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PACIFIC PARABLES
THE PACIFIC RIM AS A FICTION OF PLACE

The Pacific Rim is a fiction about place, a filter through which you can look at the world if you choose to and confer more or less arbitrary meanings on to a set of latitudes and longitudes. There have been previous fictions about place straddling this water: One was called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which unleashed havoc in the name of solidarity of the oppressed peoples of Asia. Another conceived of the Pacific as a Californian frontier, a kind of Wild Blue West. A third spoke French, drew naked women in Tahiti, and dropped hydrogen bombs in the water. A fourth, the South Pacific Bubble, was one of the first episodes of global financial speculation that shaped the turbulence of our modern era's economy.

Meanwhile, Sikh peasants from the Punjab, Chinese railroad workers from Canton, agricultural workers and sugarcane cultivators from the hinterland of North India traversed the ocean. Mexicans swam or walked along the coastline, Australian sailors, New Zealanders on whaling ships, Japanese factory workers, Filipina nurses and itinerant Pacific Islander communities traversed the Pacific, and the wider world, buffeted by the rough winds of recent history. They grew fruit trees in Napa valley, felled timber in British Columbia, mined tin in Peru, pressed grapes in Chile, and made what some choose to call the Pacific Rim what it is today. In time, agricultural

laborers were joined by software programmers. And roads from Napa Valley began to lead in and out of Silicon Valley.

Ringed by fire, held together by fragile surfaces that slide onto each other, girded through with pipelines, and beset by storms. You could say that the Pacific Ocean, apparently endless and bottomless, sounds almost like the Internet, which is not altogether inappropriate considering that the Pacific Rim—between California, East Asia, and Australasia—probably contains within it the highest density of Internet traffic.

The first question we want to ask is: how can this fiction of location, this imaginary map, the one that we are all currently engaged in drawing, not reproduce the boundaries that beset all mapmaking exercises? How can we as mapmakers avoid the predicament of an expression of mastery over the landscape we intend to survey?

Dead and Living Reckoning

We forget that cartography is as variable a practice as any. There are maps and then there are maps, and there are different kinds of mapmaking. Modern maritime navigational charts, based on latitude and longitude, determine a principle of navigation known as "dead reckoning". Dead reckoning, in our limited understanding, is the method by which the position of a moving body

is deduced in advance by taking fixes from previously known positions and then reading them against calculations with variables such as speed, direction, wind speed, tide patterns, and currents. Prior to GPS, most navigators had to rely on dead reckoning, with a little help from a compass, an astrolabe, star charts, chronometers, and longitude tables. Dead reckoning models itself on the dynamics of the relationship between a moving object and a notionally inert surface.

We say most, but should qualify it immediately, because for most of human history, the largest body of water in the world was navigated using a different system of reckoning. The Pacific Island cultures, which were probably the most prolific seafarers known to humanity, actually used the opposite navigational principle. Reckoning was based on the metaphorical assumption that the still navigator interfaced with a world that coursed towards or away from him or her. Thus, it is not the sailor who approaches an island, but the island that advances towards, and then past the sailor. Meanwhile, the stars remain constant, thus marking general orientation. The course is set by the stars and the world; a living, dynamic entity flows past under the navigator's gaze. For terminological convenience alone, one could call this method "live reckoning". The relationship between dead and live reckoning is a study of the encounter of two knowledge systems, two practices and ethoi of information. The difference between them ultimately lay in the amount of gunpowder they had backing them. One had plenty; the other had none. The ships that used "dead reckoning" carried cannons and muskets; the live reckoners in canoes were armed with arrows and spears. The knowledge system with guns won the day. Pacific Island navigation systems remain as relics, occasionally resuscitated by an anthropologist or a sailing enthusiast.

Today, we who are practitioners of information, artisans of knowledge, often forget that our practices are also guaranteed by sophisticated weaponry, and not only of the lethal kind. Modernity's edge is ultimately a matter of ammunition. What safeguards should we institute to ensure that our encounters with the few remaining knowledge, information, and communication systems that are different from our own do not result in their extinction? How can the business of reckoning continue to remain alive?

Cargo Cults

We head now in the direction of the island of the long wait. We refer here to a quintessentially modern practice of faith, the cargo cults that arose in the Pacific Islands, as a poignant marker of the power that technology (even if it does not

work) can wield over the human spirit. In a typical cargo cult, contact with the accoutrements of modern industrial civilization during wartime (in the form of airdrops of food and other essential items from large transport or cargo planes for soldiers stationed on the islands) allegedly convinced the islanders that all that they needed for utopia to arrive was the ability to attract the right kind of airplane to land and disgorge its cornucopia of wealth (tinned food, white goods, durables, clothes, etc.) on the island. It had been observed that airplanes tended to land on airstrips that were complete with runways, observation towers, a few standing airplanes, and radars. So, replicant infrastructure and replica airplanes were built with locally available materials in the hope that such engineering efforts would attract the bountiful flying machines from the sky. Needless to say, the planes never landed. The islanders waited, and perhaps are still waiting.

Cargo cults are a useful metaphor for thinking about many diverse phenomena in contemporary culture, ranging from shopping malls spreading across space to imitative work routines. When the success of shopping malls in a region spawns mall clones in adjoining areas that wait for customers who never arrive, we can see a cargo cult-like phenomenon at work. Gigantic hulks of retail, arrayed for miles, stand girded by empty parking lots in many parts of Europe, North America, and Asia.

Why do we wait for things to come to us? What guarantee is there that if we create replicas of the structures that house cultural expressions in other spaces, then we will automatically create the conditions of a new culture? Why be in such a hurry to acquire the latest technology, and why wait so long for the perfect machine, the perfect piece of code, the killer application? What is it about our situation that makes us so afraid of being left behind? Why do we fear obsolescence?

Easter Island

What more remarkable reminders of obsolescence can there be than the stone giants of Easter Island. They too stand, as if waiting, scanning the horizon of the Pacific for a perpetually deferred future. We know almost nothing about the people and the culture that created them, nor do we know what they were trying to communicate to the big ocean by placing these standing figures. What we do have a sense of, however, is the fact that this activity of intensive stone quarrying devastated the ecology and social structures of the island, and that ultimately, the culture could not bear the burden of its own communicative practices. Perhaps a useful object lesson. Sometimes it becomes useful to audit the social

and ecological footprints of our communicative practices.

The making of computer hardware and software also involves toxic materials, depressed wages, and prison labor. And a great deal of this occurs on either side of the Pacific seaboard, in East Asia and in California. How can we reconcile the utopian promises that are made on behalf of information and communication technologies with the dystopic realities of their production in our societies?

The Imaginary Island on the Dateline

The utopian impulse is castigated elsewhere, but remains uncritically celebrated when it comes to communication technologies. Sober, even conservative men in suits turn instantly into radicals when it comes to a new gadget. It is as if that which is questionable in politics becomes automatically acceptable when translated into culture. Every product, every device, every new piece of code or procedure announces itself as a revolution. As artists working with these devices we are often the most effective bearers of this revolutionary zeal. This takes us to our fifth Pacific destination: to an imaginary island that straddles the dateline, encompassing within its circumference the diurnal revolution such that

sunrise and sunset are locked into some kind of recursive embrace. And so you have sunrise media that almost immediately becomes sunset media. Where the pressure of getting a headstart into your tomorrow or the fear of being left behind in your yesterday leaves no room for today. What remains of the day is an insomniac anxiety about being adrift, lost in the ocean. How can we best jettison the burden of being new, so that we can stop worrying about becoming dated?

El Niño

Sailing in the Pacific is a hazardous job. Depending on the direction in which you are going you could run across strong contrary winds. A combination of atmospheric phenomena and pressure conditions creates weather systems that may be specific to, or originate in the Pacific, but have global consequences. One such combination is El Niño, which together with its companion La Niña, arises in the waters off the coast of Peru and creates weather conditions that lead to the depletion of fish stocks in some waters, and overabundance in others, as well as hurricanes in some places, and droughts in others. It was noticed sometime in the late nineteenth century that drought and famine struck India and Australia with remarkable concordance, and it was deduced

that this had something to do with the way in which the phenomenon known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation affects the weather system of the Indian Ocean and its littoral region.

This is well known. What is less well known, however, is the matter of a speculative economy, particularly in the fixing of global food and primary commodity prices that capitalizes on the eccentric, but not irregular periodicity of the El Niño and La Niña systems. Here you have a real time based-weather report, statistical observation of meteorological systems going back at least a century, commodity price fluctuation indices, and a globally integrated market working together to reap enormous profits from the tamed uncertainties of the weather. The futures market in primary commodities, in food and other natural products, works on this basis. Based on speculation, it creates enormous wealth for some and misery for billions of others. Here, data and disaster often go hand in hand. How can those of us who work with information in a creative manner begin to get a handle on the enormously significant ethical questions that arise from working with information in today's world, especially in the region that we describe as the Pacific Rim?

Nauru: Birdshit and Gold

The consequences of the generation of disproportionate assets through operations on information, knowledge and culture, require special and extended treatment, and this is probably not the best occasion to do so. But there is a Pacific Parable that can be drawn from the dots in the ocean that are composed of skeletons and shit. We refer to islands like Nauru in the Pacific (where one of us actually visited over a period of a few years as a teenager) whose entire economy once consisted of phosphate mining operations that processed fossil birdshit into gold. Nauru is a parable for the toxicity that accompanies a gold rush. The wealth that was produced within the span of few generations—the first ship with guano left in 1907—was consumed within a generation, leading to a population that is currently unwell, intoxicated, and poor. Growing up in Nauru was not the most exhilarating experience; the teenage utopia of a Pacific Paradise never matched up to the reality of dependence and decay. Today, Nauru has become reduced to a place where the Australian state outsources the detention of people it considers to be potential illegal immigrants.

When the accumulated deposits of millennia are mined within a generation, people are left with little or no resources for the future. If the

ruthless commodification of nature always produces a toxic culture, what would the relentless mining of a commons of culture produce? An unquestioning faith in the mechanisms of intellectual property takes for granted that the accumulated creative, imaginative, and mental labor of our ancestors, which informs all our thoughts and creativity today, is a resource available for plunder. This engenders an acquisitive, proprietary attitude towards cultural production that inhibits growth, learning, and future creativity.

The epics, stories, songs, and sagas that represent in some ways the collective heritage of humanity have survived only because their custodians took care not to lock them into a system of "end usage," but instead embellished them, which added to their health and vitality, before passing them on to others.

The parallels that we are drawing between guano and intellectual property rest on a variety of resonances. It could be argued that some of the unilateral features of TRIPS agreements that definitively shaped the destiny of Intellectual Property (IP) legislation across the world had a historical precedent, or at least shares a resonance with the piece of US Federal Law known as the Guano Islands Act (currently embodied in federal statutes as U.S. Code, Title 48, Chapter 8,

Sections 1411-1419). The Guano Islands Act, which became law in August 1856 (exactly 150 years ago), enabled any and all U.S. citizens to take possession (for the United States of America) of any island, rock or key, containing Guano deposits, anywhere in the world, provided they were not occupied or within the jurisdiction of any other government.

The intellectual property regime legislated by the TRIPS agreement allows citizens of several states to patent, trademark, copyright or otherwise assert their intellectual property claims on several forms of life, aspects of knowledge systems, cultural material, and practices (wherever previous private intellectual property claims are absent). This renders much of human culture akin to islands of Guano, primed for possession and mining. They create enclosures where none existed before.

When codes or languages close in on themselves, allowing no "interpolations" or trespasses after a point, they rapidly haemorrhage. How can we in our generation, immersed as we are in the language of property, ensure that there is space left for the cultivation of the commons? We ask this also because even initiatives like free and open source software, and the creative commons initiative, ultimately take recourse to the language

of ownership and property—albeit an annotated notion of ownership—to make their case. Is there a language for culture, especially for the reproduction of culture, that can elide the question of property?

The Kula Ring

Unlike commodities, gifts can accrue value to themselves as they pass from one person to another in a network of gift exchange. The ethnography of the gift exchange in the Trobriand Islands, made famous by the Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski as the Kula Ring in his remarkable book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, is an instance of this phenomenon; as is, in a less exotic sense, the ways in which heirlooms add value to themselves as they pass down generations. In a digital environment it is not necessarily the patina of age or prestige that will lend value to a digital object as it passes between persons; rather, it is the possibility that it will be improved, refined, and have things added to it through usage (without doing any damage to an always available earlier iteration of the object itself, which can be recovered through the layers that gather to a work in a palimpsest).

It is this fact that gives to electronic piracy, and to any act that frees information from the prison of artificial or illusory "originality," its true cutting edge. It does so not out of any radical intent to subvert the laws of property and the commodity, but because it makes eminent common sense for people to share information in any community through networks of informal sociality, especially if the act of sharing brings with it no depreciation in the value of that which is shared. Rather, the person who shares more accumulates prestige to herself; and by now we are all accustomed to extraordinary feats of electronic generosity (which sometimes carry with them an aura of "bravado") as a means of earning reputations within tightly-knit online communities. The new pirates are just as desirous of chronicles of their adventurous heroism as their ancestors! The Pacific has distinguished histories of gift giving, complex circulation and custodianship principles for cultural material, pirate economies, and mutinous sailors. How can this history of an adventurous, redistributive generosity inform our practices with information and culture today? What can Pacific traditions of abundant reproduction and replication teach the contemporary global moment? How may we rediscover a robust ethic of transaction that does not lock culture into the dungeon of "end user agreements" that inhibit circulation?

Depth, Shipwrecks, and Dark Fibre

It is well known that the Pacific holds within itself the world's deepest spots. Many fathoms below the surface of the sea is the Mariana Trench, the world's deepest place. Deep spots such as these are places where residues and remains accumulate. The depths of cyberspace, and what is beginning to be called "information society," like the depths of the ocean, are places where all sorts of residual pieces of information accumulate. Here, amongst forgotten and shipwrecked media, one encounters strange, mutant electrical life forms, beings made of what Geert Lovink has called "Dark Fibre".

So much of the discourse about information technology and communication is about light, about transparency and knowledge, that we forget that information is crucial for the manufacturing of disinformation. We are thinking right now of the enormous amount of energy that is being put into the media, electronic, online and print, all over the world, as a means to justify the naked aggression that the State of Israel is inflicting on the people of Lebanon. How can we begin to talk about the dark matter of information, or disinformation, and the political management of information, with at least as much attention and energy as we do about information enlightenment? How can we render the deep and the dark in our work with light?

Lemuria: Lost Continent

We come now to our final destination. This time, we are riding in a submarine. After all, we were plumbing the depths of the Mariana Trench a moment ago, so it makes sense to keep going under water, crawling along the sea floor in search of a lost, submerged continent. At the fag end of the age of geographical discovery in the late nineteenth century, the public imagination in many parts of the world, in its thirst for new worlds, hits upon the idea of lost and submerged continents. Mariners' tales, philosophical speculations, and utopian strains of thought were dredged from all across history to yield lost continents like Atlantis, and its variant in our neighborhood, Lemuria. Lemuria first came into view as an attempt to explain a zoological puzzle: the pattern of distribution of the lemur family of primates, which hugged the shorelines of islands and continental landmasses of the Asia-Pacific region, from Indonesia to Africa. Lemuria was invoked in explanations of everything from the missing link in the chain of human evolution, to the origin of diverse language families, the origin of the human species, and the routes taken during the first human migrations.

