurgaon landscape of fields, farms, and hills. The colors of the landscape stand saturated and golden in the sunlight set against the building’s grey, architectural frame.

If hard labor, mechanical noises, heat and dust, shouts and screams, and the movement of bodies characterize spaces of activity on the Whistling Woods site, then already cast floors and stairwells echo with the emptiness of sounds, bodies, and
machines. As Whistling Woods rapidly grew from the ground, its large floor plates and already built towers awaited their occupants in calmness.

A building after it is built, but before it is occupied, is a haunting space. Bare surfaces and expansive slabs are kept company by the changing patterns of sunlight that streams through absent, external walls. Echoes of activity, elsewhere in the building, bounce off plastered walls, weave through dangling wires and ducts, to settle into the dank nooks and crannies of the structure. Spaces for the better part are still, stark, dusty, and damp. They are haunted with the smell of concrete curing. The simultaneously acerbic and soapy smell wafts up and down through the structure and keeps the workers company as they move through the structures. The dull noise of machines creeps through the structures and diffuses as white noise across the slab.

The emptiness of the buildings, and the dull silence they encode, is broken only by the walking through of staff or worker as they wind their way across the site. As activity steps up: the empty slab awaits the bodies that will seek shelter in its cool darkness. It is only when the lunch whistle sounds, deep in the heat of the day, that these structures reveal their social life.

The lunchtime whistle at Whistling Woods sounds at twelve. Activity on site slows down as bodies register the proximity to lunchtime. Tools are dropped and machines shut and silenced as everyone runs off to lunch. Deep within the concrete floor plate sit contractors and engineers in their tin-walled, makeshift offices. They gather in groups across the conference table or aluminum desks and holler at one and another to eat with them. It is protocol that no one eats alone. The sun is hot and relentless outside and they revel in the cool air of darkness. The tin *tiffins* packed by their wives at five am are
now lukewarm. Nevertheless the men peer into and circulate the shiny, cylindrical containers eagerly looking to swap their own drab lunch. Underneath the skeletal building, laborers’ wives arrive on site carrying their afternoon meals. Hands, feet, and bodies are washed near the pipe that gently pumps water up from the sandy soil. Shady nooks are sought. Brothers and kinsmen pull a plastic sheet together and sit down to eat. Those who have no food wander the hot streets to look for an open food vendor at the nearby chowk (traffic junction).

The lunch hour extends into lethargy as meals wind down. Laborers nap on the cool, floor slabs. They lie side by side with their arms pulled over their eyes. Others smoke cigarettes or bedis on the edges of floor plates. Workers drift in and out of consciousness. A restless soul stays awake and listens to music on his cell phone. A cranky electronic voice wafts down the stairwell and bounces lithely off the glass façade: “tooooo, meri zindagi hai, tooooo, meri bandagi hai” (You are my life, you are my prayer).

When the overwhelming and dominant sounds of construction equipment fall silent, it is then that the songs of love, joviality, desire, and betrayal dance through the building to be heard again. They echo through the emptiness of the building and bounce off the slabs, reverberating and resonating with the bodies and buildings on site. It is in these silences, moments of steadfastness and calm, inspired by the love songs that drift across the architecture, that I think through the political economy of love.

Where and why do we find love on construction sites? It is hard to locate love in these speedily built construction sites that move with efficiency through out the day. Hard to articulate love in spaces meant to turn into urban spaces of middle-class desire. How
do we imagine what home and family feels like when we walk onto an open, concrete slab mired in wires? Do we not leave love behind when we put on our hard hats on? How is love evoked and even revoked on a construction site? What is love and when it is seen?

The subtleties and spread of this omnipresent emotion are hard to capture and write of. By nature it is fractured and disconnected, discombobulated, and ambiguous. For an anthropologist, it is so incredibly difficult to define and speak of. I never looked for love on construction sites. But it spoke to me from its walls. The walls of Whistling Woods’s half-finished structure hold a cacophony of declarations of love (Figure 5.1).

White chalk graffiti sprawls across the site bouncing off columns and walls: drawings of women and children, homes, and flowers. Scribbled declarations of love: I love you; I love India; I love Sumita. The walls bear the drawings of hearts and detailed drawings of women. There are ducks, parrots, peacocks, roses, trees, and mangoes. Snakes, scorpions, and warnings of danger! They occupy the floor slabs drawn by surreptitious hands during breaks and in times of darkness. A plethora of drawings rise from the skeletal structure and shout out the presence of love.

The idea of love in Hindi is deliciously vague. As we move from love to pyaar (love in Hindi) the word creates an interpretive gap that is fecund with emotive potentiality. Pyaar is a term with linguistic finesse. The contexts, conditions, and formations within which it is deployed enable different powers of the term and emotion. Pyaar can mean romantic love, a great passion for another, “hammein tumse pyaar kitna” (how much do I love you); it can speak of a gentle tenderness extended to anyone “pyaar se” (with love); it alludes to sexual desires and sex “pyaar karna” (to make love), but also encodes paternal and maternal love “bacchon ka pyaar” (for the love of your
children); it evokes our nearest and dearest friends or communities we situate ourselves through the term “mere pyaare” (my loved ones); and indexes multiple sites of affection, affect, and tenderness including for things, country, and animals.

Drawings on the walls form the site for creative action and expression on construction sites. To me, they are signs and significations of the emotions that individuals feel as they move through the processes of work everyday. They are artistic and political acts. Simultaneously, however, the drawings are creative actions through which emotions are mediated and affective ties maintained. They serve to open a discussion on the relation between affects and political economy of construction. Each

Figure 5.1: Wall graffiti on construction sites. Photograph by author.
drawing, I take to be a road map to a kind of love: of domestic and familial love, or for the love of the opposite sex, of the love of God or the love of sex. Through them I evoke and juxtapose the emotions and actions that engage with love on construction sites. These ecologies of love posit the complex relationship between the political economy of real estate, or work more generally, and the ever so ambiguous but equally powerful idea of love.

Who draws these drawings? I ask a supervisor, struck by the sophistication of lines the drawings encode. For months now the drawings caught my eye as I moved across the building. The sheer volume of drawings, the hearts, the animals, and women, echo of pain and loss, of desire and aspiration, and of anger and discontent. The strength of the emotions the drawings capture, the sensibility of the person or artifact they depict, are powerful and provocative. “It is the painters,” he replies. They draw it from the dried up plaster that they use to cake walls into a glossy plane. As it dries it turns into chalk. “This is all their wickedness (badmashi)”.

It is hard to find someone in the act of drawing. It is surreptitious and unapproved of. Drawn by those who are learning to write or those who cannot write at all. All though these lines come from a few individuals, the power of art and its significations speak of society on construction sites. Through them I read and perceive the emotions and economic relations of construction worlds.
On one wall in Whistling Woods, buried in the depths of the twelfth floor, exists a wistful drawing of a home (Figure 5.2). It is the kind that school children draw. An elongated rectangle topped with a conical roof. A neat, tilted grid forms roof tiles. In the front of the house we see a door with a latch and square window with a grill. A path leads into the foreground. The words ‘shubh laabh’ (auspicious gain) flank the house. The words are split between each side. On the right a large flowerpot sprouts four stems with leaves that look like four-leaf-clovers. Hearts with arrows through them are on both sides of the house. The hearts have the initials S.P. inscribed into them.

There are so many homes in this city of Gurgaon. The middle-class apartments of aspiration that the real estate industry builds, the old-style village havelis (ancestral
bungalows) in which its original residents claim home, the migrant dormitories, and the makeshift brick and corrugated aluminum roofed structures that form labor housing and slums. There are multiple conceptions of what one calls home.

I watch Mahaab and Mohamed, a young couple from Bengal; build their home on a small housing construction site. The thirty-something couple from Bengal constructs their temporary home along the back wall of the site upon which they will work for over a year. Picking a strategic corner, bounded by two compound walls and under a small tree, they create their home on site. They align neatly notched bamboo poles and dig them into the ground to act as verticals. The verticals rest against the corner of the compound walls to gather their strength. Old pipes and thin steel bars form the horizontals. Corrugated tin sheets are tied to the horizontals and verticals to form walls and a roof. The roof juts out two feet and over hangs outside a small area. They cordon off this area with giant, discarded flowerpots. In it Mahaab sets up her choola (kerosene cooking stove). The two of them climb the sides and place a blue tarp over the roof to protect it from the rain. They weigh it down with stones and broken bricks. This is their home on site.

Mahaab and I talk inside this small home on days when work is slow. The dark room is barely the size of two full beds. On hot afternoons, light streams into the inside of the hut, from the gap between the roof and the compound wall. It makes the white, patchy compound wall inside shine a dull gray. I sit lightly on a bed made from pilfered wood battens and plywood from the site. It is the main piece of furniture of the small home, and is draped with a brightly printed orange and black bed sheet with bold circles. A salvaged bookshelf sits next to it. It has a motley collection of items: large aluminum cooking pots,
glasses, a plastic cane basket with vegetables, and a number of bottles filled with oils and spices. A clothesline strings along the back wall. Colorful saris and clothes hang of it.

Mahaab often talks about her home in the village as we sit amidst the flotsam and jetsam of her construction-site home. We communicate in broken Hindi (hers) and broken Bengali (mine). From daily repetition we swap pieces of our lives. She talks of her home in the village often, and tells me of how they built their village home: she, her husband, and her father in law. They had to build it themselves because hiring masons is expensive. “Plus they are masons themselves-na,” she says reminding me of their skill set. Cement in the village is expensive too so it is built from bamboo and tin. It is much bigger than this house she tells me, disdainful of the space she lives in. The family saved up to build this house used government subsidies to build a toilet and latrine. They saved money and bought two solid beds for their village home. Not like the one in this room.

I imagine her village home through our conversations. A house that rests on the corner of the fields that her in-laws cultivate and her children pretend to help in. I imagine her two boys aged four and six who attend a private school in town. In the afternoons, I see her children running home through the fields and hovering over their grandmother as Mahaab and Mohamed grasp the cell-phone and scream into it. On speaker I can hear a crackling child’s voice as he brags about his day. I hear Mahaab respond, in a mellifluous voice, really? One day I see her worried and red eyed. Her boy in the village is ill. The home is too far away.

“We do all this for their education, so that they can have a better life-na?”

I nod to agree. They have two homes, these two. One idealized more than the other: one that they work to build and the other that they build for work. The cell phone
connects these two and stream love from one home into the other. The village home is the one she recalls, the one that she would draw upon those walls. The home that carries the sadness of love left behind.

Real estate economics, and property, in general, thrive on a longing for homes. The economies of real estate intersect with the love for families, the desire for a home: as an object and expression of, not only love, but also affluence and power. The work of real estate as an industry, and working in real estate as an individual, cause you to fall conspicuously on the fault line between production and consumption. As Mahaab and Mohamed build an affluent bungalow with a swimming pool and ten bedrooms they reshape the economies, form, and socialites of their own home. The two homes are linked through the systems of production and consumption and the emotive spectrums they generate98. The ties between homes intertwine with the workings of real estate.

The melancholic home reverberates on the twelfth floor of Whistling Woods. Its call circles through the building, past the bodies hard at work, those who left their homes and loved ones behind. It swirls through the minds of young men who dream of making money and going home, and echoes lithely in the acts of a child as he stacks bricks on the ground. The home moves down through the stairwell onto a chalky drawing of a woman on the third floor.

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98 Brosius (2010) argues that “the range of economic liberalization, circulated and shaped by the media, by transnational groups and globalized concepts, make sure that notions such as ‘world city’ or ‘world-class’ reach more than 15 percent of the Indian population who may fall into the category of ‘middle class’ in India. Most of all, they shape and even fire, the imagination of innumerable individuals who have access to those forms of media that circulate such images and concepts” (2010:3).
He drew a picture of a woman: hair wavy and face almond shaped (Figure 5.3). Her eyes are wide open with spiky eyelashes riming the entire eye. Her neck is covered with triangular jewelry, spiky and bohemian. There are bangles on her elongated arm and her sari flows down the concrete, grey wall. Next to her is a multi petal flower. It has concentric circles in its center and petals floating outward in gentle curls. Tendrils crawl outward from it and sprout delicate almond-shaped leaves at regular intervals. The words “I am a God” appear next to her.

A number of Banjara women appear on the Whistling Woods site one day. They are working by the main gate. The nomadic Banjara community hails from Rajasthan and Gujarat. They are linked ancestrally to the gypsies of Europe. Work needs to be sped up on site and an entire Banjara family is hired temporarily to do some excavation work:
father, mother, two daughters, and a new son-in-law. The three women capture people’s attention on site.

In the car, on the way home, Mr. Kumar, the engineer, asks me whether I saw the Banjara women on site today. How could I have not! Against the backdrop of the sandy soil they carried baskets of soil dressed in the vibrant colors of desert flowers: a medley of blues, oranges, pinks, and purples fit for the world’s fashionistas. Silver jewelry dripped from their arms, waists, and necks. A silver belt draped around one sister’s waist gleamed in the summer sun. Upon another sister’s neck was draped a beautiful, heart-shaped necklace thick and heavy in its weight. Mothers and daughters wore chunky bangles, in a sequential set from their elbows to their armpits, gradually expanding in size.

I head down to the excavation site to talk to them the next day. They work by the front gate. The women walk back and forth carrying tubs of soil on their heads as the two men excavate and shovel the soil. They walk across to the edge of the site where they build up mounds for the landscaping project. The mother and young husband are the most talkative and come up to me to tell me a little bit about the Banjaras.

Banjaras migrate to the city for work in the summer when fields lie barren and there is no harvesting or sowing work. The family has built a tent out of plastic tarp in a field nearby. They will stay there for three months until the summer ends. Traditionally a community that carried goods from one place to another they are now replaced by trains, they say. They have no land and tend to goats but as the forest decreases in size so does their ability to make a living. Piecemeal construction work makes up for that loss. I remember construction sites as a child, full of Banjara women busy at work. Their numbers seemed to have decreased upon construction sites.
These Banjara women they are very bold. Did you see the way she spoke to her husband yesterday? She stopped working at exactly five. When he refused to stop she told him you see how you come home today. [laughs] He is not going to get anything to eat today.

Women and their bodies have a high visibility on construction sites as objects of desire and attraction. The two young women, with their tight blouses and bright clothes, attract the eyes of many, and therefore, are always accompanied by their men.

