

# CENTRE FOR SENSORY STUDIES

## MAKING SENSE OF ALGORITHMS LECTURE SERIES

### The Fugitive Hands and Feet in Algorithmic Work

Tarini Bedi

Friday, 02 February 2024

11:00-12:40 EST, Virtual

[Webinar Registration Link](#)



Image credit:  
Tarini Bedi

Using my ethnographic research with men who drive for two platform transport companies in India, this presentation provokes a situated understanding of the many labors involved with work on technological platforms. It argues that people do not simply fall under the control of surveillance and the rationalities of big data but rather engage in improvisational or *fugitive* practices guided by the tactile labors of the hand and feet or what platform workers call, *haath*. In several South Asian languages, *haath* is the literal organ of the hand, but the term also refers to the more metaphorical tactile capacities of touch exercised by other organs of the body, and the skills, expertise, and work that can be encompassed and exercised by it. Further, by suggesting that this fugitivity and what David Howes (2022) calls the *labor of the senses* are distinct but intersecting components of other, embodied forms of labor, it moves the current scholarship on platform labor from technocratic, business-focused, and political economic approaches towards a tactile understanding of the capacities of workers in the platform economy.

**Tarini Bedi** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Program Director for Cultural Anthropology at the National Science Foundation. She also directs the Mobilities and Methods Lab (MML), which is an outreach and dissemination collective for teaching and research on global mobilities. She currently works on the sensory life of urbanism, kinship, mobilities, labor and technology, infrastructure, and borders. She has conducted fieldwork in South and South East Asia, Europe, and the United States. She is the author of two books, *The Dashing Ladies of Shiv Sena: Political Matronage in Urbanizing India* (2016; SUNY Press) Her most recent book *Mumbai Taximen: Autobiographies and Automobilities in India* (2022; University of Washington Press) won a 2022 Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing. She is currently completing her third monograph *Fugitive Touch: Luka-Chipi(Hide and Seek) and Tactile Work in Mumbai*.

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