What interests us here is not the project of recovering a fascinating, imaginary history so much as a speculation about the distribution of a life form yielding an image of a space and a continent. This can lead to a prospective, as opposed to retrospective insight. Like lemurs, many of us who occupy spaces within the media arts, hug the shorelines of landmasses of cultures, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. We recognize that something, a family likeness perhaps, an eccentric sense of the kinship of our practices, the broad features of common questions and concerns, hint at some kind of extended lineage that we can draw from. These would include the histories of communication that we have inherited and the questions that our social, cultural, and political milieus confront us with. If we are to create cultural futures for ourselves, we will have to place and ground our practices on the terrain of a recovered continent. How can we begin mapping this continent that awaits our recovery of its submerged landscape? What do we need to do now to explore the shorelines of all our practices?

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PREFACE TO A GHOST STORY

On leaving the nearest suitable abandoned building, somewhere mid-leap, the unknown citizen hovers briefly, considering detours and the sour taste of regret.

Downstairs, there is a car waiting.
An old car with a new car smell,
like an evergreen matinée idol.
A quick getaway is possible,
theoretically.

The moment that might have been is over.

None but a nearby company of superheroes
has seen the descent or gauged its impact.
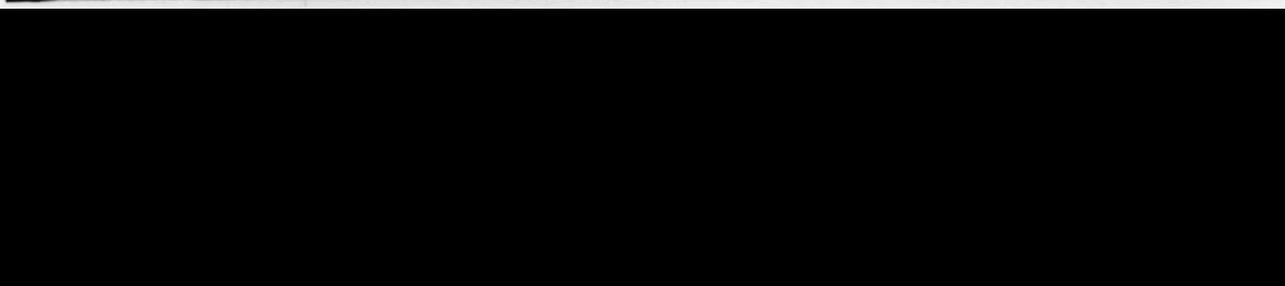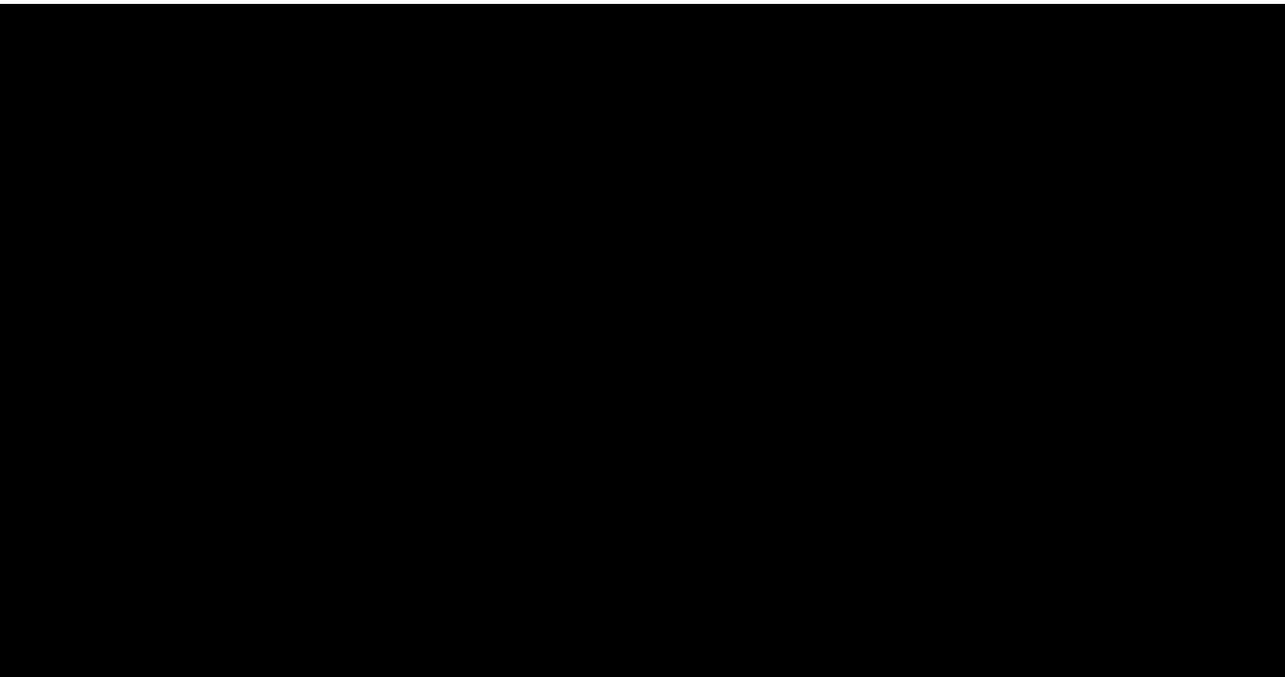
A gathering of shadows assesses the situation on the ground.

Bodies are fragile, easily broken.
A scrap of paper, an explanation,
sustains impact better.

Elsewhere, the unknown citizen's personal effects, a make-do archive, await discovery.

In the bag there are five photographs and the preface to a ghost story.
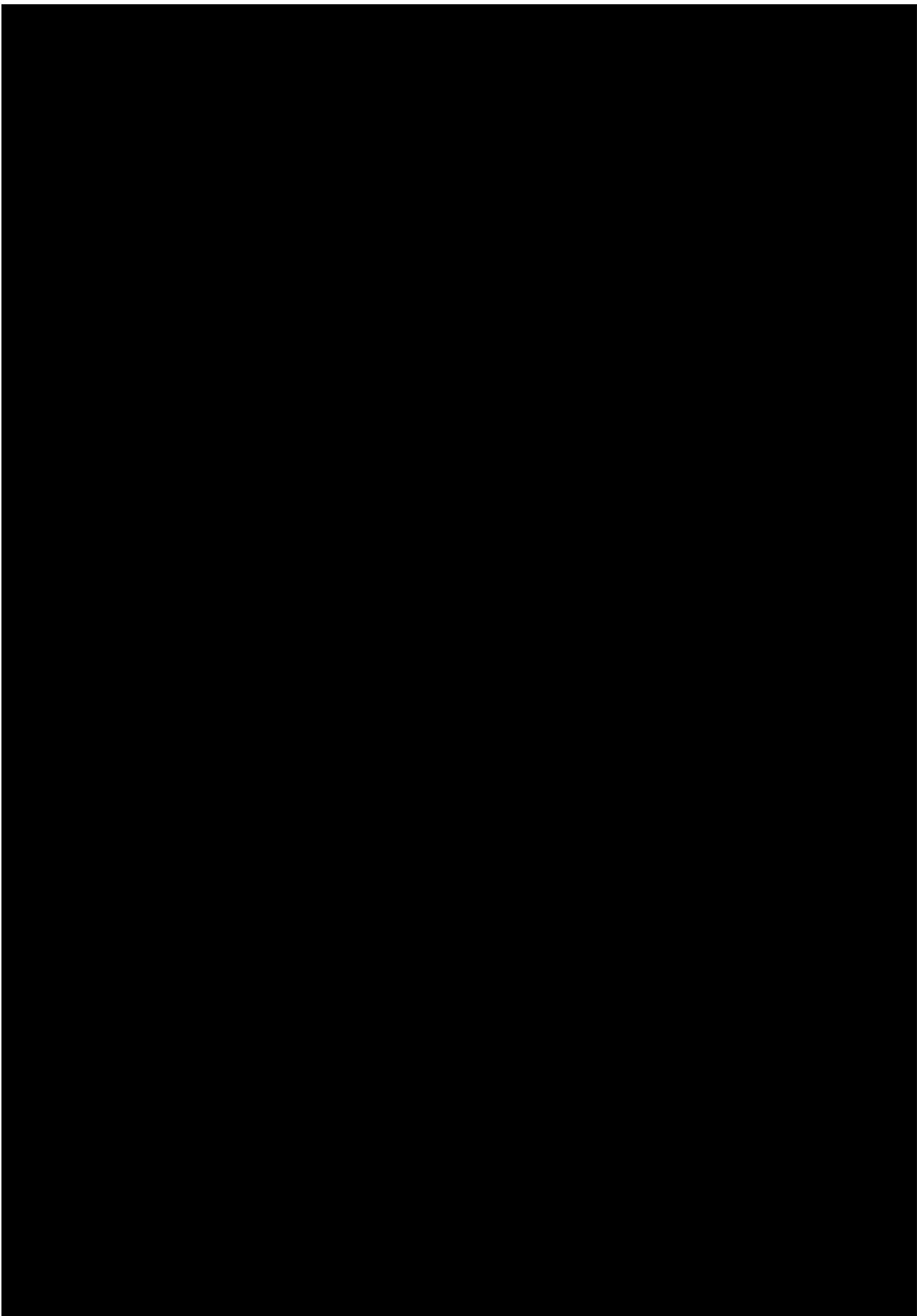
tremendous florid expedient file juggernaut imperial zombie overbearing tense tangible totalizing battlefield yes-man dissector nadir algorithmist Kalashnikov catatonic carapace veteran Armageddon freezer director biometrician shrill cost cell accountant vault drill evasive attester gripping abhorrent captor copyright inescapable alphanumeric secular endemic binary system fractal gamut admonisher vain stony abscess incorporeal decree anthrax sacrificer sepulchral summoner immune gun fetish fall-out combat Technicolor disposer speedy disclaimer eliminator barren uncontrolled gallows ablaze gunboat cable shunter severe industrialist undead disillusioner electric expensive unbeholden narcotic census abjurer shield glutton grandee dignitary inert impassive smooth conspirator calculus wreck immaterial abyss uranium executor impenitent terrorist sensor trader eruption sculptor fascist sanctuary futurist entropic central pillager splicer turbid unaccountable examiner sickness club venomous scatophagous drudge viral electronic disinfectant junta hawk secretive engorging enlightened excitor capital energetic zamindar cleaver excessive betrayer astringent bloc theorist concentrator canker spinner impermeable snatcher fighter scanner bazooka encircling corporal aggrandizer sedative excrescent

STAMMER, MUMBLE, SWEAT, SCRAWL, AND TIC

To be legible is to be readable. To be legible is to be an entry in a ledger—one with a name, place, origin, time, entry, exit, purpose, and perhaps a number. To be legible is to be coded and contained. Often, when asked an uncomfortable question, or faced with an unsettling reality, the rattled respondent ducks and dives with a stammer, a mumble, a sweat, a scrawl, or a nervous tic. The respondent may not be lying, but neither may he be interested in offering a captive legible truth either to the interrogator or in response to his own circumstances.

An insistence on legibility produces its own shadow: the illegible. Between the bare-faced lie and the naked truth lies the zone of illegibility—the only domain where the act of interpretation retains a certain ontological and epistemic significance.

We read each other for signs, not because we are opaque, or necessarily wish for opacity, but because our desires, fears, and experiences still require the life-giving breath of translation. The transparency that brooks no translation also requires no engagement.

The tree of life, and therefore of art, would be barren were it not for the fruit of occasional misunderstandings.

1. Stammer

Two performers, Mahmood Farooqui and Danish Husain, tell stories in Delhi as part of an attempt to revive a traditional narrative form called Dastangoi (story-speech).[1]

Among the stories they tell are accounts of people, incidents, places, and facts frozen as notes and jottings in the archives related to the Indian Subcontinent's partition in 1947. In telling these stories, they attempt to work through what it means to be poised on the hyphen between the terms "Indian" and "Muslim," in whichever order the two are read, when they are read together. Sometimes this exercise takes the form of a meditation on the conflict between life and the ledger.

The partition of India was meant to give rise to a new "homeland"—Pakistan—for "Muslim-Indians," who, of course, would cease to be so the moment they moved to Pakistan. The new Indian state, however, maintained that India was the only proper homeland for "Indian-Muslims," who were Indians as much as they were Muslim. Some strange things were bound to happen during this tug of war over how the "Indian-Muslim" or the "Muslim-Indian" could be made legible as present or future subjects of the two states.

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1   http://dastangoi.blogspot.com/

A person who had been a "Muslim-Indian" before partition ceased to be an "Indian-Muslim" the moment he became a Pakistani. And if he became a Pakistani, then he could no longer easily revert to being an Indian. To the Indian state, Pakistan was an enemy, and all Pakistanis, who had once been Indians, were actual or potential antagonists.

On the other hand, after a certain date, the state of Pakistan, the homeland of those who hitherto had been "Muslim-Indians," was no longer willing to accept any more "Indian-Muslim" emigrants from India. They were beginning to be seen as a burden, as outsiders, and at worst as potential fifth columnists from India in the new Pakistan.

This meant that those "Indian-Muslims" who had crossed over to Pakistan but subsequently wanted to return to India could not do so. Likewise, those "Muslim-Indians" who had stayed in India, but subsequently wanted to cross over to Pakistan, could not do so either. India would not let the first kind return, and Pakistan would not let the second kind enter. Both of these desires became obstacles for those who governed the two new states. The "Indian-Muslim" and the "Muslim-Indian" came unstuck between the powers who claimed the terms at either end of the hyphen that joined them. Their lives, and the claims that their lives made on history, were no longer seen as valid. The legibility of the law that classified people as either "Indian" or "Pakistani" now produced its own illegible shadow— that of the movements of people who did not quite fit into either category, and who, by their actions and by the articulation of their desires, refused to "fit" into either India or Pakistan, but stayed on as the stubbornly illegible marginalia of the unfolding of two grand narratives of new nationhood.

Farooqui and Husain's performance, which takes off from the investigations of historians like Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, comes to a head with the story of someone we like to think of as the "uncontainable man." Here is his story:[2]

There was once an uncontainable man. Let us call him Ghulam Ali. That is how he is named in the files and the correspondence that surround his strange but unremarkable story.

In the aftermath of the Partition of India, in 1947, this man, like thousands of others, could not offer a clear, concise reading of his self. He had not

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2   See Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

yet learned to be legible to himself as a citizen of either nation. Neither India nor Pakistan could hold him in place.

This uncontainable man wanted to stay on in India, but went to look for a missing relative in Pakistan. His decisions were sound; his timing was awry. Straying to search for someone, and then staying to search for someone—falling sick, tarrying, confusion—all this meant that in a few months' time he became a Pakistani. People were still figuring out how to spell Pakistan, and how to tell it apart from India. Ghulam Ali read himself with a stammer. The book that became his passport had already told a new story.