It is the double bind of being a woman on a construction site: of working and being watched. In work, women find a mode of empowerment and a change in their roles in the household. Through their labor on site they gain the power of an equitable (or partial) income as that of their spouse. Their work marks an escape from the social orders of village life and a chance to learn and travel. On site, however, they are watched and looked at through a continuous gaze. They form the bottom ranks of the labor chain and are considered to be uncommitted workers due to their commitment to family. The unfinished architecture, with its dark, empty spaces, makes women deeply vulnerable and uncomfortable. It is an uncomfortable place to be a woman in. A place where you don a man’s shirt over your sari so as not to be looked at as you work.

Love, lust, and longing collect onto a construction site and mingle into the economies of real estate. The empty architectures and broad avenues perpetuate and propagate the gaze. The industry reshapes the city into a zone of higher visibility of women but yet positions them as lower in the chain of social and economic value then men. The economies of their domestic labor is derided and dismissed, not counted as part

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99 Here I refer to the work of Beatriz Colomina (1992) who demonstrates how sexuality acts itself out in space. Modern architecture with its multiple frames and lines of vision is a way of propagating and perpetuating the male gaze and thus sexualizing the body of women.
of the productive labor chain. Visibility brings lust and longing but not equality and agency. The spheres of gender and economic value are drawn apart in construction\(^{100}\) and it is women who form the victims of this segregation.

The etchings of women across the site stare open mouthed at each other, their wild hair and breasts combining laughter, anger, and dread, a single word on a column captures another longing for women, “\(Ma\)” (Mother).

I pause momentarily, to breathe in the cement dust. The talcum powder-like quality of cement enables its surreptitious entry into my nostrils. The cement smells of my mother’s hair. Every night as I grew up, the construction site came to my childhood bed, in the smell of sawdust, cigarettes, and cement embedded in my mother’s hair. Her day of work echoed into our evening rituals, as she sang my sister and I lullabies in a voice so discordant voice that it jarred us in and out of our hazy dreams. My sister and I were children who occupied construction sites, dragged from place to place after school, when we insisted that we wanted to accompany her on her day. Handed down from one contractor to the other who we learned to call uncle when they bought us treats. There were other children there too\(^{101}\). The kids of masons like Mahaab and Mohamed. Construction worlds were their playgrounds and homes. They played on heaps of gravel and climbed scaffolding, sleeping within the structures being built as activity halted during the night.

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\(^{100}\) A dimension of this is prostitution: Gurgaon’s migrant population and transformation in general are believed to have spawned a number of centers of prostitution and also of unwanted children (Ranjan, Dalal 2014).

\(^{101}\) The sites my mother supervised and worked on were small projects so therefore did not have many children. Construction work in Mumbai was far more visible as I grew up and there were a number of children on the sites.
There are children all across construction sites. On the smaller ones they play on the unfinished floor plates and in the gravel and sand. Their toys are bricks and bars and stones and wood—leftover pieces from construction sites. On the larger sites they are separated into the now required daycare centers. As human rights activists and child labor laws strengthen, large-scale construction sites such as Whistling Woods bar children from their sites. They are required by law to build a crèche for children and provide day care. The children play there all day waiting for their mothers to come find them. Most are young—the ones who are still being breastfed and who cannot be left behind. The women run down the stairs and across the street every four hours to go feed them, carrying the site back and forth in their clothes and hair.

Maternal love can infuse a construction site and diffuse from it. There is so much that connects maternal love on sites. Raising a building and raising a child are both acts of care giving and nurturing. Both require constant care and attention and perish out of neglect. The surveying of materials, the continuous watering of curing cement, the meticulous mapping and construction of foundations, and monitoring the gradual growth of both child and architecture sometimes require similar techniques of care. As mothers nurture, mold, carry, and shape they blur the boundaries between the spaces of domesticity and those of work. They carry both maternal love and work economies on their bodies and in their hair. They form the bridge across both worlds.

As the five a ‘clock siren bounces through the site. I lose my female companions as they rush to nurse their babies or buy vegetables at the market nearby. I am left, alone, as I wait for my ride home, alone with the images of women bouncing off the walls.

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102 The Building and Other Construction Workers Act of 1996 requires crèches to be constructed by employers who employ more than 50 women construction workers.
Mothers, wives, and daughters call silently to each other across staircases and landings.

As I walk up and down the stairs looking for someone to talk to, I read the writing on the walls.

Scribbles of Hindi proliferate through the skeletal tower, the phrases sprawling across walls. I like the most poetic one:

*Dil ke bazaar mein sabsein gareeb hoon, is duniya mein ek hi badnaseeb hoon. Main unkein sapnon mein bhi nahi tha, aur log kehtein hain ke main unke sabse kareeb hoon*

In the market of hearts (love), I am the poorest, in this world I am the most unlucky, I wasn’t even in their dreams, and people tell me that I am the closest to them” (Figure 5.4).
Behind the undulating tower and across the street from the construction site sits the labor camp. State legislation in Haryana now requires construction sites of over ten workers to provide housing for them. At Whistling Woods this takes the form of a temporary housing colony built on an agricultural plot rented out behind the construction site. The housing colony is known as a “labor camp”.

Rows of brick structures about three meters long and two meters deep are arranged in a neat grid in militarized blocks on this site. The homes are made with cheap brick and mortar and the huts are topped with tin corrugated sheet. A block of lavatories and bathing areas are built at the back. There are two sections, one for the trained and skilled staff of masonry workers, and another for the tribal Malda workers who shuttle back and forth from the site every three months.

The latter section is in more disarray. The homes are lower and are barely the height of one person. The brick and mortar walls are exposed and cracked. Litter and plastic sheets are strewn around, as are bottles of alcohol. The hierarchies at work unfold in the domestic setup behind. The former section looks more affluent and tended. The rows are painted white and blue. Each family tries to personalize their homes. Hand-stitched quilts form curtains on some doors. Others have painted their space. I see bits and pieces of construction materials refashioned into domestic utility value: a bench made of plywood, or steel bars supporting a money plant. The street feels occupied.

Children sit at doorsteps or run around with toys in their hands. Their skin is covered in the gentle bumps of acute heat rashes. A few have hair that is blonde-brown from the lack of nutrients. I wince at the sight of an overtly blond child.
Shafi’s wife—Raveena—her young child, and mother were waiting for me in the labor camp. A few days earlier I spoke to her husband and told him I would go across and see her. The whole camp knows I have arrived. As I enter her home, several women join us in curiosity. The home is painted a deep blue from inside. Her four-month-old daughter sleeps on a mattress on the floor. She is dressed in a princess white dress and covered with black spots to ward off the evil eye. She sleeps with her hands in an L-shape, her two fists balled like a brave baby warrior ready to do battle. The room is hot and muggy. Flies settle on her face and body and swarm across the room. They settle on my face too. Raveena fans her baby’s face. I struggle to fend off the flies—unsuccessfully. I find it hard to concentrate.

Shafi and his wife found love on a bet. He used to be a photocopy machine repairman and drove through small towns on his motorbike repairing machines. A shopkeeper friend he got close to showed him a phone number one day. It was of a young woman (Raveena). The shopkeeper said she was the same caste as them and that he had been calling her trying to chat her up (patao). The shopkeeper was having no luck: all Raveena did was shower abuses on him. Shafi teased his friend “she abuses you… I will show you. I will chat her up (pata ke loonga). Give me a month.”

“I went through so much trouble to meet her. I thought if I do not like her then I will not marry her, if I like her I will.” He must have liked her, I think to myself. Here they are two years later, married, in NCR, with a baby girl, on a construction site, miles away from the hometown where he pursued her.

103 Muslims situate themselves in caste categories as well. But it is also interesting that some workers refer to their religion as a “caste”. I believe this is linked to affirmative rights action in India that grants privileges to “scheduled castes and tribes” but does not recognize the lower economic status of a majority Muslims in the country.
People on site pointed Shafi out to me as the young man who ran away from home because his father did not approve of his choice in a wife. Raveena is of a much poorer background than his family. Shafi’s dad, he told me, is a big political leader in their small town and has several businesses. He was shocked to see Shafi’s choice and banished him from the house. Shafi saw Raveena, courted her in an ultimate act of male one-up-man-ship, liked her, and faced family disapproval when he wanted to marry her.

“Leave her and we will give her family money to marry her to someone else”, his father told him. “You want her family to have money, I will give you her dowry money,” Shafi narrates their fight and his rebuttal. In the end there was no resolution. He ran off with her and his friend got him a job here. He worked his way up the ranks but his mother sneaks money into his bank account to help the young couple out.

Construction work brings a mix of castes, classes, religions, and ethnicities into the labor camp. Individuals are forced to work with each other and stay next to the other. Often this promotes intermingling but tensions also manifest. Mahaab is Muslim and stays adjacent to a Hindu Bihari man, she calls him chacha (uncle) and feels safe when he is around she misses him when he goes home on holiday. Raveena’s Hindu neighbor however is gravely appalled when Raveena tells me that her brother slaughters bulls\(^\text{104}\) for a living. “Itne paap ka kaam karta hai tumhara bhai, haaai” (you brother does such sinful work, for shame), sparks an argument between them. Work economies reconfigure caste and religious equations on site. Working and loving side-by-side means negotiating tensions of caste and religiosity. It is a change for the women who live here too. There are no mothers-in-law to harass them and they need not cover the heads here from village

\(^{104}\) Slaughtering cows is considered to be a sin amongst Hindus.
elders. In the village they work in the farms and in the home. Here several of them do not work. They spend more time with their husbands and friends. Social relations reconfigure through the economies of emotions\textsuperscript{105}.

Entering the market for Shafi became a means to support his choices of love. For Bansilal love, work, and money began as entirely intertwined. A rotund and jolly man with a Poirot-like mustache, Bansilal is the financial director of Whistling Woods developers. Far from the camp, in the air-conditioned office of Webuild, he offers me peanuts as snacks (he is trying to lose weight), and narrates the story of how he met his wife. His wife works for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). When they met, Bansilal was in charge of financial legal compliance for his office. He visited the RBI for permissions. Her boss, who he met everyday, began to like him very much. One day he told Bansilal that one of the employees was like a daughter to him. He asked Bansilal if he was interested in marrying her? Bansilal chuckles with male bravado as he tells me the story. “I handed him my file. You take care of this and I will take care of her. I went everyday and handed her boss the files and took her out.” I think to myself about the world of construction possibilities that that relationship enables\textsuperscript{106}.

Miriraj and his wife also form a working relationship. They are a husband-wife mason-helper team from a Northern state of India. He has a rotting tooth and she a lazy eye. I meet them when I walk up the stairs of the tower block and meet Miriraj working alone on a column. I stop to ask him about how he learnt his craft. He yells at me “yehhi

\textsuperscript{105} See Ayona Datta (2012) for a more detailed commentary of social life and intermixing amongst migrant workers living in Delhi slums.

\textsuperscript{106} Marriage and political economic alliances are common in Indian upper class worlds—a legacy from the kings and queens—but also through age old community based trading practices. You hire your own kin to do work, this enables community-based working groups. It also works to build conglomerates and consolidate power.
“hamein sikhata hain” (this one teaches me). He is chuckling and I follow his finger to find his wife hiding behind a column clutching her sari across her face. “She is my mason … look, look, how she is holding the leveling tool (fanti).” His wife clutches the fanti and looks at me shyly as Miriraj laughs away. We all laugh. From then on I look for them on site.

I stand next to Miriraj’s supervisor – Jeevanji – on one of the numerous floors of the Whistling Woods tower talking one day. We see Miriraj pass us once, then twice, circling the stairwell and then the floor plate. Jeevanji yells at him “why are you going upstairs? To look for your kuli (the term means laborer but is used to describe women laborers on site)?” He turns to me “he climbed twelve floors looking for her. He is always looking for his kuli” With a swift turn of his head he yells at Miriraj, “Ay, get back to work. Always looking for your kuli!” Miriraj runs off but as I leave I see him walking up and down the stairs in search of her. I see him walking around searching for her often after that.

Work in real estate mines the power of teams. Partnerships combine skills, speed up work, and consolidate domestic and economic interests to channel them into the growth of an industry. The affective and emotive ties to family are drawn and channeled into the energies of work. The domestic, political economic bonds—with their positive abilities of support, double incomes, and transforming gender roles, and negative traits of patriarchal power, abuse, and exploitation—are enhanced through the presence of husband and wife teams at work. Bonds of love become the bonds of work.
On the third floor, sunlight streams upon a wall cutting an image in half diagonally (Figure 5.5). Hidden behind a stack of dust-covered glass and wire mesh is a drawing of a woman and her child. She wears a sari neatly tied and wrapped around her thin waist. Its folds etched clearly with parallel lines. In her arms sits a child. Its hair radiates outwards in all directions in singular lines. Its features are more ambiguous, unlike her clearly defined almond-shaped eyes and smiling mouth. The child’s mouth is wide and open—maybe it is crying? The woman stares ahead into the space before them. The father is not in the picture. Perhaps he is the one that draws?

Amar is the marketing and sales director for Whistling Woods. He lives in South Delhi with his wife and two kids. On a Diwali day I head to a party at his house. The small-roomed, but tastefully decorated, home surprises my architectural sensibilities. It
extends across two floors and is all white. Marbles floors and white walls with blue gray aluminum frames for doors. The living room is large with white sofas, and is punctuated by chic decorative plates, design books, and a good music system. Amar leads me upstairs to show me a warm study with cane curtains and wooden chairs. Brass antiques sit across the space and a white desk spreads across the end of the room. I see his two daughters in an adjacent bedroom and they look up at me with the distracted eyes of childhood.

Amar is a jovial person with a lot of ambition and a strong temper. The son of a middle-class Punjabi family he developed expensive tastes in business school. Whistling Woods has been his path to success. As Webuild grew, so did Amar’s affluence, he bought and renovated a new home, got himself a brand new car, and takes his children to Europe on summer vacations. One day he narrates his family’s visit to Bombay where they stayed at the Oberoi hotel—a prominent five-star hotel – by Bombay’s famous sea promenade—Marine Drive:

Do you know that movie where Amitabh\textsuperscript{107}, where he sits on Marine Drive and stares at the Oberoi ... when I had first come to Bombay and was doing my first job... I used to come sit on Marine Drive and stare up at the Oberoi... so Nilima and I decided we wanted to take our daughters to live in it – to show them what life is like. So we stayed there for three days. Next time I bring them I want them to stay at the Taj.

