Let Me List For You The Heat Inside
Pieces of Summertime

Mermaid, Pilgrim, Spectator
Rasha Salti Curates a Deep Sea Cinema

Translations of Exile and Entrapment
Parastoo Anoushahpour's *The Time That Separates Us*

Harman's Interlude

Writings by
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Pieces of Summertime

"The season changed two hours ago. Will my life change as well?"

— *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard, 1974

1. It is April 20 and the capital is mind-numbingly hot. Summertime in the inner-city of Jahangirpuri isn't unlike its other district counterparts in Delhi. Flies swat and buzz, chorusing around ripe watermelons displayed on roving fruit carts. Steel ware clangs as, routinely, wheels crunch on coarse roads. Ragpickers, mostly women, rummage and sort through trash to find items to sell to wholesalers and thrift retailers.

   But today the noise of midday is distinctly disruptive. The Municipal Corporation has launched a "demolition drive" to raze all illegal encroachments in this working-class enclave. A few days before the crackdown, there was a riot in the narrow bylanes. During a religious festivity, Hindu mobs pelted stones at a mosque where Ramzan prayers were taking place. A clash followed. Many were injured. A police officer died.

   Now, men in uniforms are wielding lathis and shouting orders, holding back crowds of screaming women. Many of the boys have fled, leaving their wives and mothers to battle; easier to avoid police capture, its tentacles marking and maiming many a youth. The straining of muscle, stomping on ground, rumbling of bulldozers, crushing of concrete—ground, brick, plastic, tar, tin, copper, brass, stone, plastic, sheet—the weaponry of these hot, hot times.

2. The heat of streetlife, collaged in an urban and coastal afternoon daze, is both heavy and muted in Panchal Mansaram's 1967 video piece *Devi, Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth*. The artist's still, then panning, camera movements capture the streetscapes of 1960s Bombay, marked with outdoor publics, informal economies and religious symbolisms.

   It is wet, warm, wryly windy, as the peninsula often is, filtered with hues of sunset ombre and sandy terracotta. Seated before a characteristically torrid but vacant seaside, a stunning woman in an emerald green sari holds up a flag (she, a parodic variant of the "devi" or goddess figure), next to a toy goat (picked up from a street hawker) and a willowing yard of magenta cloth. The woman, the goat, the cloth, continually reappear.

In disparate moments, Mansaram intimates the public life of city summers. A chainsaw cleaves into a large slate of wood, registering the heat of timbered friction on an industrial substance. Baking in the sun, lethargic child performers bury their bodies artfully into hot sand, only their heads and hands popping out. People continue watching this mundane magic—indifferent, some enthralled, distracted—a tableau of working reactions, men of the shoreline, gathered en masse.

At the monument of Gateway of India, passersby stare into the camera while squinting out the sun's glare, simultaneously awed by the deified woman wandering a city dense with men, armed with a goat and cloth in hand.

Devi, Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth, Panchal Mansaram, 1967

3. The Ontarian heat is not unbearable yet. As I write this, encased in a Parkdale stupor, the weather's dealings in warmth are still volatile. April is springtime here, but I've always known it to be the start of summer. In Kamala Das' confessional poem Summer in Calcutta, the poet inquires languidly: "What is this drink but/ The April sun, squeezed/ Like an orange in my glass?" The unbearably hot season not only intensifies the taste of fruit but permits a wholly dizzying rapture.

The beloved of the mind, as it were, mutes, migrates, slurps, swivels, slurs. Intoxicated, beaded with sweat, she apologizes, cajoling her sly humour, biting her tongue for forgetting about her wedded husband. So surreptitious but immersing are those inward moments of self-pleasure, of intense reverie.

"How brief the term of my devotion, how brief your reign when I with glass in hand, drink, drink, and drink again this Juice of April suns."

Bathed in the humid heat of a cosmopolitan 1960s Kolkata, Das' subject, enveloped, rapt, merely teases the boundaries of propriety. An unrelenting sun awakens secrets, loosens the unspoken. Unlike the stiff coolness of societal integration, heat frees musculature.

4. Caught in the grip of a summer, delayed, I flit to the frustrating heat in the wandering writings of Annie Dillard. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, her nature-rapt, nonfiction account of wooded solitude in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, heat exists like a channel tying the body to its likeness: "It was hot, so hot the mirror felt warm." Deliriously, the narrator's "summer sleep still hung about (her) like a sea kelp," as if one's own reflection, melting, searing, evinces the feathery dregs of water weeds. Summertime touch, scorches and sparks, then parches and withers.