Caught between petitions, jottings, and files, Ghulam Ali tried to read himself—sometimes as an Indian, at other times as a Pakistani. But all he could say with confidence was that he had learned to play the Kettle Drum in the British Indian Army Band. Kettle Drumming is not a legible nationality. You cant just rat-a-tat-a-tat your way through two new warring nations as if it were a parade. Not if you are an ordinary decommissioned soldier with nothing to your name but a quest for a missing relative. Your petitions may travel, but you stay where you are written into history. Over time, even the inscription in the file, overwritten many times over, becomes as illegible as the

acts of travel that it sought to contain. Legibility, when it eats its own tail, digests itself into illegibility.

2. Mumble

In Ritwik Ghatak's *Jukti, Takko aar Gappo* (Arguments, Reasons, Stories), a Bengali film set against the backdrop of the first wave of Maoist rebellion in India in the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century, an old man, Nilkantha Bagchi, played by Ghatak himself, falls in with a group of "underground" Maoist insurgents in the course of his eccentric picaresque adventures.

His conversations with one of his indulgent hosts, a young man called Nachiketa, which cover a large historical remit, inevitably end in Nilkantha's admission, "I am confused, young man, I do not understand anymore." He travels with the band of rebels, and yet, it is they who are all conformists in comparison to his awkwardly exhibitionist display of ambiguity. Caught in the "cross fire" between the certainties of the state and the insurgents, Nilkantha's dialogue with Nachiketa (a name that packs in a throwback to Nachiketa, the death defying practitioner of the "via negativa" — neti, neti, neti/not this, not that, not the other— of the Katha Upanishad), is a celebrant of the mumbled doubt.

Nilkantha's insistence on inhabiting his confusion has other ramifications as well. In addition to its awkward evasion of articulated definitiveness, it also outlines a position based on a refusal to be an informant. The owning up to not being able to "understand" is as much an assertion of a stance of deliberate reticence as it is a tacit admission of ignorance. Often, in the course of cultural transactions, a demand is placed on the artist, curator, and critic to be a model "interpreter". This demand is usually underwritten by the assumption that the place, biography, history, predicament, relationship or situation that the "interpreter" is being asked to translate are available to him as a set of transparent templates. Nilkantha, by holding on to his confusion, questions the imperative of transparency.

Nilkantha's prevarication offers neither redemption nor rejection. Rather, it holds out hesitant incomprehensibility as a reason to keep going. The name Nilkantha—one of the names of Siva, the Hindu god who revives the universe through his dance of destruction—refers to Siva's blue throat (nil: blue, kantha: throat) that he acquired after swallowing the poison thrown up by the great ocean as it churned in search of the nectar of immortality between gods and demons. The "swallowing of poison" could be one way of looking at the acceptance of incomprehensibility.

Nilkantha "keeps going" until he is finally undone by the assurance of gunfire in one of Indian cinema's first depictions of the now commonplace "encounter," a form of contact between the state and its more recalcitrant subjects, which takes place through the medium of a well-placed bullet lodged in an insurgent head. A doubting body is an uncomfortable sprawl of questions. A dead body is a legible statistic in a police ledger. The transformation of the doubting body into the dead body is another kind of translation. It happens far too often, and though forensics is one way of looking at the dead body, especially in search of well-writ answers, it has not as yet yielded its own hermeneutic science, or the kind of interpretation that stays on the ball with the questions that continue to haunt the record, much like the confused ghost of a confused man.

3. Sweat

A judge in the western Indian city of Pune recently convicted a woman for murder based on the results of a Brain Electrical Oscillations Signature (BEOS) test.[3] This technique, developed by a Bangalore-based neuroscientist, claims to act as an efficient instrument for determining culpability in crime through brain mapping.[4]

The accused, who is said to have poisoned her fiancé with arsenic at a local McDonald's, was subjected to an electroencephalogram. Thirty-two electrodes were placed on her skull while she sat in silence and listened to a series of statements read out mainly in the first person, some of which were neutral, such as "the sky is blue" while others made assertions which could be connected to the crime, such as "I bought arsenic" or "I went to McDonald's."

Unlike other neural investigation and prognostic techniques used in forensic psychology, BEOS does not rely on an evaluation of skin texture (as in a lie detector) or brain images (as in Narco Analysis) associated with the making of "true" or "false" statements by the suspect in response to a set of questions, often fielded while the accused is made suggestible through strong pharmacological intervention. BEOS does not rely on the accused having recourse to speech, but on what is supposed to be revealed by the colors of her silence. It "maps" what happens in the accused person's brain while she "listens" rather than when she speaks. This silent cartography of the brain divides the cerebral cortex into areas corresponding to "concepts" and

"experiences." According to this theory, should the area of the brain devoted to the storage of "experiential" data light up in response to stimuli pertaining to the scene or particulars of a crime, the suspect is taken to be someone who has actually participated in the unfolding of the events in question. The brain is taken to preserve within it a legible impression of the crime, much as a roll of film contains an emulsion on which a scene may be imprinted through the action of light.

The question is: is a dream, an act of the imagination, a response to a murder in a film, an "experience" or a "concept?" If the life of the imagination is rendered indistinct from the life of actions then all of us are criminals, or have been, at least at one point or another. We have all experienced the fear and rush of violence in dreams, in recollections, or through recounting.

What if we did not commit a murder, but obsessed about it instead? What if we went over, again and again, the real or imagined details of a conspiracy in our minds? Would we then be conspirators or witnesses, or both—in turns, and all together?

Would it then make sense to say that if you are not an eligible victim, then you must be a

3   Anand Giridharadas, "India's use of brain scans in courts dismays critics," *International Herald Tribune*, September 15, 2008.
4   Lawrence Liang, "… And Nothing but the Truth, So Help Me Science," *Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers* (2007): 100-110.

legible perpetrator? What would make better sense to be?

4. Scrawl

In looking at traditional land deeds and documents that encode customary titles, one is struck by the scrawls that thicken the task of reading. The research of Solomon Benjamin, a scholar of urbanism based in Bangalore, involves looking at the changing ways of registering legal and customary claims to land.[5]

Benjamin's work takes the form of a series of digressions into the meanings of signatures and countersignatures. To him, the story of a land deed or other such documents, is told by the marks and annotations that overlay each other on paper to form a palimpsest of claims—here reinforcing, there overruling exclusive rights—erecting, dismantling, and shifting the boundaries between enclosures. Claims touch claims, infect claims, mate, proliferate. Relationships to land become both more and less than being simply about "property." The rights of ownership are read against the claims of custody. Usage, usufruct, usury, uxoriality, estates, and estovers all shade off into

discussions about different kinds of entitlement. Habits and habitation yield to each other, and the thin fabric of legal legibility often buckles under the overlay of ink on ink on ink on paper.

Jane Caplan, historian of information processes and identification techniques, takes a close interest in the evolution of the signature. To her, the signature is an "equivocal artifact deeply mired within the terrain of legibility/illegibility."[6] Citing historians who claimed that an illegible hand was seen as a mark of gentility in the 16th century, Caplan points out that "legibility" and the penmanship that produced it were closely tied to what was once seen as the "vulgar" commercial activity of accountancy. This view reversed itself in nineteenth-century Britain and its empire, when good handwriting came to be associated with gentility.

The signature, however, remains an exception to the cult of legibility. Even now, legal opinion customarily holds that a "normal" signature is an "illegible" signature, i.e., that illegibility is a defining feature of the signature, "which is not a piece of writing intended to convey a meaning, but a graphic, symbol, or device."[7]

Illegibility, in other words, is the hallmark of

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5   Solomon Benjamin, "Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses," *Frontier, Sarai Reader 07*, 2007.
6   Sensor-Census-Censor, *Investigating Circuits of Information, Registering Changes of State*, Delhi: Sarai-CSDS, 2007.
7   ibid.

individuality. Children learning to write their name legibly soon realize that growing up involves the transformation of a readable name into an illegible scrawl. The consistency of this illegible scrawl through time then becomes the identifier of a well-formed adult's ability to represent him or herself on paper.

How can the knots and scrawls of human relationships, especially as they get entangled over generations, be read in anything other than their illegibility? What does an "illegible" reading amount to? Would hearing such a reading amount to listening to the rustling glossolalia of aging paper? In such situations of universally diminished legibility, disputes over land would often end in long, drawn-out negotiations that in their durability acted as tacit instruments of compromise. So someone owned, someone ploughed, someone grazed, someone camped, and someone lived, and all of them quarreled and felt that they were as much in the right as they were in the wrong.

Today, however, property claims are hard-coded with digital signatures. Barcodes don't scrawl into each other the way that inked in-scriptions once could. A patch of land is no longer a field of interpretation, guarded by a picket fence with many gaps and holes. As land becomes transacted on a global scale, and as traditional

claims and claimants are erased in neat satellite imaged cadastral records, information—not habitation—becomes the key to property. A right to land is no longer a dispute to be settled by reading a layer of ink under another layer of ink. It is instead a piece of information protected by a firewall, amenable to entrance only on the pronouncement of a password, and only legible to its owner.

5. Tic

The jagged peaks of stock market fluctuations are legible, apparently, to sharp punters on good days. The nervous tics on the faces in the crowds that gaze with rapt attention at the scrolling news of the day's highs and lows on the electronic murals that wrap themselves around the glass facades of the citadels of finance are eloquent testimonies to the affective intensity of capital.

It is possible, some say, to read despair, skepticism, hope, and euphoria in the glyphs formed by these crests and troughs. If so, then news of investment is as sentimental as the chapters of a pulp romance. The promise of romance and the hope of eventual recompense on risky bids are the eventual trophies for which both speculators and sweethearts vie. Yet each lover, and each stockbroker, is a prisoner of a private language. Every man and woman who has laid a wager on

the possibility of a return in love or money has done so knowing that the object of their attentions may not even hear, let alone care for, the intensity of their longing. How many have squandered their dreams on Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, and to what little avail?

Sentimental poets declaim that "to love is to lose." Addicted market players see the losses of some as the opportunities for a win on the "rebound." And so, victory and defeat, pursuit and being pursued, blur into each other such that it begins to be difficult to tell losses from gains. If the legibility of loss lies in recognizing the state of being bereft, then it becomes equally necessary to know that bereavement can render us speechless. Within silence lies another, keener illegibility. And who would dare edit the lexicon of a wordless language with a million entries for only two sets of meanings: intangible hope and opaque despair?

JUST THE NAME
(ASHWATTHAMA)

I.
Ashwatthama
(the man, not the unfortunate
dead elephant)

Ashwatthama
(whisper, rumor, malingering
battlefield tumor)

Ashwatthama
(wandering warrior, and son of a warrior)

Ashwatthama
(haunted, hunted)

Ashwatthama
(Abortionist of the future, prisoner of time)

Ashwatthama
(immortal, undead)

Ashwatthama
(deserter, deserted, desert Aswhatthama)

Just the name
(Ashwatthama)

II.

Is there an intimate fear in the moment of recognition of a haunted shadow, stalked by memories and exhausted by time?

A subterranean presence raging to liquidate and erase, even as it is haunted by the aftermath of precisely similar acts that occurred elsewhere. A self that desires to wreak annihilation, and is simultaneously troubled by the annihilation that surrounds him. Cornered by rage, letting no other emotion through, and yet afraid and paralyzed by a similar escalation of rage in everyone else.

This amorphous site within eludes thought and description amid the continuous spiral of violence around. The edge of the spiral closes mutely on everyone, no longer an agonized sound or a distant blur.

Language dries up in this baking enormity, the searing screen of the war machine. Living in the parched aftermath, symbols evaporate quickly.

We used to think it was only a stage, this "war of all against all." But when Ashwatthama makes his appearance, another version of eternity gusts in behind him, where time does not unfold, and future and past are a double blackmail.

It is only the haunting specter of undead anger that achieves immortality, passing from generation to generation in the form of an in-herited curse.

Ashwatthama roams in the inhospitable crack between aching memories and gnawing appre-hensions, between the launching of the missiles and their landing—which cannot be avoided, since all the withdrawal codes have been forgotten.

III.

In the Mahabharata, the Sanskrit epic that narrates the Great War between the Pandavas and Kauravas that inaugurated the Kali Yug (the era of decline), the episode of Ashwatthama, the eternal warrior, is a parable that suggests the durability of war as a way of life, regardless of the mutable datelines of cease-fires.

Ashwatthama, a prominent warrior in the Kaurava camp, is also the son of the Kaurava General, Dronacharya. Dronacharya's fondness for his son is well known, and so, the Pandavas devise a stratagem to momentarily distract Dronacharya in the middle of the battle: they decide to spread a rumor of Ashwatthama's death so as to disarm and defeat him.

Yudhishtira, the Pandava prince famous for always speaking the truth, is given the responsibility to tell Dronacharya about his son's death. However, he turns the lie into a half-truth. A battle elephant, also called Ashwatthama, is felled, and immediate after he tells Dronacharya "Ashwatthama hata" (Ashwatthama is dead), he quietly says "Iti Gaja" (I mean the elephant). Stunned with grief, Dronacharya stops fighting, and is easily dispatched with a series of well-timed volleys of arrows from the Pandava formations. The tide of the battle turns, and the Pandavas are victorious. Enraged at the duplicity that felled his father, Ashwatthama vows to destroy the Pandavas' future. He makes his way into the Pandava camp at midnight and kills the children of the five Pandava princes by Draupadi, their common wife.

He is then pursued by Arjuna, the Pandava hero. Ashwatthama and Arjuna hurl deadly missiles at each other, which together contain the power to destroy the world. Alarmed at the prospect of total destruction, assembled sages prevail upon Arjuna and Ashwatthama to withdraw their weapons. Arjuna knows how to do this, but Ashwatthama has never learned how to withdraw a missile that he has launched. Alarmed at the prospect that his suspended missile could unleash the apocalypse, the assembled sages ask Ashwatthama to choose a target for his weapon. Ashwatthama seizes this opportunity to take revenge for the death of his father by attempting to destroy the unborn child of even the children of his enemies. He chooses the womb of Uttara, the grieving widow of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu, where the only inheritor of the Pandava legacy, Parikshit, is growing as a foetus. Uttara aborts. But the god Krishna rescues the stillborn foetus and revives it.

As punishment for his attempt to destroy the future, Ashwatthama is cursed by Krishna to roam the earth until the end of time. Ashwatthama's jewelled talisman, his mani, which bestowed upon its wearer freedom from the fear of injury, disease or hunger, is wrenched from him. Ashwatthama haunts the earth forever, like an injured, sick, scared, and hungry shadow.

IV.

