

The Last Resident

*Verina Gfader, with Victoria Browne,
Rebecca Carson, William Forsythe,
Claire Hsu, William Kentridge, Mochu,
Monica Narula, Pallavi Paul, Lea Porsager,
Gerald Raunig, Sif, Lantian Xie*

THE LAST RESIDENT
 CHOREOGRAPHIC OBJECTS
 TEMPERAMENTAL NEED
 KNOWLEDGE CYCLES
 A DIVIDUAL LINE INTO THE PAST: TEN FRAGMENTS
 ON A REVOLUTIONARY LINK BETWEEN PASSING
 AND BECOMING
 NIGHTNESS
 AN UPWARD FLAPPING TRAJECTORY®
 REHEARSAL
 FEMINIST REWORKINGS OF HISTORICAL TIME

PLAYERS:

*The Last Resident, William Forsythe, William Kentridge,
 Claire Hsu, Gerald Raunig, Sif, Lea Porsager,
 Lantian Xie, Pallavi Paul, Mochu, Monica Narula,
 Rebecca Carson, Victoria Browne, Verina Gfader*

INTERLUDES:

*Fanny and Alexander, Méliès, Nilima Sheikh, Armen
 Avanessian, Anke Hennig, Mario García Torres, Spring,
 Saho, Rosa Luxemburg, Junji Ito, Synnøve B. Brøgger,
 Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Carl Schmitt, Pontius Pilate,
 Einstein, Marshall McLuhan, Xu Lizhi, Plato, monster,
 Roland Barthes, C. W. Leadbeater, Iron Moon,
 a Portuguese doctor, secret agents, Poe, Ming Tiampo,
 Achille Mbembe, The Mandarins, nine million non-citizens,
 Christine Brooke-Rose, Shostakovich, ghost voices,
 Kurt Schwitters, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, Girl from BBC,
 Ada Colau, Ettore Sottsass, prisoners, D. M. Withers,
 meteorite, a German scientist, cut-outs, ancestors, Ashish
 Rajadhyaksha, Heidegger, among others*



(1.)

The Last Resident is not a fictional character. And it certainly is not a code or cryptic thing. Not in this book or in real life. But what does it mean to be A Last Resident? What does a title, or better the undercurrent of a publication, promise if called forth as TLR? The Last Resident.

The diary here on the mahogany chest (or rather register point in the form of mental image), includes an entry noted down in December last year: Last resident at Spring. This perhaps slightly mysterious wording or prompt, conjures up memories. Due to water supply failures in the environ, where Spring Workshop, Hong Kong, is/has been operating, the host could not provide shelter for the planned seven days of the visitor's residency with the Asia Art Archive, which is located far more central in the historical part of HK. It was close to the actual arrival of the guest. And in a minute-decision, the sleepover premises were speedily rearranged. New parameters were set. Time of unrest, of tango and gambling, at and with AAA.

Later the resident finds a resonance in Ettore Sottsass's archive—a treasure of Hong Kong poetics in the form of photographs, drawings, sketches, and rifts in various notebooks. Chine, Hong Kong—immeuble—marches—magasins—enseignes/Cina, Hong Kong—construzione—mercati—negozi—insigne (1993). SOT 871. One among many.

The diary entry becoming a signifier: Being The Last Resident summons up a smile, rumor, gossip, dreams, and reality. It is more (and less) than about an artist research residency. It hints to micromovements and gravities within the imminent flow of mobile entities, people, inhabitations, goods, knowledge, fiber cables, money, on a large scale. Drifts permeate.

By and large The Last Resident has become a deeper engagement with thinking about “contemporaneity”: representing a trace of my skepticism toward this notion and its potential currency—but more so highlighting contemporaneity as something singular rather than plural. Ghostly in appearance. The specter: un-housed, unhinged. And contemporaneity as a delusive staging of a “movement.” A mnemotechnics perhaps. Stop motion effect. Distemporaneity.

The Last Resident now gives way to a discreet crowd, characters and players whose voicing of A Little Thought at the periphery of vision shall suffice, to draw up a statement on our contemporaneity as perceived by The Last Resident on this occasion of a book.

The Last Resident nods, points forward.



(2.)

Choreographic Objects are discreet systems that require activation, through either conscious or unconscious competence. The objects are not intended to generate their meaning exclusively through visual means but instead serve as lived examples of specific physical circumstances that isolate fundamental classes of motion activation and organization. A number of the objects demand reflexive, instinctive reactions to the challenging complexities of their organizing environments. Others require the conscious summoning of multiple, complex tactics to comply with the environments simple rules. The objects may provide feedback to the person engaged with them about their ability to manifest a body image that is more, or less accurate. In all cases, physical engagement is the means to understanding the class of actions to which each choreographic system refers. This is the first principle and original proposition of the Choreographic Objects themselves.

(William Forsythe)

(3.)



TEMPERAMENTAL NEED
with William Kentridge

fig. 1: DEEP TIME

As you pursue time in its various manifestations, in what way is “deep time,” understood as the profoundly different timescale of geological time, a possible device or agent in your oeuvre? Characters, the people, everyday life and instances, domineer in your visual realm, the landscape less so. And I wonder how the landscape with its immense memory is there, but not visible as such.

At one point you describe what you call the “universal archive” in relation to “perfect memory.” Could you say more about that? Differently asked, are you interested in an imagery of landscapes devoid of people, such as deserts or polar regions, white or light landscapes? In the context of the modern political cinema, there is this notion of “the people are missing.”

William Kentridge:

If one thinks of the surface of the earth as a center, or sheet of paper, you can either go downwards into the earth in geological time, or you can shift up from the surface of the earth to the top of the page, thinking about cosmic time. And on the thin line of the center of the page you have the time that we inhabit, so to speak. We can thus imaginatively use the time above us and below us as metaphors. So the time below us in the case of Johannesburg would be the geological time of the formation of the gold, which is the raison d'être of the city's existence of the city.

And then we are talking about a meteorite impact two billion years ago, which shifted the plane of the thin seam of gold of the earth down. It's very deep, about a hundred

kilometers from Johannesburg, and comes up to the surface in the city, and the meteorite impact was about a hundred kilometers away, near Parys.

So that's one way in which one understands our imbrication in an ancient set of time but also understanding that two million year old skeletons are found in the depth of only maybe two meters below the surface. In that sense timescale going downwards is very, very slow.

Going upwards we are talking then about the speed of light. And the universal archive that you refer to comes from a nineteenth-century German scientist who said if the speed of light is not instantaneous then you could imagine everything that had happened on earth continuing—an image of it continuing through space, at the speed of light. So that, if you are at a point near a star two light years away from Earth, you'd see things on Earth that happened two thousand years ago. And he was a religious man, he used biblical images of Christ on the cross or Pontius Pilate washing his head.

You didn't get it all right. He assumed if you could go almost at the speed of light yourself, then you could slow time down and watch everything unfolding in extreme slow motion—almost be frozen. It could almost freeze the film of time.

So it's not that I'm interested in these scientists so much but in what they say about the way that certain images stick in our heads, and other things that we should remember fly off past us and out of us in the way that we are constantly bombarded, as we are with neutrinos and radiation, bombarded with these traces of the world that come through us.

Am I interested in an imagery of landscape devoid of people, such as deserts or polar regions? I am not. I am interested in landscapes which may not have people in the pictures but landscapes which are shaped and constructed by

human intervention. Either in the case of landscapes around Johannesburg by the abandoned bits of civil engineering of ditches of culverts, of straight lines of power lines, that turn the landscape into a kind of drawing itself. The drawing draws itself for you.

Or else, if you think of drawings based on nineteenth-century engravings of African landscapes, I am interested in the transmission from the view of the landscape in the retina of an explorer into a sketchbook which gets sent back to London, where a commercial firm of engravers and professional artists translate the sketch into an elaborated engraving of this, for them, imagined site of this waterfall—that then gets printed in the book and sent back out to Southern Africa, whether it's an Illustrated London News or other such books, and has a different life.

So that sense of the mediation of nature through many different iterations of drawing and redrawing and reconstruction. But to do a naturalist drawing of the Arctic wasteland doesn't interest me at the moment.

fig.2: CONTEMPORANEITY

A claim that struck me as it popped up in one of your talks on shadows: the contemporaneity of Plato's metaphor. You mention the present phenomenon of "people carrying objects, they have no origination or destination, they pass across behind the viewers, still largely on foot ... flickering images, instability of images, refugees, migrations—local motion."

To what ends do you develop and push the shadow as an agent?

And what other contemporaneities could you reveal through and in your working process?

WK:

Shadows are very interesting, strange phenomena that in one sense we understand what they are—and if you look at your own shadow, and if one thinks about one's own shadow, it is of us but also more than us. So that if we're thinking the late evening when oblique light that causes the shadow, its size is much greater and extent is much greater than we are. And therefore the speed at which it moves in this elongation is much greater than we ever could move ourselves, much faster.

There is a multiplication and a magnification of us in a shadow.

There are many ironies in the shadow work in theater. If you work with rear projection of objects getting smaller as they get close to you, and larger as they get further away and closer to an external light source but certainly they come back to Plato, and the image he has to have of people endlessly carrying their loads in order to make his teaching metaphor for the prisoners in the cave, and for the people reading the book.

So you certainly could have a sense that the real hard labor is done not by the philosopher nor even by the prisoners, but by the people doing the demonstration of what a shadow is day after day for the last two thousand years, every time anyone reads that book.

And what strikes me is the continuation of this, what you would call a trope of people carrying their lives on their shoulders around the world, step after step. The burden being the object, which Plato uses metaphorically as a teaching aid, but which we see naturalistically around the world all the time. Refugees walking across the world in 2017 carrying large parts of their lives in suitcases, bags, rolled up blankets, wheel barrows—what they push with them.

And this is I suppose a reminder of where we still are in the world, and of certain continuities that are present.

In the project I am working on now, which is about the First World War in Africa, during the war there were many thousands of soldiers, and tens of thousands of African soldiers, fighting both in Africa and in France also. But there were far more—a factor of maybe ten—maybe seven hundred thousand porters carrying the wherewithal for people to wage their war. You have thus this mechanized warfare, but you have not even draft animals pulling the guns, and carrying the ammunition and the food and the medical supplies, but teams and teams of hundreds and thousands of men press-ganged from their villages to carry the war material across the continent.

In Africa it was the only way it could be done because of tsetse flies, which made the use of draft animals impossible. They would all die within a month of being in areas which had tsetse flies. And as in many cases human life is much cheaper than animal life. Apart from anything when you finish using them in the moment you don't have to take the responsibility for feeding them in the winter. People are sent back to their villages and have to look after themselves as best as they can.

fig.3: VITAL LINE

When did it become apparent to you that animation, the energy of the line—the vital line—is a strategy to engage with subjects of your interest, such as exile, apartheid, mourning, and utopianism? The incomplete image, flatness, shadow-figures or schematic, loose figurations, indecision, potentialities.

WK:

I think there's always meeting between a material, a medium, a technique, and a subject. And in many ways the starting

point is the medium. What charcoal suggests. What the erasure of charcoal suggests. What the jointed-ness of paper cut-outs makes possible.

The charcoal. It started off really as a process of tracking the drawing as it was being made, which came I suppose from an uncertainty about commitment. Saying, the drawing is now finished. And a temperamental need for provisionality: for things to be able to be rescued and changed.

That's a temperamental fact. But it also has an impact on how one sees the world. Either as a fact, a series of static images, or as a series of facts, all of which are in a process of changing or could be changed. You know, literally we know that the table is only one moment between the journey from the tree to timber, to the table, to the fire, to the ash, to the smoke.

