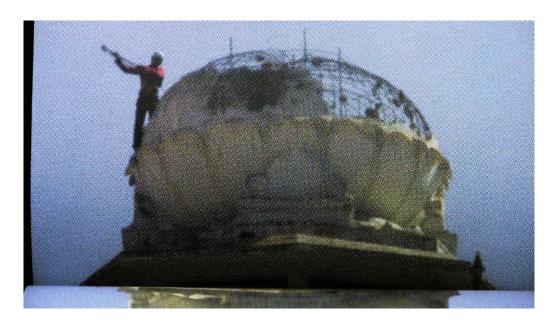| The Highlights - The Last Image |
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Still from the video and book, *I Will Die When I Stop Building*, 2012

After many requests made to his foundation and his four sons who are its trustees, all I am given is the following biography, perhaps typed up by the foundation's press department:

> About the founder - Sri. M. S. Ramaiah
> Industrious and enterprising, an Engineering Contractor of all India repute, a person with a lavish common sense, Sri. M. S. Ramaiah founded "Gokul Education Foundation" in the year 1962 as one of his bold ventures to perform service to society through a private educational system. Under the aegis of this foundation that same year was born M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Technology. Access to a much needed engineering education was provided to all those who had been denied such an opportunity, in all parts of the country and outside.
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> Sri. M. S. Ramaiah who is widely hailed as a visionary, educationist, industrialist and philanthropist saw to it that the institution, which commenced with only two disciplines, grew by leaps and bounds over the years. The institution now boasts of offering Bachelors programs in twelve disciplines.
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> In 1979 Sri. M. S. Ramaiah founded M. S. Ramaiah Medical College and thereafter brought into existence at regular intervals M. S. Ramaiah Medical

Teaching Hospital, M. S. Ramaiah Dental College, M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Nursing Education and Research, M. S. Ramaiah College of Law, M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Management Studies, M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Hotel Management, M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, M. S. Ramaiah College of Arts, Science and Commerce; M. S. Ramaiah Polytechnic, M. S. Ramaiah Composite Junior College and M. S. Ramaiah Vidyaniketan.

Sri. M. S. Ramaiah, who thus toiled incessantly and untiringly from the year 1962 and founded a galaxy of institutions in the firmament of education and service to humanity, plunged us into deep grief when he left us to join the lotus feet of the Lord on December 25, 1997. However his noble children did find solace and consolation in taking over the management of his institutions and continuing the work from where he left. Remembering the cherished wish of their father, founder of this gigantic complex of educational institutions who dedicated himself to causes of social relevance, his illustrious sons have embarked upon several more projects for the benefit of society at large.

Every biography is haunted by that which is absent from it, that which has been forgotten or repressed. When people see a biography of a mere three paragraphs to describe the life of a man who is said to be a "visionary, educationist, industrialist and philanthropist," they begin to talk.

How did an illiterate man with no education himself rise from construction worker to building contractor to property developer to, finally, a self-styled educationist and philanthropist? Leaving aside questions of educational philosophy, curriculum and infrastructure, where did the money to buy enormous tracts of land and build his vast empire come from? No records have been found to back up the hundreds of landless and disappeared farmers who had claimed that false papers and brute force had been used to extort their land from them. A reporter who works for a well-respected national newspaper told me off the record that an educational institution would be a perfect front for money laundering. You establish a foundation, receive large donations and use the money to buy more land to develop property and pay large salaries to honorary faculty. Someone should look into Ramaiah's relations with political figures of his time, she said. We tried, she said, but there is no paper trail. No documents.

Before facticity comes mythology: As far back as I remember, everyone in Bangalore knew that M. S. Ramaiah had met a fortune-teller. Ramaiah had been informed that his ever-expanding complex of university campuses would not only keep his name alive, but would, quite literally, keep his heart beating. In other words he was told that he would die, immediately drop dead, if he stopped building.

I grew up a ten-minute walk from his giant educational complex - Ramaiah Nagar. A palace from afar; a cheaply built maze at close range. I know we have family photographs shot on our balcony with the palatial structure framing us, the sun setting behind it, but when I looked through our photo albums, I couldn't find any. Then I thought I would re-photograph this memory whose evidence had disappeared, only to find that the city had since grown dense and tall, and that it now blocked the entire view I remembered. We can no longer see Ramaiah Nagar from our balcony, and the story feels like an insignificant footnote in the larger story of Bangalore's development. Our house, which in the early 90s was at the edge of the city, is now considered prime real estate in the city's center.

One of the fastest growing cities in the world, Bangalore's population has quadrupled from approximately two million in 1975 to eight million today. As the center of India's booming IT industry, the city's Development Corporation has hastened to project an image of a "global" city. In subsequent reconstructions, Bangalore has consistently used models of the other to imagine and define itself; the phrase "Silicon Valley of India," like "Bollywood" for Mumbai, is a case in point. As a result, the most modern buildings consist of a pastiche of architectural styles accumulated over decades. M. S. Ramaiah's educational complex is a perfect example of this: A labyrinthine structure, it includes architectural elements ranging in style from British Colonial to Hindu, Neo-Islamic, and more modern forms. The provisionality of architectural styles extends to the poorly constructed buildings themselves, which often crumble during the monsoon rains and need be continually reconstructed. There was a running joke that Ramaiah's buildings were intentionally built to collapse, in order that he could keep rebuilding them, and by doing so stave off his own death.

Development does not stop in a developing country. As the term implies, developing countries are trapped in a perpetual state of temporal anteriority. Our present is your past. And as parallel lines appear to converge at an ever-postponed point we keep developing in order to one day become present. To one day appear.

But who are we? Who is this Ramaiah? Who builds the buildings that make up a development? The abstract labor that kept Ramaiah alive both corporeally and symbolically was, after all, someone else's concrete labor. Who are these laborers, catching up with the present, invisible to those who develop? Some say, "India is Shining" (a government sponsored slogan meant to brand India's image as an economic powerhouse). Perhaps the bright sheen of development blinds us, making the body of the laborer disappear. It is as if the concrete labor of development floats free of the laborer and, thus disembodied, attaches itself to the corporeal imaginary of the developer.

I have called this corporeal imaginary the "Last Image," a term borrowed from Siegfred Kracauer, who coined it to describe the non-photographic, mental image we retain of a

person after his or her death, a composite of memories that prunes away details that seem insignificant. The urban developer's Last Image is a composite image, each signature encapsulating a different time. First, there is biographical time, the linear narrative written and repeated until it stands in for the absent body. Then there is the accumulated time extorted from the laboring bodies that keeps the developer's body, quite literally, alive. The urban developer and, indeed, the project of developing, of development, is again, quite literally, living on borrowed time. This ghostly time, this other time, is an ever present then, a temporal anteriority that haunts the now of development in which it is being enacted.

To accomplish the impossible task of embodying utopia, the illiterate educationist uses his spectacular architecture, his shining city to sublimate the labor of those bodies that actually build his vision. And even though he, the developer, will fade away (Ramaiah died in 1997), development itself will hurry on, haunted by its own imminent death. Fearing its arrival in the present, development locates itself in the past while projecting itself into the future.