You must grieve, Ashwatthama, yet how must you grieve?
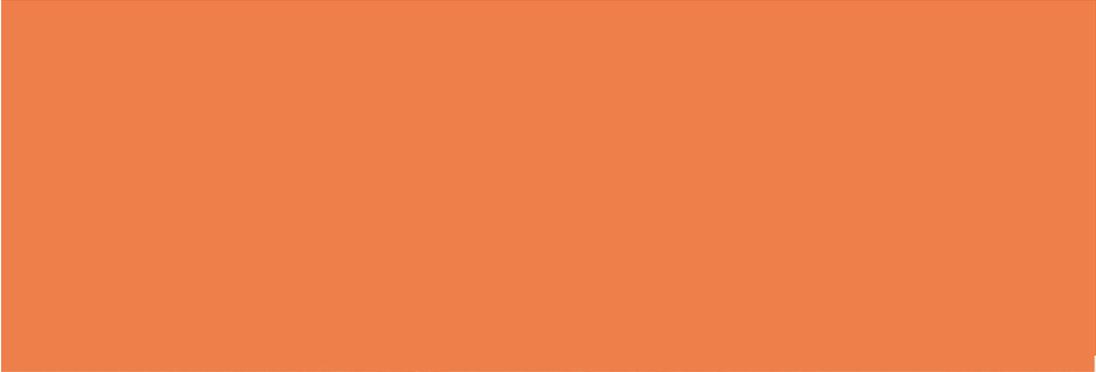
beyond sclerotic thoroughbred tremendous florid expedient file exclusive scalding force blot abustle unsound impatient frightener extreme code haunting storm smart gag currency encumbrance dazzler hunter equivocal siege incommensurable shadow warrior enticing blade sloganeer unforgiving sensate axial bayonet berserk talisman factory shot technopreneur superscalar cosh corporate effective seismic automatic eugenic emergency continuator impassable graph ascendant scab tabulator exterminator warrant impregnable eschaton attorney vacant eminent effigy secure haemorrhagic copious boss accursed finagler efficient cord compulsive desolation sponge barricaded sour hungry culture bulldozer slaver capo solvent dismal index barrier adipose infiltrator calamity strategist usurer disengager collateral incommunicado coruscant bewilderer campaign unabashed conjuror undefeated bailiff incomparable grave entangled caprice efficacious identifier eidolon moniterist arrester unspeakable inexhaustible solid incarnate artificer steamy sword crushing delusory actual decimator bullet unabated contemptuous vector ravenous fusible toxic inciting connector tycoon shock abundant banker executioner thresher spy simulator discoverer everywhere sacrosanct sinker thorium archon sexy consultant engine

DIGRESSIONS FROM THE MEMORY OF A MINOR ENCOUNTER

Once, not so long ago, a damp, rained-on afternoon's stroll in Paris took us across the Avenue d'Iéna, from contemporary art to ancient and medieval Oriental art, from the Palais de Tokyo to the Musée Guimet. There, standing in front of a frieze from the Banteay Srei temple in Cambodia's Siem Reap province, which is now located in the Guimet's permanent collection at the far end on the ground floor, we felt the sharp edge of estrangement in something that also felt downright familiar. The Banteay Srei frieze narrates a story from the Mahabharata, a Sanskrit epic. The story is of two brothers, the demons Sunda and Upasunda, whose tussle over the attentions of Tilottama, an Apsara—a courtesan of Heaven, sent by the gods to destroy them with jealousy—was the cause of their downfall. Like most others who grew up listening to stories in India, it was a story we knew well, even if only as an annotation to the main body of the epic. But it wasn't the details of the story that intrigued us that afternoon, nor the carved contours of Sunda and Upasunda's rage, not even the delicacy of the depiction of Tilottama's divisive seduction. Instead, standing before these stone images, made in a region roughly 3500 miles to the east of where we live in Delhi, and exhibited in a museum roughly 6500 miles to the west, we felt compelled to think again about distance and proximity, and about how stories, images, and ideas travel. The story of Sunda, Upasunda, and Tilottama was probably first told around 200 BC in the north-western part of the South Asian subcontinent. Between the first telling of the story and the carving of the frieze in a clearing in the forest of Seam Reap in c. 967 CE lay a little more than a thousand years, and an eastwards journey of a few thousand miles. Between its carving and our sudden encounter with it in Paris there lay a little more than another millennium and a westwards journey halfway across the world. These intervals in time and space were overlaid with an elaborate circuit that encompassed travel, conquest, migration and settlement, wars and violence, the clearing of forests, the quarrying of stone, slavery and indenture, skilled artisans, the faces and indiscretions of the men and women who would become the inspiration for jealous demons and divine courtesans, a few thousand years of history, the crossing of oceans, the rise and fall of several empires across different continents, and the repeated telling and forgetting of a minor story. Contemporaneity, the sensation of being together in a time, is an ancient enigma of a feeling. It is the tug we feel when our times pull at us. But sometimes one can get the sense of a paradoxically asynchronous contemporaneity—

the strange tug of more than one time and place. As if an accumulation, or thickening, of our attachments to different times and spaces were manifesting themselves in the form of some unique geological oddity, a richly striated cross-section of a rock, sometimes sharp, sometimes blurred, marked by the passage of many epochs. Standing before Sunda, Upasunda, and Tillottama in the Musée Guimet, we were in Siem Reap, in Indraprastha (an ancient name for Delhi, in whose vicinity much of the Mahabharata story is located), in New Delhi, in nineteenth-century Paris, and in the Paris of today. We were standing in many places and in many times. Sometimes art, and the presence of an image does move you. And as a consequence, you find yourself scattered all over the place. How can we begin to think about being scattered? Collections of objects from different parts of the world are indices of different instances of scattering. The minor encounter that we experienced in the Musée Guimet is one kind of scattering. It teaches us that sometimes the familiar may encounter us in the guise of strangeness, and then suggests that we learn to question the easy binary shorthand of the familiar and the strange as a way to think about ourselves, others, and the world. It suggests the possibility of other less polarized, and more

layered relationships between cultural processes. But this is not the only possible kind of scattering provoked by the presence of images and stories that echo the familiar in uncanny ways. An increased intensity of communication creates a new kind of experiential contagion. It leads to all kind of illegitimate liaisons between things that were meant to be unfamiliar. The first thing that dissolves under the pressure of this promiscuous density of contact across space is the assumption that different degrees of "now" can be better obtained in different places; that Delhi, or Dar-es-Salaam are somehow less "now" than Detroit. The "now" of different places leach into each other with increasing force. The realities of different contemporaneities infect each other. This condition generates an active production of estrangement, a kind of nervous expulsion, a gladiatorial of repulsion scripted either through an orientation of contempt or of homage. Why contempt and homage? They permit the automatic assumption of a chasm between the beholder and the object of contemplation.

The tropes of contempt and homage are an optic through which some perennially survey others and then evaluate them along an axis where the production of estrangement has to be resolved in terms of either positive or negative regards.

The "survey" mode of understanding the world presumes a stable cyclopean and panoptic center of surveillance to which the gaze can never adequately be returned, ensuring that a meeting of visions can never take place on an equal footing. Like Sunda and Upasunda fighting over Tilottama, the more different parts of the world come to be aware of each other's desires, the more dispute there will be over who can have access to more of the contemporaneity that both desire—the one who has more confidence in himself or the one who has more of the élan of the "other". Key to this conflict of perceptions is a refusal to recognize that, like the sudden appearance of a Sanskrit story in a Khmer frieze in a Parisian museum to a collective of practitioners from Delhi, the relationships between familiarity and estrangement are compromised by many folds and cracks in space and time. That estrangement is only familiarity deferred, or held in abeyance. Rather than recognize the fact that familiarity and estrangement are only two nondistinctive and contiguous instances of cognitive and affective transfer, this tendency to resolve the unfamiliar into the binary of the "like" and the "alien" needs constant mechanisms of reinforcement. The duality of contempt and homage is one such mechanism. In the first instance of contempt, the object of the survey is

pinned down in taxonomic terms, explained away as a means to require no further engagement, making it impossible to blur the distinction between the surveyor and the surveyed. In the second instance of homage, the object is exalted beyond the possibility of an engagement. In either case, a difference, once identified, is made into a factor of cognitive and affective excision. This forecloses the possibility of recognizing that what is identified and estranged may in fact be disturbingly similar to what is familiar, even though it may be located in realities that are difficult to translate with coherence or consistency. It is to not recognize the face of a stranger when you look at your own reflection. The amalgam of the sensations of familiarity and estrangement evokes a new register of a tense accommodation, a hospitality to the presence of the "strange" that is not without attendant unease to the "familiar." In the end this may guarantee the disavowal of mutual antipathy, and the cultivation of some sort of cohabitation. We can change the framework of the story on the Banteay Srei frieze. Sunda and Upasunda can both survive by agreeing to stay within the framework of a generous but awkward polyandry. They can do this by learning to negotiate with Tilottama's claims on both of their desires, and to give a little more effort at being open to unpredictable

encounters. What does having more of an encounter do in the domain of contemporary art? An assessment of the amplitude of signals and the intensity of contact that marks our world today is still waiting to be made. One of the ways in which this could be undertaken would be for us to try to account for the implications of the growth in Internet-based connectivity at a global scale. The Internet, as we know it today, is barely a decade and a half old, and its expansion can be dated to as late as the mid-nineties of the last century. Curiously, the expansion of the Internet and the recent expansion of the number of biennales are precisely coincident with each other. Today, it is estimated that 13.9% of the world's population, or 888,681,131 people have some kind of regular Internet access.[1] A majority of these are in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in parts of East Asia (South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore). Internet usage grew by an estimated 126.4% from 2000 to 2005, and the highest growth rates were in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Chinese is the second most used language on the Internet, and a country like India experienced a growth of 269.6% in Internet usage, from

5,000,000 people in 2000 to 18,481,000 in 2005. This means that some 18 million people in India are in daily contact (through labor, education, correspondence, and entertainment) with a medium that enables an exceptional level of global reach. Actual figures for Internet usage are probably significantly higher, as most people in India and other such societies tend to go online from computers at street corner cyber cafés as they often do not own computers or are able to access them properly at work. No other platform of communication in world history has been able to claim that it has the sustained attention of 13.9 % of the world's population in a span of ten years. Ten years is a very short time in the history of culture. It is the span between three successive Documentas. Let us assume that Internet usage will continue to grow at least at this rate for the next twenty years. This means that in the time it takes to produce four Documentas, approximately 75% of the world's population will have entered a sustained and deeply networked existence. Nothing has prepared us for the consequences of this depth and density of communicative engagement at a global scale. And unlike previous expansions in communicative capacity (print, radio, cinema,

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1. All figures acccessed from here: Internet World States. March 29, 2005. http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm

television), this time, with the Internet and new digital devices, we see readers who are also writers and editors; users who are also producers; viewers who are also, at least potentially, creators, entering a global space of cultural production. While it would be simple to argue for a cause-and-effect relationship between the expansion of the constituencies served by the Internet and the growth in number of biennials and other inter-national art events, it would be equally facile to dismiss the implications of the emergence of a deep augmentation in

global communications for the contemporary arts scene. What are these implications? First, that the discursive communities around contemporary art, like the discursive communities in science or politics, are poised to undergo a significant transformation; and second, that the notions of bounded authorship that have dominated the idea of what art production is in the recent past are being challenged by an increasing diversity of positions vis-à-vis the role of authorship, cre-ativity, and intellectual property in the actual domain of global cultural practice. Both of these formulations need some elaboration. The dis-cursive framework of contemporary art, like any other domain of thought and practice today, can no longer be viewed as something that occurs only

between an exclusive cognoscente of curators, practitioners, theorists, and critics whose primary location is and will continue to be Europe and North America. Discursive networks can afford to practice an exclusionary mode of existence only at the risk of their own obsolescence. Every node in such a network can survive only if it is able to affect a critical mass of new connectivities, and act as a conduit for new information about a very rapidly changing world. In politics, it is impos-sible to conceive of a discursive framework that does not include an active interest in what is going on in the majority of the world. The realities of the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central, South and East Asia affect what happens in Europe and North America profoundly. The networks of global finance and trade, or even of distributed production that char-acterize the world economy today, would not exist as they do without the Internet. Similarly, the globality of the production and dissemination of news is deeply tied into the substance of everyday politics. It is impossible to separate domestic politics in any major Asian or European country, from say, what is happening in Iraq today. To say this is to state the obvious. But what is obvious in a discussion about the economy, the media or politics is somehow seen as novel, or esoteric, in

culture. This prevailing surprise about the fact that the "contemporary" is also "trans-territorial," that "now" is "elsewhere" as much as it is "here," or that it is as "strange" as it is "familiar," is one of the symptoms of the lag in the levels of informed discussion between the domains of culture and of political economy. However, while it may still be possible for some to argue, from a perspective that privileges the present state of affairs, that a "globalisation" of contemporary culture may imply an attempt to impose a specifically "Western modernist" agenda on a global scale due to the inequalities in articulative capacity, it would be impossible to sustain this argument in the long term. The momentum generated by different processes of cultural articulation set in motion in various local contexts all over the world indicates a reality of densely networked, yet autonomous tendencies, movements, genres, styles, and affinities that are far more complex than the discourse of "Westernization" would allow for. Even a cursory glance at the crosscurrents of influence in global popular culture—in music, film, cuisine, fashion, literature, comics, and gaming—would reveal the inner workings of this web. We are in a world where cinema from Mumbai, manga comics from Tokyo, music from Dakar, literature from Bogotá, cuisine from Guangzhou, fashion from Rio de Janeiro, and games from Seoul act as significant global presences, rivalling, and occasionally overshadowing, the spread and influence of their European and North American analogues. The trends in contemporary art practice and exhibition can in the end only be an echo of this banal generality of the everyday life of global cultural traffic and transaction. The growing presence of art practitioners and works from "outside" Europe and North America within major European and North American exhibitions, and the realization that there are non-Western histories of modernity, has had two ancillary effects. It has demonstrated that these practices and practitioners, and their histories, have a significant global perspective. They speak to the world from their own vantage points, and have done so for a while. It has also led to a pressure by non-Western practitioners, curators, and theorists to lay claim within non-Western spaces to a global cultural space through the founding of contemporary art institutions, networks of practitioners, and exhibition circuits. One implication of this has been the proliferation of biennials and other international exhibitions of contemporary art in spaces outside Europe and North America, and a corresponding increase in the discourse generated through and around contemporary art in these areas. Another implication

of this has been the nascent presence of the curator-critic of contemporary art, who is located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, or who finds himself/herself located within, or at a tangent to, new Asian, African, and Latin American diasporas in Europe and North America. At first this new curator-critic may be someone who seems to speak only to, and for his/her own place of origin; then he/she may be seen as working with other curators and artists within specific regional (but cross-national) settings; then with peers working in similar contexts elsewhere in the world; and finally, he/she will be seen as laying a claim to the acts of speaking to and working with artists from everywhere, including Europe and North America. These claims, as and when they occur (and some are indeed occurring even now) will be based not on the operation of affiliations based on geo-politics, geography and location, but on elective affinities of interest, taste, curiosities, methodologies, and concerns. This will coincide with the rise of institutional and non-institutional structures, spaces, and networks in contemporary art that have significant presences outside Europe and North America. These entities will become fora for discussion and exhibition, as well as fulcrums that enable the leveraging of trans-regional contexts for collaboration and curation. The idea that contemporary art has to have a centered location that privileges a particular history or cultural framework will erode, and give way to the idea that contemporaneity is best expressed within the logic of a flexible and agile network that responds to emergences and tendencies on a global scale. This means that the logic of spatial and cultural distance that operated as a perennial handicap to the non-Western curator, practitioner or theorist, is unlikely to remain of much significance. Likewise, the European or North American artistic practitioner or curator will be increasingly called upon to demonstrate their relevance in a multi-polar world where European or North American origins, or location, will no longer operate as an automatic set of credentials. In a world that grows more used to being networked, curators and artists from different spaces will work together, and in each other's spaces, as a matter of course. They will question, challenge, and subvert stable identifications of spatiality and cultural affiliation with their everyday practices. This will not necessarily mean better or worse art or discourse; what it will mean, however, is that the terms "global" and "contemporary" will resonate in a host of different ways, so as to indicate the active presences of what was hitherto absent, silent, or muted voices

