ABOUT

I am currently living and working in New Delhi, India.

My work is research based and often employs video, performance and text. Recent projects include CITY AS DEMO, BACK TO WORK and NOTES ON MOURNING. These projects reflect on work-as performance and inquire into the changing notions of profession and labour, the transactional value of work, fictionalised accounts of future cities and societies.

Since the last 2013 years I am also working with the Mobile Academy Berlin, a group of artists, researchers and academics, from various fields (media, literature, philosophy) working between the intersection of art and science, and on different modes of knowledge distribution. http://www.mobileacademy-berlin.com

I am writing my PhD at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. My research is looking at the representation of labour in Indian contemporary art, through the depiction of labouring bodies, through activist engagement with and advocacy for workers unions or groups, or through collaborations with them in the making of art works or projects and also into hidden labour in artist's studio spaces and the changing notion of the "art work" in the 21st century.

ART WORKS

Ongoing:

UNCONTROLLED LIVES (2019)

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing refers in her book "The mushroom at the end of the world" to ecological relations by *First Nature* and *Second Nature* to the environmental transformations caused by capitalism. *Third Nature* describes everything that survives despite capitalism. The first living thing to emerge from the soil of the blasted landscape after the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 was a mushroom. Like rats, raccoons, and cockroaches, mushrooms are willing to put up with some of the environmental messes we humans have made. Yet they are not pests, they are delicious culinary treats. Their aromas are not pleasant, but mouldy and heavy, disturbing even, evoking a sense of sadness in some. They grow fast and stubbornly in a dark and damp environment, some glow at night, some are poisonous, some rare and some create enormous economic values.
We can only learn from them: How to live in ruins? Are there possibilities of bio-cultural hope? Do they show us one kind of collaborative survival in an ecosystem on the verge of collapse?

Mushrooms communicate, and they are being communicated through: They are made up of tiny threads called *mycelium*. These travel underground, connecting the roots of different plants in an area, even different species, allowing them to communicate. Below the forest ground, fungal bodies extend themselves in nets and skeins, binding roots and mineral soils, long before producing mushrooms. Mushrooms are uncontrolled lives and which can guide us, when the controlled world we thought we had fails.

At first step the studio space will be turned into a temporary Greenhouse by using the material that is stored next to the studio space. We will build an environment that is suitable for mushrooms that also gives us the possibility to work together in order to produce art works: The Greenhouse will be turned into a temporary knowledge laboratory. While the mushrooms are growing (2-6 weeks), we will discuss different models of knowledge distribution, strengths and weaknesses of communities, networked communication, collaboration/contamination and survival strategies.
The workshop will be a sensory experience, of smell and taste, and a learning experience being part of a growing process, a full cycle of planting, growing and harvesting to which the students will respond in different mediums. Drawing, photography, video, text, audio works and performance. At the same time we will mutually think about the following topics, which will guide us through the one month project: Progress, Collaboration/Contamination, Community, Salvage, Translation, Cohabitation, Curiosity, Care and Survival.

THE MISSING BODIES OF CAPITALISM (2018/2019)

My ongoing artistic and academic research on **The missing bodies of capitalism** focusses on the disappearances of physical bodies from the rapidly changing world of work. Are the contours of the human body - its psycho-physical apparatus, its sensorium, its extracorporeal presence - being changed to accommodate the new conditions of work? Are bodies taking new shapes to make way for a new future of work, or is the body being abdicated for an absence, for an 'off-shoreness' of cognition itself?

My earlier research into the data economy highlights the precariousness of the contemporary body, an inherent feature of communicative capitalism. While cognitive labour marks a shift in productivity from the body to the soul of the worker, expropriating mental energies as well as putting to work the subjectivity of the worker, I ask - *where does the body take place?* It is argued that this is not confined to creative or knowledge work but is instead identifiable in all performance of labour that is communicational, relational or affective. Such 'performance' is most effectively mobilised by networked technologies in ways that make it flexible, fragmented and insecure. In the history of human work, work has become increasingly less physical, and the body seems to disappear from it.