That's fairly obvious but you can sometimes even make it more clear. If in a drawing you understand that this quick scribble that turns into a cat can with minor erasures and changes turn into a telephone, and then turn back into a cat, and then into a fish and then into a blind stamp. That instability of object, which is about instability of perception and subjectivity, comes from the flexibility that charcoal animation gives you.

*The paper cut-outs, shadow figures, and other fragments, for example, in *The Nose* (referring to the production of Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*, first performed in 2010 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York) are more about the world as fragmented as provisional coherence for the moment when the different elements come together, for a moment, and are recognized and then can disappear into their constituent elements.*

So that becomes about the way in which we construct meaning in the world, and I suppose the way we construct possible subjectivities for ourselves.

fig. 4: MAGIC

Animation (history) and the spark or magic: from within your cultural background, where do you locate the “magic” in your work? Your work draws one in, the speed is so precise to keep one being fascinated with the “what lies ahead” and there is erotics in that sense, can you say a few words about your use of magic and the magic of today? And what is the function of this magic in the formation of knowledge and lack of knowledge?

WK:

I suppose the magic is not a category I would ever use. But insofar as we talk about things that are in us, but more than we are aware of—or more than are subject to rational control—but which nonetheless have a potency. Then one could say everything of the world of the unconscious, that part of the house that we can’t go into and know is there but have to allow it sending things out to us occasionally, I suppose that’s as close as that I would get to magic.

And there are various questions of, what are the strategies, what are the incantations you need to make to allow this to have some potency? So, working imprecisely; allowing yourself to recognize things rather than know things in advance; working without script or storyboards. So that the process of making is a process of discovery.

I wouldn’t have described this process as magic. I think that’s a misnomer for what this process is, but the element of surprise should be there.

However for me the interesting thing is not that it comes from a force outside of yourself but then it’s very much inside yourself, but which has to be released in some form—or accessed.

*And for this it’s important to leave gaps and incomple-
tions, because one thing we can never resist doing is trying*

to make sense of something. Trying to work out, how is the trick done, how is the magic done. And when we retreat from that, from wanting to know how something could—what could be a possible explanation, then in a way we give up one of our big characteristics. Which is not to find the answer but to be pressed to find something that could have been an answer. And in trying to find something that could have been an answer you also understand the provisionality of all answers that we give.

So you'd find this way, you miss a word that someone is speaking, and you have to imagine what that word is. Or a language that you only imperfectly understand, when you imagine what the words you don't know could possibly be and construct maybe a fiction. But your own fiction of what might be there.

And this for me the same as the animated films where there are hints and fragments and moments of certainty given, but large gaps which in a way we glide over effortlessly; we put connections, how things fit together. We make coherence of different pieces of black paper that suddenly resemble a horse or a man or an old woman walking. And it's not to say this is a generosity on our part and something that we are unable to resist doing.

fig.5: HEALING, VIOLENCE, JUSTICE

Is there a relationship to law within the kind of re- and over-working of a drawing and other working methods you return to? In the need for erasure, cutting out, projecting.

WK:

In many ways the work I've done is trying to escape from legal reason, which is, as you know, my family's background. To say, can one make meaning in the world without using

the same positivist rationality of cross-examination legal argument?

It's not to abandon the aims of that kind of legal thinking as such, but it's to say, can one reach them in a very different way? That shows the imprecision of the final answer in a way that the clarity of legal reasoning disguises.

fig.6: TIME OF THE LIGHT

And working time: Do you also work in the night, in a dark space, in a dark studio without much light?

You underline the significance of the studio, including saying that the studio allows a certain sense of temporality, and the idea of "the studio as nuclear-free zone." In your current life all over, how would you describe the temporality outside the studio in contrast with the inside of the studio? Are these two worlds that constitute a third or always already many worlds and versions of world-making?

WK:

A lot of my work is done under artificial light, if I'm filming or animating to keep the light coherent. If I'd relied on daylight it would change too much and there would be jumps of exposure, even in a ten-minute gap between two frames being shot. So by and large it's a studio of artificial light. There are beautiful views out of the studio but that's through an office and very often the curtains are kept closed. Suddenly, I go into someone's studio which is full of daylight, and think what a pleasure, why don't I have a studio like that? For some drawing that would be good but in fact a lot of the work I do may start as a drawing, but at some stage I need to put a camera over or in front of it.

I work best in the morning rather than at night. That is why I am talking now, in the evening, rather than during the day.

And you want to know about the studio and temporality outside the studio, in contrast to the inside of the studio. I mean, the studio is not a time machine but it makes very clear the shift of time, between time as we experience it and time as it is reconsidered in the work inside the studio.

Now this is a commonplace and I think that something you glimpse for a moment may take you an hour, a day, a week to realize as a drawing, as a painting, as a sculpture. In animation, which has to do with duration, it's very clear that one minute piece of film that an audience or you as a viewer will view that has a duration of a minute, may take several days to achieve. So time stretches in that sense, but it also transforms itself from this invisibility of temporal passage to the clear materiality of distance, of charcoal, of erasure, of knowing that you got to move the mark three millimeters between each frame every twenty-fifth of a second. So those kinds of transformations of time are clear. And there is the moment of what it is to be lost in the work, for the way in which time can disappear as you're trying to make the image—make the film.

Regarding the question of two, three, many worlds in its simplest form you could say that your studio is like the black box of a camera in which light enters, gets inverted and ends up on the photographic plate at the back, or the receiver at the back of the camera.

It's not quite the same with the studio, but you could say the studio is the dark space in which the world is invited in, in all its different forms: the memory of the artist, images that are pinned to the wall, drawings half done, conversations that are coming from the phone, notes that are brought in. In the studio there is the space of fragmentation, when the images are fragmented, the world is taken apart, reconstructed in a different way and then sent back out into the world either as a drawing or a film or a conversation or lecture, or interview. In that sense the studio for me does have both a physical and

a kind of psychic importance. And when I say I am going to the studio I am referring to both crossing the garden to go into the building thirty meters from the house, but also into a kind of expanded head.

As I am talking to you now I am looking at—on the wall across from me—some blue text that I’ve written, which says, “fugitive words,” “my red bicycle,” “enough and more than enough,” “two private thoughts,” “struggle for a good heart,” “escape benevolence,” “a box of shame,” “that which we do not remember,” “pause,” “soul,” “recreation and danger,” “the bad solution,” “yesterday’s good idea.” And then the series of drawings for a film for the Ursonate (2017) which are different portraits of Dadaists and African resistance leaders. There’s a wall of First World War maps which have been drawn for projection for the project on the First World War in Africa.

In a way these are the things I am thinking about at three o’clock in the morning when I am awake for these particular projects. But they also function as provocations for the next thought, for the next stage of each project.

fig. 7: COSTUME

The relationship between animation and the stage, performance, improvisation has long engaged you. However the dimension of the “costume” does not necessarily pop up first when watching your animation work, which is so minimal or reduced to a degree, almost always in the process of disappearing, of being no-image. I am curious about this opulence and presence and materiality of the costumes you create, absolutely fantastic extended bodies (with and through crazy time machines and devices)—or rather things becoming bodies and human.

Any comments?

WK:

That's interesting because there are the physical costumes—not so much in the animated films, where it's either a suit or used to be nakedness but now it's essentially Soho [Eckstein] in his suit—but in the performances that I do myself the costume is kind of the same which is de facto the clothes that I wear in the studio—a white shirt and black trousers—which then started being filmed in different projects and now they kind of have to keep in being used to keep the coherence of those projects.

In a way the Méliès films (7 Fragments for Georges Méliès, 2003) are about aging. Each time, and in the place where the films are being shown, there's another six months or another two years of age difference between myself in the space and myself in the projections. I mean that's mainly a project for myself rather than for anybody else watching because I am not there that much, but it is part of the meaning of the work.

The other costumes, literally, there are obviously very beautiful costumes made for the operas and productions, which are not made by me, they are made by a costume designer but in very close consultation and collaboration.

And then there are things which are half way between humans and machines and objects: tripods as legs and different megaphones with wheels, as heads and wings—which are supposedly about Marshall McLuhan's extension of the body, our cell phones as an extension of our memory, the telephone as an extension of the voice. All of these things that he demonstrated in The Medium is the Massage, which I read when I must have been twelve or thirteen I think. It had a big impact. I'd never thought of these as costumes but that's a good way of describing them, if that's what you're referring to.

fig.8: WHY A DRAWING LESSON?

What can drawing teach us today? How can animated lines help us to understand our relationship to time?

WK:

I think a drawing can always demonstrate the construction of meaning: that meaning is not something we receive but something we construct. In the sense that the making of the drawing is making the drawing's meaning.

And the animated lines teach us about provisionality, about transformability, about the delight we have in fooling ourselves, that suddenly a line turns from just a line on a page to an image of a cat. And once we have seen the cat we can't just think of what we are looking at as simply a line. It's both things. It's three things: it's the line, it's the cat, it's our own pleasure at our self-deception.

P.S. I haven't made any notes or drawings that are worth looking at as you asked for. I take a photo of—no, it's not even taking a photo of one—it's a little red pencil square on the table, which was the studio.



(4.)

KNOWLEDGE CYCLES

with Claire Hsu

Verina Gfader:

A beginning through your archive and rituals of accessing.

When intuitively searching “ghost” in the Asia Art Archive collection, a link brought up the recent workshop, The Performing Archive. Let us take this hint to the archival and performing, both conceptually as well as strategically or structurally. Why this event now? What are the urgencies to be discussed for an archive—and in particular AAA—in our present?

The current hype of performance and choreography in the arts may be interesting to relate to in this respect too. Perhaps unresolved questions of dis-re-embodiment.

Claire Hsu:

So you typed in “ghost” and came up with this. Interesting. That particular project was proposed by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Professor of Practice at Lingnan University, who has been working with film archives for many years. He proposed this program after seeing the work the artist HO Tzu Nyen had done at AAA, G for Ghostwriter, as part of a multi-year residency. This project was carefully re-packaged and brought to the students in Lingnan to initiate discussions around the archive performing history.

You ask “Why now?”—in fact questions around performance and the archive have been embedded in different programs and the manifold conversations that have happened at AAA for years—how the archive performs history, how we archive performance, and how performance then is activated from the archive.

One of the areas of The Performing Archive that we’ve been invested in is performance art which is one of the areas we would like to build a collection for with depth.

This is currently represented through a few distinct research collections that have come our way: for example, through the Ray Langenbach Archive of Performance Art (RLAPP) and the archive of the Singaporean performance artist Lee Wen. Through various research projects and work with other archives we realize how important a form performance art has been in so many countries in the region where the infrastructure for the arts is less stable and/or there are high degrees of censorship. The temporal and fluid nature of performance art has in some cases been adopted by practitioners as a way of circumventing censorship and other restrictions.

The question of how we archive something as ephemeral as performance art becomes an important challenge and question for us. And subsequently what is possible in terms of resuscitating or re-experiencing performance art once it has been documented in the archive. We've been experimenting in different ways—for example we worked with Nonny de la Pena to produce a virtual reality project with Lin Yilin's well known work, The Life of a Wall on Lin He Road, or in December this year we will be presenting Out of Turn, during the Serendipity Festival in Goa, an exhibition that has come out of research on performance art in our collection curated by Meenakshi Thirukode.

Last December's project, The Ground Beneath My Feet, is unusual in that we worked with HH Art Space in Goa to commission a series of new performances in an attempt to consider the body as archive. We are always experimenting with diverse forms.