Devi, Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth, Panchal Mansaram, 1967

Perhaps the arrival of summertime is registered most aptly in its incompleteness or unpredictability. Dillard's narrator later encounters the season with impatience, feeling little control over when the heat will come and when it will go. Why are the summer nights in Tinker Creek still cold, she wonders? Why has it been "gray, sporadically, but not oppressively, and rainy for a week"? "When is the real hot stuff coming," she wonders, "the mind-melting weeding weather?"

5. Is summer the loudest season? One least marked by conscientiousness, or its stolid accomplice, shame? Do tempers run high even in the drowsiest of hot afternoons? Evictions are sudden, notices shorter, fatal accidents more reckless, hunger unquestioned, shelter unoffered, harassment even more routine.

   Thieve now by day what you once stole by night, the season conveys fascist diktat.

   Is this why, in the broad daylight of scorching April, Jahangirpuri residents saw their belongings turn into refuse; large cranes demolishing makeshift storefronts sheltered by tin roofs, carts selling second-hand items, sacks of discarded ware—crumpled, twisted, bent, crushed.

   This too, a residue of summertime, when the season turns, suddenly, punishingly, into a time for wailing.

6. In cities, heat is felt most potently in its aftermath, when the day has nearly transpired and the body leans into cooler dusk. Decades pass. The heat is only hotter, especially in the winter.

   Mansaram's *Devi Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth* addresses this public temperature like a political sensation that grips and turns our insides. Towards the end of his film, Mansaram trails a narrow bylane, glimpsing the human remnants of the hot coastal inner-city of Kamathipura in Bombay: countless, stained picture frames of Goddess Lakshmi adorn alleyway walls; sunlight flits on the mirror of a sheltered storefront; metalware litters the streetside, several pairs of dentures are seen; sleep-deprived hawkers and nocturnal hookers yawn their sweaty, unprosperous days away. Religiosity and economy decay and enmesh Mansaram's cosmopolitan collage, cloaking its undefined flesh—blurring, drowsing, reassembled, urban surrealism. This heat—of crowd, customer, stranger, skin—is felt in the vaporous humidity of homosocial publics, the strangling porosity of decaying city.

7. It's June in Toronto. The Northern heat does not yet scald. Everything frozen languidly leaks into an iridescent puddle, without swiftness, without vigor. While ice on skin oozes, supple, solemn, it doesn't quite incite gooseflesh yet—not as it would on a scorching afternoon. A popsicle thaws, planting dots on concrete—but does it melt with juvenile urgency as in the peak of July?

   No. Matter does not quicken these days; there are no threats of shapeshifting minutiae; the broiling immediacy for crucial, crucial summer.

Devi, Stuffed Goat And Pink Cloth, Panchal Mansaram, 1967

Devi, Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth, Panchal Mansaram, 1967

8. Capable of subconscious evocations, the heat of summertime contains ripe potentiality, flirting with memory and immediacy. In Akhil Katyal's poem Jangpura Extension, for instance, the narrator walks away from his lover, crushing dried up bougainvillea petals that litter the pavement, as "remnants of the sun, attenuated under (his) feet." He reminisces, citationally, "the earth," was "thawing from longing into longing." Later, he responds to a queer man cruising the streets of South Delhi's Jangpura Extension, eventually refusing his subtle advances, observing "the sun thawing in his eyes."

9. My nostrils dry up like unplucked weeds. The stench of sundrenched plastic perhaps best typifies my summer in the city. A reused Smart Water bottle tastes rancid once abandoned by the window, for hours in the sun.

Negotiating sweat with shimmer, celebratory articles of clothing liven, smelling different each time. Unworn skirts bake in their coy nylon skins in my mirrored closet; the polypropylene of torn sneakers bakes into soil with every jog. A dank, synthetic odour blankets the passerby scurrying down the sidewalk.

Finally, here, the year's first damp heat of summertime. I wake up to a newly resistant humidity, a familiar sweat that leaks into my waking dreams. I open my windows more, I take out the fan from my closet, then fan myself with a scrap of cardboard in hand. Meanwhile, the outdoors turn appropriately restless, and the breeze feels satisfyingly uneasy, at times restlessly stagnant.

10. End of summer. July departs and makes way for a warmer August. The sun sets as I leave my apartment for air. A sweaty run down Dunn Avenue. A long, wet kiss under the flickering traffic light by McCormick Park. Fingers unexpectedly trail new skin, nape of the neck so raw and untraced. My gaze giddy, limbs feverish, adolescent. I walk back home, a seasonal teenager.

    Do not look up at the waning sun, I think, unless you want to be blinded. Or lulled into a glazing trance. Look down, instead, at the weeds, at the sunned-on concrete. "It's summer now: the heat is on. It's summer now all summer long," Dillard writes. The heat is here to stay.