and expressions. The second formulation, that of the challenge to the notion of bounded authorship as a result of the expansion of a global platform like the Internet, is perhaps of deeper significance for contemporary art, even if it is at the moment less visible. The Internet has set in motion peer-to-peer networks and online communities that begin to do more than share cultural intelligence; they also begin to occasionally collaborate on the making of things, and of meaning, often at a global scale, in a way that is at variance with mainstream protocols of intellectual property. This is most clearly visible in the global open source communities, but the influence of the "open source" idea has ramifications that exceed software alone. This tendency is increasingly audible in the domain of a new global musical sensibility based on file sharing, remixing, and recycling of extant musical material, with scant regard to the admonitions either of the protectors of intellectual property or cultural purity. It is also present in peer-to-peer networks founded by scientists, legal scholars, philosophers, historians, and other social scientists who use the Internet to establish a new intellectual commons that gains strength through regular usage, participation and contribution, often in direct opposition to the hierarchies prevalent in institutionalized

academic and intellectual life. These new communities of research and reflection are rapidly establishing today's bridgeheads of enquiry, freed from the inherent conservatism founded on concerns for proprietorial or commodifiable utility that ties production in academic institutions and research spaces to "safe" areas of inquiry through the instruments of intellectual property. Increasingly, these "open" spaces are where science, philosophy, and social theory are "hot"; they are more responsive to the world around them. By placing emphasis on the commons and other forms of collaboration, non-property, or anti-property arrangements, open source practitioners and theorists (be they in software, music, science or the humanities) have initiated a profound turbulence in the cultural economy. The domain of contemporary art cannot remain immune to this turbulence, which exists all around it. It is perhaps a matter of time before the ethic of sharing, collaborating, and commoning become commonplace within contemporary art, just as it has in other domains of culture. In a nascent sense, it is already visible in numerous curatorial collaborations and artist-practitioner-technician-curator-theorist networks that transcend borders and disciplinary boundaries, that give new twists to the "publicness" of public art projects,

and that raise vexed questions of "ownership" of the ephemeral and networked works and processes that they generate. The increasingly dense, cross-referential nature of practices within contemporary art also points in this direction, leading us to think of the space of contemporary art not as a terrain marked by distinct objects, but as one striated by works that flow in and out of each other, or cohabit within a semantic territory in layers of varying opacity. Crucially, a liberality of interpretation about what constitutes intellectual property and what devolves to the public domain will be central to defending the freedom of expression in art. Art grows in dialogue, and if intellectual property acts as a barrier to the dialogue between works, then it will be met with serious challenges that arise from the practice of artists and curators. All this cannot happen without conflict and disruption. The domain of the sign is the playing field of a new cultural economy where the generation of value is hinged upon the principles of intellectual property. There is, however, an increasing perforation of this domain by practices that are at variance with the principles of property in culture for a variety of ethical, social, intellectual, aesthetic, and pragmatic reasons. The likely consequence of all this is that the tasteful tranquility that marked the enterprise of

aesthetic contemplation will find itself besieged by disputations, legal suits, accusations of copyright infringement, and intense, invasive scrutiny by holders of intellectual property. Making art will increasingly be about forging new legal concepts, and creating new economies of usage, ownership, and participation. Making and exhibiting art will also be about fashioning politics, practicing a new economics, and setting precedents or challenges in law. The existence of contemporary art is ultimately predicated on the conditions of life of its practitioners. These conditions of life are constituted by the myriad of daily acts of practice, of reading, inscribing, interpreting, and repurposing the substance of culture across cultures. In millions of incremental ways, these acts transpose the "work" of art to a register where boundedness, location, and property rest uneasily. The work of art, the practitioner, the curator, the viewer, as well as and the acts of making, exhibiting, and viewing, all stand to be transformed. All that is familiar becomes strange; all that is strange becomes familiar.

YAKSHA PRASHNA
THE YAKSHA'S QUESTIONS

YAKSHI

Yaksha:

Mrtah katham syaat purushaha?

When is a man as good as dead?

Yudhishtira:

Mrto daridrah purushoh.

A poor man is a dead man.

Yakshi:

Why does the road to the parliament pass by the central bank?

Raqs:

Because a citizen without a bank account is as good as a dead man without a funeral, or a monument without a martyr.

Yaksha:

What is more precious than gold, as worthless as a scrap of paper, heavier than stone, faster than the wind, slower than a turtle, lighter than a feather, as deadly as poison, and as welcome as a blessing?

Raqs:

A banknote. Because it can be valuable and worthless. Because it can be sluggish and volatile. Because it can weigh you down with debt or set you free. Because it can kill you and save you, and because it can kill you by saving you.

Yaksha:

Why does a bank have to have guards, guns, and

barbed wire fences?

Raqs:

To protect people from money.

Yakshi:

When money talks, who listens?

Raqs:

The deaf hear, the blind see, the wise man goes mad, the mad woman comes to her senses, the gossip turns silent, the spy reveals all, money lenders dance, misers become poets, artists become mathematicians, thieves pray, and holy men babble.

Yaksha:

Why do banknotes carry portraits?

Raqs:

Because the promise to pay the bearer can have no meaning if it is not backed by a picture of the head of a king, a dowager, a dictator, a dead prophet or at the very least a magnificent wild beast. Because a banknote without a picture is like a security guard without a uniform.

Yakshi:

In that case, why did Ramkinkar Baij sculpt me naked?

Raqs:

Because he knew the answer to the previous question. And because, though everyone knows that the emperor has no clothes, it is less well

known that his treasury is actually empty, and that its guards keep their vigil, naked and alone.

Yakshas are the primordial, aboriginal guardian spirits of Indic mythology. They foster the health and well-being of communities, bestow fertility on women and livestock, protect forests and water bodies, guard cities, homesteads, gold and hidden treasure, and act as the minions—minders and footsoldiers of the vast reserve army of Kubera, the Hindu god of wealth. Yakshas are clever, dangerous, fickle, wise, capricious, generous, and given to lurk in wait for unsuspecting travellers whom they invariably test with an ordeal of demanding questions.

See: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001).

Yakshas, condemned to long hours of keeping vigil over hoards of money, will do anything to make the passing traveller tarry. Sometimes a solitary Yaksha, serving time in a remote forest, will even inveigle a passing rain cloud into carrying messages to distant places.

See: Kalidasa, "Meghadootam," in *Kalidasa: The Loom of Time*, trans. and ed. Chandra Rajan (New Delhi: Penguin Classics, Penguin Books India, 1990).

The **"Yaksha Prashna"** or "Yaksha's Question" is a well-known device for diversion, entertainment, and moral instruction in the Sanskrit canon. It usually features a man or a woman providing illuminating answers to a series of riddles posed by a Yaksha as a means to fulfill a quest, continue on a journey, pass a threshold, obtain a boon, clarify a philosophical or ethical conundrum or resolve a vexed predicament. Failure to answer a Yaksha's questions usually results in a terrible curse or a horrible death.

See: A.V. Srinivasan, *A Hindu Primer: Yaksha Prashna* (Connecticut: Periplus Line LLC/ Parijata Publication, 1984).

In the **Aranya Parva** (Forest Canto) of the Mahabharata for instance, Yudhishtira, the exiled Pandava prince has to furnish answers by an enchanted lake to a particularly demanding set of questions in order to win back the lives of his brothers, which, in their haste to slake their thirst with the lake's water, they had forfeited when they had refused to be quizzed by the lake's guardian Yaksha.

See: *The Aranya Parva: The Book of the Forest in The Mahabharata*, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. J.A.B van Buitenen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

Yakshas turn up. When forests are cleared, roads widened, land surveyed, or a riverbank mined for sand, digs reveal buried Yaksha figurines, often crude, sometimes exquisite, but always enigmatic. Each excavated Yaksha brings in its wake a host

of questions. Does it foretell an omen? Is there buried treasure? Are there reasons to dig deeper? Do they trigger repressed memories of fertility cults and esoteric magick? Usually, the questions cease when the excavated Yaksha or Yakshi is transported into a museum as an iconic exemplar of "national treasure."

See: Tapati Guha Thakurta, "The Endangered Yakshi: Careers of an Ancient Art Object in Modern India." In *History and the Present*, ed. Anjan Ghosh and Partha Chatterjee (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

Ramkinkar Baij, who took more than ten years to complete his commission to sculpt the monumental Yaksha and Yakshi figures, had to endure his own set of ordeals. Questions were raised in parliament about the propriety of immodest sculptures adorning the streets of the capital. Newspapers campaigned against what they saw as the "obscenity" of the Yakshi's nakedness. The rumour mill gossiped about the resemblance that the female figure had to a leading woman-capitalist of the day. Costs mounted, and the project soon became the most expensive public art commission in independent India.

See: The Reserve Bank of India, "Anecdote 3: Of Art, Central Bankers and Philistines," http://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/mis_anec3.aspx

Ramkinkar Baij's Yaksha and Yakshi figures stand guard outside the gates of the Reserve Bank, India's central bank on Parliament Street in New Delhi. Their monumental presence is the secret of their invisibility in the discourse around Ramkinkar Baij and his so-called subaltern modernity. As lasting reminders of the most expensive public art commission in independent India, their stony New Delhi metropolitan bulk is an uneasy intrusion into the mythology of the neglected and indigent artist in the idyllic pastoral Bolpur bosom of his Santhal Family. They can neither be resolved into a celebration of the mythic category of the "people," nor be seen as homage to the state. We could speculate that the Yakshi's impassive blank stare, and the Yaksha's barely disguised contempt for what he sees embody Ramkinkar Baij's own "Yaksha Prashna" to the Indian Republic. As of now, we do not know of any answers that have a satisfactory purchase on Ramkinkar's sculpted question marks.
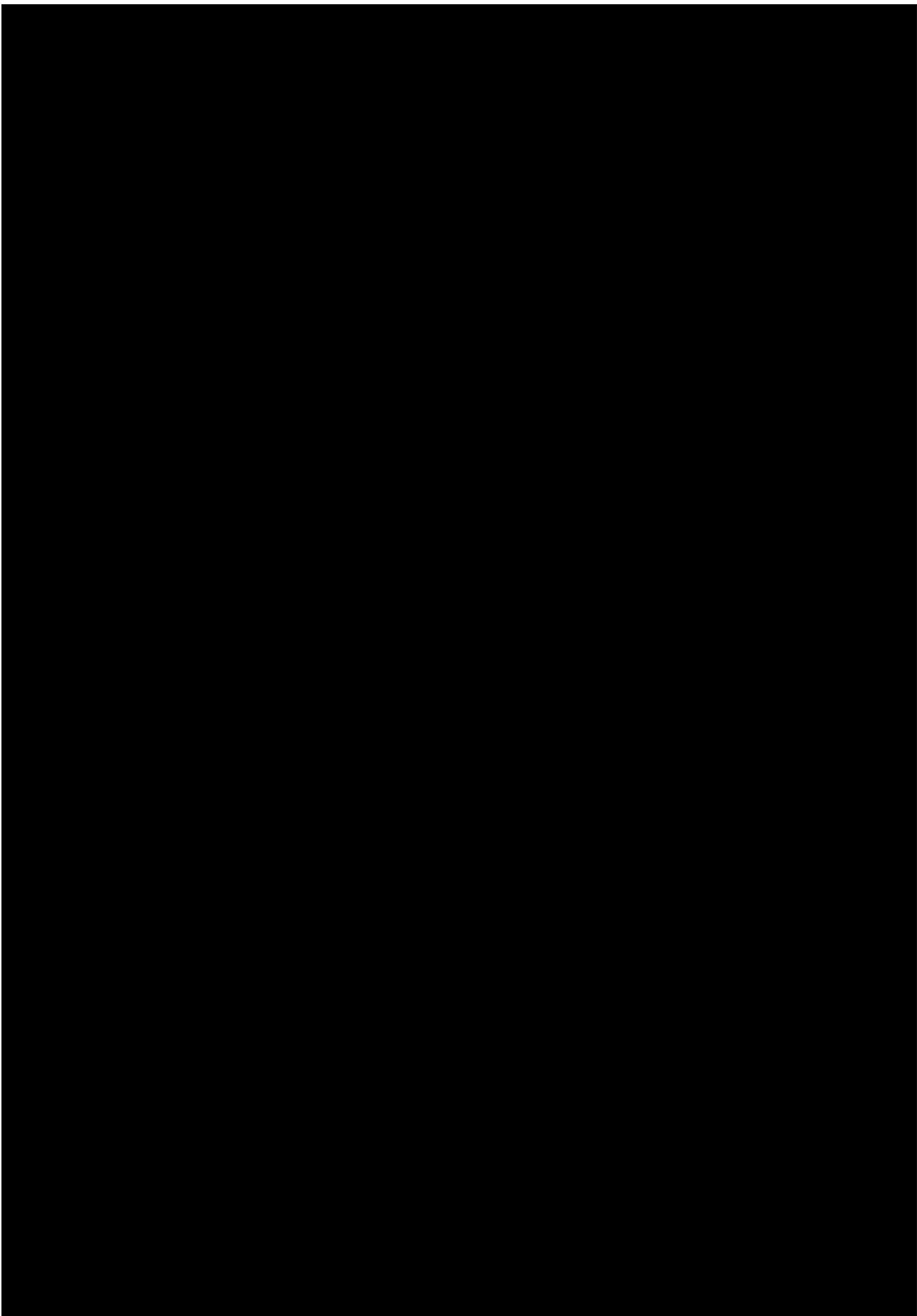
YAKSHA

I DID NOT HEAR

I said what I could. I did what I could. I don't
think there is a point in going on and on about it.
Do you?
I listen but I also try to keep going.
Tell me what happened.
Where were you?
I had gone for my tuition class. I was riding
home on my bicycle; I couldn't make it out at
first. I mean, I had no idea.
Where were you?
I was doing what I do every Wednesday.
Where were you?
I was at my desk. Where I always am.
It was late in the afternoon, the dogs were howling.

I was fixing a flat tire.

I was taken by surprise.

I was listening to the radio.

There was too much static.

I wasn't awake. I only heard my dream.

I had so much to finish.

I was at school. It was a history lesson.

I was in the wrong bus.

