

# Amid the Fog, Smoke and Dust

Jerome Reyes, Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi, Nine Yamamoto-Masson

**3:30 pm:** Where shall we begin? From Delhi, Tokyo or San Francisco?

Together? Simultaneously?

**9:00 pm:** Yes, the seriousness has to be embedded – and stated: *how* we speak and relate to one another today. Empathy could certainly be one of the underlying drives. Empathy that circulates in the wider field of solidarity.

**Delhi, December 23, 2012:** Around twelve thousand people gather on the road leading to the presidential palace in India's capital city, where on any given day it is prohibited to move, even in small groups. People from all walks of life, irrespective of their affiliations and backgrounds, assembled in protest against the persistent negligence of state machineries. This unprecedented scale of coming together animated the question of women's safety in the public spaces of Delhi and other parts of the country.

*'Hum Kya Chahtey, Azaadi'* – What we need is: freedom  
*Pyaar Karne ki Azaadi* – freedom to love  
*Dosti nibhane ki Azaadi* – to friendship  
*Raat ki Azaadi* – to the night  
*Din ki Azaadi* – to the day  
*Ghar me bhi Azaadi* – at the house  
*Is Desh mein bhi Azaadi* – in the country  
*Is Duniya mein bhi Azaadi* – around the world  
*Sadak pe bhi Azaadi* – on the road  
*'Hum Kya Chahtey, Azaadi'*

*What wins in a race from Tokyo to San Francisco,*

**7:00 am:** But it also holds the spirits of hundreds of Taiwanese aboriginals who were forced to fight and die for the Japanese emperor. On 24 February 1979, the shrine priests refused to return their spirits to their communities.

**7:00 pm:** The coordinates of the places are given; we then gather their material *qualities*...and their solidarities.

**9:30 am:** The driving element is the shifting of positions between one another, the slippage of situatedness. Speaking from these places we belong to, and from the many others we partake in through other alliances.

*I didn't see. I took her word for it.*

**7:30 am:** Anchored by the horror of the brutal attack on the 23-year-old paramedic student, who was gang-raped on 16 December and later died, the protests shook the foundations of Delhi's bureaucracy, paralyzing it through their sheer numbers. Water cannons, tear gas, and baton strikes failed to break the momentum

**Tokyo, 26 December 2013:** Japan's prime minister, Abe Shinzō, true to his government's revisionist and nationalist line, visits Yasukuni shrine. The following year, he sends ritual offerings for the spring and autumn festivals. The shrine, the spiritual center of Japanese militarism, honors fallen WWII soldiers, 'martyrs' of the 'holy war' to dominate Asia. The spirits of 14 Class A war criminals responsible for massacres and mass rapes are enshrined and memorialized there.

*the radiation?*

**10:30 am:** For AI Robles, the late San Francisco poet and activist, 848 Kearny Street known as the I-Hotel in downtown San Francisco was a dream always unrealized, always out of reach: 'They lived, as it were, in two worlds – in a world they left behind, and in a dream before their eyes.'

**3:00 am:** The main question is: How to speak about them effectively, seriously – and what form of seriousness could be politically productive here?

**1:00 am:** The key to making something understood, without explicitly saying it, is to stay within the same code, to read the same air. Anything outside that code will fall on deaf ears.

*'I'll ride with you'.*

*When you are tired we will walk for you.*

**7:00 pm:** These new energies reworked anger, posing challenging questions to the structures that perpetuate such crimes and discriminations. Along with the demand for justice and the call for a gender-just society, these protesters demanded to reclaim the city and make freedom – not just safety – the only way of being and living.

*For the longest time we didn't know her name.*

**9:25 pm:** The gesture is clear: no remorse. Venerating the murderers, the rapists, the system that forced hundreds of thousands of girls and women from the colonized territories into sexual slavery. Across Southeast Asia, the women who survived suffered in silence. The survivors who have come forward are in their late 80s, frail – but they now have the support of thousands of people who demand justice for them and their absent, invisible, nameless sisters.

*or the fog?*

**San Francisco, 4 August 1977:** Residents of the I-Hotel – a low-cost residential hotel that became the nexus of community involvement and home to the living, walking, breathing memories of the Filipino American community in downtown San Francisco – are evicted. For a decade, students, antiwar dissidents,

When thinking about violence – unspeakable, unimaginable violence – it's not always necessary to see pictures to believe it. Sometimes only silence, only the absent, unseen image can capture the crisis of any approximation of horror.

For the eldest generation of Filipino immigrants who called this area home in the early 20th century, the legacy of this building remains paradigmatic of their historical loss.

third-world strikers, Asian American women, power movements, freedom riders, and immigrant seniors had been fighting together against the threat of eviction, pushed by real estate developers.

The absent image... and through its absence, its multiple ghostly presences.

*"You have seen nothing in Delhi."*

**11:30 pm:** Foreshadowing velocities of global urbanization, these alliances played a part in an era of spectacular capitalisms on the move and were antecedents to gentrification and the making of global-finance cities. A decades-long community commitment to building a new, reconstructed I-Hotel in 2005 after its demolition in 1981 provides a rare example worth reflection.

It leads to a moment of transformation, a pause to make sense of surrounding situations and realities.

**11:00 am:** How can locals who are pressured to move out respond? Sometimes, other willing transplants and locals are committed to finding ways to work together; their stakes are on many sides of many porous divisions...

*You cannot see any trace of what happened in Delhi.*

**3:00 am:** However, these longstanding mobilizing tactics may prove insufficient against current, larger capital forces now dominating San Francisco.

*The displaced people of Fukushima cannot go back to their homes for at least another forty years. Children's thyroid glands are bulging.*

To see all of these factors and actors together is to work through decades of institutional complacency and democratic collectivization.

To live in the contemporary is to both witness and inhabit a set of simultaneous events and experiences. It is to mark inconsistencies and reconfigure affinities between places and their fleeting velocities of engagement.

But it is also to traverse these intensities with the chorus of our voices from close and far away; and to move through them with our bodies, making sense of the contemporary from its beyond.

On the ground,

amid the fog, smoke, and dust,

hearing becomes sharper,

and trust is essential.

*Amid the Fog, Smoke and Dust* emerges from a lecture-performance (presented as part of IAVC / SFMOMA's 2014 Visual Activism symposium) that interwove three voices and three cities, simultaneously overlapping past realities, present happenings, and future speculations. This text, in its medium-specific iteration, renders the dialogue among the temporal and spatial coordinates of Delhi, Tokyo and San Francisco, cities we three belong to and speak from. Furthermore, the multiple voices, images, and silences we stumble upon in the process produce combinations and solidarities that open unanticipated points of engagement with the textures of the contemporary and its beyond.