

years of the Soviet Union. Vertov's film—a documentary that itself unfolds via early techniques of montage—was occasioned by the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution and celebrated the construction of a hydroelectric plant on the Dnieper River. For her video, Selander reassembled these official images of a regime at its height and intercut them with frames she shot in Pripjat, a town located on a tributary of the Dnieper that housed workers of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and that became a toxic ghost town after the disaster. The installation also includes a display case holding nine photographic works created by exposing photosensitive paper to stones containing uranium, a gesture that references the historical proximity of the advent of photography and the discovery of radioactivity.

The Offspring Resembles the Parent—created in 2015 in collaboration with Oscar Mangione—concluded the exhibition. The video's title is inspired by a passage from Aristotle's *Politics*, in which the philosopher asserts that it is not natural for money's value to increase through interest, since money, unlike livestock and agriculture, cannot reproduce itself. Composed of still images (largely archival) and found video footage, the work conveys a bitter reflection on the inconsistencies between human and economic values. Much like *Lenin's Lamp Glows in the Peasant's Hut*, this work is a meditation on the difference between institutional and individual memories. The work begins with images of the emergency banknotes printed in Germany during a period of extreme inflation in the 1920s; their designs are emblazoned with propagandistic messages in text and image alike. In hindsight, we can read this currency as a material trace of the onset of an era fraught with crises concerning sociopolitical, cultural, and moral values—a time that, in so many ways, is indistinguishable from the present.

—Eugenio Viola

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

MUMBAI

Ashish Avikunthak

CHATTERJEE & LAL

Set in a location with few distinguishing qualities, in *lieu vague*, Samuel Beckett's spare, minimal *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is in many ways an ideal transcultural text, easily adaptable to different geographical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Using the play's basic premise—two men wander an apparent wasteland interminably awaiting the arrival of a third character—as a starting point, Ashish Avikunthak's seventy-nine-minute film *Kalkimanthakatha* (The Churning of Kalki), 2015, transforms Beckett's absurdist postwar "tragicomedy" into a subtle postcolonial reflection on the idea of God as absence, drawing on ancient Indian philosophical and religious treatises that prescribe acceptance of inaction, uncertainty, impossibility, and emptiness.

The film was shot in Super 16 and digital video in Allahabad during the 2013 Maha Kumbh Mela, a huge Hindu pilgrimage in which the devout gather to bathe in a sacred river. Occurring every twelve years, it is thought to be the largest single gathering of humans on earth. You would not know this from Avikunthak's film, though, which unfolds as a series of short duologues (most of which are shot in gray, grainy black-and-white, with the occasional sequence in muted, dusty color) that take place in largely uninhabited, desolate, almost mythic landscapes—misty windswept fields, deserted hilltops and riverbanks, ancient ruins, and, in an overt nod to Beckett, a clearing under a large tree. These settings are peripheral to the main action of the pilgrimage itself, aural traces of which enter through the occasional faint hum of chanting or sermonizing. Speaking in a stylized literary Bengali distant

from everyday use, the men rarely look at one another, often gazing suggestively offscreen or scanning the horizon.

Avikunthak's protagonists search for the mysterious messiah-like figure of Kalki, the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu, whose arrival, according to Hindu mythology, marks the end not of all time but of one temporal cycle, after which the succession of ages simply begins again. This a priori acknowledgment of the cyclical rather than linear structure of time seems to normalize the trope of uncertain and infinite



repetition, which registers as absurd in Beckett's play, and the frequent experiences of déjà vu that follow become intimations of possible reincarnations. Through their never-ending and seemingly futile quest, the men—who, much like Beckett's protagonists, bicker with an almost marital intimacy—discuss and debate various esoteric philosophical quandaries: the relationship between blind and reasoned faith; the need for conviction in the face of doubt; the value of inaction; the wisdom of the unknowable and impossible; and infinite searching as an auspicious, affirmative process that builds and strengthens faith. A sublime musical interlude—a woman playing a *tamboura* under a tree, shot in crisp, vivid color—shatters the claustrophobia of inaction. The dialogue then shifts to conspiratorial talk of an impending war, peppered with readings of passages from Mao Tse-tung's *Little Red Book* (1964). Unlike the meandering philosophical ruminations, these are terse, direct, and pragmatic, evoking the notorious history of India's Naxalite movement—an armed Maoist insurgency that originated in the West Bengal village of Naxalbari. Kalki is eventually evoked in a sped-up sequence of the two men chanting the name while circumambulating a rotating camera.

Near the end, a recitation of the names of different avatars of Vishnu (from the more standard Rama and Krishna to Mohini, the only female one) seamlessly extends to include appellations of Communist thinkers and leaders from around the world (Vietnamese general Võ Nguyên Giáp; Bolshevik rebels Nikolai Bukharin, Leon Trotsky, and Lev Kamenev; Romanian Communist Nicolae Ceaușescu), aligning ideas of cosmic rebirth and political revolution. Through this film, Avikunthak orchestrates a somewhat unexpected encounter between opposing perspectives or bodies of knowledge—sacred/secular, modernity/tradition, philosophy/politics—the friction between them forcing each to open up to the wisdom of the other. And by using an uncompromisingly difficult avant-garde form and structure to explore Hindu thought and ritual practice, the film troubles ongoing attempts by fundamentalists to assert definitive orthodox interpretations onto a religion defined by its rich multiplicities.

—Murtaza Vali

Ashish Avikunthak, *Kalkimanthakatha* (The Churning of Kalki), 2015, digital video, color and black-and-white, sound, 79 minutes.