VG:

You cannot separate the question of actually documenting performance art and performing the archive. There is no clear distinction, one question or dynamic supposedly drifts into the other, whereby the relation between those dynamics,

movements or responsibilities is and remains unresolved. And we talk about possibilities, performance art on that level implicitly offering and enacting a deep engagement—a deep thinking about the archive as well. And of any kind of idea of maintaining a spirit or energy of sorts—and the way this can happen or is articulated. Let's not phrase it as being translated, but what exactly is it that "performance" does when it is no longer? What is its new place in the world? Whenever one watches and accesses it, it becomes something else.

CH:

Inevitably it is constantly transformed. There is indeed this flow from one space to the next, and the various things that it can do and that it raises. And the moment that it is performed and if you are there watching it—and you are there with it—is certainly a very different experience as when you see it recorded online, or re-performed. It becomes this other performance. The constant flow and fluidity is something that is very interesting through the archive. It is a cycle of knowledge as opposed to the creation of knowledge.

VG:

Can we talk more about how the role of the body comes in here, and someone's actual presence in relation to those flows and cycles? Because when you attend a performance or performative event you share it and it's "proper public" most of the time—yet not always! Online it might not be in that sense, because the entire digital dimension of being able to experience a performance online is another environment that comes in as a layer—is a surplus—and a new complexity on that level. When you sit in an actual physical archive and look at material and watch a movie then you are quite private and your body is also subjected to other rules, laws, moods, technologies (lived abstraction). Your body might be tense. Your mind be in a different state.

CH:

We are made up of different sheaths: there is the physical body, there is the mind, there is the soul and these are connected through different layers and energy networks and points. There is inevitably a discrepancy between watching the performance “live” or online as these different experiences will trigger different responses within our physical, mental, subtle and even possibly, astral bodies.

VG:

Is performance then a device for the evaluation of “energies”? And of re-catching energies within and even through the archive institution?

CH:

I wish you were here, because last night our team went to a very surprising place for Hong Kong, near the border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. A few friends opened Tao Yuan in a private house after giving up their corporate jobs. It’s a holistic experience, where everything we ate was grown in the surrounding farms and everything we ate from was made from the natural materials around the house. It was a very distinct experience for many of us who (myself included) have grown up and live in a plastic, disposable society. How do we live in a way that brings the least violence to ourselves, those around us, and the earth?

Drawing on my personal interests, I’ve been studying yoga and Ayurveda for a few years and I truly believe in the importance of allowing time to slow down and distill the mind. I am often thinking about how we can make sure the values we say we uphold trickle down to all levels of the organization. To make sure that what our hands and feet are doing are aligned to the words coming from our mouth. Not everyone is receptive to this (there’s an immediate tendency to question ideas that challenge

our ingrained patterns), and so it's always a fine balance.

Why I am interested in (Chinese and) Indian systems of healing is the holistic approach to the body, mind, and soul which differs from allopathic medicine significantly but that's a whole other conversation. What is fascinating in history are these moments when very diverse systems are able to come together in a complimentary way. Take for example, Garcia de Orta (early sixteenth century), a Portuguese doctor who traveled to India and spent a great deal of time researching Ayurveda and the plants of India. He published Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India, a vital reference that allowed people to access old and new knowledge from Western and Eastern medicinal systems. This very successful hybrid medicinal system was implemented in a hospital in Goa and made its way back to Portugal where it was adopted in hospitals in Lisbon and Coimbra. In 1822, the British Raj outlawed this integrative approach which was labeled "pagan," and it was supplanted by the European medicinal system.

What's interesting is that there is now a revival of the study of Ayurveda. What becomes clear is how fundamental certain bodies of knowledge are to our understanding of the world and our place within it and that this knowledge flows in cycles—at once obstructed and then again revealed. It does take time however to unlearn deeply ingrained patterns of thinking so as to become receptive and open to this knowledge when it comes around.

VG:

In relation to a future and this drive for revival, whatever we imagine as being a vision, a becoming, projection of sorts—we have talked elsewhere about the past, memory and archive as a storage or enactment as if there is this "past"—this huge thing that we know or are ensured exists somehow; how would you think about the "something to come" or that is "ahead of us?"

CH:

The past is only interesting to me in relationship to the present. What is ahead of us is of minor interest to me. The seeds we plant now is what will shape the future. The past is an essential tool for understanding the present—we are constantly looking to it to better read our current situation, however the reality is such that we are never truly able to access it in any linear or complete way. The hope of the Archive in our case is that by contributing to filling gaps within the way art history has been constructed, we have some way of shaping our present and then a future.

The problem with the excess of knowledge today is that we are constantly living “elsewhere”—and while we can draw on the many archives out there, the only way we can truly understand what it means to be, is to be able to be hyper aware of life as it unfolds in front of our eyes.

To understand that life is constantly in flux, and that there is nothing the archive can do to stop this or capture the full extent of these forces. The archive can never be complete, but it can be an incredible tool for a self-inquiry. The stories in the archive also become a metaphor for better understanding the world.

For example, through the fifty-year practice of Baroda-based artist, Nilima Sheikh, now in her early 70s—and incorporated in our archive narrative!—we are able to consider the flow of knowledge across major countries (China, Iran, India), consider the role of women in society (her role in the autonomous women’s movement) or look at the way the pigments she uses in her paintings themselves tell so many stories.

VG:

Her work with pigments, kalai, vermilion, terre verte and the like—painterly grains that (time) travel and take loops, sounds amazing.



(5.)

A DIVIDUAL LINE INTO THE PAST:
TEN FRAGMENTS ON A REVOLUTIONARY LINK
BETWEEN PASSING AND BECOMING¹

Gerald Raunig

1

“Historical materialism ... annihilates the idea of progress ... Its basic concept is not progress, but actualisation,” writes Walter Benjamin in his *Passagen-Werk* (1927–40). Benjamin’s historical materialism is a queer historical materialism, as his dialectics is a minor dialectics. *Passagen-Werk* teaches us to distrust progress, distrust utopia, distrust prediction, distrust tomorrow, distrust the future. *“Those who fell prey to the future, [seek] advice from the soothsayers,”*² from brokers, economists, and analysts. On the other hand, the machine of passages, of passages and of arcades is a socio-topological machine, and it is a temporal machine, a space machine and a time machine between passing and becoming. NO FUTURE, no I shall be, as in the Rosa Luxemburg quote and inscription on Mies van der Rohe’s *Revolutionsdenkmal* in Berlin Friedrichsfelde, constructed in 1926 and deconstructed by the Nazis in 1935. A dividual line draws us into passing, actualizing fragments of the past, right from the extended present, the now-time of becoming.³

1. Written July 4, 2015, on the occasion of the symposium “Memorial For(u)ms — Histories of Possibility,” organized by the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in collaboration with HAU Hebbel am Ufer, within the framework of Sanja Iveković’s project, *Lady Rosa of Luxembourg*, on Mies van der Rohe’s *Revolutionsdenkmal*.

2. All quotes without reference from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Concept of History,” in *Selected Writings*, Volume 4, 1938–1940 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).

3. For dividuality see Gerald Raunig, *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2016), footnotes 3, 4, 5.

2

Here, the question of form is not so much a question of whether an aesthetic form could be attached to the revolution, or what kind of visual language should be employed to address memory politics, or which form a monument to revolution could take today, or even if there is any proper form of commemoration of a revolution. Here, the question of form is instead the question of the form of revolution itself.

3

Molecular revolution dwells in the molecules of everyday life, not molar, but like a mole, sometimes hidden or unrealized, sometimes evident, like in the social practices in Greece and Spain today. It is the disobedient dissemblages between micropolitics and new forms of government, their destituent ruptures, constituent processes, instituent practices that recompose the splinters of past revolutions with today's fragments of molecular revolution.⁴

4

Molecular revolution is discontinuous, and it is a simultaneous process of its components' resistance, insurrection, and constituent power. There is no straight line of stages from the everyday resistance against oppression to the big event of mass insurrection, successful revolution in the "proper" sense, which is always the wrong sense, and finally, to the building of a socialist society afterwards. Molecular revolution means that in the molecules of everyday resistance, in the chains of insurrectionary events, there is already a constituent process at work. Not just a prefigurative model for the future, this constituent power is molecular revolution in now-time.

4. For instituent and destituent practices, see Stefan Nowotny and Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices:

New Introduction to the Revised Edition" (2016), <http://transversal.at/blog/Instituierende-Praxen-Introduction>.



5

Now-time does not mean a pathetic and immediate insurrectionalism that lives and dies in a here and now without past, the masculinist pathos of the event as the one and only event, the true and successful event of revolution. Any talk of the immediacy of the event or an era of riots smells like reductionism. Yet now-time means an insurrection embedded in everyday resistance and in constituent power.

6

The work of the molecular materialist historian is not to reconstruct Mies van der Rohe's Revolutionsdenkmal, to rematerialize the history of the oppressed. The many minor histories, the molecular memories do not desire alternatives to the grand narratives of the victorious. They do not need alternative canons of commemoration and cultural memory, alternative representations, alternative heroes and heroines of the oppressed. They do not reduce them to victims, sacrifices, martyrs of the revolution. They do not reduce the histories of the Revolutionsdenkmal to biographical details of Mies van der Rohe. Rather than excavating and assembling the red bricks of his monument into a new counter-monument, they assemble the fragments of the discourse of Luxemburg, which is of course also connected to the discourse of Lenin, of course also connected to the discourse of Emma Goldman, of course also connected to the discourse of Gustav Landauer, the vibrant and vivid revolutionary discourse of the first twenty years of the twentieth century, an ongoing molecular revolution. Luxemburg is not an individual here, not the individual heroine next to another individual hero named Liebknecht or another individual named Richard Müller. Luxemburg is indeed a machine, a social machine, a text-machine, a revolutionary machine. Repeating the discourse of Luxemburg, repeating the Luxemburg machine means actualizing the revolutionary

practices in the European now-time against austerity politics, against the hegemonial masculinity, against the eternal conformism of social democracy, against the extreme forms of subservience in machinic capitalism.

7

There is a strange link between the future and the history of the victorious oppressors. "Not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious." Or with Boris Buden: "We do not know yet who will win the Second World War." This is not futurum exactum, but the violent future of revisionism. Not only the colonization of our future by today's soothsayers, but a brutal future colonizing our past.

8

For molecular revolution we do not need objects of art, we do not need monuments, we do not even need processes of participation in commemoration. The imperative of participation is a central component in the modes of subjectivation and self-government in machinic capitalism. The part always goes after a preconfigured whole. Here we have to find ways out, destituent practices, lines of flight from the valorization of our relations, affects, socialities, even future relations, affects, socialities. The territories of machinic capitalism are by no means immaterial. Yet their matter is not homogenous, molar matter, it is precarious, fragmented, dispersed matter. "Class struggle" is still "a struggle for the rough and material things, without which there is nothing fine and spiritual." And these fine and spiritual things are still "present as confidence, as courage, as humor, as cunning, as steadfastness in this struggle, and they reach far back into the mists of time." Queer, minor, molecular historical materialism must pay heed to the "most inconspicuous of all transformations" and search for ways to assemble the dispersed multiplicity of matter in social-machinic space and

time. Then passing leans towards becoming, “that, which has been, turns [...] towards the very sun which is dawning in the sky of history.”