Water Has Memory, Meera Devidayal, 2018

Mermaid, Pilgrim, Spectator
Rasha Salti Curates a Deep Sea Cinema

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A stormy tide was arguably first captured on camera by the Lumière Brothers in *Baignade En Mer* (1895), where two children and a woman jump into torrential waters. In recent works such as Meera Devidayal's *Water Has Memory* (2018), such rise and tumble of misty foam intimates a quotidien godly performance, trudging a shore of the Indian Ocean. Witnessing the city of Mumbai absorbed by a spectrum of tides, this video opens Toronto-based South Asian Visual Art Centre's (SAVAC) Monitor 14: *Adrift with the Summer Tides*, an online screening of experimental works curated by Rasha Salti.

Salti's curatorial conceit impersonates the conceptual resonances of waves, heralding images, allegorizing in cinematic current, a geopolitics of shorelines, thresholds and stranded conditions. A presentation themed on wave patterns, this showcase is divided into four programmes, each embodying a tidal trait. Spanning stages of billowing tide, wave crest, breaker tide and ebbing wave, the programme visits a swelling Indian Ocean, a dense Dead Sea, a migratory Mediterranean, and ultimately submerges one into a subconscious geography.

Not all films, however, behold the water as a protagonist; many—such as Valerio Rocco's conversantly existential *Dialogue with the Unseen* (2019) or Inas Halabi's penultimately arresting *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2020)—are scorched in desert winds. Bereft of much fluid in sight, works like Taiki Sakpisit's *Shadow & Act* (2019) close the screening with visions of crumbling, derelict decay of an underwritten dynastic past. Bodies of water, often, make impromptu appearances; Dalia Al Kury's darkly humorous, surrealist docudrama *Syrialism* (2020), for instance, crescendos in its protagonist's dream when a gushing stream merges disparate landscapes— from an apartment window into an urbanscape of debris and smoke. Between vaporous blue and verdant rush, a stage is set, for players both exiled and mythic.

In *Water Has Memory* (2018), conversely, rumbling tides overlay skyscrapers and low-rise residential blocks. Pockmarked in grids with protruding window air-conditioners, still frames glimpse office-going men in starched white shirts. Bustling crowds frequent Marine Drive, a famous Mumbai shoreline popularly featured throughout Hindi cinema—often a set for a drenched romantic walk in the city (*Manzil*, 1979) or a maddenned gangster's lonesome wail (*Satya*, 1998). In split frame shots, the ocean commands largesse, foretelling an impressionistic concrete jungle. Its wafting horizon establishes the very thesis that trickles from one film to the next.

We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction, Inas Halabi, 2020

Syrialism, Dalia Al-Kury, 2020

As a displaced mermaid pines for lost form, waves refract folkloric exile in Monitor 14. The astrophysics of winding water guides the viewer's gaze, limb, and breath, encouraging a meandering, swimming spectator. "Waves are the outcome of the attraction of the Moon and Sun and they generate energy," Salti writes in accompanying programme notes, staging a tidal kinship between terrestrial and celestial realms; a practice of looking, backward and toward.

Her first program, the billowing tide, peaks in a cacophonic, droning soundtrack in Gian Spina's *Jordão*. Closing the film is a group of devotees trudging across the Jordan River, possibly the Qasr al-Yahud or the "Crossing of the Jews," in the Israeli-occupied side of the West Bank. One man waves the Israeli flag in furor.

These sacred waters, where John the Baptist is said to have lustrated Jesus, fill Spina's footage. *Jordão* indulges a touristic exultation that contributes to the Israeli occupation, barring access to clean drinking water for the over three million Palestinians residing in the West Bank. Meanwhile, its pilgrims capture a mythos of exile, one where return is not only possible but coupled with a rousing celebration. A paradox of water pilgrimage flushes through Salti's lineup.

"When is a pilgrim like a sieve? When he riddles," Anne Carson observes in *The Anthropology of Water*, a lyrical collection of poetry and prose documenting her walk of the Camino de Santiago. "It is an open secret among pilgrims and other theoreticians of this traveling life," Carson writes, "that you become addicted to the horizon."

Bathed in languid waves, the divine shore is a fallacy. Wave crest, Salti's second programme, emulates the climax of one such mocking, baptismal dip. "The most visible and emblematic part of the wave, where it tips as it rises and where the water appears to froth," she writes, reminding me of the magnificent, lethal tide of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1831) by Japanese ukiyo-e artist Hokusai.