CITY AS DEMO (2018)

Alternative proposals to Future Bhubaneswars, 8 sets of printed text/photos, 2018

When futurity collapses into contemporaneity, single channel video, 22 min, 2018
https://vimeo.com/302803504 pw: development

Concept and direction: Arnika Ahldag
With Antarin Chakrabarty and Meera Parida
Camera: Ashis Dhir Dhir, Sabyasachi Panigrahi and Biswajit Sahani
Editors: Babu, Anil and Soubrat - Light House Productions
Subtitles: Sibdas Sengupta (Oriya), Anuraag Mehandiratta (English)
Assistants: Rasmita Barika and Anoukshya Hota
Support from: Niroj Satpathy, Nityananda, Heartfelt thanks to Club Everest
Stage set up: Hari Bhai, New Life Tailor, Padma Wholesale, Jagannath Tent house, Pabi and Jogen

"Nobody really is from Bhubaneswar" a young student from Bhubaneswar told me when I had just started asking around what the city is like. He hinted the city's relatively short modern history, having been established just after Independence. Bhubaneswar became one of the fastest developing cities in India and the "best city to do business in India" according to the World Bank rating of 2014. Bhubaneswar became smart. The city already seems to be what India's future should be like and therefore becomes the test bed for data collection.

When futurity collapses into contemporaneity seeks to juxtapose the history and structures that have made contemporary India and the future that is being modelled upon its cities. It addresses questions of exclusion of communities that are not the supposedly "customers as residents" of what the city as a gated community could be.

Bhubaneswar has been built by many, by the bureaucrats, the migrant workers, the IT employees and now the smart city mission. **Alternative proposals to future Bhubaneswars** are fictionalised proposals to alternative dreams and aspirations for the city.

Originally created for the Bhubaneswar Art Trail "Navigation is Offline" 2018,
curated by Premjish Achari and Jagannath Panda

Screened at ET4U - contemporary visual arts in Mid & Western Jutland, Denmark, 2019

BACK TO WORK (2016/2017)

What is the work of art in the art of work? Do we become visitors, observers, passersby, ghosts, guests, artists as fake employees, or fake artists as employees? Must we be a bug in the system, much like a software virus, trying to ingest the sheer volume of the company, with insufficient or erroneous logic? Could we perform well? Performance is a claim - productivity's claim, technology's claim, or a claim measured by how and when deviations occur. To perform is to know, for knowability needs to be unmeasured, through occupying work with a soft wear - an outfit, a posture, an ID card that beeps open doors and computers. The workplace becomes not the setting for the work, but art itself.

KAFKA'S CASTLE (2017)

How is productivity, idleness, and attention measured and quantified across the dispensable resource of contemporary digital capital? The artists insert low-resolution provocations as 'noise' amidst a vortex of signals generated from various working sites for a company's CCTV monitoring system. The resulting composition is a choreography of quiet thoughts exteriorised and staged for the surveillance archive, and left for the system to decode and reassemble.

With Amitesh Grover
Medium: 65 low-resolution photography prints on sun board
Produced at HCL Tech Pvt Ltd. (Sector 126, Noida, India)
Printed at Digital Image Solutions, Delhi.
Originally commissioned for the exhibition "Hangar For The Passerby", 2016, curated by Akansha Rastogi at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

THE ABUNDANCE (2017)

The film foregrounds the unprecedented volume of labour-intensive digital service industries. It features an Induction Day expert, one who inducts and trains hundreds of workers every month. He profiles their personalities, engages them with attention techniques and verifies their background for the company. His whirling, twisting, gambolling body is seen alongside the architecture of dreams he inhabits, one that spirals and gyrates as he swivels and turns. The building and body sometimes seem engaged in a pas de deux, at other times appear as witnesses of each other, till exhaustion interrupts and brings them to a grinding halt.

With Amitesh Grover and Shaunak Sen
Featuring Karthick Palanivel
MEDIUM: Double channel projection, 12mins.
Originally commissioned for the exhibition "Hangar For The Passerby", 2016, curated by Akansha Rastogi at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

LEAKY FOLDS (2016)

