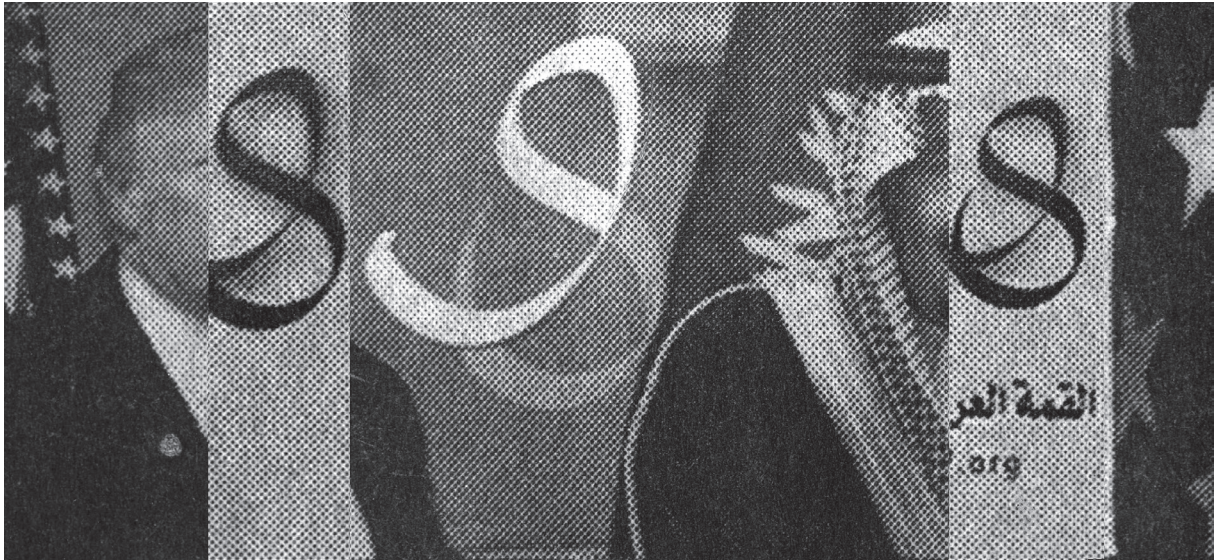


# SRESHTA RIT PREMNATH

*Notes on Unlearning the Present*



27

It is difficult to say whether the present always feels tumultuous to those who inhabit it. Arriving as a student in the US soon after the Lewinsky scandal and living through the Bush years and 9/11, Trumpism feels less surprising as an authentically American political sentiment than the landslide election and re-election of Barack Obama. By electing a black man America presumably absolved itself of its founding violence and so returned openly to its deep-seated racism. In considering what it means to make art during and after Trump, we must recognize the fact that the fear and xenophobia that buoyed him to victory was always-already here, albeit temporarily repressed.

Every day a new horror is revealed and we are called upon to react by posting, commenting, liking and making art that does much the same. Must our eyes blink to the ticker-tape of social media or should they instead penetrate the *longue durée* of historical time? Or indeed must we focus on the much longer arc of the Anthropocene that threatens the very conditions of our existence? How do we meaningfully engage with the multiple scales of time that evade our imagination while existing in a present that is ever-diminishing? Where is the here and when is now? Is the now this second? Today? This millennium? And what

is the ambit of our locality? The length of the body or the boundary of the nation state?

In my intertwined roles as artist, editor and educator, I try to forget the dictum that I must live for today, as if there were no tomorrow. By unfolding the present, the anxious moment can reattach itself to the events surrounding it, and that which has withdrawn in the constellation of significance we call the present may once again advance. We must unlearn the present to see its many faces, and to allow other constellations to present themselves. ===