This programme pulsates like a cliffhanger, particularly in the fables of Jayce Salloum's *untitled part 9: this time*. As young school-going Afghan boys narrate popular tales of beloved trickster, wise-fool Sufi character Mulla Nasruddin, a pair of eyes superimpose a fading vision of seesawing Bamiyan mountains in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The viewer becomes attuned to an oral pattern of waves—of narrative repetition, coded with variation.

Sukhdev Sandhu adroitly explores this fragmentary spectatorship, akin to an underwater trance, in his review of Phillip Scheffner's *Havarie*. This controversial film depicting "dark-skinned men aboard a small rubber dinghy," Sandhu writes, "is a slow cinema, a film about time," haunted by "those who sail or drift across (sea), those who disappear into it, or are forever damaged by it." Pixelated imagery obscures and stretches moments of maritime crossings.

Colliding water migrant with water mythology, *Adrift with the Summer Tides* reminds me of a scene from Geetu Mohandas' 2019 Malayalam-language film *Moothon*, where 14-year-old Moosa takes to the sea from Lakshadweep to Mumbai in search of her estranged brother. When a swallowing wave crest capsizes her boat, the teen hallucinates a mermaid spirit, who saves her from drowning. Similarly, this hydrofilmic quartet arranges a communion between the surviving and the spectral.

Here, however, adrift bodies aren't necessarily unmoored in a hydrous sense. Works bearing distinct elements of collage, movement, and lyric—such as Karan Shreshta's *stealing earth* (2018) and Daphne Xu, Beatrix Chu and Diane Zhou's *Nothing Ever Happens Here* (2018)—choreograph bodies on land. From the former's portrayals of protest song-and-dance by Indigenous rural dwellers of Nepal's Chitwan National Park to the latter's blue-collar quotidian of Hebei's working-class residents, corporeal forms inhabit tenuous modernities, entangling dispossession with capitalist extraction. Rivers are absently present in such works, scanning earthly concerns with an aquatic undercurrent, troubling labour with love.

Jordão, Gian Spina, 2020

The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Hokusai, 1831

Despite tidal trials, wave patterns flit us between tragedy and thrill, sieving both sound and skin. “Rivers connect us,” Hannah Claus repeats in her undulating essay *we all begin in water*. Her first water song installation uses imagery from multiple rivers in Mi’kma’ki, printed on transparent discs tied with threads, to unfurl “a visual pattern of the digital sound waves.” In Monitor 14, a similarly formalist inquiry ensues.

Imperceptibly, during the screening, Mairead McClean’s *A Line Was Drawn* (2019) seems to end with a sonic cadence of oars wading through still waters, whereas a tide trembles in an Arabic song on live television in Ghita Skali’s *The Hole’s Journey* (2020). “The sea is angry. It doesn’t laugh. The story doesn’t make you laugh. The sea is wounded. It can’t wither.” Documenting a literal shipment from Amsterdam to Morocco, Skali’s work ripples with riddle: “Why is the sea laughing? Why, why, why?”

The final rung of Salti’s selection, the ebbing wave, resolves fluvial inquiry. Inspired by the residue of tides receding, this titular wave pattern conjures the famous beach scene in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), where Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr entwine and kiss amid crashing and retreating Pacific currents. Retreating across a figurative shore, ebbing wave glimpses aqueous remnants, trailing lost touch that rekindles connection.

Untitled Part 9: this time, Jayce Salloum, 2020

Pathompon Mont Tesprateep's *Part II: Fatimah & Kulit* (2019)—based on Assanee Pallajan's short stories set in the political turmoil of the Deep South in Thailand (1946-60)—depicts two companions, torn apart by circumstances, reuniting momentarily. "Separation is not a bad thing. We all have our duties to fulfill," explains Fatimah to Kulit. Kulit, seemingly fleeing state persecution, responds assuringly, "better to bend than break."

In emotive 16mm black-and-white outtakes, Tesprateep's work cascades with tidal tendency, ebbing as it drains. The film concludes *Adrift with the Summer Tides*, a screening that traces within its viewer, a shoreline of memory. Admittedly, I wished for a shorter showcase, transient and swift like a swimmer's lap. Still, this lineup of moving images crafts a winding intrigue. Like a pilgrim who riddles, one shapeshifts within this deep sea cinema, "to escape underneath," in Carson's words, "to a dim water kingdom."