9

We do not know which sun will dawn in Greece after tomorrow. But we know that new forms of resistance and instituent practices have crystallized against the violent consequences of the financial crisis in Europe, and especially the debt crisis. The right to housing and the debts of those who claim this right have not only resulted in collective resistance and aid against evictions, but also in molecular everyday practices reversing the concept of debts. Debts are certainly the first means for harnessing people into the machines, for the plying of compliant characters, the earlier, the more effectively. At the same time, however, debts are also a terrain of molecular revolution. Think of Strike Debt in the US or the protests against evictions and occupations of buildings by the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) in Spain.⁵ Set up in 2009 the Plataforma was born out of the disaster, depression, and radical separation of those affected by the mortgage crisis and the austerity politics in Europe. Fuelled by the genealogies of earlier Spanish movements against gentrification and eviction like V de Vivienda in the midst of the 2000s, and of course also by the bigger stream of 15-M, they began to connect the singular cases of evictions. They invented new practices beyond representation, non-representationist practices exemplified in the non-performances of core activists like Ada Colau. From assembly-based local support networks and practices

5. For the municipalist movements see Gerlad Raunig, “New Preface to Art and Revolution” (2017), <http://transversal.at/blog/art-and-revolution-preface-2017>, and various authors on “municipalisms monstruo” (2016), <https://transversal>

[.at/transversal/0916](http://transversal.at/transversal/0916). And in German, Niki Kubaczek and Gerald Raunig, “Die politische Neuerfindung der Stadt” (2017), <http://transversal.at/blog/Die-politische-Neuerfindung-der-Stadt>.

of resistance against eviction like escraches, the Plataforma became widely recognized as a political actor once it launched a national petition for a legislative initiative curtailing the banks' rights to cash in debt, to promote debt reliefs, and prevent evictions. During the last year, the activists of PAH were central components of the alliances in the Spanish communal election campaigns. Out of the manifold molecular practice of micropolitics, social movements, and new parties, they developed instituent practices between party and movement, in Barcelona under the name of Barcelona en Comú. On June 13 that year Ada Colau became Mayor of Barcelona.

10

The space-time machine, the line between passing and becoming is a dividual line. It is not a line that connects individuals, be they persons or things, subjects or objects in different times and different spaces. It is a dividual line, drawn in the field of immanence, affirming all the virtual lines of this field, and actualizing them. Even though things and persons are involved here, dividual flows do not function through subject-object separations, but rather through disjunction and conjunction. There is no "I am. I was. I shall be," but there is the dividual line from now-time into the past and back to now-time, the dividual line between becoming and passing. Never whole, but always before the whole, before that which is indivisible, undivided, individual. Dividual forms of remembrance and revolution do not draw us back and into the linear past of the forefathers, drawing down into the earth of blood and soil. They rather consist of leaps between the times, demonically hopping, never getting stuck, bifurcating, seeking out ever new forms of resistance in what is past and what is becoming. These leaps do not jump at us from the past like zombies, undead spirits demanding satisfaction for the disruption of their eternal rest, and they are also not

just “our” leaps, a voluntaristic appropriation of the past, always available to us. The return of the leap in time takes place between the times, between present becoming and passing—in strange assemblages between Gezi Park, the Zagreb University occupations, Syntagma, Tahrir Square, Zuccotti Park and Puerta del Sol, between V de Vivienda, anarchist movements of the twentieth century, the PAH, the Paris Commune, Latin American constituent processes and 15-M. The leap between the times is not an invocation of great past times, but rather the specific form of the dividual line, prodding backward into the past, a line to ancestors who are not necessarily our ancestors, not a family line, not a lineage, but rather a line to objects belonging to no one, a line to past socialities that provided no grand narratives, a line to dissemblages whose fragments are there to be actualized in molecular revolution.

(6.)



(7.)

AN UPWARD FLAPPING TRAJECTORY[©]

I brought this stuff
 I brought these feathers
 To take flight ~~~
 flap flap

: But do these things/objects carry power, are they charged with some energies? Does it make sense to bring these feathers together in one way or the other for becoming a distributed network, an assemblage e/affect?

: Yes. Initially, you asked if we could do some kind of experiment. And I replied that the experiments I have done before—and still do—as part of my practice, call for another format. For me, experiments should be both all-inclusive (as in there is nothing outside of the experiment—everything that happens is integral to the process) and obscured (resisting illustrations). They are always envisioned without an audience. They can't be anything close to an event. I simply have not found a way to work with experiments as performances. They stay intimate, cocooned, occulted. Often, the experiments are done with friends I know really well. They are built on trust and a letting go into something unknown. And that leap can't be forced. Obstruction happens the second elements of performance, achievement or any

©Lea Porsager with Verina Gfader. The actual conversation that took place at the launch of Gfader's book Cloud Chamber (Officin, Copenhagen, January 31, 2018) has been overcast by another, flappier one.

Most definitely low pressure moving in. Note that Lea Porsager's voice has been edited by Synnøve B. Brøgger as part of an ongoing exchange that has lasted for years.

kind of “specialness,” or ego, creeping in. What I enjoy about an experiment with friends is its rawness, and the freedom that is the possibility that absolutely nothing will come of it. That risk of “failure” is key to the expansion that sometimes happens. Afterwards, working with the material, other stories can unfold in strange, tentacular ways. Alls and nothings can be spun around, flipped! Joyful fuss starts to emerge!

: *We should touch upon the question of your “thought form.”*

: The concept of thought-forms stems from Theosophy and the book *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater from 1905. I’ve been working with that book from various angles. Contemplating if there are simple ways of explaining its importance. And I guess the reason I am attracted to these two concepts spliced together (thought and form) is first of all the disruption of the clear cut between the two. Here, I align myself with New Materialist thinkers, more specifically physicist Karen Barad and her theory of agential realism. Barad’s theory can be seen as a conceptual framework for conceiving discourse and matter in their intra-active inseparability, and I will argue that the concept of thought-forms are manifestations of these inseparably enacting practices. In a world made up of quantum phenomena, Barad reminds us that clean cuts are not really that clean: “Intra-actions enact agential cuts, which do not produce absolute separations, but rather cut together-apart (one move).”

I have been working with thought-forms since 2012, as a tool for conceptualization and materialization. I discuss it extensively in the artist’s book *Ablaze with the Fires of Matter* (2013). In 2015, I repainted all the thought-forms from Besant and Leadbeater’s book in watercolor for the

14th Istanbul Biennial (as the originals from 1905 were gone at the time). I appeared on the artist list as “medium for Annie Besant.” I was channeling Besant. In a way, thought-forms can be seen as celestial readymades. A very disturbing thing, if you look at our notions of ownership and individualized special abilities. These paintings are icons in Theosophy, copying them is a no-go! But somehow, I don’t see it as copying, I think of it as a kind of spiritual Sturtevant practice. I am referring to the American artist Elaine Sturtevant and her remakings of all these iconic works (many of them male artist, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, and the like). She explicitly stated that they were not copies. For her, repetition was a working method in itself. To re(con)figure these spiritually informed works—to be a medium—questions the very core of ownership and divination. The act of re-creation troubles both the idea of talent in the art world, as well as transcendence within spiritual doctrines. Specialness, the chosen ones, blessed with special abilities (surely, not everybody can be a psychic!). Notice that the thought-forms in Theosophy are only seen by a select few clairvoyants. A lot of power to wield, if you think about it. So what happens when I re(con)figure their visions? According to Besant and Leadbeater, thoughts are infectious forms that affect our embodied existence. Negatively charged thought-forms are capable of striking other mental bodies through their vibration and radiation, while forms born of positively charged affects like love and unselfishness have the ability to impact surrounding mental bodies on a higher level. These form what “extrudes into the external world” as “matter of the universe,” creating colored forms in the air!

: Ownership and taking possession of some thing—is linking to your work in terms of possessing a spirit or energy; other dimensions if you like. Energetic fields, I am uncertain how to call them. Fascinating that you remade or redid those

thought-forms in watercolor. Watercolor is making something but is “losing” something at the same time: the object, entity, as you see and sense it? With watercolor you have fluidity, translucence. The brush/line (and thought) is un-controllable, controllable only to a certain degree. It has other qualities than a metal sheet—a frozen, static material as such—at first sight.

: I definitely felt that the thought-forms came from elsewhere, and still they came from me. I overstepped a myriad of boundaries. Not being a painter, not being the original source, and so on. When I bring in Sturtevant, it is because she rejects the idea of copying. Barad says in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: “Originals don’t preexist as such and mimesis can’t be the reproduction of what came before, not when time itself is constituted through the dynamics of intra-activity and the past remains open to material reconfiguring.” Furthermore, she states that “the production of the new can’t be located and it certainly can’t be owned. Neither the past nor the future is ever closed. It’s not that the new is generated in time; rather, what is at issue is the intra-active generation of new temporalities, new possibilities, where the ‘new’ is the trace of what is yet to come. © is not a symbol of ownership of the right to copy, but rather of the responsibilities entailed in producing differences (for whom and at what cost?).”

Re-creation is a complicated thought-form process. It is something that I would like to understand better, also because everything about the art world is so intimately connected with ownership. That is why Sturtevant’s position is still so thought-provoking and important.

: *Let’s talk more about the cut. You are describing this gesture or call for removing the cut between this “form” and “thought.” Reappearing then in translated scenarios?*

http://slit.agency

http://unslit.agency (password: AUBSBBLP)

There seems to be some violent act at play in your work, but obscured or delayed or projected—is not becoming form as such. Or does it form in some sense, and if so, in what way? Also in relation to an audience, someone who encounters your work, the work's sphere, its viral force. Pause, masturbate, withdraw. There's a qualitative vibe of slinky-ness, the object—in Julia Kristeva's sense. And then there is the "and splice"—cut and splice. Is the cut always necessarily a splicing? What is the cut doing?

: I fell in love with the paradoxical pairing of *cut-splice*. A cut splice knot was originally called a cunt splice, as in "typically used for light lines," "where a single splice would tend to come undone, the rope being frequently wet" (almighty wiki). Again, my project is very much informed by Barad's agential realism as well as my long-term occupation with esoteric doctrines. In narrowing esoteric systems down, my emphasis has been on Theosophy because of its infiltration with/influence on visual/visionary artistic practices, and on Kundalini technology (White Tantra and cosmic NAAD technology), systems I have practiced myself and used in my work. I am aware that I grab specific extremities in esoteric, artistic, and quantum matters, so my research is deliberately situated along the seams of these (illicit) couplings.

To rub spiritual concepts up against quantum matters is not a new phenomenon. Often referred to as quantum mysticism, quantum mechanics have been used and misused by spiritual systems in very specific ways since its conception in the early 1900s. I am not interested in science-as-metaphor for transcendental realities, especially not in ways that leave the underlying dogmas of these spiritual systems unchallenged. I like to think that my aim with colliding quantum mechanics and esoteric systems is a more challenging one. That I am looking for something a bit more unruly and lively than mere illustrations. A critical discourse that aims to

disrupt fixed notions of truth through a practice of radical openness. Vibrating indeterminacies and unresolved tensions!