At his home on Diwali day we play cards. It is a custom amongst middle class Delhiites. Ten rupee notes are gathered by all of us in a bowl at the center of the table and cards distributed. We work towards creating the perfect hand. The winner picks up the

\textsuperscript{107} Amitabh Bacchan is a popular Bollywood actor of the eighties. He is popularly known as the ‘angry young man’.
entire stash. I win big and then lose it over the course of the night. I make a sum total of
thirty rupees that night (fifty cents).

“Will you go take a picture of my Gudiya (doll)?” asks Miriraj when he sees me
with my camera on site. “Yes,” I promise and head over to the labor camp where his
daughter plays in the tinned structure that is her daycare. She is young, a little over a
year-old, and crawls on the floor. I recognize her as a mix of her two parents. The old
woman caretaker holds her up as I take her photograph. Gudiya stares at me with serious
eyes. I return with a hard-copy photograph a month later. “Do you recognize this person?”
I ask as I show Miriraj the photograph. A smile breaks across his face. “Yeh toh meri
gudiya hai!” (This is my doll!) He laughs excitedly. I smile back at the proud love that
glints in his eyes. I know, as Gudiya grows up, she will not be brought to the city, the
only reason she travels now is because she is being breastfed: the labor camp and the city
are not safe spaces to bring young girls.

Shreelal, the site supervisor has a daughter too. At site in the afternoon I sit down
next to him. He starts talking to me. He pulls his wallet out and shows me a picture of his
daughter. I look at a girl with super curly hair – dressed up with lipstick and kajal
(kohl)—there are multiple gold chains in her neck.

If I do not go home for a month then she stops eating. Right now
she must have come home, thrown her bag, and must be playing
train in her room … or maybe cops and robbers. Her uncle lives
with then na, he also has two kids. Who are her age. They play the
whole day.

As a woman anthropologist in a dominantly male space it is hard to bond with
men. The protocols of behavior towards a middle-class Indian woman make drinking
alcohol, talking about sex, and smoking taboo topics. So men talk to me about fatherhood
and of the wives they leave behind, of people they love, and the responsibilities they feel towards them: the mother who is sick and needs medicine for her cancer treatment; The alcoholic father who died too soon; the sisters they need to marry off. The heavy financial weight that marriage, death, birth, and other rituals of life carry with them. Work for them is also about becoming fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles. It is about the familial net into which they must bind themselves and care for the ones they love.

Like the card game we played that night, familial relations and work economies are an infinites gamble. The hands played and the cards held are so stacked in the favor of few. The children of some fare better than the children of others. Class replicates itself through the political economies of work.\textsuperscript{108}

In a corner that no one goes to, there is a picture of a woman (Figure 5.6). She is naked and wears only a *bindi* and a nose ring but seems quite unashamed. She looks directly at us. Her breasts are neatly drawn in two gentle arcs across her chest. Her transparent underwear and genitalia are emphasized with neat lines in the now familiar white chalk on cement walls. A floating penis is etched next to it. The drawing is a road map for sex.

It is almost impossible for a single, young woman to speak to men about sex on construction sites. I am to be the chaste, Hindu girl, unmarried, unknowledgeable about sex, uncurious, and innocent. The women do not care about these protocols. “Do you know any of our Bhojpuri songs?” one asks me one day as I visit the labor camp. I shake my head and she pulls out a cell phone. On the small screen a woman thrusts her breasts

\textsuperscript{108} Willis (1981) book on working class children is an excellent discussion on the modalities of class reproduction in the education system.
Figure 5.6: Roadmap for sex. Photograph by author.
and wriggles restlessly on the floor as she sings. “What is she saying?” I ask. “There is an itch in my blouse, come scratch it,” she says. They laugh wildly.

On another day they tease a woman: “Come join us, come join us, today she does not want to sit with us!” The woman they are hollering at walks shyly away. My curiosity is answered when they tell me her husband stayed home from work today. “He is making a lot of demands,” they joke. As she walks by they tease and shout at her across the labor camp compound.

In the labor camp sex is public and celebrated, but there are also so many secrets related to sex. The empty buildings and damp corners hold memories of sexual abuse and rape. There is a reason why Miriraj searches relentlessly for his wife and women only work in teams with their husbands. Sexual violence is common on construction sites. The dominantly masculine construction world also holds sexual abuse for the young men who apprentice with master masons and craftsmen. Apprentices are expected to cook, wash, clean up, and often do services for older men. A young man cryptically tells me he does not like what his ustaad (master craftsman) makes him do in the room at night. The construction economy caused a boom in sexual economies in the area (Ranjan, Dalal 2014). The head contractor tells me he does not want women on his construction site as he does not want to be responsible for their safety. As I walk through the towers I am now wary of the dark, uninhabited areas. I stay within sight.
Another wall declares: “Tension *mat lo, kaam ho jayega*” (do not stress out the work will get done) (Figure 5.7).

In the grassy fields, boys too young to be called men, play cricket with a makeshift bat and ball. Young men huddle together looking at pictures on one man’s cell-phone. Their hands on each other’s shoulders, their wiry frames leaning on each other. The younger ones come and go. Many come to work in the city for a short time to earn some spending money that they may take home. Others work in the summer when schools and colleges are on leave. “This is my age to roam,” says Veer to me. It is easy to sort the married ones from the unmarried. They former tend to be harder workers, do not disappear from site as easily, and take on greater responsibility. They have wives and children to feed at home.
Mrs. Singh, a woman planner tells me about women’s married lives:

After marriage life is very difficult for women. Husbands do not help at all. Look, at this woman amongst my office staff. She comes from Faridabad everyday. On one hand she works here, then she takes the metro and then the bus and then another to reach home. She reaches at about eight. Does not even change her clothes and has to look at her kids’ homework. Cook food, feed them. She sleeps at two. And again in the morning she is back here. Her husband owns a shop. He does not help at all. Now you tell me—nowadays they want that the women earn but they do not help at all. And she, on top of that, has two bedridden elders in her house. The entire responsibility is on her.

Mr. Kumar, the site engineer, jokes with me on our car ride home:

Life is like a spider web… the more you enter it the more you get stuck. First you get married you feel now I am free, but you start to worry about your wife. Then you worry about the kids… I miss those carefree days.

“Marriage is such a thing, get married and you suffer, and do not get married and you still suffer.”

Marriage transforms the ways of working on site as the numbers of responsibilities grow. It collides with property as well. An architect who wants to get married is worried about his home. He looks for a good house to rent, as he wants to impress his future in-laws, and show them that their family is as affluent as theirs.

“I need to build a house before I marry,” say the young men who like to roam. Workers save to build homes upon the lands they own. “Her mother does not like that fact that I do not own property.” “We divided our ancestral property. Our wives started fighting too much.” Property, home ownership, and land are attached to prestige and affluence in the city, town, and village. To build a home, to buy some land, and to own an apartment or property is what most strive to achieve through their working lives.
Domestic relations continue to intertwine in property relations and extend through the bonds of marriage and family.

Mrs. Singh tells me how a man who runs an arranged marriage bureau asked her for 5% of the dowry offered for her daughter as a commission. “You can afford it you are an Agarwal.” “I told him are you arranging marriages or brokering property?” she explained to me indignantly.

A rapid and rabid real estate industry thrives on the linkage of marriage and property. Developers multiply property through the construction of new apartment blocks, and expands and extrapolates property through the flipping and leasing of space. Property is a mark of social and symbolic capital and needed to improve marriage prospects. Marriage and property drive each other in a rush to accumulate. Property becomes the chief mediator of individuals’ private spheres, the mode through which domestic relations and marriages come to be framed. Through this the real estate industry controls and regulates the politics of home and life. Conversations on marriage, land, and property intertwine with each other and spiral through the staircases in a heady rush.

Leaving the families on site behind, I cut across the giant basement floor plate to go back to the office. Sparks are flying somewhere in the heart of it as welders fix the ventilation ducts. Hidden in the darkness is a frustrated quote:

“Gareeb ka paseena, khoon choosta hain ussein kameena kehtein hain.”

(The one who sucks the sweat and blood of the poor, they call him a bastard)

(Figure 5.8).

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109 This is an upper caste Hindu community.
110 This is not a new argument but extends as far back as Engels.
Can love be exploitative and hungry? Like the love of money and ambition? Like the love for capital that drives contractors and developers to pull work out of laboring bodies. Ram, a site supervisor explains the politics of love in construction:

Labor is hungry for love and to get them to work we must speak to them with love/ affection (pyaar se baat karna). This is the method (tareeka)... with a little love we have to get them to work. It is like this, if an educated architect or engineer speaks to them at their level, they feel good. I talk to them like they are my brothers—(if I say) brother, please do this—then he will do the work properly. Yesterday, what happened, he [contractor] talked to him [the worker] and abused him verbally. Then he [the worker] began working loosely (kaam dhila karne laga). Then the senior contractor said to him son please do this—this work is going on so please get yours done before that ... [then] He finished it in one or two hours. Basically, this is what talking with a little love is.
My brother, my son, my child are common terms used to get work done on site. They are ambiguous shape shifters these terms. At times they symbolize an affective dimension of the contractor and laborer relationship, who can have bonds of affection and companionship. At other times they are tossed carelessly in instruction or used to mobilize someone who is reluctant to work. At times they patronize. Love gathers coercive weight on construction sites. Talk to them with love or affection and they will walk up twelve stories carrying the heavy bars of scaffolding on their heads. Affection wins hearts and acts as a coercive tool. The site contractor Jitendraji is loved for his calm mannerisms and his genteel way of talking to people. Laborers follow him from site to site. “We love Amar,” rave his staff to me. No one would tell me otherwise. Public love for your employer is necessary and requisite. The politics of love strangulate most on construction site.

The cement grey wall is a perfect backdrop for the white chalk. A giant OM: the Hindu religious symbol is etched upon the wall in chunky text. Next to it there is an image of what seems to be Lord Shiva—God of destruction. His hair is piled high in locks. He has bare arms, a bare torso, an elongated nose and long drooping ears—the characteristics of those who are above humans (Figure 5.9).

Before he embarks on his story of love, Shafi feels the need to tell me the story of religious sacrifice. He tells me about Ibrahim who was asked to sacrifice his son. He took him to the forest and tried to kill him, not once, not twice, but ten times. The son did not die. God was testing his sacrifice. The love for parents and the love for Allah come first, Shafi believes. Yet he left his parents for his wife.
Mr. Kumar tells me he is a great believer in Sai Baba: a patron saint from Maharashtra. He takes a trip to the main shrine once a year and always takes his wife and kids. Every morning as we ride together he prays to the small image in his car before he begins our drive. He has a giant image of Sai Baba in his home. Mr. Kumar tells me that everything that he has in life he owes to Sai.

The love of God is increasing in India; the sheer force of this love astounds me. A number of temples and religious complexes rise across the North Indian plain. As India grows more and more affluent there is an increasing love for God. Industrialists leave gold bricks at sacred sites. The numbers of holy men multiply, they tell us how to raise our children, behave, and govern women. The love of God multiplies as work grows precarious and industries more aggressive. It is God who forgives the sins of corruption,
embezzlement, and exploitation. Money flows into religious coffers as industrialists try to atone wrongs they have done. The individuals who stand exploited, the men bodies are broken through construction, the illegalities, and irresponsibility are all washed away with love from God.

Whistling Woods grows at a breakneck pace as if rising to God’s own abode. Every fifteen days a new floor is added to the building and the stacks of floor plates rise one by one. A new floor plate is poured into place. At the end of the day, the molten concrete is already drying up. Water is poured over it constantly. The chemical reaction generates the heat that hardens the concrete and will make it durable for life. For 28 days we must cure the concrete until it achieves its durability. The water, like love, seeps into and strengthens the very pores of this building.

Love, Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) argues, has always been a tool of domination. While writing about historical actions and formations of settler colonies, Povinelli seemingly responds to Michael Hardt’s valiant call to study the “political economy of love” (2004)\textsuperscript{111}. Povinelli draws together love (intimacy) and capitalism. Intimacy, for Povinelli, “[l]ike Capital … demands an ever-expanding market; and, like capital, intimacy expands through macro-institutions and micro-practices” (2006: 190). The power of love, she believes, “lies in its ability to connect the micro-practices of certain forms of love to the macro-practices of certain forms of state governance and certain forms of capital production, circulation, and consumption” (2006: 191). While Povinelli is interested the liberal subject under Empire, her writings form provocations to think of

\textsuperscript{111} Though Povinelli’s project is a genealogical study of the ways in which self and governmentality are intertwined through the concept of the intimate encounter (deriving from love) she subsumes capitalism as a part of her argument.
the role of love in neoliberal industries, to think of the political economy of pyaar in Indian real estate and construction.

As each floor plate is added to Whistling Woods and its walls come up one by one, as the electrical wiring is put into place and glass panes attached, I am reminded that they were produced within a matrix of love. Political economic lives at work are not devoid of love. Love cures the concrete materialities they produce. The husband-wife teams who work together and their children who play on unfinished slabs. In the bored looks of the frustrated steel welder who dreams of the film he watched last night. Through the day you carry mud and mix cement hoping that you are mixing a better future for your child. In the night you yearn for them. The corners of these buildings hold the secrets of domination, violence, and sexual abuse. Of torment, of anger, and of the frustration of knowing you are exploited. Love becomes the structuring device of work.

Love on construction sites weaves through the capitalist formations of work. As a social and intimate relation it forms the undergirding structure for the necessity of labor. As a sexual relation it serves to control the labor and bodies of women and young men. It draws together the power of family and then uses it to divide and exploit. Property, as land and women, are mobilized and accumulated through pyaar: pyaar forms a mode of capitalist accumulation. The self seeps into structure through maternal, paternal, and sexual love. Pyaar serves to dominate and serves to whitewash the systems of economic exploitation. The term’s affective dimensions are manipulated and mobilized for political economic worth on site. The invisibility and versatility of the emotion enable its power. It rests on different bodies and draws them together in a differential relationship continuously indexing the affective ties to home, family, God that serve to mystify the
forms of domination and inequality it simultaneously produces. We are all entangled through the politics of pyaar.