Nothing Ever Happens Here, Sponge Gourd Collective, 2018

Part II: Fatimah and Kulit, Pathompon Mont Tesprateep, 2019

Translations of Exile and Entrapment
Parastoo Anoushahpour's *The Time That Separates Us*
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The Time That Separates Us, Parastoo Anoushahpour, 2022

Who will grieve for this woman? Does she not seem
too insignificant for our concern?
Yet in my heart I never will deny her,
who suffered death because she chose to turn.
— *Lot's Wife*, Anna Akhmatova, 1961

But before fire stitched me in salt to the ground
Who was I?
Before I traveled from my body into a body
Who was I?
— *The Plaint of Marah, Woman of Sodom*, Kazim Ali, 2013

In the impossible
interval where she stood, Marah saw that she
could not turn her back on even one doomed
child of the city, but must turn her back
instead upon the saved.
— *The Turning of Lot's Wife*, Scott Cairns, 2015

The story of exile never starts at the beginning. In Christianity, Judaism and Islam, it was the literal annihilation of two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah, that led to the forced departure of their only surviving family. Shepherded by two angels in disguise, Lot (the nephew of Abraham), his two daughters and his wife, were made to leave their town on foot while their homeland was devastated with clouds of fire and sulfur. During the journey, Lot's wife Edith (also called Marah, Irit or Ado), turned back to look at her emblazoned Sodom. As punishment, God perpetually froze her into a formation of sodium and sediment.

Now austerely heralded as Pillar of Salt, peaking atop a cliff in what is now the Jordan Valley, this towering structure forms the crux of Parastoo Anoushahpour's orbital, oneiric and myth-informed work of ecocinema, *The Time That Separates U*s (2022).

The Time That Separates Us, Parastoo Anoushahpour, 2022

Made in collaboration with Bayan Kiwan, Haneen Dajani, Dina Mimi and Firas Hamdanhe, the artist's solo debut film investigates the archetypal feminine in monotheistic folklore, opening with prolonged footage of a burning horizon in the simultaneously contested and worshiped valley encased between Israel, Jordan and Palestine. Invested in the translations of exile and entrapment surrounding the Pillar of Salt (or the Site of Lot's Wife), Anoushapour first scans a blurry view of the mountainous region. Employing a series of episodic vignettes—still photographs, guerilla footage, strobing imagery and documentation of phone texts, many of which are shared from her collaborators—she offers the viewer a multitude of geographic perspectives around this site.

Through the course of her film, the artist personifies the architectural physicality of historic ruins and holy sites. At varying points, a pair of hands constructs an assemblage, collaging photos with a scientific purview. An image of the Temple of Hercules—three, curved, gigantic fingers—stacks among this series. Related snippets of the desert landscape follow suit: blonde, arid, baked earth; bunches of verdant Apple of Sodom amid sparse vegetalia; and ubiquitously, across multiple photographs, fingers—of many, mostly male, tourists and tour guides, pointing to the novelty of rocks that most fascinates Anoushahpour's project.

In a memorable sequence, visual replicas of the female form also emerge: over a photographic capture of red flowerbeds, the same hands place a large photo of a naked woman, posing with a strap-on (or a prosthetic penis) before the camera. She is wearing sunglasses, her skin glossy, her frame fierce and statuesque.

As a pair of hands stack smaller versions of the same nude continuously, one on top of the other, a voiceover narrates the film's central story of exile. Here, too, loss of homeland begins at a narrative endpoint: what happened to the departed Lot and his daughters after they found refuge in a cave? After their home in Sodom had been destroyed permanently? After his wife—their mother—was punished into stagnation for eternity?