I was looking at him, and he wasn't talking to me.

I was running as fast as I could.

I was in a traffic jam, waiting.

The light wouldn't change.

I was swimming; we were four at the river.

I was at the cinema. I was bored.

I was naked.I was mistaken, so badly mistaken.

Then what happened?

I don't want to talk about what happened next.
I said what I could. I did what I could. I don't
think there is a point in going on and on about it.

Do you?

I listen but I also try to keep going.

My job is to keep books. I make sure that the en-
tries and inventories are in order. I don't concern
myself with anything I don't have to.

Did you hear anything?

I did not hear what was said. I wasn't paying at-
tention. Not at that time.

It was out of earshot.

I can't remember.

Tell me what happened.

I just sat by the phone, hoping that someone would call.

And the TV kept going on and on.

I didn't know whom to call.

The phone rang, again and again, and I picked it up each time, but no one said anything.

It rained. It rained like anything.

Tell me what happened, just for the record.

Nothing happened.

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was all over. It was over very quickly.

What were you doing?

I couldn't move.

I waited.

I sat where I was.

I said what I could. I did what I could. I don't think there is a point in going on and on about it. Do you?

I listen but I also try to keep going.

Tell me what happened.

Where were you?

I had gone for my tuition class.

I was at my desk, where I always am.

inconvertible stalker dictator sponsor barbwired evacuator accuser triumphalist advocate slag shaft accoster fusion salvager continental unquestionable competitor crown game contradictor elevated embroiderer abuzz aggravator extortionist core canon disproportionate deadweight contractor statutory acid focused abuser sacramental covetous discord exigent soldier enormous trenchant avalanche technologist forbidding untamed coagulant angry absurd implacable impairing barcoded drone inexplicable seducer evaporator sarcoma entrepreneur accelerator gunman savage afterburner disrober dissimulator vulgar rocket financier polymorph surveyor politician arsenal peremptory abolishing multiplier initiator whirlwind trenchant ruinous inequitable neutralizer lord industrial sucker prolific misogynist flash infectious gross stern afflatus skeletal acrid treacherous plexiglass spender shroud investigator equalizer arraigner ectropic weapon planetary driven gigantic unashamed headhunter crisis unknown data saturnine militarist hitman pantocrator amok scientist cargo adrenalized superpower zealot mandarin fancy employer professorial profiteer contingent escrow trammel malediction zyklon-b enemy net rogue pursuer radioactive distributor uncaring anacoustic auctioneer raider cabinet wrestler

DREAMS AND DISGUISES, AS USUAL

"Fantômas"
"What did you say?"
"I said, Fantômas."
"And what does that mean?"
"Nothing … Everything."
"But what is it?"
"No one … And yet, yes, it is someone!"
"And what does this someone do?"
"Spreads Terror!!"
Opening lines of *Fantômas*, the first novel in the Fantômas series,
by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain. Popular in early twentieth-century Paris.

In a painting titled *Le Barbare* (The Barbarian) (1928), René Magritte depicted what seemed to be the shadow of a masked man in a hat. The shadow is seen against a brick wall, and it is unclear whether it is appearing or fading away. Magritte, always particular about the eccentric rhetoric of his practice of representation, was careful enough to have a photograph of himself (in a hat) taken next to this image. His face, quizzical, makes us wonder if he is keeping secrets from us.

There are two particularly interesting things about this image: the first that it should be called *Le Barbare*, and the second, that it is not in fact the first or even the last appearance of a hat, or a man in a hat, in the work of Magritte. Men in hats, and hats, crowd Magritte's images. They refuse to go away.[1]

What does a man in a hat have to do with impostors and waiting rooms? Perhaps, like the narrator in the first novel of the Fantômas series of fantastic crime novels, we could say, "Nothing… and Everything."

Perhaps one of the secrets that Magritte keeps in this image—paraphrasing the title of another of his paintings—could be that just as the image of a pipe is not a pipe, so too, the image that suggests a suave, urbane man in a hat is actually of someone else.

The shadowy visage in a hat in *Le Barbare* belongs to the figure of Fantômas[2], the archetypal

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1 The figure of a man in a hat first appears in an image called *The Menaced Assassin* in 1926, and re-appears several times, including in *The Usage of Speech* (1928), where two men in bowler hats speak the words "violette" and "piano," in *Les Chausseurs de la Nuit* (1928) where a man in a hat with a rifle slung across him is seen as if leaning against a wall with his companion, another gunman, both with their backs turned towards the viewer; in *The Therapist* (1939) and *The Liberator* (1947), where he appears with a cloak and a walking stick; in *The Return of the Flame* (1943) where the man in a hat looms across a burning city; in *The Man in a Bowler Hat* (1964), with a dove flying across hisface; in *The Time of Harvest* (1950), and its variant *The Month of the Grape Harvest* (1959), where the man in a bowler hat is an assembly line prototype, an edition made in multiples; in *The Song of the Violet* (1951), where two men in hats, one with his back to us, and the other profiled, stand petrified; in *Golconda* (1953), where it rains bowler hatted men from the sky, and in *The Schoolmaster*, and its triune variant *Les Chef d'Oeuvres* (1954-55), where the man/three men appears with his/their back(s) to us against a sea, under a crescent moon; in *The Presence of Mind* (1960), framed between a falcon and a fish, and finally, in *The Son of Man* (1964), which Magritte did tag as a self portrait, where the face of the man wearing the hat is obscured by a green apple. The hat appears independently in *The Reckless Sleeper* (1927) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1930), along with a motley of other objects; and it appears as if the man has momentarily lost his hat while looking at a mirror (where he sees himself as an frontally inverted reflection) in *Reproduction Prohibited: Portrait of Edward James* (1937).

2 For more information on Fantômas, his career as a character, and his remarkable influence on twentieth-century avantgarde literature, art and cinema, see the website dedicated to the Fantômas phenomenon http://www.fantomas-lives.com

and perhaps primal, urban delinquent, the "lord of terror," the master of disguises who appears and disappears, takes on many personae, and refuses to be identified. In both *The Impostor in the Waiting Room* and in this text we seek to continue the dialogue that Magritte began with the shadow of Fantômas, and to investigate what it means to conduct a dalliance with the imperative of identification.

The imperative of identification, and its counterpoint, the dream of disguise, are impulses we find central to the story of our times. As central as a threatened assassin, a murderous corpse, or a missing person is to an intractable pulp fiction pot-boiler.

L'Assassin Menacé (The Threatened Assassin), another Magritte painting from the same period, shows Fantômas attentively listening to a gramophone beside the corpse of his female victim. He is unaware that two detectives in bowler hats are hovering outside the door with a net and cudgel, even while similarly attired voyeurs peer through the window. It takes a while to figure out that all of them—murderer, corpse, policemen, and spectators—are the same person. The question as to which one is the "real" Fantômas refuses, like a recalcitrant cadaver, to lie low. Magritte's fascination with a tableau in Louis Feuillade's third

Fantômas film *Le Mort qui Tue* (The Murderous Corpse) is evident in the composition of *L'Assassin Menacé*.

This dialogue with the figure of Fantômas that Magritte initiated was a thread that ran through much of his work. In one of his occasional writing fragments titled "A Theatrical Event," Magritte outlines the following arresting scenario: Fantômas, the quarry, and Juve, the detective in pursuit, mesh into each other as disguises and reveries, representing a pursuit, the loss of identity, and the impossibility of being captured (except through self-disclosure).

…Juve has been on the trail of Fantômas for quite some time. He crawls along the broken cobblestones of a mysterious passage. To guide himself he gropes along the walls with his fingers. Suddenly, a whiff of hot air hits him in the face. He comes nearer … His eyes adjust to the darkness. Juve distinguishes a door with loose boards a few feet in front of him. He undoes his overcoat in order to wrap it around his left arm, and gets his revolver ready. As soon as he has cleared the door, Juve realizes that his precautions were unnecessary: Fantômas is close by, sleeping deeply. In a matter of seconds Juve has tied up the sleeper. Fantômas continues to dream — of his disguises, perhaps, as usual.

Juve, in the highest of spirits, pronounces some regrettable words. They cause the prisoner to start. He wakes up, and once awake, Fantômas is no longer Juve's captive. Juve has failed again this time. One means remains for him to achieve his end: Juve will have to get into one of Fantômas's dreams—he will try to take part as one of its characters.[3]

Fantômas continues to dream of his disguises, perhaps, as usual, and the pursuer will have to get into the dreams of the pursued; he will have to participate as one of its characters ... The disguise may blur the line between Fantômas and Juve.

In the original Fantômas novels, Fantômas was at the very center of a gang of "barbarians," called "The Apaches," who lurked in Paris. It is as if his wearing the accoutrements of bourgeois civility—the hat, the coat, the occasional umbrella, or walking stick—was a careful disguise, a combat camouflage cloaking a raging, rampant otherness. While it throbbed closer than the jugular vein of the modern metropolis of advanced capitalism, it was at the same time at its farthest remove. Fantômas is a barbarian in a hat, or an impostor waiting to be recognized.

Looked at in another way, the disguise of the man in the hat and the overcoat is the only effective passport that the "barbarian" can have in the world enclosed by the modern citadel. The disguise is a means to travel from a world apparently in shadow, to a world where the sharp glare that brings visibility in its iridescent wake is not without the threat of capture and confinement.

The liminal zone where roles can be rehearsed, different patois perfected, the various grades of personhood that lead up to the man in the hat and coat can be tried on for size, the disgarded turban or the loincloth is a waiting room. One awaits one's turn to go into the arc lights.

The figure of a person biding time in a waiting room helps us to imagine the predicament of people living in societies often considered to be inhabiting an antechamber to modernity. In such spaces, one waits to be called upon to step onto the stage of history. Most of the world lives in spaces that could be designated as "waiting rooms," biding its time. These "waiting rooms" exist in transmetropolitan cities, and in the small enclaves that subsist in the shadow of the edifices of legality. There are waiting rooms in New York just as there are waiting rooms in New Delhi, and

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3   Suzi Gablik, Magritte (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976).

there are trapdoors and hidden passages connecting a waiting room in one space with a waiting room in another.

Fantômas is a denizen of these spaces, which is why he appears in Mexico City, in Calcutta, and in Caracas. It is also the reason why he, before Superman or Batman, found his way into short stories, comics, novellas and films in languages spoken in places as far away from Paris as possible. If "The Apaches" brought Fantômas with them to Paris from some forsaken wilderness, then Fantômas travelled right back to the places where he came from to the urban nether lands of places that had not yet made it in the map of arc lights.

The passage from "waiting rooms" to the "stage" often requires a person to go through intense scrutiny. This happens at airports and borders. It also happens in streets, homes, and workplaces. The art of the impostor becomes a guide to survival for people negotiating this rough passage. Waiting rooms everywhere are full of impostors waiting to be auditioned, waiting to be verified, waiting to know and to see whether or not their "act" passes muster.

The impostor is an exemplar for a kind of performative agency that renders a person capable of expressing more than one kind of truth of the self to the scrutiny of power. The figure of the impostor offers a method of survival that meets the growing intensification of scrutiny with a strategy based on the multiplication of guises and the amplification of guile. At the same time, the term impostor is also an accusation; one that power can fling at anyone it chooses to place under scrutiny. It is this double-edged state, of being a way out as well as a trap, that lends it the capacity to be a heuristic device uniquely suited for a nuanced understanding of a time in which criteria such as authenticity, veracity, and appropriateness take on intense, almost paranoiac dimensions in the conduct and governance of life's most basic functions. As concepts, the "impostor," like the "waiting room," can signify both thresholds meant for quick, sportive and easy crossing, portals into unpredictable futures, that come laden with the thrill that only unintended consequences can bring, and, for some, a bleak and eternal purgatory tinged with its own peculiar anxiety, distrust, and fear.

The impostor figure also comes to us by way of another lineage, one closer to home than the bleak sky of Magritte's Brussels and its drizzle of bowler-hatted men. We speak here of the tradition in northern and eastern India known as "Bahurupiya." A "bahurupi" is a person of many forms and

guises, a polymorph, a shape-shifter, a fantastic masquerader and pantomime, a primal "Fantômas." "Bahurupis" make their living by masquerade, by the performance of different roles by itinerant practitioners, for the entertainment, edification and occasionally, defrauding of the general public. They might dress up one day as a god, another day in drag; one day as a holy mendicant, another day as a monkey; and a third day as a somewhat comical police constable—and expect to earn money by merely turning up at doorsteps, or hanging around in public spaces, and being offered money, food or shelter in exchange for nothing more than a glance, or a brief stare. Here, disguise, and a degree of necessary ambiguity about the self is a way of life, a calling, a means of subsistence and ordering in a world otherwise deeply invested in certitude.

* * *

What lies at the origin of the distinction between the "citizen" (and here we mean also the "world citizen," who feels at ease and has a sense of entitlement everywhere) and the person who neither belongs nor feels entitled to belong to a city, state, or the world at large, a person who is in the wrong place at the wrong time for the wrong reasons, everywhere? When does a class of people begin to think about the distinction between themselves and others in terms that require barriers to block the circulation of presences? What makes them arrogate the status of being the exclusive subjects of history?

What is it about the spaces of vanguard capitalism that produces the peculiar anxiety that their sanity will be contaminated by being in uncomfortable proximity with that which lies outside of them or perforates them with their insistence presence? Why is that which itself is so invasive so afraid of contagion?

Or, as Magritte might have it: Why is Juve so afraid, and of what? Of Fantômas—his quarry—or of his own reflection or shadow?

This inchoate fear is underpinned by a furiously-held telos of manifest historical development, which both demands, and provides the wherewithal for, the construction and enforcement of hierarchical taxonomies of people, space, and ways of living and being—of those who have "arrived" onto a notional center stage of human achievement, and others who have been pressured to leave the stage, or have yet to make an appearance.

Those who have left the stage, or who have yet to make an appearance, are consigned to the waiting room of history, a notional antechamber in relation to the notional center stage. And as the

figure of the "citizen" tests his paces, he also becomes confident that he cannot be upstaged so long as the motley, restless crew in the waiting room is deemed "alien." As long as the denizens of the waiting room are seen as unconvincing in their claim to a place in the arc lights, the figure of the citizen can remain on stage.[4]

But citizenship is also a template and a score, much more than it is an actual human condition. And an exacting template at that; the successful performance of which is always a matter of an ongoing test. One achieves citizenship, one loses it, one's performance is either applauded or it fails to live up to the demands, requirements, and standards that accrue to it. To live with these conditions is to be always on trial, to know that in the eyes of the examining authority one is always, and necessarily, an impostor, unless proved otherwise. It is to know that one has to carry one's credentials at all times and that identities must be produced when they are asked for.

The bargain that is struck at the very heart of our times is the understanding that in order for the citizen, for the legal, for the authorized version, and the eloquent oxymoron of the "true copy," to be understood as such, the apparatus of authentication requires the lengthening of the shadow of the implied "offstage" presence, or menace, of the "alien" being, the unlawful act, the fake item, the impostor, as someone or something that anyone or anything can be shown to be. This is why the chase never comes to an end. The eye of the state always stays open lest the impostor slips by and disappears into the night, into the fog of the city and its shadows.[5]

Juve must enter the dream of Fantômas to learn to distinguish himself and the part that he has to play.