The drawings on the walls at Whistling Woods are in the process of being slowly erased. I see the painters move one floor down at a time. They start from the top floor and every few weeks are on the lower one. They cover the drawings with a smooth, white plaster to create an ivory covered wall. They spread the white plaster over the drawing in thicker and thicker layers, to create a smooth layer for paint. I walk onto a freshly painted floor; there is only chalky, white paint where the drawings once were. The white walls mask the emotional weights of their production.
IV

The roads in and out of urbanism: road ecologies and a transforming Gurgaon

At home on the road

“Every second person in Gurgaon is a migrant”\textsuperscript{112}: The information technology worker from Patna, the Bengali rickshaw puller, the American consultant, the Rajasthani, landless day worker, the student from Manipur, and the Orissan accountant. They stream into the city through the international airport, the Indian railways, and the state transport busses that ply the roads of the Indo Gangetic plain. They come piled in tempos and trucks, and come in on cars and in caravans, moving into and onto Gurgaon’s roads.

Gurgaon, like many cities in India, is the tiny city that grew up way too fast. The infrastructure of this multinational town, at the edge of India’s National Capital Region (NCR), drags in the wake of its real estate boom. The tiny train and bus station stand woefully inadequate staggering under the weight of the populations they must serve. With the railways falling short, and the airport accesses limited, it is the road that rises to serve both the rich and the poor in their quest to occupy Gurgaon. Motorcycles and Mercedes, busses and BMWs, camels and carts, auto rickshaws and bikes ply back and forth through the network of Gurgaon roads that slice, splice and circumambulate the city.

\textsuperscript{112} The official population of Gurgaon doubled in the years between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India 2011). This is based on number of households so is not likely to count a large number of migrant workers. Donthi (2014) states that the population of Gurgaon district grew by nearly 75 percent to 1.5 million in the years between 2001 and 2011, his source is unmentioned.
This thread-like network is held together by the massive stretch of the National Highway Eight.

The Indian National Highway Eight (NH8) is an aggressive stretch of highway that leads out of New Delhi towards Jaipur, the capital of the state of Rajasthan. The highway is part of the Golden Quadrilateral network that forms a diamond shape across India and connects the nation’s four metropoles together. The nationwide transportation corridor moves through the affluent Western Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra. It draws together industrial and port cities and connects them to the Nation’s capital. In 2012 the NH8 came into the spotlight as the first leg of the newly proposed Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) project.

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor is a mega infra-structure project of USD 90 billion (Rs. 4,23,000 crore) with the financial & technical aids [sic] from Japan, covering an overall length of 1483 KMs between the political capital and the business capital of India, i.e. Delhi and Mumbai. This project incorporates Nine Mega Industrial zones of about 200-250 sq. km., [a] high speed freight line, three ports, and six airports; a six-lane intersection-free expressway connecting Mumbai & Delhi and a 4000 MW power plant. Several industrial estates and clusters, industrial hubs, with top-of-the-line infrastructure would be developed along this corridor to attract more foreign investment. [DMIC 2015]

The DMIC highway is emblematic in the fact that it, like many of the express roads built in India, is a public-private partnership. Parts of the highway and the accompanying townships will be handed over to private corporations who will build the infrastructure in return for development rights.

The glorious developmental proposal for the DMIC heralds the coming-of-age of the Indian road as the literal and metaphoric, public-private pathway to India’s development and economic prosperity. It shifts an emphasis from state led initiative to its
co-option into privatized modes of development. This unites the highway and the road with land speculation, rural development, employment opportunity, and international relations. The smoothness of the proposal belies the territories of difference (Escobar 2008) that the developmental vision of building roads creates in reality.

Neelkanth Sir\(^{113}\), a retired planner, and I drove down the NH8 once a week. Together we travelled up and down the highway weaving in and out of the boundaries of Gurgaon, exploring the city and its peripheries, and meeting people who planned, built, occupied, and controlled the areas that surrounded it. Our days began early to beat rush hour traffic that would impossibly clog the highway in the morning and late evenings. A typical day would see visits to three or four different sites including road projects, villages, planning offices, construction sites, and farmlands. We would drive down sandy roads and roads clogged with sewage, on potholed roads and roads that shone with the smoothness of new asphalt. We sped along in an accelerated rush on some mornings and sat sweltering in muggy traffic on other afternoons. We flew over potholes and open ditches and climbed up embankments and gravel heaps. We picked up villagers and dropped off papers; investigated new development and hiked through forests in search of long-lost temples. We were two unlikely companions bound together by the experience of being on the road\(^{114}\).

\(^{113}\) Name changed to protect identity

\(^{114}\) Since the 2000s road development acquired a new mantra and took on a life of its own. The Indian annual Union budget each year began to allocate more and more funds for road and infrastructure construction projects. Road building was considered a key generator of jobs in rural India and a primary way to stimulate the economy. The railways in India were the dominant infrastructural intervention of social progress (Bear 2007: 288). This responsibility now rests on the roads. Built with public-private partnerships the rise of roads also demonstrates the shift from state-led developmentalism to private entrepreneurism. This expansionist emphasis on road construction as a mode of economic development also restructures the geographic relations of areas. Arterial development along roads created thread-like urban development patterns along them and blurred the boundaries between cities and neighboring areas. Within urban areas especially, road building operates in tandem with real estate and building construction.
The road is a technological artifact and a mode of state developmental intervention. The road, as site of developmental decision-making, prioritizes and privileges certain geographies over others. The networks built deliberately connect certain spaces to each other while depriving others of connectivity. Through its networked geography the road shapes and governs territory, produces difference, and is a device of protest and contestation (Graham 2011).

For Neelkanth Sir and I the road was also a space of friendship and discovery. For those who cannot access it or travel alone it is a site of frustration and loneliness. It holds the promise of success and the memory of loss. The techniques of its making make the ecologies of space and society and intertwine it with the making of public and private political economy. The road is a life story, a tool through which both space and self are shaped. In this chapter I explore the trope of roads, literal and metaphorical, that we travel on, exploring what it means to be alive on the road and what this life on the road says about the state’s political economic relations.

*The roads that pave our past and present.*

Roads have a life history of their own and the NH8 has seen more of the world than all the people that ply it. The history of the construction of Indian roads can be traced to the reign of the Mauryas who governed India in the early 7th century (Chattaraj 2010: 46). Arterial corridors laid down by Sher Shah Suri, Mughals, and the British were

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Areas along highways have rapidly urbanized and in the case of some states like Kerala formed one giant urban agglomeration (Swerts et al 2012:6). Tsing (2000) and Smith (1984) are examples of scholars who critique this uneven development and highlight networks as enabling the production of this unevenness.
successive overlays upon these ancient roads (Chattaraj 2010:46). The NH8, from Delhi to Jaipur, forms part of these historic paths that connects two ancient capitals of India to each other. It is this path that was repeatedly built over up until Independence where it lay stagnant until the Golden Quadrilateral Project was proposed\textsuperscript{116}. It was then that another layer of concrete and asphalt was added to this ancient road that Neelkanth Sir and I now drive upon.

It is eight a.m. on a cold January morning. HUDA (Haryana Urban Development Authority) metro station is full of rickshaw drivers looking for fares. As I come out of the station a mob of men surround me, asking me if I need a rickshaw, shouting names of popular office destinations, and offering me a shared ride in a packed fourteen-seater auto rickshaw designed to seat eight. I move through the crowd purposefully and walk towards the east side where Neelkanth Sir is waiting for me. He cuts a lean figure for his advanced age and I often marvel at his ability to remain youthful and enthusiastic. He waves at me and ushers me into the car throwing the newspaper he is reading into the back seat. Sir and I head out onto the road discussing what we want to do that day and the state of my project in general. We circle around the empty plots that were supposed to house Gurgaon’s town center that never was built. The car turns to merge into the NH8. The road already has several commuters making their way to the factories and offices along the route. We pass over a series of flyovers, and sir steps on the gas\textsuperscript{117}.

\textsuperscript{116} A more detailed history of road building can be found in Chattaraj (2010). The stagnation of road building seems to be due to a focus on industrial and agricultural development in India through the 50s, 60s, and 70s.

\textsuperscript{117} Speed and acceleration are often discussed with respect to ethnographies of the road. Authors discuss how speedy growth relates to effects of speeding and critique roads as having differential speeds or conditions of development (e.g. Menoret 2014, Chattaraj 2010). My earlier chapter discusses this notion of speed, which can be used to think about this chapter as well.
The NH8 is part of several interstate highways constructed and controlled by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). The NHAI is the primary organization behind the construction of national highways but several other authorities build roads as well. Each Urban Local Authority (ULA) or municipal council is responsible for road construction and maintenance in its own urban area. For e.g. parts of the NH8 that pass through Gurgaon are subject to the jurisdiction of the Gurgaon Municipal Council. Regional development authorities or authorities for specially created industrial or economic zones, including airports, build roads in the areas under their jurisdiction. In some cases a special authority is created to build specific highways. This is the case for the upcoming Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC).

Neelkanth Sir and I head out of Gurgaon. At this point the NH8 forms a six-lane highway. It is a fairly new road and has several elevated overpasses at major intersections. We sail over them one by one as the grey-black tarmac expands in front of us. The road gradually elevates from the areas around and is separated from them by a bank of sand, a bed of overgrown weeds, and often has a small, parallel side road running along it. The elements change as we move along and pick up speed.

As the density of Gurgaon’s built environment diminishes, the road gets dustier and wider. Parts of this segment are under construction and cordoned off. The middle of the road is a strip of unfinished mud. Heaps of gravel and mud lie piled next to it, waiting to be placed onto the mud. A large roller rests in the central lane commanding the attention of those who drive by. The highway narrows into one usable lane as the bric-a-brac of road construction increasingly occupies the center of the road.
A highway widening project such as this, or any new road construction, requires land acquisition. The master plan made by the local planning authority serves as the determining factor.\textsuperscript{118} The location and size of roads in the master plan determine the amount and location of land to be acquired. This is done through eminent domain.

Funding for land purchase and road construction comes from a variety of central and state funding sources and from developmental funds such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The nodal agency in charge of the road creates a proposal that is submitted to the transportation ministries at the state level. The funding structure is based on funds allocated through state and central construction budgets as well as foreign direct investment and private investment (in return for rights to toll tax\textsuperscript{119} and land development rights along the highway\textsuperscript{120}). Once approval is given land acquisition begins. The NH8 widening passed the land acquisition phase and HUDA has acquired funding for the project. The work was contracted out to a contractor through a bidding process\textsuperscript{121}.

The physical construction of roads is a layered process as well. The contractor builds the sub-base layer first. A CBR (California Bearing Ratio) test determines the existing strength of the soil. The thrust and materials for the road are calculated on the basis of this soil strength. The existing soil is mounded and tamped accordingly and the road level is raised above the surrounding area to safeguard against floods. Additional soil and stone are added to marshy areas where the road is expected to sink more. Pipes

\textsuperscript{118} I discuss master plans for this region in Chapter Two.
\textsuperscript{119} Private entities are granted the right to collect toll tax and develop land along the highway in return for bearing part of the construction costs.
\textsuperscript{120} This serves to enable capitalist accumulation more than development. Infrastructure also moves capital back into the centers of capitalist accumulation, in this case Delhi, faster (Smith 1990).
\textsuperscript{121} For more on process and funding structures for highway development see Gupta et al (2009).
through the embankment and the right configuration of slopes ensure adequate water drainage. This forms the sub-base.

The base layer is laid upon the sub-base. This layer, known as a “mettled layer,” is 30 centimeters to 50 centimeters deep. It consists of small stone aggregates that are crushed and compacted. Compaction or vibration rollers are dragged over this layer repeatedly to give it strength. The final layer is a bitumen layer. This often consists of bitumen, metals, lime, and cement. This layer fills the voids between the base layers and is further compacted and rolled down. Road construction process in this case is one of slowly building layer after layer, compacting and consolidating each and gradually constructing a highway. Each layer melds into the one before it to produce the strength of the road. One kilometer of road takes approximately one month to build in this mode of construction. The life history of important roads is one where their own ancestry mingles into the present to form the foundation and strength of new roads.

This steady, layered, ancestral growth is characteristic not only of roads, but families as well. Mann Singh’s family has a historical connection with the North Indian construction industry. The family and its network are a formidable presence in building construction. Singh’s father is the first large-scale plumbing contractor in North India. The firm was set up nearly fifty years ago and has several offices. In 1977, Singh recalls that his father had contracts in Bombay and Jammu and Kashmir. Their contracting company shared its growth with the growth of several prominent developers and they have long established friendships and working relationships with developers. It is rumored that Singh’s family has strong political connections too.

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122 See Birla (2009) for the modes through which familial networks mobilize business pathways.
I meet with Singh in an elongated glass and steel building, where I tiptoe around a large BMW parked in the driveway of the small plot to get into the building. The empty, marbled lobby inside belies the narrow entrance as a giant stairwell spirals through the height of the building. An elaborately carved figure of Ganesh—a Hindu god—rests placidly at the center as a number of people run up and down the stairs holding files in their hands. I wait for my appointment on a plush, maroon seat that is part of a design series of curved sofas snaking through the lobby. A well-dressed secretary guides me to Singh’s office.

Singh and his brothers were educated as engineers and took over their father’s business after they finished their studies. “I did my civil engineering and completed in 81 and as soon as I completed my engineering I joined the company. Me [sic] and my brothers run the company. One of my brothers is in Bombay running the same business in the name of XYZ constructions. He has a hotel also.”

Singh and I talk about his construction family from a glass cabin on the third floor. From the vantage view of Singh’s office, we can see the giant, open-floor plan that holds a number of workers, divided into groups or sitting alone in small glass cabins. His staff work steadily on their computers. They draw in the thin lines that depict pipes and wires through the structures of buildings in and around of NCR. The arterial networks that circulate air, water, electricity, and other essential components for a building to run.

It is said that the two of the brothers split the business down the middle to create two prominent firefighting and plumbing contracting firms in NCR and beyond. Their business still stands strong. “Our business has grown up so we do not face any challenges any more. People get the challenges from us.” The grandchildren too form part of this
family business in different capacities. I meet Kiran, one grandson who became an architect and started his own architectural firm. Presumably, his projects are enabled by his father’s contacts. The walls of his office are full of elaborate designs of hotels, airports, and public parks. The elaborate designs swish and swirl across the large-format prints that hang off the walls: large-scale projects that a young team of architects usually finds hard to get.

Several of NCR’s large-scale contracting, engineering, architectural, and developer firms have shared the road to economic success together. Their paths and businesses grew together. Their empires are family-led and have spawned a series of contracting, architectural, engineering, and developer business through the incorporation of new generations into the fold.