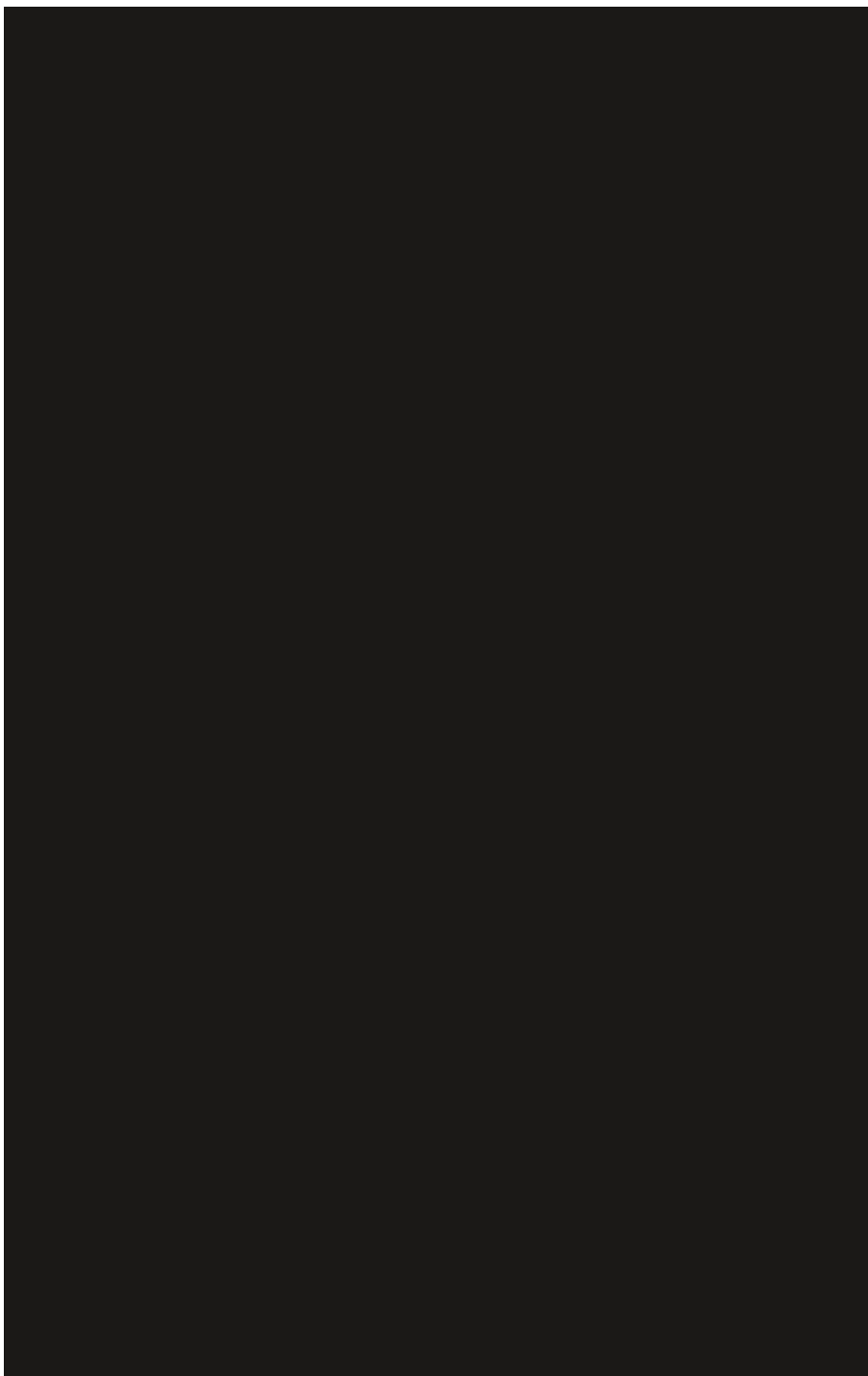
: There is ambi(poly)valence. Then because your work feels very erotic, in one way. In another way however it does not at all, almost rejects eroticization—escapes from erotic registers? It has this strange synergy of being and not being one or the other. One even fails to describe this “state of suspension.” There is this desire to touch the thing(ness) but actually one does not want to touch it at the same time. It shouldn’t be touched. It has a sphere of seductive seclusion.

: Sigils, I guess; that’s like little knots of energies that you can focus your mind on, right? It’s the symbol that you’re using to brace energies, or concentrate or focus in order to live it out.

: It’s a way of exciting materials. Sigilization is a *doing*, a manipulation of matter, sometimes enforced by way of masturbation, or meditation, or other sexual acts (a.k.a. sex magick). Somehow, maybe, sigilization-through-masturbation emphasizes the impersonal nature of the force that, when focused, hurls us into some kind of lonely conjunction, or nearness, with the cosmos? How the work is simply rooted in these muscular spasms. Making the body free, loosening thoughts, soiling your sign and sullyng your character—making out with the world, so to speak. And, in that lovemaking, forgetting your wish—the seed itself. Forgetfulness is super important in sigilization, as the portal through which the new rises. It demands a “loss of normative consciousness”! The tantric techniques call for a “local sensitization to a nonlocal reality” (Ann Weinstone), the cosmic threads, the deep entanglements. “To become one is to become with many,” as Donna Haraway would put it.

: I am curious now as you talk about orgasm ... bringing/trajecting us into these other spheres, and about libido and libidinal energies. We also have several exceptional matters of "timing," in what you say.

: Time is too huge of a topic. I would be afraid to get fixed on some clever explanation where my understanding hangs on by a thread. I can only stick to a very intuitive combination of words. Like "spooky ongoingness"! Who knows what that means, but it is inspired by the notion of ongoingness (on/goingness) offered by Haraway (and Barad), combined with what Einstein described as "spooky action at a distance." The concept that an object can be moved, changed, or otherwise affected without being physically touched (as in mechanical contact) by another object. The nonlocal interaction of objects that are separated in space (at least, that's what wiki says). Maybe spooky on/goingness has something to do with iterations. In different spiritual practices and meditations you are faced with the act of repeating, repeating and nevertheless always being in a different state. Like an electric charge and discharge. Time facilitates a kind of self-fertilization, breathing in and out, letting the breath be self-tangled in the process of leaving, in becoming other. Unborn! In pleasure Wilhelm Reich saw energy expanding outwards. On the other end of the spectrum, he saw fear, anger, decreasing that same energy, turning it inwards. In both directions you find a trembling sensation, both directions being equally deserving. Space-time foam and foam mattress! (As above, so below!) An assemblage of relentless gyrating, an upward flapping trajectory! U U U.



REHEARSAL

*Video and Post-Cinema*¹

Mochu, Artist, Delhi; Pallavi Paul, Artist, Delhi; Lantian Xie, Artist, Dubai

Interlocutor: Monica Narula, Raqs Media Collective, Delhi

Dear Lantian, Pallavi, and Mochu

Verina knows about our panel and she would like to do an email conversation with all—I have sent her the ideas that I had shared with you. Our panel for the December conference, “What Time Is It?,” needs some marination.

This panel could open up the space of thinking the post-cinema cinematic dispersal, proliferation, and enveloping in an inventive way. The charge will come from us being able to bridge the conceptual and creative lines through a series of provocations that capture the relay and entanglement of delirium, danger, and dissipations that this post-cinema landscape offers.

All three of you work with images and concepts. And through a weave of personal works and works/materials pulled in from various routes, other situations, and circuits, we can have a panel that re-quickens the humdrum panic-stricken or disinterested intellectual modes of our time!

*warm regards
Monica Narula*

1. New Delhi panel on Video and Post-Cinema: Lantian Xie, Mochu, and Pallavi Paul, with Verina Gfader, toward What Time Is It?: Technologies

of Life in the Contemporary, December 14–16, 2017, Sarai-CSDS, Delhi and Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi, sarai.net/what-time-is-it/.

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Here are a few prompts from my side, embracing both my project for The Contemporary Condition and your conference panel, "What Time Is It?," yet to come.

A. How would you begin thinking of the "post-cinema cinematic" through the time horizons you sense around you, some of which are present in your works? And how to engage with a cinematic consciousness that seems so much of being of an unknown dimension, now more so than it had ever been? What does cinematic time have to do with our present?

B. Landscapes for whom? If you think of an exteriorization of consciousness in form of the "landscape," what landscapes are you thinking about?

C. Through what devices or figures, or unique places, are we allowing the past making way into our present? Can we think of archive systems beyond an instrumentalization of memory, but emphasizing collective individuation processes?

It seems that "time" also imposes its own call for emancipation in the sense of, "To project ourselves in time is a basic gesture of emancipation."²

Verina

--

I'd love to join you all in this conversation. Thank you kindly for the invitation.

2. Armen Avanessian, Anke Hennig, Mario García Torres, "The Present Is a Place We Can Always Come Back to: Toward a Speculative

Temporality of Images," in Mario García Torres, An Arrival Tale, ed. Daniela Zyman, Cory Scozzari (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 81 of 74–81.

To start with: I've been thinking a lot about the credits sequence from Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 2002 film, Blissfully Yours. Here's a link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2FM3ml-T9E>

The credits appear mid-way through the film in the middle of a car ride sequence. A Thai-language rendition of Summer Samba is playing on the stereo. Two lovers steal smiles and glances from each other's eyes. One is driving, the other one is sitting alongside. They don't say much, so the credits play almost like an internal monologue. When scarce words are uttered, they are whispered, turning the credits into subtitles, annotating their words or the words of Summer Samba until they are all indistinguishable, as if the two lovers are whispering to each other a list of the names of all the people who have worked to make their story possible, whispering them into their samba.

As Monica rightly pointed out, the whole sequence feels like stillness in movement.

*Best from sunny Dubai
Lantian Xie*

--

dear all,

Stillness and/in movement, my mind drifting to Roland Barthes, here a quote from his Mourning Diary: "As soon as someone dies, frenzied construction of the future (shifting furniture, etc.): futuromania."

Lantian's prompt, this strange extract from Blissfully Yours, pushes us nicely. To me there is a discomforting

stuck-ness (delirium?) in the way of a double—potentially infinite—movement or vision. I would love to talk more about this triad of “delirium, danger, and dissipations” mentioned in the panel outline in relation to this film extract and also other works, such as yours: In what way is delirium/danger/dissipation addressed or obscured by a smooth montage and the topic of the romance? What are its implications for thinking a present subjectivity? What subjects are produced by this montage-effect?

From my own perspective, there is a deep concern with the relation between paradigms of movement and representation of time—human time. Having in mind animation with its particular ways of fictionalizing movement, and its “naturally” infinite possibilities of forming—bodies, entities, abstractions, time, and space.

*Such as a fragile soap bubble that never bursts and smoothly floats through the rooms of an empty house in the video *The Tenant* (2010) by Rivane Neuenschwander & Cao Guimarães: it is a metaphor for permanent drift and a hint to a subject or subjectivity in low-res definition.*

I am interested in thinking “the drift” as a contemporary symptom—geographies of drift via the drifting in and of images. And the current moment, with universalizing exile as the condition of being human as proposed by T. J. Demos (in “The Ends of Exile: Towards a Coming Universality?,” 2009), digital disembodiment, and the homogeneity of images versus the heterogeneity of lives and communities. I propose to trust the unpredictability and creativity of the drift as a medium of transmission itself.

Verina

I've been trying to think about special effects and CGI as a cinematic counterpart to the material, computational, and financial flows happening at a cosmic scale. By this I mean the combination of solar-carbon capitalism and other subterranean or extra-terrestrial economies as yet unknown to us which circulate both organic and inorganic matter across and beyond the earth. The subsequent formation of networks and atmospheres together produce new surfaces of movement. I see these surfaces as slimy, slippery, and infinitely smooth, offering no resistance or friction, like liquid crystal screens or oil spills. Surface itself manifests here as special effect, both in the sense of animation of inert matter as well as stretches, skews, distortions, perspective collapse, morphing, convolutions, kaleidoscopic scatter, flares, particles, and disintegrations.