Leaky Folds conflates the topographical measure of contemporary workplace with our psychological spreads, that of two artists immersed, and waged. Having sought mock-employment in one of India's biggest software firms, we appeared as workers at various locations across the company's campus - at doorways and in elevators, in fire exits and at secure access points, during night shifts and as shadows of colleagues. We encountered narratives of data secrecy, offshore sites, and recurring crises, as we learnt to perform digital service work. Often, we performed disruptions within the workplace - exercises in abstraction, uselessness, and work-lessness. We assemble our notes from this 6-months long immersion in these leaky folds. Read these perforations as our first-hand comment on the spreadability of digital capital, obsession with logistics and automation, and the messy reality of a post colonial world. We reconsider notions of value, leisure, performance, and acceleration, and seek to dither, to un-measure. Our bodies leaked. Our data leaked.
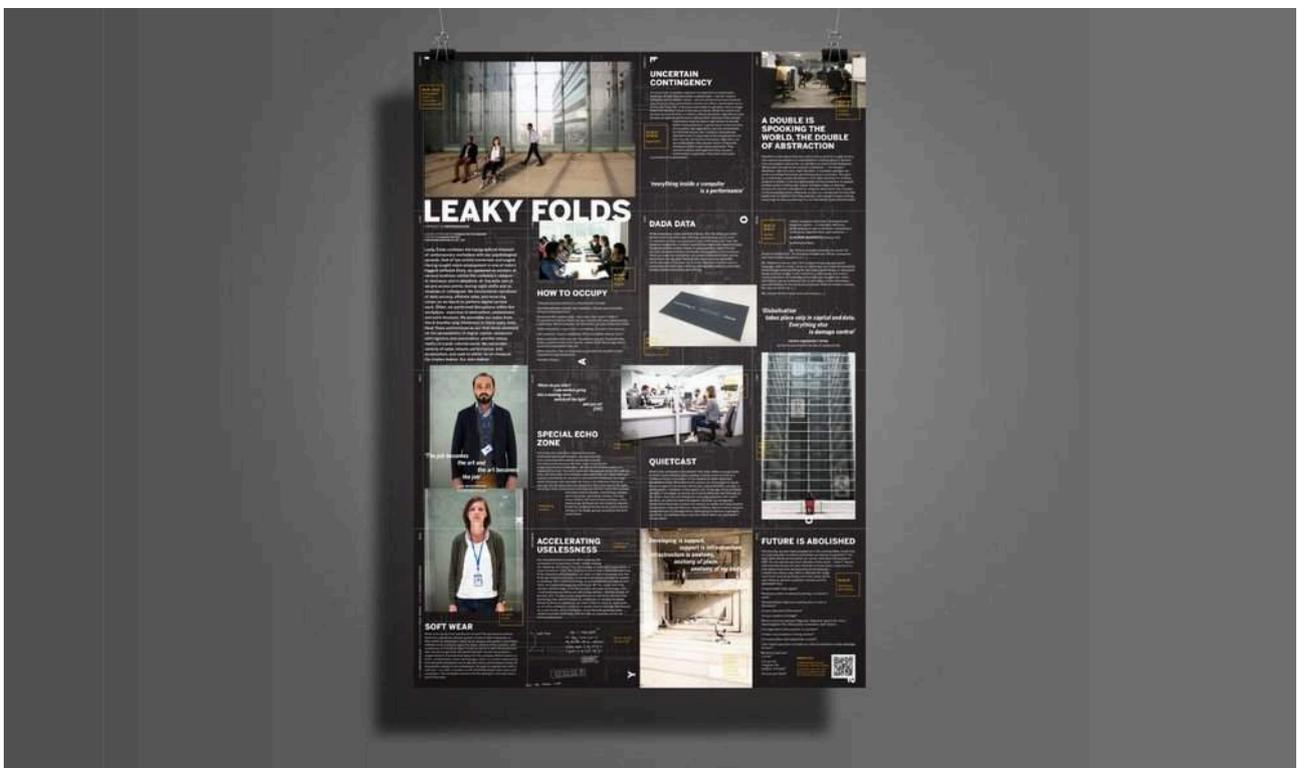
With Amitesh Grover
Designed at Oh Design!
Originally commissioned for the exhibition "Hangar For The Passerby", 2016, curated by Akansha Rastogi at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

WHAT THE FROG'S EYES CANNOT TELL THE BRAIN (2016)

Error logs and crash-scripts from softwares that run global digital business are used as a fundamental resource for illumination here. This pulsating room - flickering constellations of recurring crises - reminds us of the perpetual anxiety that drives the seamless technosphere today. Much like Frogs who are excellent bug perceivers, but ones who starve to death being surrounded by food if food doesn't move, the whole world becomes invisible here as it shifts uneasily between one crash and another. What the frog's eyes cannot tell the brain.