The rise of these firms and business are tied to other familial networks of capital whose historic business practices in India enabled the growth of its construction industry: Jaypee the cement manufacturing company that moved into real estate development and road construction; Tata Group that moved from electricity and steel production to housing and real estate; Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) that started in real estate development and moved to energy and thermal generation. These networks of heavy industries are formed by the same groups of people come to be tied to networks of political power in the region. Often their kin networks overlap with political families. Like the roads they build, old construction families share layered histories and connections.
Making new roads

Important highways in India are now built with advanced technological equipment that can construct four to five kilometers per day. These machines create concrete roads that are far more durable than the bitumen described above. New expressways between metro poles are built with these technologies. In this construction process, 3.5-3.74 meters by seven-meter concrete paver blocks are prefabricated in a factory setting. They are fixed on site with the help of guide rails and sensors to ensure level precision. The guide rails and sensors secure the pathway of production and ensure the pavers fall into place at the right angles and curvature. This creates a seamless and smooth highway where technology controls the levels and path of the road. This also facilitates a higher speed of construction. The technology, known as slip-form pavers, produces new highways at a fast pace.

Technology creates more than just one kind of road. Ifthikar, a tremixing mason, supports the mechanization of the industry. “I feel happy when I see people using machines as machines means more money.” Learning how to “tremix” changed Ifthikar’s life. Tremixing is a technique of laying concrete floors in square panels. A square is cordoned off on an unfinished floor slab using steel channels. Concrete is cast within it. The concrete is dried and cured through a suctioning cloth and machine. This allows for quicker curing and setting times and creates a highly durable and hardened floor, a floor ideal for heavy use areas such as factories, power plants, and parking garages. Tremixing is a highly skilled technique and has its specific contractors. Ifthikar himself is one such, small-scale contractor.
He appears on the Whistling Woods site one day in the giant basement that was to be a parking lot. I see him as I walk to and fro between the giant pit and tower area under construction. With a crew of six people he shifts from bay to bay. He casts the floor of each bay in a day. Ifthikar stands apart from other workers, as he is always exceptionally well dressed for someone who physically works with cement-concrete. Neatly ironed shirts and clean blue jeans form his usual dress code.

He stands by the side of the square panel and supervises his staff as they pour concrete and even it out. He then carefully removes his own shirt and lays it on cement bags nearby, before he gets to work swooshing an aluminum bar across the concrete to level its finish, finally attaching the tremix cloth and pump to a newly laid panel. One day, after much cajoling (protocols of gender and class made him reticent) I ask him to speak of his life as I interview him. I am shocked when he tells me he has very little education\(^{123}\).

Ifthikar’s father is a tailor\(^{124}\) in their village. He is one of eight children: five sons and three daughters. As a tailor his father could barely make enough to feed them all. Ifthikar describes this financial pressure as causing his father to be worried or stressed all the time (\textit{pareshani}) and the elder, male children stepped in to help. His elder brother was the first to leave their village in the tribal areas of the newly formed state of Chhattisgarh. The brother became a mason in Gurgaon and, when Ifthikar dropped out of school in the fifth grade, his brother encouraged him to come join him in the city. Ifthikar speaks of the family’s absolute poverty where he was too ashamed to go to school because of the lack of clothes.

\(^{123}\) Most of the skilled laborers on site have studied till the eighth or tenth grade and can read. It is hard to be upwardly mobile if you cannot read.

\(^{124}\) The profession also marks them as a lower caste.
I did not have clothes to wear. I used to go to school in only underwear or torn shorts… I did not have a decent notebook, a pen, or a pencil. At that time a pencil cost 10-25 paisa. I did not even have that. I used to work in the fields till nine. I went to the fields at six and worked till nine.

Ifthikar was angry at the constant beatings he got at school and stopped going as an act of rebellion. After ‘roaming’ around in the village for a few years his family encouraged him to join his brother. He came to Gurgaon. “For two, three months, I just looked and roamed around, and then went back to the village. Then I came back from the village and slowly, slowly learnt.” He slowly found the work to be “OK” (theek). His brother taught him a mason’s work bit by bit. He would correct Ifthikar on the proper usage of tools. Sometimes he would stop working on a project and ask Ifthikar to take over. Another familial tie paved the way.

“After six months I said that I want to work on my own. My brother said you are still a child. I told him that I would see. I have already left home [so I can do this too].”

Ifthikar went to Chandigarh and on from Chandigarh to Varnala through recommendations and information from friends and acquaintances. In a town called Nalgadh he finally managed to land a small contract job. He got himself two helpers to work for him. Confident from that experience he returned to Delhi and asked his brother to buy him a tremix machine. They borrowed money from family and friends, looked for a cheap machine, cajoled a dealer, and bought one. He has been working on his own since. That was in 2003.

Ifthikar and his brother educated their younger brothers who also became masons. They rebuilt their mud house in the village into a seven-room home. They married off
two sisters (and paid their dowry) and are educating the last one. The shirtless young boy now says that he cannot wear un-ironed clothes.

Smart and quick-witted Ifthikar has an opinion on everything. He talks about privatized health care being more accessible than public health and critiques class hierarchies in India for replicating British rule (*angrezi raj*): he dreams of leaving the city and returning to his village in 2013.

I will open some small business of my own. I will consult people in the village. … I will live on my own terms/will, so that there is no pressure on me. I will have some small business. Invest one or 1.5 lakhs and start a gift item or clothes store that sells shoes and jeans and things. Right now I am going back on the 3rd for a holiday.

Even those born in less fortunate circumstances and far less affluent families than Singh’s have benefitted from the economic opportunities offered by the construction industry, albeit at a far differential scale. Technological acumen promises better futures.

The introduction of new technologies, fast learning curves, and quick entrepreneurial skills helped several individuals within the construction industry to construct better futures for them. This trickle down effect while enabling some marginalizes many as the numbers of workers required change.

The avenue for technological change in construction occurred through road technologies. The modularity as well as the scale of road making enabled the introduction of expensive construction equipment, which gradually made its way into real estate construction as well. The push towards highway building took these technologies on the road bringing an access to more technologies with them: electricity, mobile phones,
Internet, and consumer goods infiltrate the markets along the roads we build. A remaking of self occurs as technologies and tools move out and beyond urban realms.

**From the urban into the rural**

Road construction activity on the NH8 falls behind Neelkanth Sir and I after a few kilometers. The next part of the landscape belongs to industrial plots and proposed-but-not-built private housing complexes. These are interspersed by *sharab-theka* shops (liquor shops) at five-hundred-meter intervals. The yellow signage of the *sharab* stalls resonates with familiarity for the everyday commuter. Roadside dhabas or restaurants for truckers and commuters decorated with Christmas lights and neon signs emerge alongside. The amount of sand and dust increases to remind us that there is a desert close by. On the way we pass two brand new roads barricaded off from the highway. These are the Southern Periphery Road and Northern Periphery Road that form a partial ring road around Gurgaon. The roads await a politician’s “OK” to inaugurate them and are cordoned off. The roads are nevertheless festooned with flags erected by a developer to celebrate their property along the new highways.

Gurgaon roads have a strange relationship to their city. The rapid, privatized development of real estate constructed a city with no roads. Muddy tracks, open drains, and sewage flowing down highways characterized the roads of the city in the early 2000s. Even today it has roads where there are no buildings and buildings where there are no roads. Citizens are up in arms. Roads and real estate are like two warring cousins, supporting and abandoning each other in a continuously changing angry familial battle that drags new members into it everyday.
We come to the ageing tollbooth that signifies the end of Gurgaon and the beginning of Virgaon—the town area developers now call “New Gurgaon”. Haphazardly stacked brick and concrete structures painted pink and blue with signs of garage repair, car shops, brokers, rooms for rent, and mobile phones characterize this once-village now ramshackle town.

Neelkanth Sir is a Virgaon man. He was born and raised in this village. He cuts an interesting figure as a son of a farmer with a family of four sons and four sisters. He is from a land holding caste that fought for and achieved special caste category. This caste owned the majority of land in Gurgaon unlike the more Jat controlled areas of the rest of Haryana. The community traces its ancestry to the God Krishna. Their traditional occupation was cow herding but several owned large amounts of property in Gurgaon.

Sir’s family farmlands were sold to the Haryana Urban Development Authority years ago but his ancestral home in the village still remains. He is the youngest son in his family and was educated by his brothers who remained farmers. Unlike them, but enabled by them, he won scholarships to Delhi’s premier university Jawaharlal Nehru University to study geography and later went to the prestigious School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) to study planning. Appointed planner in the Town and Country Planning Office of Haryana, Neelkanth Sir has not only planned urban areas for the state of Haryana, but his career has changed the future of his farming family. Through his network he enables his nephews’ careers. Several of his family members run construction equipment business. A nephew works as a watchman for a housing complex built on village land. His own son works for a developer and a family relative is a broker. On an average day Sir’s phone is

125 Name changed to conceal identity of informants.
ranging with people asking for advice on land, where to buy property, how to transfer property, or how to acquire permissions for construction.

Networks, families, and village kinship matter deeply in Haryana as well as the construction industry. It is an industry where a majority of business is conducted through trust and kin relations. Contractors will draw laborers from their own villages and maternal villages. References spread by word of mouth and networks of kin. There are legacies of villages supplying specific kinds of labor to urban areas. The best tiling and skilled stone masons come from Rajasthan, the best electrical workers are Muslims near Agra, and steel workers come from Muzaffar Nagar. Masons came from Bilaspur. Malda laborers from West Bengal form the largest bank of laborers in NCR and occupy the lowest and broadest part of the labor pyramid. As demands for construction activity increase laborers are drawn from further and further away. But the networks along family and familiarity lines remain. The construction industry builds its own roads into rural India through networks of kin.

Roads into social change

On our drive Sir and I converse about my work and his but over the year diversify into conversations on my life and his. He often speaks of development in the area and changes that he has seen and I marvel at the life he has led. On a rainy June morning he takes me to his childhood hangout. We drive outward towards the hilly, Kikar forests bordering Virgaon. Neelkanth Sir’s old school sits atop of the hill beyond the town. The school is surrounded by dense, brambly vegetation and we can barely see the building.
He pulls up to an elaborate gate with statues of deities. There is a temple complex and a cowshed where his school once was. We walk into the complex past an old, dry tank filled with broken rubble and moss. Sir tells me how he jumped into this tank on hot summer days. He leads me through the thicket to the edge of the hill. “This is where I used to come and study,” he says to me.

It is almost midday and the ground is hot under my sandals. I stare down at the drought-cracked mud. Black ants crawl across the surface almost covering it. I look around and am mesmerized by the sight in front of me. A valley dips before us covered by a canopy of green. In the near horizon, I can see the tall, black monstrosities of buildings under construction raise their ugly head and roar. I wonder silently to myself about how long this forest cover will last? I turn to the right and see a male peacock sitting resplendent on a tree branch in the shade. His tail sweeps majestically down the branch as a few peahens peck about in the cracked mud. As I stare openmouthed, it takes a delicate jump, spreads its wings and glides gracefully over the Kikar canopy down into the valley. Its golden yellow and gemstone-like blue wings catch the midday sun. I laugh aloud in delight!

The transforming ecologies of Gurgaon bring parallel shifts in the human ecologies of Gurgaon. A number of migrants both of the middle and laboring classes move to Gurgaon to find work there. Rapid urbanization brought with it groups with different values and placed them adjacent to each other in the same space. Social values and roles were under transformation. Take for example shifting gender roles as Lal Bahadur articulates.
Lal Bahadur works on the Whistling Woods construction site. Originally from Bihar he splits his time between one month at home and three to four in the city. He is a chipper on site, the person who rectifies improperly cast concrete. With gloves, hammer, and a chisel, he chips away at concrete. He smoothens rough patches and gets rid of awkward bulges, he hides everyone’s mistakes. I stand by him as he works on the site one day. The regular beat of his hammer hitting the chisel punctuates our conversation with a dull but steady beat.

Lal Bahadur is silent and calm but his eyes shine with interest as I tell him what I do. “I have wanted to talk to you for a while now but was afraid,” he told me when we first met. I understood. Protocols of class did not allow him to approach an upper class, single woman on site. Hearing about my student background, he proudly tells me that he comes from an educated family and is well educated himself. All his siblings are educated. He talks to me about how much he enjoyed school and studying and loved English and Math. Circumstances changed his path. “I used to study, there were a few guys in the village who started mocking me. [Because] My father owns a store but we were in bad financial state. I had two sisters to marry.” Lal Bahadur caved under the pressure of a gossiping village and sought help from a maternal uncle. He left a Bachelor of Arts degree program to come work as a chipper.

Lal Bahadur’s maternal uncle is his contractor and they both struggle to get their dues from the “companies” they work for\textsuperscript{126}. The two of them had a fall out with each other after a year or two of work and Lal Bahadur asked his friends for jobs. An acquaintance he met set him up with a job in Kerala where he spent ten months. Lal

\textsuperscript{126} As Chapter Three discusses corruption is inherent in the industry. It is commonplace not to be paid the last set of fees owed to you. Clients and contractors often tend to create excuses when it comes to payment of fees and salaries. Several are caught in the loop of endless, frustrated visits to demand their dues.
Bahadur loved his time there. For him it was a cultural shift and a time of exploration. He raves about the people and the work ethic of the South. He returned to work with his uncle a few months later. He has land, which he will have to cultivate after his father. Familial duties beckoned: he is the only son, his mother was ill, and he had a wife in the village. The responsibility weighed heavily and he moved close to home.

He brags about his wife with a fondness and pride. His wife is educated as well. She is works in an anganwadi (child daycare center) and has a BA. She also stitches clothes. “She makes better money than I do in the village. The anganwadi give 3000 rupees and then from the food for the children (in the anganwadi) there is grain left[127] and then she earns from the stitching 1000/2000 rupees.” He tells me that his family does not want him to do construction work. His mother and wife do not know that he does manual labor on site. Lal Bahadur’s travels along the road allow him to perform a class category that he does not work in. His transformation from home to site is a marker of the desire for improved hierarchy and dignity of laboring practices that prompt movement upon roads, and at the same time demonstrates the fallacies this movement can bring.