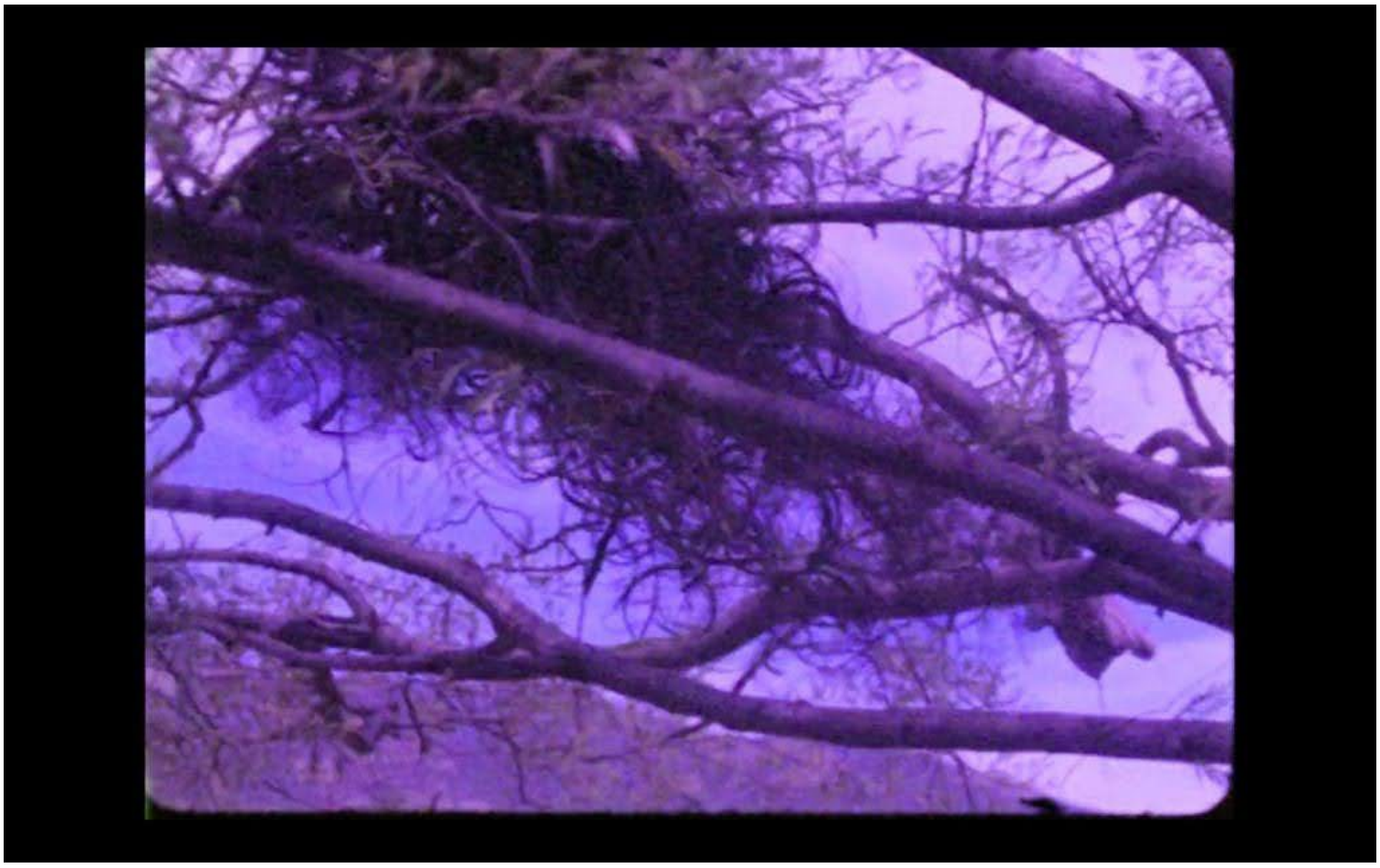
The Time That Separates Us is steadily absorbed by the perverse and the abject, conditions often relegated to women characters in theological lore. According to the Old Testament, Lot's daughters, bearing the burden of duty to repopulate their newfound sanctuary, decided to intoxicate their father and have sex with him in order to have his offspring. Both daughters birthed a son each; while the eldest delivered Moab, the youngest gave birth to Bani Ammi. Respectively, both these offspring initiated lineages of the Ammonites (Moabites and Bani Ammon) as recorded in the Book of Genesis.

The Time That Separates Us, Parastoo Anoushahpour, 2022

The Time That Separates Us, Parastoo Anoushahpour, 2022

Traces of what was later deemed as “sodomy,” or deviant, condemned sexuality, pulsate through this film’s generations of feminized subjects like lifeblood. Anoushahpour’s photographic repetition of the phallic feminine itself conjures Edith’s punitive transformation. The artist conveys sapphic anatomy best when she delves into the sedimentary structures of land and its rocky terrain, marked by the phantasmagorical flora indigenous to the Jordan Valley.

One of the film’s more compelling transitions is that of a faraway shot of the Pillar of Salt, cutting into a feverish, monochromatic sequence, where a pair of hands meditatively pick apart the toxic and inedible Apple of Sodom. “A gigantic tree grew around Sodom, the apples of which turned into smoke and ashes when plucked with hands,” the narrator elaborates, scoring an unsettlingly flickering interlude, where strobing shots render the fruit, flowering at its top, being peeled by fingers with chipping nail paint. “When struck, it explodes with a puff, like a bladder.”



Coyolxauhqui, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, 2017

The sequence is reminiscent of the frenzied cinematography of vibrant cactuses in *Coyolxauhqui* (2017) by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, a poetic video piece restaging flesh dismemberment of the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui by her brother Huitzilopochtli—dispersed across acres of land, casting a light on the state of femicides in contemporary Mexico. At its most hermetic, Anoushahpour's piece appears to similarly lament a mythologized woman, violated and undead, crystallized by a male force and immersed in silt forever.