With Amitesh Grover
Code Design & Manufacturing by Himanshu Bablani (Ardubotics))
Material : Neopixel LEDs, Arduinos, Code, Wood, Metal frame, Wires & Power Adapters
Originally commissioned for the exhibition "Hangar For The Passerby", 2016, curated by Akansha Rastogi at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi
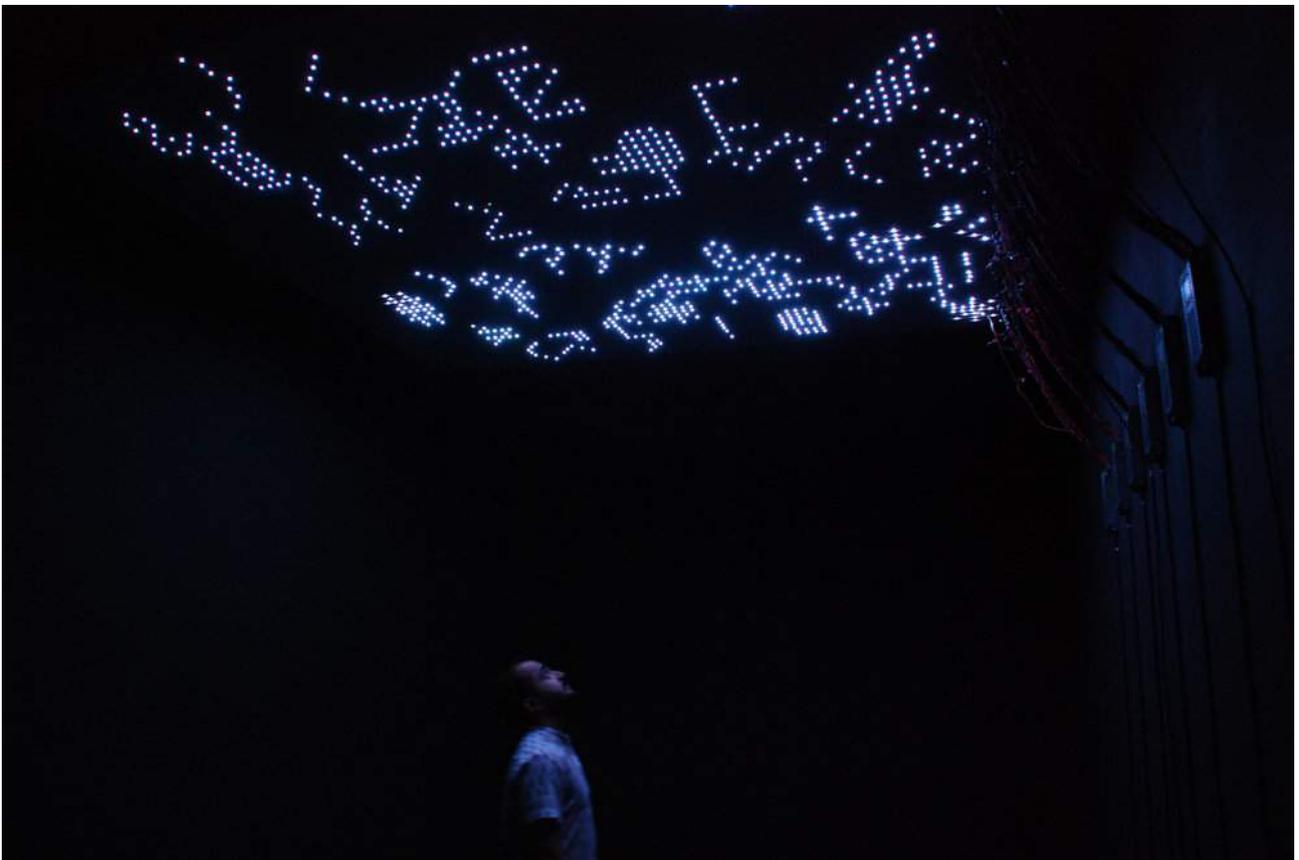
ON MOURNING (2015)

NOTES ON MOURNING invites an Oppari performer to discuss the tradition of mourning on stage. Opparis are professional mourners in Tamil Nadu (Southern India). These mourners belong to the living tradition of Oppari, practised mostly by women who perform bereavement at a person's death. Opparis are rich in wordplay, and improvise lyrics, melodies, and the art of 'crying', often for something in return (offerings, gifts, money). However, the tradition is dying out in contemporary India.

Jayalakshmi, an Oppari performer, introduces the tradition and perform songs of mourning. She is in conversation with Arivazhagan, a young Tamil researcher who also belongs to a family of mourners. This event seeks to address questions arising from the practice of mourning that extend beyond the single event of one deceased body. Does a refusal to mourn condemn a trauma to repeat itself ad infinitum? Can repeated mourning ever take form as a productive practice? How can we (un)learn through exposure to absence, to desertion? 'NOTES ON MOURNING' is a live-interview-performance event, where we ask these and more questions.

CREDITS

Performers : Jayalakshmi Gopalan & Arivazhagan Arumugam
Concept & Direction : Amitesh Grover & Arnika Ahldag
Language Interpreter (Tamil-English) : Aprameya Manthena
Sound Design: Hemant Sreekumar

Premiere at Khoj Artists Association, New Delhi, India (2015) in collaboration with Shaunak Sen

Festival Belluard Bollwerk International, Switzerland (2016)