As Lal Bahadur moves out of the city, his village space is changing too. An increasing emphasis on education brings a parallel increase in educated young men and women in villages and small towns. There are, however, few white-collar jobs for them. Government jobs are in high demand, as they provide side incomes through bribes and perks as well as a guarantee of lifetime employment. An emphasis on educating the girl child and empowerment of women reserves governmental jobs such as those of childcare workers, teachers, and health-support staff for women. Educated young men seem to

[127] Aganwadi workers are often known to pilfer grain supplied to feed the children and sell it illegally. This extra profit makes the job more lucrative.
have greater difficulty finding jobs due to the larger number of educated men. This often leaves young men, from rural areas, unemployed, and feeling inadequate. Migration seems to be the only solution, which often results in women taking care of the home.

Several make their way to the city to find work in construction. Like Lal Bahadur their wives are often better educated and earn more than them. The roads in and out of rural India create villages where there are more women than men. They form the caregivers and primary income earners\textsuperscript{128}. This in turn gradually reshapes the roles they play within the broader contexts of familial and social life.

Neelkanth Sir is so happy to see my excitement at the peacock that he decides to show me more of Gurgaon’s naturescape. Across from his school sits another temple complex that is run by an old school friend of his. Sir takes me there to speak of his reforestation dreams. Neelkanth Sir’s friend allows Sir to run some plantation activity within the temple complex, so he plants saplings of trees that he grew up with that are pushed into extinction in the area by the aggressive growth of Kikar. “We will plant more trees here in the rains,” he promises out aloud. We explore the small saplings that he planted. Krisanji, his school friend joins us. A retired police officer, Krisanji is a potbellied and mustached man with a slight limp. He comes to the temple bringing steel bars and other materials for the temple construction. We sit down on plastic chairs in the small angan (front courtyard). The temperature is starting to rise, but the courtyard is cool and shaded by the trees. Sir and Krisanji start a discussion about which tree they planted and which tree was around when they were young. “My brother planted these two trees”: Krisanji points at the peepals around us. That tree was just this high when we

\textsuperscript{128} This is not entirely new. Women in India, especially in the fields of agriculture and domestic work, have oft served as primary income earners for their families.
were kids. I ask the two of them why the school was up here when the village was down there? They explained that 50 villages shared the school. Students came to the school from other villages on the other side of the hill. Now there are more schools.

Despite the high levels of unemployment, education undoubtedly provided opportunity for several. Neelkanth Sir’s colleague and fellow planner—Yusef—has a life history of mobility through education. A fifty-year-old Muslim man he enjoys a comfortable post in the town-planning department in Gurgaon. I interview Yusef formally one day, in a two-storey, dimly lit bungalow, surrounded by plants that Yusef lovingly planted. He narrates his childhood story to me. His life is structured by landlessness, agriculture, and India’s educational policies. His two daughters move through the bungalow playing as he mixes Hindi and English in his narrations of his life history to me (English words in italics).

I was born in Rajasthan. My mummy and papa were uneducated landless laborers. We had land but my father’s brothers harassed my father and he had to dispose of the land to them only. … Muscle power and might is right play a big role there. We had to migrate after that to my father’s maternal uncle’s village. My mother wanted us to study. We were two brothers and we used to walk two kilometers to the nursery school … I studied till the second and [then] our village people called my father back. I started studying in our village until the 8th grade. In 1974 I did the 8th grade. I was a studious studier. But the situation at home were [sic] such that I had to leave my studies. It was 1974. There used to be a migration of laborers from Rajasthan to, to a major township near Ahmedabad. After Diwali (the festival of lights) when agriculture stopped. This was rain fed agriculture. They say the world runs on wishes (umeedon pe saari duniya chalti hai). My parents found this out and the four of us went there to make bricks near the Sabarmati. The conditions were not conducive there. And I was a child. For five to seven days I fell ill. But then I thought we have to work hard. … So very good, the highest amount one lakh five thousand bricks were made by us—the full family. The rate for bricks was 20 rupees for 1100 bricks. There is a broker who
buys the bricks. His commission is two rupees. So ultimately you get rupees 18 for 1100 bricks. …

After 1977 our village school became a secondary school. Then my father he died in 1976. Before that, the government had a scheme for giving land to landless laborers. We got five bhigas. In the summer we used to till the land the entire family together. It was our only asset. … We had a bumper crop of maize but there was no rain. We used to carry pots of water from the pond to the field. At that time my father expired due to [sic] snakebite. … After that I was a laborer lifting stones for one rupee a day. But I ran off after half a day. I bought a few vegetables and started selling them in the market. After that I started selling ice candy.

In 1977 I took admission in the ninth grade. The school staff paid my fees and a teacher gave me a uniform. That was the turning point. In the 10th grade I was thirteenth in the state. … I got a fellowship to go to college. I used to send money home and pay for instruments for the fields. I bought a water pump and carried it for forty kilometers, my brother and I.

After his early struggles, Yusef’s entrepreneurial spirit serves him well. He gets a degree in Geography and is offered a scholarship to the Center for Environment Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad. He returns to Haryana to give the state exam for planners and finally enters the town-planning department in the state. A series of well wishers who recognize his intelligence and fellowships enabled this young man to achieve what he has today.

The changing scenario of building construction and urban development planning hold many success stories like those of Yusef: young laborers who started small-scale contracting work that turned into firms; architects who started developer firms; uneducated contractors who created large corporations; and absolute, landless tribals who now run labor-contracting businesses. The geography of the lives of several Indians radically shifted through the movement into construction (but only for the entrepreneurial few; see Chapter Four). Construction offered a faster track into social mobility than
agriculture for those whose access to land is limited. Simultaneously these narratives of social mobility have a lot to do with individual entrepreneurship and mobility through social networks. Tactical maneuvers on the parts of select young men enabled their rise in the industry.

Krisanji and Neelkanth Sir used to walk home through the forest together. Their old path now runs through the large boundary walled property of XN Company. Sir complains vehemently about them.

They [XN] have taken over four hundred acres of our village land. The government gave them a hundred acres of land and then they asked for 250 acres. Now they just use one acre and God knows what they do on the rest. I have initiated a court inquiry. I will do something and get that land back.

Virgaon is a rich village. The village collectively owns a large amount of land and part of it lies within a protected forest belt. Most of the villagers have sold their individual farmlands either to the Haryana Industrial Development Corporation that built an industrial area just opposite the highway from Virgaon or to developers who now seek to build apartment complexes along the NH8. Several families made large amounts of money and a few invested this in land further down the highway or in different villages in which they have familial relations. Different farmers profited differentially. Those who sold their land early did not have enough to leverage with and hence are considerably less well off than the ones who played the real estate speculation game. Some still hold onto their property and wait for prices to rise. This financialization of agricultural land is tied to power. The landless and the displaced are at the bottom of this monetary chain.
An oft-repeated complaint amongst laborers in the industry is that the size of land holdings is diminishing and survival through farming small plots is extremely difficult. The Zamindari Abolition Act enabled landless tenant farmers claim over the lands they tended and attempted to even out stilted landownership. The act itself had differential success (see Balakrishnan 2012) and passed small, and often barren, land holdings to tenanted families. Decades of growth of joint families and families with large number of children, as well as changing property laws, have left farmlands divided and subdivided down. Increasing agricultural cost including fertilizers, high yielding grain varieties, and technological requirements such as bore wells and water pumps make agriculture a costly business. Expenses in the village mount: A sister’s wedding, a father’s death, an illness, or sheer familial hunger brings several into New Delhi’s borders searching for work. Building construction welcomes the landless and those who wish to supplement their income from agriculture.

Veer, the young and charming layout mason, understands the meaning of landlessness. He comes from an extremely large family with little or no land.

We are of the lohar (metalworkers) caste. This does not mean that we beat iron the whole day, we also use the karni (cement scraper), the hammer, and do furniture work too. My family works in the furniture line. Most of them work in the village … My father; he is one of seven brothers. And each one of them has five-five, six-six, my family has the least [children]. Even then we are five brothers and one sister. When I was a child they counted the family, it was over a hundred people. We do not need a village … of the entire family my father and I are the most behind. When I was born we used to eat and live together but by the time my youngest brother was born, everyone had separated. My father drinks a lot and lost a lot of money.

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129 This is coupled with the rise of industrial farming like Reliance Agro.
130 See Wahi (2014) and Vaidya (2014) for discussions of property legislation and its transitions in India.
Absolute poverty (*gareebi*) and the necessity of feeding the rest of the family took Veer out of school and into the city to work. He quit school in the sixth grade and started working in the construction industry when he was thirteen years old. They could not afford the INR 35 (less than fifty cents) a month fees for the private English school in the village he wanted to go to. The public school did not teach anything, he insisted. He moved to the nearest city – Ranchi and worked as a helper for a mason and started apprenticing as a mason. He quickly moved up the ranks in six months and now works as a *raj mistri* or layout mason, the top of the line for masons. He started his career in Ranchi but moved to Gurgaon with his family in 2006. He is only twenty years old and has already spent the last seven years of his life working. “My age is to walk around, roam around. And here I am, I am working, I am earning.”

Agricultural land does not sustain a family but its monetization does. The subdivided agricultural plots in remote rural areas do not produce enough grain to fill the stomachs of a family of eight like Veer’s. Marriages, deaths, education, and growing consumerism in rural India places demand on families that land holdings cannot meet. Construction, Veer tells me, “draws the best of the best and the worst of the worst. Here a man works in the sun. Works in the sunlight. Your face must be black. A person becomes dark; the shine on your face reduces. If they do not get any work anywhere else. If they have had a hard time in some other work or been thrown out of it, then they will get work here.”

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131 As opposed to Yusef’s educational experience, where governmental schooling and education policies acted as enablers, recent shifts in rural education see the rise of “private” schools that have greater credibility than the government school. Workers in the construction industry repeated to me that they rather send their children to private school than have them waste away in public school. This distrust percolates in other state institutions as well, and indicated a disillusionment with state action, often united with a reading of the state as corrupt (Gupta 2012).
The movement of roads out into the country and the movement of individuals, like Veer, into cities mark a layered history of dispossession. The piecemeal division and subdivision of agricultural land from generation to generation that produces land holdings so small to root out income based cultivation. The capturing of non-profitable land in affluent areas—small land holdings, arid, stony, and inaccessible land—by wealthier farming families and the sale of this land to brokers and middle men who wait for land booms in small towns along major highways (Balakrishnan 2012). The dividing, flipping, and acquisition of land removes it entirely from Veer’s hands. Construction embraces all into its arms promising better, but more unstable, futures, from the land for all those who land betrayed.

*Transforming ecologies along the road*

Beyond the village of Virgaon spread acres of protected forestland filled with trees, peacock, hyenas, and all kinds of flora and fauna. The Kikar tree, an Acacia species introduced by the British (Economic Times 2014), which took over the countryside, dominates these lands. The short, stubby, and resilient tree reigns over NCR’s forested area forming an impenetrable cover, its small, multi-leafed branches intertwine with the next tree to produce a verdant canopy. The thorny, brambly tree is a resilient species and survived the rapid shrinking of Gurgaon’s water table as the city grew. The scenario was different in Neelkanth Sir’s childhood. He describes alternate landscapes of dense trees and plants that occupied these forests before the Kikar took over. He narrates tales of water tanks and lakes dotting the Gurgaon countryside forming small oases for the area’s flora and fauna. He even tries to reconstruct the lakes by pumping water into old tanks,
but to no avail. This is indeed a narrative of loss, Gurgaon; the land of lakes is now the land of water shortage and drought. Construction and a burgeoning population have literally sucked the water out of the area. A crisis looms over the city’s head.

The construction industry drains human energies too. Laborers start working as early as thirteen years old and at forty deteriorate physically under the hard labor the industry demands. Death is expected on construction sites. It walks behind workers as they step across gaping voids and walk under exposed electrical wires. Everyone carries stories of death. At Whistling Woods a laborer dies on a hot summer night. He had a heart attack in his bed at night, I am told when I come to site the next day. I imagine the heart attack prompted by a hard day’s labor under a fifty degree centigrade sun. Gurgaon rises on the bodies of dead workers.

MD talks to me about his experience with death. He lay in hospital in coma for three months after falling from a three-storey building that was to be a school.

I myself was in coma for three months. I fell from the third floor. The doctor said that I did not even have breath. … Just like this three storey home, that was a three-storey school. And on the last floor at that level there was a gate that had only two columns. You had to put a roof and then have a third hanging column. I made that column and opened its shuttering. … I cast it and opened it up. There was a Bengali carpenter. The two of us worked together. The idiot, sisterfucker, I used to look out for him, he used to look out for me. We stayed together with love and affection. He was a Bengali, a carpenter just like me. We stayed in the same hut ate together. The problem was that he drank alcohol. … When the second roof was opening. I said do not open up the first column. They opened the support. The roof took us with it. We fell next to a very big DG [diesel generator]. He fell straight into, where all the plates, metal was stored. He got cut up completely. One of the column supports fell on me. I was conscious that I was falling from two storeys. I got up from it and ran in fright and fainted.
While MD lay in coma for months, he did eventually survive and rise to work again. Most share the fate of his friend. Construction sites echo with a sense of loss. They are memorials of the lives that the buildings took with them. Of the ghosts that lay buried in the land until it was dug up. Of the villages it once used to be part of and the villages and towns that people left behind. Construction work has sucked human energy and claimed human lives. Death at construction sites is sudden, unexpected, and swift. People do not realize where it comes from. The new city rises on the bodies of the dead.

The Kundali Manesar Palwal (KMP) Expressway marks the maximum extents of Gurgaon. The National Capital Region Master plan proposed the KMP expressway as a ring road around the entire footprint of NCR. The bypass is designed to divert trucks and other traffic that plough through Delhi to access areas in Punjab and the North. On a June morning Sir and I drive up the NH8 to the KMP expressway. The expressway has been in the news as it was to be completed over a year ago. People are angry, the construction is stalled and the project has run out of funds.

After a half hour drive out of Virgaon, we see the concrete pillars of the KMP rise above us. The KMP is an entirely elevated highway and we turn left, onto a village road, to look for a way to access the expressway that is raised a good four to five meters above the road. We drive parallel to the KMP looking for a ramp up. Sir tells me this area is formed from five villages and each has their separate panchayats (village governing councils) hence it is called Panchgaon. There are fields and small shops around us. Every once in a while we pass a set of small shanties with villagers sitting around offering chai and other small services. The fields are a dry brown as it is summer but there are patches
of intense green with a few trees offering dense shade. On our right runs the KMP and we are moving parallel to it.

