



Lisa Björkman

University of Louisville, Department of Urban and Public Affairs

Political Theatre and Political Deceit in Mumbai

In the Indian city of Mumbai, public spaces are often used for mass-political gatherings – protest marches, road blocks, campaign rallies – and those who gather for such events are often compensated in cash. Popular and scholarly discourse tends to dismiss ‘paid crowds’ as inauthentic, even fraudulent forms of public assembly. This research instead explores the material and spatial dimensions of cash-compensated mass gatherings in Mumbai as forms of political speech and representation, probing the dueling moral registers by means of which the theatrical character of political life is evaluated: as either political theatre or political deceit. Taking embodied, emplaced and spatialized forms of urban theatricality and public performance seriously as idioms of political communication, the accounts suggest, may offer one way out of the impasses of post-truth political present where speech acts tends to be either evaluated for their truth value or else dismissed as lies. Attending to material-spatial dynamics of political utterance and to embodied forms of representation calls attention to a richer array of ideas and moral-evaluative frameworks operative in city spaces and places.

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Student Building 005

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