The film's final moments emulate a shift in ecology from dry desert with its siroccos winds to dense waters, plunging us into a muted fluvial stupor. In a jarringly straightforward, documentarian turn, Anoushahpour records real-life moments of holy baptism of tourists in the Baptism Site or "Bethany beyond the Jordan" (Al-Maghtas), located north of the Dead Sea. Pilgrims en masse dressed in loose white garb enter the river where John the Baptist is said to have first lustrated Jesus. A man, overwhelmed with emotion, dips his body into the murky waters, at once trepidatious and exalted. Meanwhile, an army officer with a rifle strapped around his back patrols the holy site.

Departing from the work's otherwise impressionistic wanderings over the land and its feminine phantoms, Anoushahpour's choice to close her film with this footage is a curious one. The decision sits rather confidently when bookended with lyrically fleeting, silent shots—a woman, presumably kneeling in prayer by the Pillar of Salt, before walking away; a candid glimpse of a face with high cheekbones, melancholic and commanding, looking askance at the camera; a daintily seated, mustached figure, perched on a boulder in the cave that housed Lot's daughters, cloth turbaned artfully over their head, draping around their hairy chest; their midriff and belly is bare, while ample hips and legs are curtained with soft, sheer fabric, reaching the ankles. Each image is timed at only a fraction of a second.

In a deliberately stilted, even lethargic, recollection of a biblical and quranic legend, *The Time That Separates Us* recasts the scriptural feminine within a landscape where exile is omnipresent and the displaced are tucked away. The tragedy of Edith—a woman stilled in perpetuity for the mere act of looking—invigorates Anoushahpour's reexamination of ancient lore. Her inquiries reverberate elliptically: what is the price of bearing witness to a vanishing homeland? What of its remaining people, what of the cursed and the landlocked of annexed territories?

Untitled: Silueta Series, Ana Mendieta, 1978

Disputing a certain spectatorial ease, this work assaults the borders of both avant-garde ecocinema and historical documentary. In a sense, the artist's thesis recalls the conflation of female form to flagrant forest found in Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas Series* (1973-80), enacting its own distinctly self-assured and exploratory treatise on both violence and sensuality. Can one be exiled, she seems to posit, in utter stasis? Can one be exiled in her own country, if not stranded merely a stone's throw away?

This piece is inspired by Nimisha Srivastava's tremulous and textured short Chadariya, which played as part of Monitor 15: Clearings in the Fog. *The following fictional account responds to the film's vivid exploration of intergenerational intimacies in the zenana, the domestic realm traditionally relegated to women of the household. The text looks to the tense and evocative landscapes of flesh, skin, scars, and strands of hair captured in Srivastava's work, veering between anonymity and extreme proximity, be it the indoor stupor of afternoon humidity, or the slippage of clandestine pasts and medical histories amid lethargic chatter. Observed in part by a reflective, prepubescent trans protagonist, the piece thinks through bodily autonomy beyond the womb and its (in)capacities for birth, staging physiology as a perennially potent and dynamic negotiation. Here, protagonists navigate secrecy, decision-making, physicality, and disagreement with covert ease, within unspeakably, invisibly charged confines.*

Harman's Interlude

Chadariya, Nimisha Srivastava, 2022

I peered out of our window with squinted eyes, scanning the blur that was our neighborhood compound. Crusty-eyed from a blankly depressive nap, I noticed in the waning twilight a taxi cab nearing our front gate. The car door opened to reveal Auntie Sumana, a petite woman with a mint green suitcase and a salmon-toned carry-on bag in hand, and a protruding bump swelling from her belly.

Chadariya, Nimisha Srivastava, 2022

A glum paralegal, Sumana was a woman who looked at children with vague curiosity and some fear but mostly the fondness of a smitten student. For me, Sumana had a certain, enduring succor. Sumana would fly in "from abroad" once a year and greet Heidi and her mother with presents. She would stay with them for three or four weeks at a stretch, or until it felt like it was time for her to leave.

After arriving this time around, she changed from her oversized Freddie Mercury t-shirt into my mother's billowing and starched off-white kameez.

On most nights during her sojourns, Heidi would listen to her mother and her aunt chatting in sibilant whispers. A pristinely plump Sumana would whisper to Heidi's mother, both curled lethargic and fetal towards each other like curving apostrophes on the stiff bed in the middle of the night.

A barely asleep Heidi was cocooned in between the two.

Chadariya, Nimisha Srivastava, 2022

"Isse accha I should've taken a mifepristone early on in the first month itself."