I talk to Sir about a recent television show and news articles that derided the village Khap Panchayats they had in Haryana. Consisting of senior men in the villages Khap Panchayats are traditional governing councils that set protocols of behavior for the villages they govern. They had come under national spotlight recently for their strong stand against inter-caste marriage, intra-village marriages, and statements such as that chowmein (i.e. Chinese style noodles) and other fast food lead to rape (Saini 2012). The popular television show featured a Khap Panchayat leader opposing marriages between a young man and woman from the same village. The film star who interviewed the leader derided this opinion. As I described it to Sir, he asked me my opinion. “People should marry whomever they want. I do not really care,” I replied.

Neelkanth Sir explained to me the logic behind the panchayat’s opinion. Boys and girls in the same villages are raised to be like brother and sister. That is why they should not marry. He says in fact even the Panchgaon kids are said to be brothers and sisters (for Virgaon villagers) and we do not marry them. He tells me about a woman he met in a Norway airport who is living with her brother. They have kids together. He said he spent time with her at the airport and then she wrote telling him this. He was shocked. He shows me photos with her at the airport that he took on his phone. He says in the western world these things are very common. Would you marry someone to her brother here?

Despite Sir’s view of the west and its incestuous ways, and the logic of village elders, a sea change occurs in the ways in which caste and village social relations are understood in the greater Gurgaon area. Real estate development creates a heady mix of
differential norms. Already in Gurgaon an increasing professional crowd derides the local villagers for their alcoholism, patriarchal attitude, and misogyny. The villagers believe the professionals to be heartless and indecent (the professional keeda or insect). There are migrants from a variety of villages and expats from different countries across the world. One of the chief fault lines of this mix is the high rate of rapes in the area. Working professionals in multinational companies blame the “drunk village men” and their patriarchal behavior. Khaps defend the men by deriding women’s behavior and clothing. The battle over social and spatial change takes place over the bodies of women.

The bodies of young women in particular are policed, protected, and discussed. Preeti forms an example of a young woman in Gurgaon. I studied with thirty-year old Preeti. She is an architectural colleague who grew up in Delhi but went to architecture school with me in Bombay. Her parents were part of the first wave of Delhi –ites to move to more spacious apartments in Gurgaon and she moved back to live with them after she graduated. She works for a developer in Gurgaon. On one of my first days in Gurgaon she picks me up in her car to show me around the city. She cuts a neat and trim figure in a pencil skirt, blazer and white formal shirt. I am a little taken aback as she drives me nonchalantly through a space I considered foreign and threatening. She explains the different plots and sectors to me and points to areas where the original villages lie. “It is advised not to go in them,” I was told by a professor, I meet. Preeti designs bungalows in the North of India and has lots of construction opportunities in her work. “In Delhi,” she say, “you can actually build architecture.” The limited space in Bombay makes architectural projects a rare commodity often in the hands of big developers only.
We head to one of the early shopping plazas in Gurgaon, which is an open-air arcade. It is full of expatriates in coffee shops and stores stocking German, Korean, and other foreign foods. “This is a place where my friends and I hang out a lot,” she tells me. I look around to see several young women like us sitting in coffee shops comfortable in their western attire. Preeti admits to me that life in Gurgaon is a little more restrictive than our undergraduate years living in Bombay, but insists, “you find ways around it.” She echoes a sentence that several middle-class women in Delhi also reiterate: “Having a car changes everything”.

The protocols and rules for women have two oppositional faces in the villages of Gurgaon and the real estate projects built on their farmlands. One are inhabited by village women who must cover their faces from the village elders and are married off at legal marriage age and the other embodied by women like Preeti and me, independent and professionalized. The focus on the car or the idea of not letting women out of the house, on to the public road, for both, however, is telling.

Although liberating the car requires the road. For both categories of women, the road forms the unsafe space. It becomes the space outside the shelter of family and familiar ground where they can be violated and harmed. In the case of mobile women, be it construction workers who come to sites from villages, or the wives of laborers who live in labor camps or the middle-class house wives taking their kids for painting classes in a mall in Gurgaon, the road and their movement through it represents a moment of

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132 Changing governmental policy is changing the dynamics of gender in villages too. In the Gurgaon-Manesar several local village women now train to be teachers or run the child care centers that are set up as part of the Government of India’s primary education drives. A number of these jobs as well as positions on the village council are now reserved for women. The promise of a steady income enables several young women to step out beyond their households and work in the government sector, most often encouraged and supported by their families.
vulnerability. As values transform on the road they threaten to rage their battle on the bodies of women: transforming values, transforming spatialities, and the anxieties leading from the same are expressed through the restrictions on women’s movement, criticisms of their comport, and a policing of their bodies\(^\text{133}\). The road both literal and metaphorical, and the spatial and social changes it brings, has led to increasing anxieties related to the bodies and behaviors of women.

“Samjho ye bhi meri bitiya hai” (imagine that she, too, is my daughter): I skirt judgment and gain acceptance through Neelkanth Sir’s extension of family to me. I too am looked at like a daughter of Virgaon, untouchable by its men, uncorrupted, and obedient. The responsibility rests uneasily on my liberal, Bombay-girl shoulders. The road from Harvard to Haryana has policed me as well.

Neelkanth Sir and I eventually find a way onto the KMP expressway. We head onto the elevated road up a dirt road that is likely to eventually be a ramp. The car struggles: I hear its wheels scrape and slide but we make it up onto the concrete surface to investigate. The KMP is in various stages of completion. Parts of it already have a concrete floor while some stretches consist only of tamped-down mud. We drive across loose gravel and it hits the bottom of the car in a continuous shower. Sir does not seem concerned and we drive on. We come to a bridge that is fully concrete cast and finished. Its connection to the rest of the road however is a set of open steel bars that cause the car to jump as we drive upon it. Stacks of gravel and mud are heaped on both sides of the expressway and large stretches of it are closed off. An occasional motorcyclist passes us as we drive upon it.

\(^{133}\) This is an extension of Partha Chatterjee’s (1994) argument of women as bearers of the traditional in colonial India. Here they are the bearers of the anxieties of transformation of values.
Sir tells me that the expressway is supposed to be a bypass but the government has proposed eleven “theme townships” along the expressway. These include an education city, a world trade center city, a fashion city, a leisure city, and a leather city. I express my surprise that they chose to have a leather city. He tells me it is to help the Muslim population called Mavs develop. Muslims are a minority in Gurgaon hidden from the eye on its distant periphery (this is the land of the Hindu God Krishna after all!). I have heard Sir speak about them before and discuss the favors that the government offers to keep them happy. I sense disapproval in his voice. Several locals I meet echo it.

Nasreen is a Muslim woman who works as the assistant director in Webuild Developers. Unlike the Mavs in Gurgaon, Nasreen comes from an affluent family and is a world citizen. She grew up in Kashmir and went to school there. The escalating levels of militancy in her area pushed her well-connected family to look for prospects elsewhere. They moved to the United States where she studied network engineering, she did her Masters degree in London, and finally relocated to Dubai where her family now lives. She worked in retail, IT (Information Technology), and the FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) sector before making her way to real estate “eight to ten years ago.” She worked for the World Bank consulting on Jammu and Kashmir and did retailing as well. Her return to India was marked by her marriage a few years ago and she has been in India since. Despite the fact that she is a “world citizen” she considers India home. She speaks of being a woman and a Muslim in the construction sector.

It is male dominated. But fortunately, when I joined real estate in India, you know, my family was very apprehensive, they thought I was too pampered, that I would not be able to handle it. They

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134 Government officials in Haryana are Hindu in majority and take serious offense to cow slaughter.
thought there would be a gender bias. On top of that I was a Muslim. So when I moved to Delhi I had a huge problem in finding a house because I was a Muslim. There was a lot of apprehension but I was lucky. I have not had any instances where a broker would have misbehaved with me, or the organization, or I have been sidelined, or they would have been biased...I am not saying it does not happen, it has not happened with me. In the past years I have met 5000 people. ... To be very honest since I have always had people open up to me and share things with me and be honest with me. ... I have never taken favors or given favors. I have seen girls and women in this industry who have been wearing, you know, with the short skirts and transparent clothes. But I have never felt the need for it. People respect you for what you are representing ... at the end of the day we are all brand ambassadors for the organizations and the families we come from. ... I have seen board of directors and I am [sic] only woman there but I am comfortable in my own role.

Gender, castes, and religiosities have hit the road differentially in the real estate race. Infrastructural development has taken place on preferential lines with politicians manipulating roads and rail paths through their own districts and communities. Specific communities have benefitted from the making of roads and others not so much.

As we head home, we take the back roads through the tiny villages that dot the outskirts of Gurgaon. The roads here stand in contradistinction to the dominance of the NH8. Like the unbuilt parts of the KMP expressway these roads are unfinished and incomplete. They are made of a mixture of mud and sand, and expand and shrink with the seasons. We drive through roads so muddy that repeat tire tracks through the wet mud have transformed the road center into a series of parallel grooves. At points the desert sand envelops the road and erases the thinning asphalt from sight. The car grows muddy and dusty as it longs for the tarmac-like asphalt of the NH8 where it may race again.

The inequality of roads maps into the bodies that take them, sometimes the road betray their allegiances to some and deny the others the very access they bestow upon the
lucky. At the medical camp, that runs one day each week, I meet Lallu, whose body is a body that roads betrayed.

Coming from the Malda region, Lallu comes to the doctor with a bandaged forearm. In the small, dark, dingy space, he waits his turn as the doctor moves through the thirty odd laborers in line. In broken Bangla, I ask Lallu where he is from and he identified himself as a Malda worker. A tiny district of Bengal that borders Bangladesh, Malda is a catchall space where tribals, Bangladeshi’s, and minority communities coalesce to find work in North India. A series of labor contractors channel them to cities. Lallu shows me his pass. A stamped document that says he comes from Malda. He tells me that he heard that they gave you work in Malda, so he went there with some friends. He paid four hundred rupees for the pass. He arrived in Delhi on a train with thirty other workers and is assigned to work here for three months. He is twenty odd years old if at all and says he works in the fields when he does not do construction work. Uneducated, he also lacks Hindi speaking skills, and is hired as the manual laborer on site. He does “helperi”—mixes concrete, carries things, shovels, and cleans.

The doctor sees Lallu for all of two minutes. He records his name and his age, prescribes combiflam, an anti-inflammatory pill, and recommends his fracture for further investigation. The instructions are written in English, a language that Lallu does not understand. When I ask his supervisor what will happen to Lallu’s hand, he says that they are not required to treat it, as the fracture did not happen on the site. “If they get injured at work they come running, they are very clever that way.”

For Lallu, and those who stood in the line at the medical camp with him, roads have been harsh. The chronic diseases they carry in their bodies: asthma, rheumatoid
arthritis, tuberculosis, low immune systems, and skin infections are complied effects of body deprived of nutrients through a life of poverty and years of a harsh working environment of heat, dust, and back breaking work. They carry home these chronic diseases adding cancer, STDs, and liver diseases to the mix. If roads like the NH8 have multiple sets of jurisdictions then very multiplicity of jurisdictional authorities serves allows the elision of responsibility by all. Their bodies are the problem of rural authorities. The road leaves them with no space to make their claims.

Life stories are markers of the way in which we would like to read the unfolding of our lives but also articulate experiences of the era through which we have moved. The roads we have taken speak of a multiplicity of spaces and understanding of selves. Here roads are markers of our affective ties to the people and places we leave behind or return to. They represent the traumas and torments that bring us into the present and the joys and failures that we have felt on our way here. They are the infrastructural technologies whose elements of transformation resonate with the technologies through which we transform ourselves. They are the technologies that differentiate, neglect, and cast aside. These technologies act as tools for the transformation of the social, moral, spatial ecologies of urban areas in Gurgaon.

Travel and transformation, as Clifford (1997) would argue, are inherently linked. It is the modes of travel and the technologies of transformation that alter our life histories and paths in site-specific ways. The National Highway Eight as it runs out of New Delhi and into Gurgaon acted as a tool for rapid and rabid urban transformation of Gurgaon and its peripheral areas. The technological devices through which the highway expanded, and affected people as it drew their lives into more highly skilled work, enabled access to
work and education, as well as increased the price of land holdings. Roads juxtapose groups of people, their spaces, and the artifacts of their lives. On them old traditions mix with changing forms of life, villages with emerging urban areas, cement with cow dung, and bullock carts with cars. The public spaces and socialities of roads mark the mobility and social transformation of a group of travelling Indians for whom the road marks a new way of being in the world.

The Indian government occupies a strange relationship with these infrastructural and social technologies. On one hand it is the state that paved the way for the introduction of new technologies and scholarships that made possible the lives of planners like Ifthikhar and Yusef. Policy initiatives and women employment drives have affected the social dynamics of areas and produced a transformation in gender relations. Yet, the roads, both literal and metaphorical I have traced mark a transformation in the actions of state actors. A movement away from a focus on state led developmentalism that intervenes critically in policy and planning to a movement into the hands of a body of private consultants, planners, developers, and other industry experts who govern the roads India walks upon. The past forty years depicted through the travels and transformations in the lives of the individuals I draw together depicts a shifting configuration of state action and its role in the everyday lives of its citizens. As a device of governmentality the road becomes metaphoric of the choices a state makes, the citizens it enables and the ones it leaves behind. The rhizomatic pathways that roads strike transform the ecology of a geographic region. Together they unite, gather and

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135 An example of an article on roads and changing sensory experiences of everyday life is Harvey’s (2005) work on roads through the Peruvian forest: where the road, as a clearing through the forest, brings light, and as the bringer of new building materials also brings the sound of rain on roofs, as the material changes from thatch to asbestos.
redistribute space, constricting and compacting certain regions together while pushing
others further away\textsuperscript{136}.

Life histories are interesting sites of analysis of three decades of transformation in
this almost seventy-year-old Nation-State. In the narrations of their own life histories
men and women strung together their own experience of mobility within the broader slice
of national history through which they travelled. “The point is to recognize the
constructedness of those experiences that seem most deeply ‘natural,’ and to reveal “the
precarious, creative, disruptive tension between experience and representation” (Steedly
1993: 20-21) that narrations of roads and processes of road design and construction bring.
In this mode we seek to preserve the tension between what we would like the roads of our
life to bring us, and the reality of what they bring.