Following this image, can the notion of the present itself be a special-effect?

Just like what we consider the self might be an effect too, of the unconscious itself not really being separate from the "great outdoors" or some kind of a radical outside/exterior.

An excerpt from Oxana Timofeeva's essay, "Ultra-Black: Towards a Materialist Theory of Oil" (2007), might be useful to bring this into context:

The unconscious is not a mysterious substantial reality beyond our psychic life, but a structural formation of the process of repression which, as Lacan explains, coincides with the return of the repressed. Similarly, the inhuman and unnatural planetary outside of the world can be regarded as the very image of its interior, which returns from the depths of oblivion in a scary shape that

we do not recognize. The world constantly turns inside out, and we are the hole through which it does so (by “we” I do not mean exclusively humans, but a much bigger collective of beings that precedes concrete species). (www.e-flux.com/journal/84/149335/ultra-black-towards-a-materialist-theory-of-oil/)

I’m reminded here of the manga comic Enigma of Amigara Fault by Junji Ito (<https://imgur.com/gallery/ZNSaq>). The human-shaped holes discovered by a rock-face interestingly appear immediately after an earthquake, a minor subterranean reboot. The story proceeds with people identifying themselves with specific individual holes that fit their body precisely. However, let us think ahead of the main storyline and imagine ourselves to be the holes with human spectators investigating us from outside. In which case, are the human figures approaching us—and “fitting” us perfectly—a kind of high-definition hallucination of a “self”? A special-effect caused due to seemingly unrelated geographical re-assemblies?

*Warm regards
Mochu*

--

In the light of some of the things suggested by Lantian and Mochu, and by Verina’s prompts, it becomes useful to plot this concept as a temporal (post/cinematic time—Verina), material (technological/CGI—Mochu) and sensual (delirium—Lantian) opening into thinking through the exhaustion and also the expiry of images. It is the graveyard of the contemporary image that I am interested in. When can an image be declared truly dead? It is useful to say that I am looking at post-cinema in a corporeal sense. A working

site for this is the body of the secret agent. To refine this thought further—the trace of the body of the secret agent. I am trying to do this by also thinking about the power of the narrative. A narrative for which there cannot be a reference image. There is also an archive here—but a self-imploding one. Oral histories and official files of secret agents working during the Second World War are inconsistent. Often the story does not add up. This is a challenge for the visual because good spies are meant to be invisible. The premise for action there is erasure. The spy has to erase herself in order for an image to form—and in the absence of any reliable narrator—this floats like a question on the surface of the historic “documentary image.” I am pasting below a bit from something I am writing; not sure if this is the abstract for the conference panel yet.

In the context of evidence it must be noted that images are seen as messengers of truth. They are often called upon to validate the world from which they emerge. It is for this reason that to overthrow “an image”—whether it was the toppling of the Saddam statue, or the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, or even the latest efforts to erase images of Mughal era architecture from popular culture by the Hindu Right forces in India—is a deeply charged act. Further, images and by extension the truth systems they signify, are not always only under siege from outside but can also suffer internal disruptions. To explain myself better I briefly turn to literary theorist Bill Brown.

In his work on “the theory of things” (A Sense of Things, 2003), Brown asks us to turn our attention towards the distinction between “objects” and “things.” The difference between the two, Brown argues, lies in the threshold between the “nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable.” In other words

the relationship between the two is characterized by constant tension and possibility. According to Brown, something is an object when its address to the human subject and the world around it is concrete, that is a car, a stove, a table. The moment these objects stop working and their use value runs out, that is the car breaks down, the stove stops, the table breaks, we are confronted with the 'thingness' of an object. He notes, "You could imagine things, as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization or their mere utilization as objects—their force as a sensuous or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems."

I use Brown's description to assess the fate of images and testimonies that seem to have broken down. Whose "use" value as evidence or truth has long run out. Whose attestation now exhausted holds no power in the theatre of public opinion.

Some stuff:

Official Secrets Act: Girl from BBC (dramaturgy of sensations/ "secret" as backdrop for pop-culture), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjOp7i2De8o>. This is pre-WikiLeaks: The sinking of the ARA General Belgrano, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__MbC0rsUq7E (the productive non-image/erased image).

X

Pallavi

--

Mochu, the manga—woah, most excellent! Thanks for sharing this. Reminds me of Deepak Unnikrishnan's "Gulf Return" text.

Re: CGI, the movement you describe makes me think of celluloid running orbits from reel to reel through a projector gate. That (and the title of one of your works, Cool Memories of Remote Gods) also makes me think of temperature. There's a certain velocity and also a scalding heat that facilitates this celluloid movement and smoothness of surface, and I can't help but recall the solar sintered city I live in, which is often depicted as CGI fly-through precisely as a means to image capital flow without friction.

There seems to be a certain kind of heat conductivity, light reflectivity, and also a particular surface tension at work. I'm thinking specifically of glass, marble, steel, and other such surfaces that require cleaning, buffing, sanding, sweat, and time to sustain their grip-less-ness.

I'm curious about your thoughts on whiskey, which seems to cling/grip to glass (and throats).

In Kurosawa's 1949 Stray Dog, there's a montage mid-way through the film that depicts the film's rookie-cap protagonist wandering through a heat wave in search of a thief who stole his gun. The sun beats down with increasing intensity as the sequence goes on, and the policeman's ego, pride, and image of his own cleanliness slowly unravel as he becomes lost and delirious in the heat of Tokyo's working class neighborhoods. His sense of control literally melts and drips off his body. There is demise here too, perhaps.

Verina, I also wanted to pick up here on the pronoun "our" regarding present, projecting in time, emancipation, and situating landscape.

People always come to Dubai and complain about the heat or lack of greenery or streets, but streets and green

feel precisely like CGI surfaces here. This seems to confuse people intensely. Sometimes these people come from elsewhere but often they come from the high-rises and mansions up the road. The sun is always quick to make these people blush.

Reminds me of this, from an interview in Ocula, Raqs did last year:

To us, the contemporary is a space to join in the ridiculed and halted Bhole ki baraat (the marriage procession of Shiva). Shiva's wedding party was a raucous procession of wild animals, outcasts of all kinds, ghosts, and goblins with distorted, imperfect bodies, unresolved consciousness, in delirious moods and states of being. The story of Shiva's wedding ends with the god dancing in rage in response to being insulted by his in-laws for the nature of his companions. Shiva appears to have been Nietzsche's favorite god. Such processions will always find it difficult to enter history and, by extension, the museum. Rather, these unruly energies are detours. They take paths and seek connections that are not yet there; they play with instruments whose sound is yet to find an amplifier.

There's that thing in physics with the snail next to the electron. They both move the smallest possible distance, in the same direction, to the nearest possible nearest. Ostensibly they both leave and arrive at exactly the same time, having hardly left or arrived at all—a refutation of stasis, and also distance perhaps.

The other day some friends and I had a conversation about acceleration and how it is imagined in films. More specifically, we were thinking about fly-throughs and car chases. In the

same conversation, someone asked whether intimacy was possible at high speed, and it reminded me of that scene in Hitchcock's North by Northwest in which there is a shot of an embrace in a train cabin, followed by a hard cut to a wide shot of the train speeding into a tunnel at night.

To bring back Blissfully Yours, end credits there also use the road to refute the oft-frequented usage of credits to describe the motion of descent, or demise. Credits always feel to me like memorials or tombstones. The crawling down of credits feels quite like the crawling into cavities in the manga Mochu shared, and also the demise of image that Pallavi speaks of.

Pallavi: I was just the other day reading Achille Mbembe's "The Power of the Archive and its Limits" (2002), and there was this idea of death as an erasure/abolishment of debt that I very much liked: that images are held onto by those who feel that they are owed something by images—a nostalgic sentiment, no?

Now you'll have to forgive me again for returning to my context but it's what I know best. In Dubai, images precisely begin to produce symbolic value after being declared dead. Here, the state's ideal subject is one who is already dead; martyred in service of the nation, longed for as maternal abandonment or paternal recognition; or remembered as evocative of time before. This before-time is conceived of as post-colonial—before the British—but also, since we are one million citizens and nine million non-citizens, past-time also functions as time before non-citizens, which is fiction but nonetheless effective!

In this way, the past from where I am is Arab-supremacist, Islamic empire, pan-regional ethno-state alliance, et al.—i.e., time that is nameable and regulated. This is of course

not to say that things did not happen, because of course they did, and anterior(s) and past(s) certainly seem to convene unevenly as contemporary — taken as a political distinction — and feel all the more resoundingly delirious, unspeakable/unnamable, and unencumbered with the idea of resolution.

Much in the way Pallavi speaks about implosion, this sort of symbolic time value absentia also feels thick, palpable, buoyant, and bursting.

I'm also thinking here about image death/erasure insofar as visibility and opacity. People are always parachuting in to look for the subaltern in a way that privileges capture, evidence, and the gaze of the overseer as revealing or life-giving. My friends and I speak often about opacity, and withdrawal, and refusal, as practiced means to evade image.

L

--

Thank you Lantian for this long drift! Will continue the ramble format here.

Great reference to the Gulf-return link, Unnikrishnan's book has been on my wish-list for quite a while now, should order it soon.

And true, Dubai's sun-drenched-ness flows well with its CGI fly-through ads, making it the ultimate special-effects program that renders in high resolution both the solar economy and its dark counterpart, the slippery oil beneath the surface — what Negarestani refers to as the Black Sun-Flower. In that sense Dubai is perhaps the sharpest weapon that the earth has

developed against the sun, at least its most radiant war cry. The glass shield (fire wall) that threatens the sun with its own image. After all, behind the sun there is always the dark disc of death. I guess the people you mention, who complain about the lack of greenery in Dubai are too used to their dependency on the solar market, that's why they perhaps prefer trees and plants to glass and concrete, which are silica based assemblages. The earth rises up against the sun, just like it armors itself in a mesh of communication networks run on silicon technologies, which again the sun intermittently wrecks with its teasing flares. Is Dubai the first Chthonic Flare that aims to disrupt the solar-hegemonic-complex?

About whiskey! Reminds me of this bit from Avital Ronell's Crack Wars: Literature Addiction Mania (2004), where she speaks about resurrectionist memory by referencing Baudelaire and Poe:

Intoxication names a method of mental labor that is responsible for making phantoms appear ... It was by working on Edgar Allan Poe that Baudelaire recognized the logic of the tomb, to which he attached the stomach. The stomach became the tomb. At one point Baudelaire seems to ask: whom are you preserving in alcohol?

Maybe this moves on to what Pallavi said about the graveyard of images—since engaging with codes is the same as engaging with graveyards (to en-encrypt and de-encrypt—which in turn makes any secret agent a key operator in resurrectionist programs.

But for states, the exorcism of phantoms has anyway always been a priority, similar to the projections of Dubai that Lantian speaks about: an ideal past without migrants,

ghosts or non-citizens. So as we counter the lethal tactics of immigration policies, can it be that in our every sip, we might be able to preserve a non-citizen in whiskey?

Mochu

--

These conversations seem almost like snatches we hear in transit on moving trains and buses. We hardly ever forget them, rather commit to the senses more deeply than other fully formed, coherent, legitimate conversations. It is precisely because they are dismembered that they can be remembered well.

Lantian, the links you draw between death and image alongside a constant production of a future has kept me thinking about the need to narrativize disappearance. This need is not the need of the disappeared (obviously) but of those under whose regime the disappearance occurs. The narrative is the key that has been thrown into the sea, so there is on the analogue lock of history the shape of that story, rather the space where it would have sit. Without the key there is no need for a lock — without the story, disappearance is of no use to power. Art then is lock sport, always working on the register of the duplicate — to pick a lock is to pick a story, to imagine a future without a power center.

