Gregor Samsa woke up one morning and discovered that he had tuned into a giant insect. In an alternate universe, he had finished writing his PhD dissertation.

Doing PhD was indeed a Kafkaesque experience. It included waking up in the middle of the night and staring at the dark ceiling, hoping an idea might come down like an alien astronaut. And when the astronaut actually came, I was recuperating from yester-night’s sleep deprivation by taking a siesta. These unfulfilled promises and unrealized potentials were accompanied and, eventually, overpowered by fond memories of unmediated friendship and unmitigated camaraderie. These relationships instigated me, poked me in the ribs, restored my head on my shoulders after its dislocation by panic and pretension, and, most importantly, translated all my disillusionment and discomfort into self-confidence and mental resolve. It is impossible to pay off these debts, and I do want to be indebted to these people forever. However, acknowledging them is also necessary, so as to inform the world where to seek help when in need of support, encouragement, and constructive criticism.

First, institutional support and funding: this thesis would not have been possible without the Fellowship from Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the infrastructural facilities at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) and Jadavpur University. Institutions are not mere blocks of concrete, they are made of individuals and personal relationships. My gratitude goes to all the non-teaching staff at the Centre for their help in any matter official. I would like to thank personally Kavita Bhowal, the coordinator of the PhD program, Dr. P. K. Sengupta, the acting Registrar, and Professor Tapati Guha-Thakurta, the Director at CSSSC for all the support and cooperation. No mention of gratitude is enough for the library stuff at the Centre, especially Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Sanchita Bhattacharyya, and Jayati Yajnik, whose relentless and unconditional help in looking up and finding the most suitable books and materials for my research should be made example of. In this connection, I must also thank the stuff at the National Library, Calcutta and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Much of the original materials were found at these two great institutions.

If there is any trace of an interdisciplinary approach in my thesis, the credit should go to Presidency College, Calcutta, where I was a student of Economics from 2002 to 2005. How can I forget those erudite discussions with students from other social science departments whose grasp over their disciplines surprised me and inspired me to locate the intellectual worth of my own discipline with respect to theirs? The days at the College, as we used to adoringly call it then, were not of only constipated academics; there were ample opportunities for deviation. Sometimes I feel that I am still participating in the viciously anti-mainstream addas we used to have at the College Canteen, so wonderfully run by our very own Pramod-da; I am still sitting and savoring transcendental indolence...
at the Corridor of the Main Building, so eloquently messy and spacious; I am taking strolls around the College Square and by the countless bookstalls exuding an aura of delectably directionless scholarship; I am pining for the cheap yet affectionate lemon tea in the comforting darkness of Buro-da’s tea shop and fighting over the bad yet endearing coffee at the gorgeously aging Indian Coffee House; I am shouting slogans with my comrades in the anti-establishment demonstrations that gave me the first taste of political commitment in my middleclass existence wrapped in the garb of calculated indifference. And suddenly, I realize that I am not doing them anymore – I cannot do them anymore – as the College Street of my early youth has left me waiting at the crossroad of melancholia and maturity. This dissertation bears signs of a battle to move out of this conundrum and find the tired, old, sad College Street back in its glory, boiling with energy, swimming in intellectual exuberance, crawling in my own life and thinking. I share this ambition with all my friends, comrades, co-conspirators from the College: Baidurya Chakrabarti, Upal Chakrabarti, Shinjini Das, Jishnu Dasgupta, Rohan Deb Roy, Priyankar Dey, Atig Ghosh, Phalguni Ghosh, Banojyotsna Lahiri, Agnidip Mukhopadhyay, Tilak Mukherjee, Pratay Nath, Riddhi Sankar Ray, Jadge Roy, Shibashis Roy, Sayantan Saha Roy, Medha Sarkar, Anandaroop Sen, Anwesha Sengupta, Diptansu Sengupta, Kaustubh Mani Sengupta, and Ritam Sengupta. It may seem surprising to some that I have named few people who were not formally enrolled as students of Presidency College. But, fortunately, in our time, the College and its “outside” were not as strongly demarcated as today.