The National Highway Eight is suddenly cordoned off one morning. A long line
of traffic cones and string barricades divides the three lanes out of Gurgaon down to two.
As we drive outwards on the highway we see a number of large, temporary pavilions
constructed out of bamboo and cloth. I see masses of young men, dressed in saffron shirts
and shorts, run along the cordoned-off road. On their shoulders rest bow-like, bamboo
arches festooned with streamers and ribbons: two clay pots hang from each end. I am
confused and mildly alarmed at the sheer number of religiously devout men running on
the road. My companion explains to my non-North Indian self that this is the Kanwar
Yatra. The word kanwar indicates the bow-like structure and two pots that the men carry
on their shoulders and yatra means to travel.

\textsuperscript{136} Tsing (2000) etches this unequal quality of networks.
The Kanwar Yatra is an annual pilgrimage in North India where devotees of the God of destruction—Shiva—collect water from auspicious sources of the Ganges such as the towns of Haridwar and Rishikesh and walk or run the water back to the temples of Shiva in their own villages. Highways in the region cordon off areas and divert traffic to account for the male crowds of over seventy-five million that run along the highway. Non-Governmental Organizations, patrons, and religious institutions build temporary pavilions along highways where devotees are given free tea, food, and shelter. The men are not to put the pots of holy water down and are given poles to hang them on. They run to meet the tight deadline: the auspicious night when they must pour the water on their neighborhood Shiva temple. This is done to mitigate the destructive powers the body of Shiva holds and to release the eternal nectar of life masked by the poison he swallowed with it.

The highway is jammed. Streams of men walk and run around us. The road washes over with saffron and discarded plastic cups. The cars jostle together, stuck. Trucks and tempos, cranes and cement mixers, motorcycles and Mercedes sit entangled and angry as the pilgrimage takes over the road. It is in these moments that the tensions between reality and desire, between experience and aspiration, between old and new forms of life in the region display themselves. For those who have lived and worked in India’s construction industry: the road is part of our everyday rituals. In their everyday they travel—between construction sites, from one site to another, from home to site, from city to city, or from village to city—and navigate the seemingly oppositional spaces and cultures they encode. Through their movement from site to site they draw together experience and aspiration, home and work, professions and patrimonies to name a few.
The shouts of ‘Bam Bam Bol’ and the stream of men on the road evoke the ritualistic aspect of our travels on the road. Travelling down a road, moving through the pathways of life, like rituals, are transformative moments. Upon them we negotiate between the oppositional worlds that structure the life of the mobile: the village and the city, Harvard and Haryana, women’s worlds and the worlds of men, home, and work. It is through them we try to move beyond the circumstances of our lives. It is upon these roads that anger and grief, loss and longing, alienation and belonging are stoked, channeled, and domesticated (Turner 1982:41). It is through these networks that sociality and space come to be renegotiated and reshaped. It is also these very roads that exploit, plunder, and deprive.

Road technologies present and produce their own “uneven” ecologies stringing together spaces, objects, and people in its networked pathway: it produces and mels oppositional ways of life, people, spaces, and terrain into a complex whole. In its drive to continuously shift capital, uneasily and restlessly from place to place (Smith 1991), the building construction industry produced new roads, literal and metaphoric, that restructure the life of those who came to work in it. This new technology built an ecology of people, spaces, and materials that bear the potential energy for creative transformation but also generated an ecology seething with destruction. Bodies and selves, lives and loves, language, aspiration, intent, and environment pause lithely in the gap between creation and destruction. The road gleams with the potentialities of both.

137 Chant to worship Shiva.
Conclusion

Phase I of the project is almost complete. The permissions are in place and the building authorized for occupation. The giant box-like structure awaits its teams of computer engineers. Workers apply the finishing touches. Carpenters set up panes of glass and painters paint the fiberboard ceilings. Clouds of white dust fill the building as they scrape and smooth the grainy surface into a glistening flatness. The moist, muggy smell of paint takes over the giant floor plates. Smooth glass walls shine with newness and await the desks that will fill the office space behind them. In the atrium below, a veined and flurried marble floor unmask itself as the protective slurry; cast over it is whittled away by the bristled wheel of the polishing machine. Mirrored walls bounce light onto the unearthed marble sending reticulated patterns across the room. The lights turn on and a warm yellow infuses the space.

“You know, after this building is built they will not even let us in through the gates.”

The words fade as the truth they carry crystalizes. Workers leave the site in teams. The concrete grayness of the building dissolves into a milky white. A brand new air-conditioning system takes over. Slowly and steadily the dust and heat vanquish into the building’s outer realms. Security guards anchor themselves at the gates with guestbook ledgers to guard this ethereal kingdom. The heavy atmospherics that occupied this construction site’s past are relegated to the other side of the stainless-steel fence where the second phase rises to the beat of the diesel generator. The banner “Now Leasing” is strung across the completed side. Only the noise bleeds, unconcerned by the divisions we
try to strike, entering the completed building as a dull hum that pulsates through the concrete structure. It reminds us of the spectral presence of construction around us.

The dull hum turns into a cacophony across the steel fence, deep within the giant striated and gilded pit within which the basement rises. The work must go on in phase two. Here we see machines, workers, and materials grouped together in teams. Together they work to build the structure in a piecemeal fashion. The red earth is compacted with the elephant-like rollers upon which a young laborer rides. The ground underneath shudders and shakes as it consolidates under the weight of the mighty machine. Veer, the young layout mason, and Afshakji his engineering partner in crime, line out measurements for the beginnings of a foundation. In the corner, stumpy columns mark the beginnings of phase three. Everyday a new foundation emerges, to be covered in mud and molded into a column. A series of staircases and lift cores rise through arrays of spiky steel bars. The retaining wall completes its full circle around the building. The space transforms from a pit of mud into an arcaded floor. A new slab or column emerges. A wall is built where one did not stand. A path is blocked off and a new one created. The construction site is an Escherian space formed and then unformed through the makings of architectural elements, a series of staircases, slabs, and columns whose patterned logic has yet to be revealed. A series of elements that meld, morph, and dissolve into each other.

Within each act of transformation is embedded an act of erasure. The shifting and growing planes layer over the processes through which they emerge. The concrete structure effaces its making. The foundations are buried under a pile of mud. Steel and
pipes are cast into concrete, and concrete masked with plaster. The plaster in turn hides under the plywood panels that finish the building’s interiors.

This invisibility and the processes that create it also render bodies and the spaces they occupy invisible. The city seeks to erase the worker, her labor, and the informal settlements that temporarily house them before they are swept off to a new site to begin the process anew. These politics of erasure, the continuous drive to render certain spaces and bodies as invisible, and the act of not seeing become vital in the construction of city space and urban life.

Creativity as a fetish thrives on rendering invisible the infrastructures (historical, social, physical, and governmental) of labor (or lack there of). As an ephemeral commodity form creativity operates on and through sensoriums: it deploys emotional landscapes, social and familial ties, thrives on anger, desire, greed, and despair. It operates through the material realm shaping and reshaping its subjects.

“Sisterfucker, before I leave this site I will also sit by the pool. I will lie down on one of those chairs like they have in Goa. Like this! (Folds his hand behind his head as if he is lying in the sun on a lounge chair.) Wearing sunglasses,” swears Srilal the young contractor who likes to brag about his wheeling and dealing.

Acts of building not only encode past and future but are also sites of the active transformation of social and individual life. They are sites where tastes are cultivated and class distinctions and aspirations understood. The rising levels of corruption within the industry generate both anxiety and social mobility. Power hierarchies are transformed as the unexpected get rich and middlemen rise to control land and commodity chains. New machines bring new skills and force bodies to behave in new ways. Ecologies and areas
are transformed changing the way various classes live and love. Production and construction becomes a mechanism of change that parallels social and material transformation, where the material acts not only as an index of the social but also as an active agent in reshaping ways of life. Through this the built environment comes to both index and produce our aspirations of the future, our transformative present, and the histories of our past.

And here is remerges creative action as drawing fantasy into reality, of being driven by desire for better futures, of melding past and future into the product of building construction. My work here has been to excavate the idea of creativity from the realm of artistic practice and place it within the possibilities and potentialities of political economic human action in the world. It is through the realm of our creative actions in the world that we transform our environments and enact change on local, national, and global scales. It is through these actions that we produce value, economic, cultural, or symbolic, that defines our space in the world.

Creative actions have infused the construction industry and the actions that are represented in this text. In the lives of Ifthikar the young tremix mason, who had no clothes to go to school in, but pulled together machines and skills with his brother’s help, and now runs a small contracting company. Jitendraji’s own story of growing up in rural Uttar Pradesh and working his way up to the ranks of head supervisor speaks of the same. Shreelal’s diploma in construction united with his father’s social capital of being the long-time chauffer of a civil work contractor make him an engineer on site. Lallu, the young Malda mason, who bravely took an opportunity offered of working in Delhi, crossed the border and paid five hundred rupees for a fake identification card upon which
he lays his claim to work in India. Creative action has different goals across different class categories. Amongst the elite it shows itself in the former landowning family that now trades in land or like Gautam’s architect friend’s leveraging of one investment against the other to buy his family a home.

If anything, my time on construction sites has shown is that actions on site are driven by thoughts of building home and life. The architectures that we build are built through the aspirations and love for those we leave behind to go work for everyday. We build because we want better futures for our loved ones and ourselves. Be it the two-bedroom homes for our families like Gautam and his wife, or the small farmhouse that Neelkanth Sir wants to live in at the edge of the fields, or the daughter that Meher wants to educate. The jeans and T-shirts that Mahaab buys for her sons and nephews, and the mobile phone that shows videos that Veer hopes to impress his friends, and the women he woos, with. The architectures of today are embedded with the desires of tomorrow: they are the promise and imaginations of what we hope the future will bring.

Big capital acts creatively as well. Seen in the inventive actions of Webuild’s director and his brother whose investment firm decides to move into real estate in India, who together start the Whistling Woods project. Ponty Chadha the liquor baron who moves money from alcohol to real estate. Pilfering materials from construction sites and bribing an officer to get a building passed can also be read as creative. New forms of moving money, corporate alliances, and governmental strategies too embed similar creative energies mobilized along existing networks and transforming various forms of capital. Creative action acts at several scales molding the city into the shape it takes.
Capital creatively melds, and forms, and molds, and breaks to perpetuate inequality. We see strategies of land grabbing by bending the rules and doctoring the books. Creative ways of hiring labor ensure that most are not covered medically and deprived of benefits. The inventive acts of shifting and reshifting labor and the divided down ways of hiring serve to perpetuate exploitation of bodies on site. A worker who dies from heat stroke is creatively said to be outside the responsibility structure of the developers, as he died off site. Individual creativity works within the structure of these larger exploitative practices. It relies on youth and energy and sucks it dry. A relentless strategizing to survive is needed and it takes its toll through alcohol, drugs, and separated families. Creative action traps individuals in a relentless creative pursuit from which they can never break free. It degrades the body, land, and perpetuates inequality. Construction economies are bound together by the twinned demons of creation and destruction.

It is within these material histories that the past stands erased. The farming lands upon which they stood, whose footprints echo in the strange plot shapes upon which apartment complexes rise. The lakes that filled Gurgaon have now seeped into the cured concrete. The histories of army men the area has trained who now work within the construction industry militarizing its machines and men. The farming communities turned entrepreneurs who deal in soil, sand, and land. It echoes in the masons trained by their families, and the history of skilled labor whose area of origin speaks of their skill set: tiling masons from Rajasthan, electricians from Uttar Pradesh, and stone masons from Andhra. Material histories encode familial, social, and ecological histories into the making of new urban space. They are all creatively unacknowledged and silently erased.
A yellow dump truck arrives at the pit on morning. Slowly it winds its way down the mud road carved along the pit walls and makes it way to the base of the pit. The engineers perk up and dispatch the young laborers who work with them to the truck to guide it to the concrete foundations that are now cured. The truck is full of damp mud, hauled in from another construction site. It backs up towards the foundation and raises the truck bed. The trap door opens. The mud shudders and slides down. The foundation lies buried in the landslide. The workers scramble to distribute the mud evenly using shovels. Jitendraji turns to me and with a wry smile says, “look, look, all our work is dissolving in the dust (hamari mehnat mitti mein mil rahi hain)”.

The term mitti mein mil gayi or rahi hain (to dissolve in the mud or dissolved in the mud) is often used within the Indian context to speak of fruitless work. Of the fruits of labor lost. The clouds of dust rise in seeming symbolism of the fetish, the obscurity of creative energy and power that it generates and the social relations that it erases. The strategies of creativity, and the accompanying creative destruction of capital, buried the work of many under the avalanche of real estate development. The transformative economy has deteriorated and degraded bodies and landscape and has pinned individuals into an industry that has a short shelf life.

Creativity echoes out of the construction sites of India and reverberates across the country. It speaks within the boardrooms of big business that think through ways to expand and accumulate. It spreads across the country in the face of advertising, as the smooth, happy opportunities India offers. It looks at us in the lives of young designers, and the booming music and cultural scenes, in the stalls of informal street hawkers and the basket designs of tea workers. As people’s alliance movements, the dispossessed,
feminist and LGBTQ activists seek sites of innovative action and intervention. Creativity celebrates the resourcefulness of a country as it is depleted of resources and is stalled by inaction.

The celebration of creativity serves to erase, evade, and co-opt the presence of the state. In India it has enabled Indian state actors to place greater and greater control of the country’s resources and development into the hands of private operators. A celebration of the creative power of Indians and their innovative solutions continuously mask the lifting of environmental protections, evasion of labor laws, depletion of agricultural lands, and produces dispossession on a massive scale. Creativity bears the promise that Indians will be able to fend for themselves and survive: it obscures the fact that politicians and bureaucrats, increasingly work in tandem with corporations, and act in self-interest rather than state or national. In a set of creative actions, the Indian “corporate tigers” come to govern politicians and journalists. Even the prime minister, Modi, elected for his promise of industrial and infrastructural development now blurs his actions through publicity of his fashion, the talk of his clothes serving to distract, from the modes through which he dangerously offers the country’s natural resources to corporations.

It is easy to speak of creativity, to celebrate it, to think of it as political action, and to develop creative critiques. But as long as we remain on the plain of creative and inventive, the true structural inequalities, perpetuated by the extraction of value from bodies the world over, will always remain.
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