Mochu, the image of embalming a non-citizen in whiskey is thrilling and troubling at once. The apparitions of those alive (non-citizen workers) and those dead (at the hands of similar systems) form a coalition around this image. I am thinking about Xu Lizhi, a migrant worker from Shenzhen in China who jumped off the Foxconn building

(where many other workers too had committed suicide) and his poem "I Swallowed an Iron Moon." Excerpt at <https://hyperallergic.com/373287/iron-moon-an-anthology-of-chinese-worker-poetry-white-pine-press-2016/>.

To swallow without respite and to drink to embalm—to this I propose another mode: to Dance—to tread the intelligent environments of the future. If "being" was the referent for Heidegger's "actual history," then what can we propose as the site of departure for an "actual future?"

Here is a short interview clip of lighting designer Ingo Maurer talking of darkness as a blanket and light as material. Perhaps an opening there, <https://vimeo.com/42266754>. I am still away but this is definitely a virtual vibrant adda that I am enjoying being a part of.

*love to all
P*

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PostScript:

The REHEARSAL is over.

Any attempt to understand presence, or being there in time, will always be a reconstruction. Or in Christine Brooke-Rose's terms, a REMAKE. Like the novel, reconstruction is always something that can be read both backwards and forwards since the reconstruction is necessarily displaced from the time which held the actual experience. Perhaps, as Verina has suggested when introducing this book, contemporaneity reflects something closer to that which is singular since,

Memory is necessary self centred. For other people are fogs, alter ego et galore. Memory does not reconstruct points of view, only personal reactions, and all portrayal is betrayal. Only art reconstructs points of view, artificially, the novel, the film, the play, the staged confrontational interview. In memory all the parts are played by actors called John, in self-confrontation. And memory can invent memories.

Memory can quantum along from notion to notion. The meeting of particles are events and vice versa. The void before the Big Bang is a nil mass not a nothingness, the void has a structure, and gets transformed. But memory is not an acceleration of particles, either.

Memory is more like intercepting and decrypting, thousands of messages missed, or captured but not decrypted, and even the captured and decrypted now burnt or not released. Memory intercepts the messages of a mysterious invented enemy unseen, giant knight or flaming dragon, the interceptor a speck in time ...



(9.)

FEMINIST REWORKINGS OF HISTORICAL TIME
with Victoria Browne

Verina Gfader:

*To structure the interview, perhaps we can work along the idea of a growing lexicon of temporalities. Thus to depart with a notion that struck me as it popped up in *Feminism, Time and Nonlinear History* (2014) at the periphery of vision as it were: the time of the divine. To what ends do you develop this “agent”? And why does it come to fruition particularly today?*

Victoria Browne:

One of the driving questions at the heart of my book is “what is historical time?” It’s an elusive concept and of course there can never be one definitive answer, but I tried to consider some of the different layers or “strands” of historical time—the different ways in which historical time is formulated or brought to life. I worked with a kind of typology: narrative time, calendar time, generational time, and an archival structuring of time I designated the “time of the trace”—all of which play an important role in linking pasts, presents, and futures together and thereby generating imaginings, experiences, and templates of historical time. But something I neglected to explore was the relationship between historical time and the time of the divine, which of course is hugely significant. Though the modern concept of historical time might appear to be “godless,” just a series of empty “nows,” the modern idea of progress, of historical time as a linear movement inexorably driving toward the future, based on a single time frame for all humanity, can be traced to Christian ideas of redemption and eschatological doctrines such as the End of the World and the Last Judgment. This doesn’t mean we should accept Carl Schmitt’s thesis that all

concepts of modern political thought should be understood as secularized theological concepts; but I do think that the study of historical time should take account of the interpenetration between “divine” or enchanted temporalities and those designated as “secular.” In relation to feminism, this would mean considering the ways that notions of divine providence or purpose have shaped various feminist notions of temporal progress, freedom, duty, or agency, or how belief in sacred origins or divine ends has informed the politics of different feminist activists or movements. So often, it is presumed that feminism is a quintessentially secular project, that feminism and religion are bound to be in conflict. But actually, feminist movements at various times and in different geographical contexts have often been deeply embedded in religious belief. Recently I’ve been looking at the religious themes in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, whose visions of progress for women and a future of equality are rooted in her beliefs about the God-given nature of humanity. Though these religious or “divine” aspects of her thinking are routinely ignored, it shows us how important the “time of the divine” has been in shaping feminist temporalities. It’s especially important to acknowledge this today, I think, in an increasingly aggressive secularist climate in Europe, with oppressive policies directed against women of religious minorities in the name of “secular” progress.

VG:

Two points: there seems an intimation of a widening of perspective on many levels throughout your writing on “lived time.” And that having to do also with a “praxis” of encoding time which you proclaim as being at the core of thinking historical time. I am interested in the potential intimacy of such praxis; what social (and public) imaginaries are formed here? And following from that, is it accurate to say that your notion of “praxis” develops a parallel dynamic to or correspondence

with Bernard Stiegler's elaboration of technics as a means of generating time, knowing time, and making time real (speaking time)?

Related to above, are certain artistic practices technics for generating and understanding time?

VB:

*My understanding of historical time as a kind of time that is practically generated is influenced more by Paul Ricoeur than Stiegler. In his three volumes of Time and Narrative (1984, 1985, 1988), Ricoeur speaks of tracing the past through archival research, constructing historical narratives and calendrical timelines, or putting together genealogies based on generational frameworks. To me, this suggests that historical time is a matter of "praxis," as all of these kinds of temporal practices connect us to different pasts, presents, and futures, allowing particular experiences, structures, and conceptions of historical time to come into being, with important sociopolitical investments and effects. We could certainly draw a parallel here with Stiegler's elaboration of technics as a means of generating time, knowing time, and making time real, though I think Ricoeur's ideas are grounded in a more traditional notion of phenomenological experience than Stiegler's ideas about prosthesis and so on. In some ways, Ricoeur may seem an oddly stuffy or conventional philosopher to draw upon for a feminist project, whilst Stiegler perhaps appears as a more radical or contemporary figure, and his work is clearly of relevance to feminist philosophy and historiography (see for example D. M. Withers's latest book, *Feminism, Digital Culture and the Politics of Transmission*, 2015). But for me, the clarity and patience of Ricoeur's work was enormously helpful when I was trying to develop a grasp of "historical time" as a very specific concept and form of time, distinct from "lived time" more generally. This question also brings us to a recurring issue concerning the relationship*

between feminist and androcentric philosophy—whether it is productive for us to keep drawing on the same old white male philosophers for inspiration and conceptual tools. I certainly don't think feminists should ever set themselves up as a "disciple" of any canonical male philosopher like Ricoeur or Stiegler, but I think it's fair game for us to raid androcentric philosophy for our own ends, for tools that help us think and work through problems.

VG:

Interesting that you pose the apparent radicalness of Stiegler because of certain thematics and his supposedly more contemporary being. I just wonder if you could explain a bit more the "feminism" you are developing. Can one say, there are feminist aspects and dynamics in, for example, Ricoeur or Stiegler's thinking and mode of becoming? Deleuze and Guattari are pursuing the notion of the minor, which includes becoming-woman and becoming-minor ... I wonder if you could expand on the "feminist" precisely in relation to feminist philosophy and historiography. What feminisms and futures? Or, what feminist futurity does the polytemporal allow?

VB:

I'm not sure there are "feminist aspects" in Ricoeur or Stiegler, or Deleuze and Guattari, as I don't think any of these thinkers were/are particularly interested in feminist politics or philosophy (in fact they often seem completely ignorant of it!). It's more that there are aspects of their work that feminists can appropriate and use for feminist ends. Actually I recall Deleuze describing philosophy or theory as a "tool box" to be raided or used in different fields of thought, and that's how I approach it. As I discuss in my book, though, I don't think there is any such thing as "feminism" or "feminist philosophy" in the singular—it's rather that "feminist" serves as a shifting signifier, naming those who identify certain sets

of problems or issues (e.g., sexual violence or androcentric epistemology) as priorities for thought and political action, though often by very different means, or with different visions of the past, present, and future.

VG:

Robots cannot die, and they certainly feature in our visions of what is coming (including questions of artificial intelligence and labor). Immortality was introduced in fictional characters in animation only at a later stage. Any thoughts on sensory knowledge: storytelling and finality in relation to contemporary heterogeneous social/living realities?

VB:

*Feminism has a complex relation with robotic imaginaries and the promises and threats posed by automation and reproductive technologies. Shulamith Firestone springs immediately to mind, and her techno-utopian vision of women freed from the labors of gestation by cybernetics that would enable fertilization and gestation to take place in laboratories rather than female bodies. At the time she wrote *The Dialectic of Sex* in 1970, IVF technologies were on the way to becoming available, and there is an investment in the book in the power of technology to bring desired social change, but Firestone also recognizes that whilst patriarchal social structures remain, technology cannot become an empowering tool for women. In terms of sensory knowledge, it raises interesting questions, given how important the idea of embodiment has been within feminist epistemology. Does the supplementation or mediation of embodied experience through reproductive technologies or automated labor drastically alter feminist visions of history, or of the future? Perhaps the most fruitful place to look would be imaginative explorations in feminist literature, science fiction, or artworks.*

VG:

Could we polemically say, that we inhabit time projections?

VB:

*Certainly we could! Though the temporal framing of such a claim is key: it's not that we project a vision of time and then inhabit it, or that we inhabit a certain social milieu and then project a vision of time on the basis of our experience. Rather, time projections and structures pre-exist us and determine our existence, even as we re-mold and re-make time through the ways we exist. I recently read *The Mandarins* by Simone de Beauvoir and she makes some very powerful statements in this book about time and history, including the claim that we can't change history, and we can't escape it: we can only live it. For me, this offers a fruitful formulation for feminists as we think about our engagement with time and history: it's about how we attach, confront and respond on a political and ethical basis to the past and to the times we're living through, to the "contemporary."*

VG:

The Mandarins sounds like an essential, wonderful reference, thank you!

And then we have materialities of lived time: thickening, palimpsests, time-reckoning ...

Let me refer here to my research on the Japanese painter Atsuko Tanaka, who gave up figurative painting when being hospitalized in 1953. Tanaka says: "I wrote down the dates—four or five days—until my release, and colored around them with crayon. I thought: This is painting. I subsequently drew calendars, and the compositions of numbers drawn with crayon on linen. Linen, which is a simple material, is accepted by everybody with little resistance." As the numbers were written down, they "gave form to time" (Ming Tiampo). Tiampo, in her essay on Tanaka, titled

“Electrifying Painting,” describes the artist’s disorientation by the sameness in the routine of hospital life and how the counting of the days until release needed to be visualized. Two Calendar paintings emerged at the time, in 1954. The Calendars are paper collages, one with ink and pencil in the format of a portrait, the other one, landscape format, with oil and ink. Measuring 38 x 54 cm each, they are ordinary calendars “elevated” into works of art; and as such sit occultly outside the discussion of realism versus abstraction. And as their complex process involved the use of the architectural blueprint—they become “a palimpsest of semiotic systems: spatial, temporal, numeric, and linguistic, thus highlighting the spatiality of how a calendar represents time.” Interestingly, Tiampo notes that “this collision of semiotic systems revealed their arbitrariness and materiality by revealing how the same shape could simultaneously represent part of a building or part of a letter and thus a day.” A sort of animation mechanism is indicated here, whereby the calendar’s virtual plasticity becomes a translation tool. It opens up a lexicon of “forms,” and sensitizes us to the calendar as an encounter of difference, plurality, and adaptability to change in its environment.