If Presidency College and College Street shaped my intellectual proclivity during my formative years, it was the Economics Department at the University of Calcutta which sharpened it and gave it a direction that would hopefully remain with me for the rest of my life. My teachers at the University – Dr. Anjan Chakraborty, Professor Ajit Choudhury, and late Professor Kalyan Sanyal – taught me to think out of the box and interrogate the pre-established strictures of the discipline. After completing my master’s degree, I was a little befuddled and could not decide my next move. Inducted by Dr. Rajarshi Dashgupta, I stepped into CSSSC as a participant in the Research Training Programme (RTP) in 2007 and met some inspiring teachers who changed the course of my academic lineage and made me start from the scratch. The lectures by and the interactions with Professor Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Professor Gautam Bhadra, Dr. Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, Professor Moinak Biswas, Professor Pradip Kumar Bose, Professor Arindam Chakrabarti, Professor Partha Chatterjee, Professor Rosinka Chaudhuri, Dr. Anirban Das, Dr. Prachi Deshpande, Professor Pradip Kumar Dutta, late Dr. Anjan Ghosh, Dr. Bodhisattva Kar, Professor Udaya Kumar, Professor Manabi Majumdar, Dr. Manas Ray, Dr. Priya Sangameswaran and Professor Lakshmi Subramanian opened new avenues of thinking and turned me a heretic in terms of allegiance to the fixity of disciplinary wisdom. One course that particularly incited this sentiment was “Interrogating Political Economy” – designed and taught by Professor Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Dr. Anirban Das, and Dr. Bodhisattva Kar. It amassed texts on various subjects by people from various backgrounds expressing absurdly disparate opinions on the notion of the “economic” and gave me the confidence to pursue a research idea which would not turn its face from this absurdity of diversity, but embrace, explore, and articulate its centrality in conceptions of the economic imaginaries of our time and before. This attraction to the absurd was reinforced in motivated discussions with friends and colleagues at the Centre and scholars who often frequented its library, archive and canteen: Debarati Bagchi, Trina Nileena Banerjee, Arka Basu, Shubhasree Bhattacharyya, Sayam Ghosh, Shruti Ghosh, Aryak Guha, Kamalika Mukherjee, Sraman Mukherjee, Rajdeep Roy, Shrimoy Roy Chaudhury, Shubham Roy Chaudhury, Sukanya Sarbadhikary, Nasima Selim, and Deepak Sharma. Often these discussions spiraled into idle chats and innocent nattering which helped me take life more lightly and accept failures more gracefully. I cannot thank them enough and express my gratitude, love, and respect. Suffice is to say that I am not worthy of so much care and attention, but I aspire to be.
After RTP, the most logical step seemed PhD. I got registered as a PhD candidate at Jadavpur University with a Fellowship from ICSSR and my association with the Centre continued. At Jadavpur, I had as supervisor Dr. Vivekananda Mukherjee who was kind and cordial and extended his hand of help whenever I went to him with even the most insignificant quarrries. I knew Dr. Bodhisattva Kar – or, Bodhi-da, as he likes to be called by his students and juniors – since Presidency and he was a part of my growing up within and without the premises of the College. We shared the same taste in literature and film (also partially in music) and we both hated fish. This seemed a fair reason to accept him as my co-supervisor from CSSSC – and also he was one of the most perceptive and well-read persons I had met. Without his constant encouragement, guidance, and moral and intellectual support, this dissertation would not have materialized.

Apart from me, Bodhi-da had taken under his wings two other PhD candidates – both from our RTP class – Debarati Bagchi and Shubhasree Bhattacharyya. We were the first members of the research group that assembled to discuss each other’s works and support one another in difficult, more difficult, and most difficult times during the excruciating journey to completion of these. Later Swati Chatterjee, Priyankar Dey, and Ankur Tamuli Phukan joined the group. We also had Anwesha Ghosh, Sanjna Mukhopadhyay, and Rupsa Ray amidst us during their M Phil research. Debjani Bhattacharyya, Andy Blu, and Nishaant Choksi visited when they were in Calcutta for their own research. Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, Jishnu Dasgupta, Sikandar Kumar, Uponita Mukherjee, Aviroop Sengupta, and Kaustubh Mani Sengupta also read papers and exchanged ideas with us in some of these sessions. I am at a loss of words to describe how much enlightened I was during these discussions and the addas thereafter, how much enthralled I was during the late night sojourns to China Town, how much relieved I was amidst the laughter and cackle, and how much relaxed I felt in an atmosphere where the deepest thoughts were presented and challenged in a non-competitive mode, yet with a hardboiled skepticism that should adorn every academic endeavor. Although everybody contributed to my thesis in many ways – from assisting in final editing to collating and organizing materials – I must mention particularly Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay and Priyankar Dey who pointed out some serious mistakes and misconception in my work and suggested concrete remedial strategies to overcome them. It is entirely my responsibility that I could not do justice to their advice. Arun Kar and Bolan Gangopadhyay – Bodhi-da’s parents – had to put up with my various tantrums. Thanking them would be an insult. I also believe that, by now, I have a claim on their affection and patience.

Finally: I have no clue why my own parents Ashok and Rita Mitra and my sister Shrabani have been tolerating me and my endless misdemeanors for the last thirty years. Sudarshana Mukhopadhyay is comparatively new to this genre of patience, but she has become quite adept in the last few years. If I ever solve this mystery, I shall let you know, but I have a strong suspicion that not everything can be explained by the theory of rational behavior. On a serious note, their contributions to this thesis and, more importantly, to my life cannot be measured by any terrestrial standard. I have heard that one needs superhuman powers to live with a PhD candidate. I am certain that people around me are not some comic-book superheroes but actual human beings with hearts bigger than the scope of this dissertation.