"Chup kar, yaar," Heidi's mother opened her eyes, agitated. *"Should I get you some warm milk?"*

"Maybe with some Rue and Queen Anne's Lace potion?" Sumana eyed Heidi's mother cheekily.

Heidi's mother and Sumana had grown up together, then apart, and now only saw each other annually. During Sumana's visits, the two would hover around each other like bees buzzing, as though nearing floral stigma. If a row sparked between the two, as it sometimes did, they would part ways for the night and rest in different bedrooms, leaving Heidi to sleep alone with her mother. On certain days, the temperature further dropped, and Sumana would spend long stretches of wintry hours buried in a book.

One such tattered copy was an early edition of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. Heidi would slide into her room in the late hours of night and listen to Sumana narrate the tragedy of Lily Bart. How the lead heroine fell from grace in the upper echelons of New York City's high society. How her birth ensured her riches and luxuries, but she died a destitute.

Pretty heavy stuff, Heidi would think, often growing impatient with Sumana's reading of passages.

She did, however, enjoy Sumana's descriptions of the ornamental finery and fashions of the late nineteenth century. The elaborate hats draped with cropped and sheer veils, intricate fascinators, floor-length gowns with embroidered hems, singed waists pulled in by stiff corsets, and otherworldly white faces, fanned by dainty wrists, reminding her of the MGM classics her mother played on VHS.

Chadariya, Nimisha Srivastava, 2022

She knew her words would corrode, even if they chance a laugh, only if the weather permitted, that is.

Heidi's mother kicked Sumana's foot, half in jest, from across the bed.

She then got up and looked at her pregnant friend.

Both broke into a giggling fit.

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On her fortieth birthday, Sumana visited again.

"You are turning forty in your own country" Heidi's mother exclaimed, beaming with consolation as she cut Sumana a thin slice of cake.

Sumana accompanied her theatrically quizzical response with an unsettling smile. Then her mouth hung open just slightly, as if pausing mid-conversation, unprepared, no longer smiling.

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On her next visit, aunt Sumana returned a shell of her plumper likeness.

Without baby in belly, still single, still intuitive, still caustic-tongued.

Both Sumana and Heidi’s mother would sit and dish on our balcony, overlooking the cluster of crammed homes, a canopy of tangled electric wires overhead. The rectangular parkette before our front porch swarmed with the daily gathering of neighborhood elders, all laughing in unison in a choral yogic ritual that echoed into our mornings.

Heidi recalls her aunt and mother taking turns oiling each other’s scalps. As both chewed on their intrepid schoolgirl chatter, Heidi, then an effeminate, introverted tween, was seated not too far away, her head buried in a book.

All were bathed in a midday tedium.

“Well, you weren’t so sure a few years back is all I’m saying.”

Heidi overheard her mother, wiping her hands with a hot towel, before dipping them into the oil.

“I paused at the possibility, I suppose.”

Sumana entertained her friend’s retort, throwing her head back in exhalation as Heidi’s mother tied Sumana’s thinning grays in a humble braid.

Chadariya, Nimisha Srivastava, 2022

Heidi’s mother nodded and looked at Sumana with knitted brows, her look of scandalized judgment softened by a stilling affection. Was Harman eavesdropping, she wondered?

She looked askance at her—the then-quiet and gawky Harman—consciously changing the subject, her pitcher shriller, her register abruptly manic.

“Harman, should we all go see Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke (We Are Travelers on the Path of Love) *this evening?”*

Sumana switched too, her response less affected and giddy, albeit in practiced unison with her friend.

“The one with the orphaned kids in a make-believe adoptive family?”

Heidi looked from under her book, scrunching up her bulbous boy-nose, pretending not to entirely comprehend. Sumana then repeated, looking knowingly at her girlish nephew.

"Aamir-Juhi waali pikchar (the Aamir-Juhi starrer)? Chalein (Shall we)?"

Heidi observed her secret-keeping mother and the all-perceiving Sumana, smiling in agreeable response.

"Sure! Priya Cinema?"

Aaditya Aggarwal is a writer, editor and film programmer based in Toronto and New Delhi. He has formerly worked at Mercer Union, Images Festival, Regent Park Film Festival, Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival and TIFF. Aaditya's writing can be found in POV Magazine, Rungh Magazine, Canadian Art, The New Inquiry, Ethnic Aisle, Trinity Square Video and Koffler Digital, among others.
He recently served as a Commissioning Editor for Reel Asian's 25th anniversary anthology (re)Rites of Passage. Currently, Aaditya is a Curatorial Fellow at the Canyon Cinema Foundation.

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