In your writing on calendar time, you suggest that calendar time needs to be understood as a socially specific creation or “version” of cosmological time. What is your “cosmological time,” and does it relate to the Greek notion of cosmos as it referred to—according to Nikos Papastergiadis—a notion of the people and a mode of ornamentation that imbued things with order and grace.

VB:

The artworks or projects you refer to sound wonderful and a perfect illustration of the qualitative notion of calendar time that I discuss in my book. Often in critical accounts of temporality, calendar time is made to seem like a merely quantitative, homogenous, “empty,” and boring kind of time,

but in fact, its constructed character means that we can do all kinds of things with it! I love the prospect of feminists getting more creative with feminist timelines and dates, such that the feminist timeline could be an encounter of difference and adaptability, and these kinds of artistic experiments would provide so much inspiration.

In terms of “cosmological time,” there are multiple ways of envisioning and understanding it—so it’s not that there are different, socially specific calendar times that represent cosmological time in the singular or as a given; rather, I would say both calendar time and cosmological time can be understood as plural or polytemporal.

VG:

The correspondence between feminism and philosophy and historiography has engaged you significantly, and they seem to touch upon the complexity of temporal mediations through one’s own body. Related to that, are techniques of restoration, recovery, translation, and repositioning one’s way against the global velocities an issue for you?

VB:

Restoration and recovery are important aspects of feminist historiographical and philosophical work, but there is always a danger of succumbing to a kind of feminist nostalgia, or “left melancholia.” I think historical recovery within feminism should be oriented towards generating critical effects on the present, shocking it out of complacency when it feels stuck or suffocating. But this process needs to be alert to the politics of translation, as you say, given how often feminism has been dominated by white western feminist narratives and diagnoses of the times. So often we think it’s necessary to have universal concepts or timeframes that make it possible to translate different experiences or trajectories into terms that “we” can all understand. But those “universal” concepts

and timeframes are always partial and propped up by certain power structures. It's vital, then, for feminist philosophy and historiography to think about how the process of translation works within these fields—how often are feminist narratives or experiences that fall outside the hegemonic frame distorted and reduced to a formula that makes them “easier to understand”? Can we make the time to really listen, to make our own selves and temporalities strange? Dipesh Chakrabarty presents a valuable model of translation as a “barter-like” process which doesn't rely on a universal logic or timeframe, but rather works as a painstaking process of term-for-term exchange, making visible the very problems of translation—the ambiguity, inexactness, and uncanniness it necessarily entails. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests something similar too, as does Chandra Talpade Mohanty when she speaks of a “temporality of struggle.” So if it's about repositioning, as you suggest, then it might not always be about shifting position to get comfortable! Becoming uncomfortable might be a better way of thinking about it.

VG:

Beautifully posed!

Relation between time/temporal being and translation and its uncanniness.

I am thinking of Walter Benjamin's “now-time” as the time in which struggles take place, which Isabell Lorey reminds us of. And she adds:

By no means untouched by the past, it is not a temporality that remains identical to itself as an immediate presence, as authenticity of body and affect, or as pure sensitivity ... Now-time is not a ‘transition’ of the past into the future; it is a constellation between the now and what has been, in which the construction of history becomes obvious ... So we must start from now-time and understand how history is constructed with the strategies

of a denial of it, and therefore how emancipation is postponed for the future. ("Presentist Democracy: Reconceptualizing the Present," 2017)

Could you perhaps explore this becoming uncomfortable in relation to subjectivities of/in time a little bit more?

VB:

I think there is a huge emphasis, in contemporary western societies at least, on being "in time" and "up to date," or doing things at the "right time," for example we are constantly entreated to "keep up" with new technologies, or in the case of women, we are constantly told that time is "running out" for us, that there's a "right time" and a "wrong time" to begin a family and so on. This presumes that as temporal bodies, we need to synchronize ourselves with the dominant rhythms or timescales and timelines, that this is the recipe for success, happiness, the "good life." But actually, the quest to try and fit ourselves into these kinds of rhythms and timescales can cause a profound sense of discomfort, anxiety, and pain. So we seek out alternative communities or political movements, like feminism, as a kind of sanctuary and way of resisting, expecting to find an alternative kind of temporal rhythm or relation to the past, present, and future that we are more in sync with. It may well be that this kind of synchronization happens very easily, but for some, they may still feel "out of step"—that there is a dominant mode of organizing or conceptualizing time within feminism that they just don't relate to. So even in oppositional political movements like feminism, it's important not to just assume that the temporal or historical experience of other feminists is the same as ours, that we all have the same understanding of the past or vision of the future, the same relation to the capitalist organization of life and labor. That's what I mean about the need to make oneself uncomfortable at times, to shift out of one's temporal comfort zone.



(10. props)

THE LAST RESIDENT

A notation. And link to an artist residency at Asia Art Archive in December 2017: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/residency-verina-gfader/period/past>

*William Forsythe
CHOREOGRAPHIC OBJECTS,
first principle.*

TEMPERAMENTAL NEED

*Interview with William Kentridge. September 6, 2017.
Through Figures or Tropes connecting to an image or object from
the realm of animation.*

KNOWLEDGE CYCLES

Interview with Claire Hsu. March 2018.

Gerald Raunig

*A DIVIDUAL LINE INTO THE PAST: TEN FRAGMENTS ON A
REVOLUTIONARY LINK BETWEEN PASSING AND BECOMING*
*Written July 4, 2015, on the occasion of the symposium "Memorial
For(u)ms—Histories of Possibility," organized by the DAAD
Artists-in-Berlin Program in collaboration with HAU Hebbel am Ufer.*

*Sif
NIGHTNESS
A night drawing.*

*Lea Porsager
AN UPWARD FLAPPING TRAJECTORY®
Lea Porsager with Verina Gfader (and occasional ghost voices).*

REHEARSAL

*A mail exchange
New Delhi panel on Video and Post-Cinema: Lantian Xie, Mochu,
and Pallavi Paul, with Verina Gfader, toward What Time Is It?:
Technologies of Life in the Contemporary, December 14–16, 2017,
Sarai-CSDS, Delhi and Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, New
Delhi. sarai.net/what-time-is-it/
Interlocutor: Monica Narula.
PostScript: Rebecca Carson.*

FEMINIST REWORKINGS OF HISTORICAL TIME

Interview with Victoria Browne. August 1, 2017.

*Images on pages 10/40/76/88, 18/32, and 94/95:
William Kentridge with Philip Miller and Thuthuka Sibisi (music);
Gregory Maqoma (choreography); Catherine Meyburgh,
Janus Fouché, ana Marovi (video design).
Workshop for The Head & the Load, Johannesburg, 2017
Photo: Stella Olivier
Courtesy of William Kentridge*

Image on page 14: Photograph by Monica Narula

Image on page 50: Sif Harriet Kølbaek Larsen, Nightness, 2018

*Special thanks to: Rebecca Carson; Anne McIleron at the William
Kentridge Studio, Johannesburg; Chương-Đài Võ at Asia Art
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Jacob Lund, Geoff Cox, and Anne Kølbaek Iversen*

BIOGRAPHIES

Victoria Browne is a senior lecturer in politics at Oxford Brookes University in the UK, and the author of Feminism, Time and Nonlinear History (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Rebecca Carson teaches in Critical & Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths, University of London, with a focus in modern European philosophy.

William Forsythe is an American dancer and choreographer resident in Frankfurt am Main, who is known for his work with the Ballet Frankfurt (1984–2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–15), and is recognized for the integration of ballet and visual arts.

Verina Gfader is an artist and researcher, with a recent postdoc fellowship on The Contemporary Condition, Aarhus University (2016–18), who orchestrates her practice as organized fields of research aided by drawing, animation, text performance and fabulations, and fictional institutions.

Claire Hsu is co-founder and executive director of Asia Art Archive, an independent non-profit organization based in Hong Kong dedicated to a more generous art history through the collection, creation, and sharing of knowledge around the recent history of art from Asia.

William Kentridge is a draftsman, performer, and filmmaker, whose practice is born out of a cross-fertilization between mediums and genres and responds to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, within the context of South Africa's socio-political landscape.

Sif Harriet Kølbaek Larsen is a Copenhagen-based 7-year-old girl.

The Last Resident: A meandering entity. Often challenged by the precarity of its, her, his, their daily life under domineering regimes. TLR practices strategies of transversal.

Mochu is a Delhi and Istanbul-based video artist and filmmaker, who combines text, video, and animation, focusing on specific instances in art history that overlap with technoscientific imaginaries in popular culture and philosophy.

Monica Narula is one of the three members of Raqs Media Collective. Raqs is an artistic and curatorial practice based in New Delhi.

Pallavi Paul is a graduate student and visual artist living in New Delhi, her work explores the philosophical amplitude of “non-fiction” worlds, and has been exhibited in venues such as London’s Tate Modern, Beirut Art Center, or Contour Biennale, Belgium.

Lea Parsager is a Copenhagen-based artist, currently PhD candidate at Malmö Art Academy/Lund University, Sweden, whose practice interweaves fabulation, science, politics, feminism, and esotericism within different mediums.

Gerald Raunig tries in and beyond the frameworks of the eipcp platform transversal texts, the Zurich University of the Arts, and other rather unidentifiable milieus, to focus, if possible, on dividualities and dissemblages, machinic capitalism and molecular revolution, technecologies and subsistential territories.

Ettore Sottsass, born in Innsbruck, Austria in 1917, and graduating in architecture at the Politecnico di Torino in 1939, was one of the great masters of twentieth-century Italian avant-garde design.

Lantian Xie makes images, objects, stories, jazz bands, motorcycles, books, and parties.





PEN = 0, 1, 1, 0, WEIGHT = 70, SLANT = 0.4, SUPERNESS = 0.75

The typeface used to set this series is called Meta-the-difference-between-the-two-Font (MTDBT2F), designed by Dexter Sinister in 2010 after MetaFont, a digital typography system originally programmed by computer scientist Donald Kunth in 1979.

*Unlike more common digital outline fonts formats such as TrueType or Postscript, a MetaFont is constructed of strokes drawn with set-width pens. Instead of describing each of the individual shapes that make up a family of related characters, a MetaFont file describes only the basic pen path or *skeleton* letter. Perhaps better imagined as the ghost that comes in advance of a particular letterform, a MetaFont character is defined only by a set of equations. It is then possible to tweak various parameters such as weight, slant, and superness (more or less bold, Italic, and a form of chutzpah) in order to generate endless variations on the same bare bones.*

*Meta-the-difference-between-the-two-Font is essentially the same as MetaFont, abiding the obvious fact that it swallows its predecessor. Although the result may look the same, it clearly can't be, because in addition to the software, the new version embeds its own backstory. In this sense, MTDBT2F is not only a tool to generate countless PostScript fonts, but *at least equally* a tool to think about and around MetaFont. Mathematician Douglas Hofstadter once noted that one of the best things MetaFont might do is inspire readers to chase after the intelligence of an alphabet, and "yield new insights into the elusive 'spirits' that flit about so tantalizingly behind those lovely shapes we call 'letters.'"*

*For instance, each volume in The Contemporary Condition is set in a new MTDBT2F, generated at the time of publication, which is to say *now.**

Dexter Sinister, 30/04/19, 15:13 PM