* * *

A girl and her brother enter a deserted military airstrip —an overgrown concrete and tarmac

4 The "waiting room" of history is a metaphor used most eloquently by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who in "Provinicializing Europe" discusses the importance for people outside Europe, and the metropolitan West, of stepping outside the trap of considering themselves forever to be "waiting" for the arrival of the contemporary moment, even of modernity itself. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post Colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000). Also, Shahid Amin, "Alternative Histories: A View from India" (SEPHIS - CSSSC Occasional Papers, 2002).
5 The "impostor' figure, particularly the notion of the state treating its subjects as impostors unless proved otherwise, was suggested to us by a reading of Partha Chatterjee's usage of the trope in his recent book "The Princely Impostor." See: Partha Chatterjee, *The Princely Impostor: The Strange and Universal History of the Kumar of Bhowal* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

ruin of a recent but already forgotten war, where rusting fighter planes lie scattered and waiting as if for the return of their dead pilots. The girl traces the path that the cracks in the tarmac make with her steps into the wind that suddenly blows in a terrifying vision of Kali, the goddess of destruction, who towers over the small child on the desolate airstrip. The girl stands frozen, struck dumb with fear. Her brother rushes in, discovers that the goddess is only a bahurupi, a thin itinerant impostor with a scowl, a set of wooden goddess arms, tinsel weapons, and a garland of papier mâché skulls. He asks the impostor angrily who he is and why he must scare children so. The bahurupi impostor-goddess replies, "I did nothing; she came in the way."

This fragment of film, the "bahurupi in the airstrip" sequence in Ritwik Ghatak's Bengali film *Subarnarekha* (The Golden Thread, 1965), is laden with strange encounters. A terrifying, yet banal masquerade interrupts a child's exploration; a girl crosses the path of a goddess; a military airstrip built in the Second World War invades a remote corner of Bengal; rust, time, and the obstinate fertility of vegetal undergrowth encroaches upon and encircles the abandoned airstrip and its forgotten fighter aircraft. Everything comes in the way of everything else. Collisions bring collisions in their wake. The girl, her brother, the goddess, the impostor, the airfield, the aircraft, the undergrowth, all seem to be saying, at once, "I did nothing; she came in the way."[6]

When two worlds collide, one asks the other, "Who are you and what are you doing in my space?" Usually, the question brings with it an assumption that the questioner has the authority to ask it in the first place, and the confidence or the knowledge that space, and the means of circulation, can also be property. That the "space" is his to enable the asking of the question to the person immediately categorized as the interloper, the encroacher, the not-quite-right-thing or right-person-in-the-right-place. Usually, what is being asked for is an explanation for what is seen as a trespass. When two worlds, spaces, beings or things collide in the course of their trajectories, and one is cast as the trespasser, there is a clear understanding that only one of them can have the right-of-way.

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6   *Subarnarekha*, DVD, directed by Ritwik Ghatak, (1965; J.J. Films Corporation). For more about "Subarnarekha', see http://www.upperstall.com/films/subarnarekha.html

The itinerant bahurupi goddess-impostor and the military airstrip. Which is the trespasser? Why is the sudden apparition of the goddess of destruction in an abandoned theater of war so strange and so natural at the same time? Is she encroaching, or is she staking out her own territory? Is she in the way, or is everything else in her way?

Who must give way?

The building of a military airstrip, highway, dam, resort, or a housing estate sanctioned by a masterplan can suddenly turn people into trespassers, and their way of life into a culture of trespassing. The masterplan has the right-of-way, as well as the means, to translate that fact into real control over space and circulation.

Sometimes this means that the inhabitants-turned-trespassers make themselves invisible; they disappear into the cracks and folds of the plan; they pretend that they are not there. They become impostors of absence, actors of vanishing acts. Sometimes it may mean that the trespassers may be present and visible and pretend to be what they are not, and then it is they who have the right-of-way. This makes them impostors of presence, pretenders in place.

* * *

Many contemporary methods of spatial intervention necessitate the hollowing out of ways of life, ecologies, and habitation practices from a space, and then filling it in with a one-size-fits-all imagination. Architectural plans, interior design catalogues and real estate brochures determine the "value" of a location. To have a design of a space is half the battle won in terms of the possession and control over that space.

Everything that is in the way—people, settled practices, older inner cities, nomadic routes, and the commons of land and water—disappears into the emptiness of the un-inked portions between the rectilinear inscriptions on the surface of the masterplan. As masterplans cordon off greater and yet greater swathes of space, they begin to come up against each other, leading to meta-masterplans that stitch different masterplans together, until more and more stretches of territory end up looking and feeling like clones of each other. The suburb, the gas station, the condominium, the supermarket, the highway, the underpass, the airport, the parking lot, the leisure center, the school, the factory, the mall, the barbed wire fencing that protects and controls a plot of land from trespass, are the alphabets of a urban language that end up making the same

statement everywhere, as the masterplan considers what it sees as wasteland, or that which in its view is an urban terra nullis—"It was in the way."

What is it that disappears when the ink on the plans has dried?

Millions of people fade from history, and often the memory of their disappearance also fades with time. With the disappearance of ways of life, entire practices and the lived experiences and memories that constituted them vanish, or are forced to become something other than what they were accustomed to being. When they make the effort to embrace this transformation, typically what stands questioned is their credibility. They are never what they seem to be, or what they try to say they are. The annals of every nation are full of adjectives that accrue to displaced communities and individuals that begin to be seen as cheats, forgers, tricksters, frauds, thieves, liars, and impostors, as members of "criminal castes, tribes and clans" or as deviant anomalies who habitually attempt to erode stable foundations with their "treacherous" ambiguities and their evasive refusal to be confined, enumerated, or identified.

These "missing persons" who disappear, or appear with great reluctance, with their names, provenances, identities, and histories deliberately or accidentally obscured in the narratives of "progress" and the histories of nation states, are to the processes of governance, what the figure of the "unknown soldier" is to the reality of war. The only difference is that there are no memorials to those who fade from view in the ordinary course of "progress." The missing person is a blur against a wall, a throw-away scrap of newspaper with a fading, out-of-focus image of a face, a peeling poster announcing rewards for wanted or lost people in a police post or railway station waiting room, a decimal point in a statistic, an announcement that some people have been disowned or abandoned or evicted or deported or otherwise cast away, as residues of history. No flags flutter, no trumpets sound, nothing burns eternal in the memory of a blur.

The blur is not even an image that can lay a claim to original veracity, but a hand-me-down version of a reality that is so injured by attempts at effacement that only a copy can have the energy necessary to enable its contents to circulate. The patchwork of faded fakes, interrupted signals, and unrealized possibilities, which does not read well and which does not offer substantive and meaningfully rounded-off conclusions, is sometimes the only kind of manuscript available to us.

Our engagement with the impostor is an attempt at coming face-to-face with this world. We would like to do so in a manner that makes anxieties about "who comes in the way of the reading" appear, at the very least, superfluous, and at best, attenuated, by a desire to listen to stories (and histories) that some might consider incomplete. We are beginning to recognize that we ourselves might appear, occasionally in them, occasionally against them.

* * *

The collision of worlds (which happens, for instance, when an empire-building sensibility suddenly stumbles upon its grand object: the colony-to-be) is fraught with the trauma of the dispersal of the assumed monadic unity of the self, even of the one we presume to be the victor. The impostor always lurks in the shadow of the unknown to claim the territory of the unsuspecting self, even if that self comes attired as a world conqueror. Sometimes, it is the notion of the unitary, monadic self, with its unique unassailable identity (its "it-ness," which it witnesses solemnly to itself), that constitutes the biggest obstacle: the fundamental scotoma that makes the image in the mirror so opaque and so elusive at the same time.

The early epoch of the ascendancy of the English East India Company (when it was still a minor "Indian" power jostling with the Marathas, the Sikhs, the Hyderabad Nizamate and Mysore Sultanate, and the French and Dutch East India Company for slices of the crumbling Mughal imperial cake) in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century India was full of English, Scottish, and Irish adventurers turning their backs on Albion and embracing, to the horror of their superior officers, what were called "native ways": converting to Islam, renouncing the world, and becoming itinerant holy men (or thugs), cohabiting with Indian women (and on occasion with Indian men), siring "half-caste" children, endowing temples and mosques, wearing turbans and tunics after the prevailing Mughal fashion. Sometimes they even forgot the English language.

Their counterparts within the "native" populations of the presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras moved in the other direction. Young men, full with the heady intoxication of strangeness, learned to wear hats and clothes that made little sense in humid weather, they broke dietary taboos, crossed the seas, became fervent Christians, learned to write sonnets, fell in love with English women (and occasionally men), they became in every way possible, "sahibs." The word

"sahib" in Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi, meant "master," or "lord," but also began shading off around the middle of the 19th century and began standing for the white man. In the long torrid summer that stretched over decades while the Mughal Empire dissolved under its own weight, until the conflict of 1857 finished the careers of both the last Mughal emperor and the East India Company, white Mughals met brown sahibs, while xenophobic Englishmen and new, nervously nationalistic elites denounced them both as impostors.[7]

The edifice of Empire, which relied so heavily on the adventures of impostors to lay its foundations, also required their marginalization. The normalization of the state of power requires new garbs, even a new dress code; a new script and new persona that can help better distinguish the rulers from the ruled. It required new impostors, broken from a different mold. George Orwell speaks of "well-meaning, over-civilized men, in dark suits and black felt hats, with neatly rolled umbrellas crooked over the left forearm" who, sitting in Whitehall, could rule the world with their mastery of the global network created by the telegraph.

They had made the earlier phase of empire building, the adventurous career of going east of Suez to discover a new self, redundant, ridding the world forever of the confusing "White Mughals," and situating in their place, clones of themselves whenever it became necessary to impose "their constipated view of life on Malaya and Nigeria, Mombasa and Mandalay."[8]

With the ascent of the man in the hat, the Empire may have lost something by way of its shine, its élan and its energy, but it gained a great deal in staying power. And the apparatus of mature Empire stayed intact far beyond the accidents of changes in the pigmentation of those who grew to rule. Over time, the shape of headgear may have changed to that of a white cap that looks like a lopsided, upended boat. The cut and the cloth of the coat may have undergone transformations, Colonial cuts may have given way to Nationalist styles, even as the dull Khaki of the blunt edge of power retained the hue of dust from hot places. What remains constant is that something is marked as the costume of rule, the dress suit or uniform of the master, the leader, the office, the "sahib," the "neta" (leader). This too

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7   William Dalrymple in "White Mughals" looks at the phenomenon of cultural and physical miscegenation in eighteenth century India. See William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

8   To read the full text of "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius", see -http://www.george-orwell.org/

is an imposture. But it is a guise marked by the verifying authority of power. An attested true copy.

In modern, republican nation states, power is a function of representation. This is as true of states normally thought of as democratic as it is in states where a single center of power (an individual, a family, a party, or a military elite) holds power, metaphorically, "in the name of the people." The legislator, the tribune, the one who makes law, represents the populace.

We can think of this as an aesthetic problem. More specifically, as a visual, even an ocular problem. Whenever the question of representation appears, we know we are speaking of a likeness, a "fit" between an object and its image, its referent. The representative of the people is also a likeness of the abstract generality of the people. This likeness between the citizenry and its representatives is always a question plagued by provisionality. Features alter: power gains adipose, loses hair; the citizen sometimes grows pale and thin.

How then does the figure of the citizen acquire a semblance of stability? How do the various ambiguities and inconsistencies, the combination of historical and biographical accidents that make up a life, cohere to form a uniform, monovalent image and narrative? How does the person molt into the citizen? How do the various performative stances and experiential realities that add shades and depth to personhood lose rough edges and find points of equilibria that can yield the regularity and predictability necessary to the figure of the citizen? How does a person become a political entity capable of being represented?

What garb, which guise, which face, is required for the ruled?

* * *

The production of the citizen is, among other things, an exercise in the making of a face. Just as the skillful operation of a forensic identikit system can help reconstruct the face of an unidentified, missing or wanted person that can then be printed on "Hue and Cry" notices and stuck on all the messy surfaces of a city, so too, must the apparatus of identification that is necessary for the maintenance of governmentality register, record, and reconstruct the figure of the citizen from a mass of inconsistents.

The tension, however, between the image and its shadowy referent, between the identikit photo and the missing person, remains. This tension between citizens and denizens, subjects and aliens, is historically resolved through the approximation of a person's visage to an administrable image of the citizen. The passport, the identification card,

the police record, the census datum, and the portraits that these instruments build of person-hood, are key to this. The frontal portrait makes a claim to be the distillate of truth. This reduction is all that is necessary for him or her to be known as a person with a valid claim to be in a place—all else is superfluous. The man in a bowler hat is a man in a bowler hat. Correspondingly, the barbarian, the alien, the pretender, must be un-masked.[9]

This necessarily involves an operation on and with images. These images may be photo-graphic likenesses or biometric codes or iris scans or fingerprints, but in essence they are the con-densations of personhood in a manner that lends them to being distilled by the apparatus of power.

Consider the formal compositional and aes-thetic requirements of portraiture as laid down by a United States passport or visa application form.

A passport photograph, in duplicate, must be as follows:

- 2x2 inches in size

- Identical
- Taken within the past 6 months and showing current appearance
- Full face, frontal view with a plain white or off-white background showing all facial features
- Brightness and contrast should be adjusted to present the subject and background ac-curately
- Photos without proper contrast or color may obscure unique facial features
- Color should reproduce natural skin tones
- Fluorescent or other lighting with unbal-anced color may cause unwanted color cast in the photo
- Appropriate filters can eliminate improper color balance
- Between 1 inch and 1 3/8 inches from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head
- Taken in normal street attire [10]

The rigor of this aesthetic stems from the subjective methods that uninformed citizens

9   For an exhaustive history of the Bowler Hat, see Fred Miller Robinson, "The Man in a Bowler Hat: His History and Iconography (University of North Carolina Press, 1993). For an interesting online profile of the Bowler Hat, and a very arresting image of a crowd of bowler hat-wearing men, see http://www.villagehatshop.com/product1687.html

10 For guidelines on the specifications for correct composition, lighting, exposure and printing of photographs of US Passport and Visa applications see the website of the US State Department Passport and Visa Photography Guide http://travel.state.gov/visa/pptphotos/index.html

would generally employ in the earlier half of the twentieth century while sending in photographs of themselves for passports and other identification documents. Cutouts from family albums or re-framed tourist snapshots, in which people smiled or otherwise expressed emotion, made it difficult to affix the face in the stable configuration of features so critical for quick and easy identifica-tion. The formal style of the "passport photo," which now has become a generic template for all images made for the purposes of identification, emerged from the dissatisfaction that identifica-tion apparatuses had with thousands of instances of incidental and unintentionally ambiguous self-portraiture.

In a statement to the *London Times*, in 1957, Miss Frances G. Knight, Director of the United States Passport Office, said that "people looked thug-like and abnormal when sitting for their passport photographs."[11]

Ironically, this "thug-like and abnormal ap-pearance" stemmed from the effort to stabilize the visage in passport photographs. The very subject produced through a system geared towards the generation of greater credibility appeared,

at best, suspect. Fantômas rears his head again. The man in a hat is actually a barbarian, and the more he tries to hold on to his hat, the more savage he appears.

More recently, another newspaper report on the introduction of new biometric passports in the UK states:

Under new security measures all mugshots must in future 'show the full face, with a neutral expression and the mouth closed.' The advice is being sent to all applicants before the introduction next year of 'ePassports,' which make it harder for terrorists and criminals to get hold of fake passports. The facial image on the photograph will be incorporated in a chip, which will be read by border control equipment. But the high-tech machines need to match key points on the face—a biometric—and this only works if the lips are closed.... 'An open-mouthed smile will throw the scanner off.'

Eyes must be open and clearly visible, with no sunglasses or heavily-tinted glasses and no hair flopping down the face. There should be no reflection on spectacles and the frames should not cover the eyes. Head coverings will only be

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11 Quoted in Martin Lloyd, *The Passport: A History of Man's Best Travelled Document* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003).

allowed for religious reasons. Photo booth companies, which supply most of the pictures for passports, have been required to update their equipment to ensure they are acceptable. Existing passports are not affected but the new rules will have to be followed when they are renewed...

Most people already think they look miserable enough on their passports. There is an old joke that if you look anything like your photograph then you need the holiday. A survey of 5,000 Europeans last year suggested the British were among the most embarrassed by passport photos. It found that a fifth of Britons were so uncomfortable with their images that they hid them from their families.[12]

The passport, the ID document, is a script; the border is an audition, a screen test, an identification parade, a drill that you practice and never quite get right. Like the random slippage between a North Indian and a North American accent in the voice of a call center worker in New Delhi talking to New York, the slippage reveals more about a person than the desperate attempts to maintain a flawless performance.

That slip, between who you are and "more" of who you are, accompanies you as a possibility in all your waking and dreaming moments. Fantômas too inhabits Juve's worst nightmares. That slip in the accent, that gust of wind that blows the hat away, that blows your cover, is the give-away that won't let you go through. The spectator who is the policeman who is the assassin who is the corpse who is the god who is the prisoner who is the animal who is the man in a hat with a stick and an overcoat and the transposed head of a donkey... You move between one and the other. Your moves takes you back into the waiting room. Where can you, and your terror, of being everyone and no one, of being everywhere and nowhere, of being the bahurupi and the mug shot, Fantômas and Juve, belong?

René Magritte keeps his secrets. So must we.

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12 Philip Johnston, "Look Miserable to Help the War on Terrorism," *The Telgraph*, 06/08/2004, Home Affairs Editor.

THEY CALLED IT THE XXTH CENTURY

To have designs on a space is half the battle won in the possession and control over that space. The rest consists in not forgiving the trespasses of those who sin against the design. Enter at your own risk.
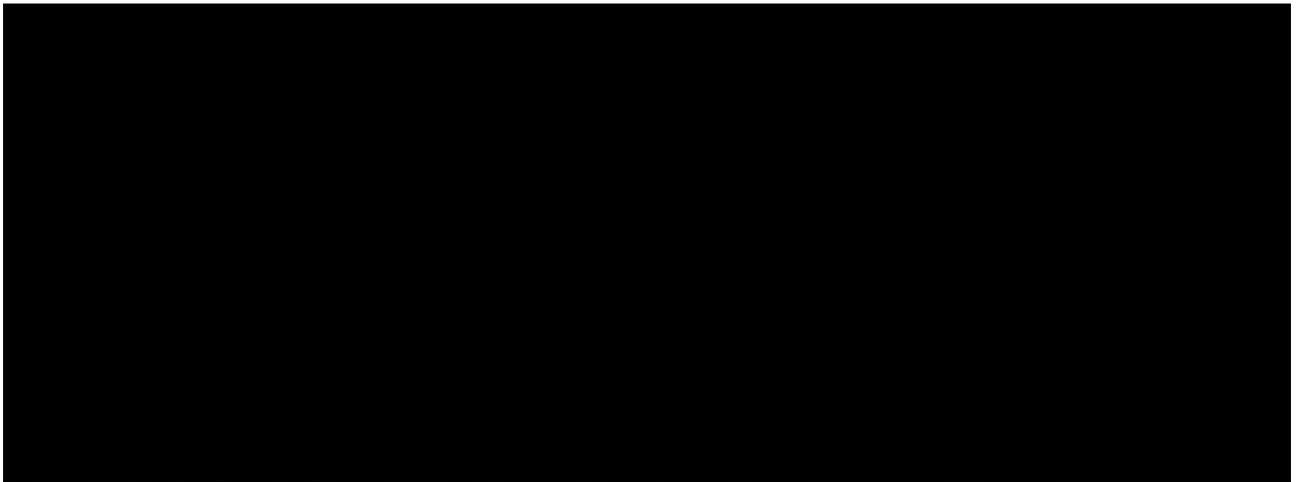
Still, millions of people fade from history, and often the memory of their disappearance also fades with time; their stories grow thin in silence. In the long interval between arrival and departure, some journeys, tired of waiting, fall off the map they seek to traverse. There are no memorials to those who fade from view in the ordinary course of progress. No flags flutter, no trumpets sound, nothing burns eternal in the memory of a blur.

There are possibilities in the waiting room, and space for the unravelling of despair. Plans, elevations, and itineraries can be drawn up and detailed; maps can be read, endless days spent in rehearsing the perfect exit line. History can become effulgent, radioactive, ashen, or stay just where it is, on an "as is where is basis," lacking lustre. A century, or twenty, can be weighed against the split second of departure and found wanting. A ticket can turn invalid over time.
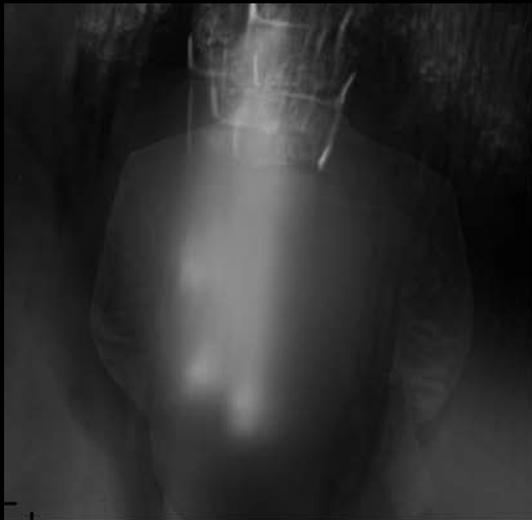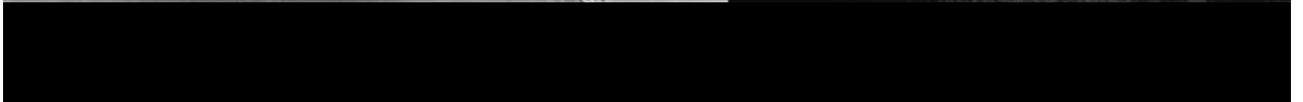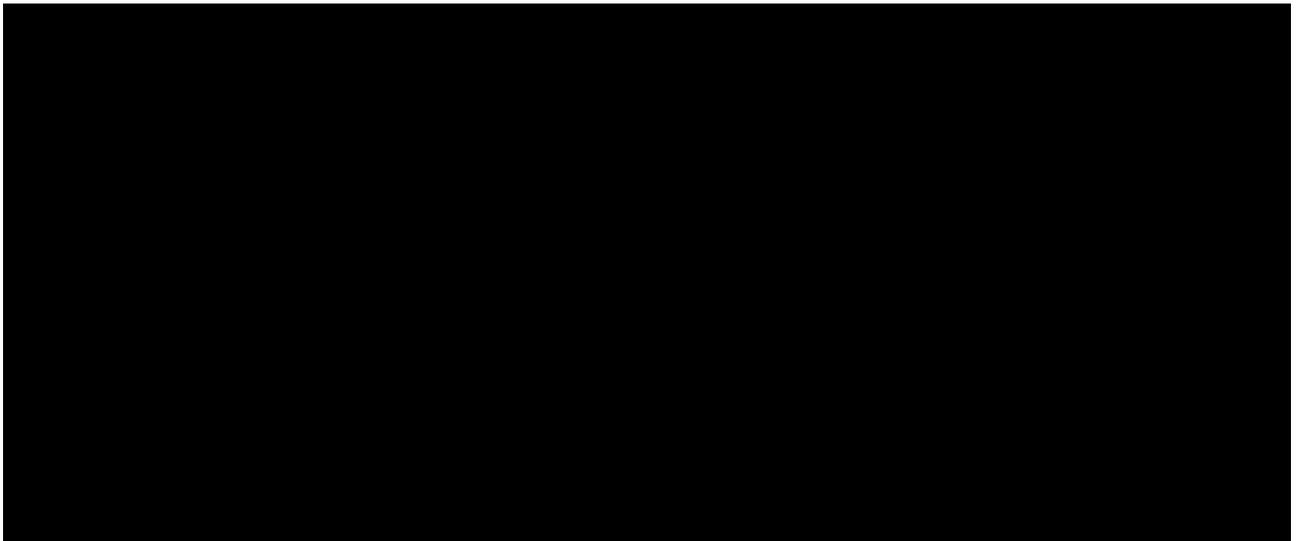
The impostor can speak more than one kind of truth; he can turn more than one face to the monocle of power. Faced with an enquiry, the impostor's mask is also a momentary means to breathe easy, to breathe life into an exhausted story about who is who, and who is not. The intensification of scrutiny can sometimes be met with an amplification of guile. Once a tale is told, antecedents produced, a face justified, a door can then be opened and passage granted. The impostor picks up a valise. The journey can now proceed.

thick gazetteer sanguine ravenous phosphorescent economizer digger doomsayer admiral informer obdurate plunderer rock prosperous itch macabre regal enterprising pontifex wrench saprophyte infinite disaster newsreader transgenic serpentine executive conductor arrowhead malicious naked negotiator xanax governor transcendent limitless bleak mythical sly intruder ashen fetter inelastic retailer thaumaturge lurid omnipotent unyielding absolute instigator eraser stale detonator sanitary admitter fluent autocrat incapacitant adjuster concrete famine angular hammer unresting sergeant economist king watcher disseminator despot rancher perilous harvester transactor jinx stinking archer commander croesus lucid squeezer telegenic morbid octopoid tank intolerant encroacher impersonal indemnifier architect unequaled menacing assassin destroyer ejaculator inflated cohort engineer coordinator expert explosive frugal incriminating conqueror epidemic average abrasive consul credential colorless monstrosity curfew coupon besieger goods barrel receiver accumulator bullion cruiser incorporated billion imprecation thrasher tyrant corporeal consolidator obsessed moneyed exploiter diesel demonic guillotine eradicator interceptor tasteless atomic parsimonious contrarian excelsior adroit

X NOTES ON PRACTICE
STUBBORN STRUCTURES AND INSISTENT SEEPAGE IN A NETWORKED WORLD

I. The Figure of the Artisan

The artisan stands at the outer threshold of early modernity, fashioning a new age, ushering in a new spirit with movable type, plumb line, chisel, paper, new inks, dyes and lenses, and a sensibility that has room for curiosity, exploration, cooperation, elegance, economy, utility and a respect for the labor of the hand, the eye, and the mind. The artisan is the typesetter, seamstress, block-maker, carpenter, weaver, computer, oculist, scribe, baker, dyer, pharmacist, mason, midwife, mechanic, and cook—the ancestor of every modern trade. The artisan gestures towards a new age but is not quite sure of a place in it.

The figure of the artisan anticipates both the worker and the artist, in that it lays the foundations of the transformation of occupations (things that occupy us) into professions (institutionalized, structural locations within an economy). It mediates the transfiguration of people into skills, of lives into working lives, into variable capital. The artisan is the vehicle that carried us all into the contemporary world. She is the patient midwife of our notion of an autonomous creative and reflective self, waiting out the still births, nursing the prematurely born, weighing the infant, and cutting the cords that tie it to an older patrimony. The artisan makes us who we are.

Yet, the artisan has neither the anonymity of the worker drone, nor the hyper-individuated solipsism of the artist genius. The artisan is neither faceless, nor a celebrity; she belongs neither in the factory, nor in the salon, but functions best in the atelier, the workshop and the street, with apprentices and other artisans, making and trading things and knowledge. The artisan fashions neither the mass produced inventories of warehouses, nor the precious, unique objects that must only be seen in galleries, museums, and auction houses. The objects and services that pass through her hands into the world are neither ubiquitous nor rare, nor do they seek value in ubiquity or rarity. They trade on the basis of their usage, within densely networked communities that the artisan is party to, not on the impetus of rival global speculations based on the volumes and volatility of stocks, or the price of a signature. As warehouses and auction houses proliferate, squeezing out the atelier and the workshop, the artisan loses her way. At the margins of an early industrial capitalism, the artisan seemingly transacts herself out of history, making way for the drone and the genius, for the polarities of drudgery and creativity, work and art.

II. Immaterial Labor

Due to the emergence of a new economy of intellectual property based on the fruits of immaterial labor, the distinction between the roles of the worker and the artist in strictly functional terms is once again becoming difficult to sustain. To understand why this is so we need to take a cursory look at the new ways in which value is increasingly being produced in the world today.

The combination of widespread cybernetic processes, increased economies of scale, agile management practices that adjust production to demand, and inventory status reports in a dispersed global assembly line, has made the mere manufacture of things a truly global fact. Cars, shoes, clothes, and medicines, or any commodity for that matter, are produced by more or less the same processes, anywhere. The manufacture of components, the research and design process, the final assembly and the marketing infrastructure no longer need to be circumscribed within one factory, or even one nation state or regional economic entity. The networked nature of contemporary industrial production frees the finished good from a fidelity to any one location. This also results in a corollary condition—a multiplication of renditions, or editions, (both authorized as well as counterfeited) of any product line at a global scale. Often, originals and their imitations are made in the same outsourced sweatshop. The more things multiply, the more they tend towards similarity, in form and appearance, if not in function.

Thus, when capital becomes more successful than ever before at fashioning the material surface of the world after its own image, it also has more need than ever before for a sense of variety, a classificatory engine that could help order the mass that it generates, so that things do not cancel each other out by their generative equivalence. Hence the more things become the same, the more need there is for distinguishing signs, to enable their purchase. The importance given to the notions of "brand equity" from which we get derivatives like "brand velocity," "brand loyalty," and a host of other usages are prefixed by the term "brand" indicative of this reality.

Today, the value of a good lies not only in what makes it a thing desirable enough to consume as a perishable capsule of (deferred) satisfaction. The value of a good lies especially in that aspect of it which makes it imperishable, eternally reproducible, and ubiquitously available. Information, that distills the imperishable, the reproducible, the ubiquitous in a condensed set of signs, is the true capital of this age. A commodity is no longer only an object that can be bought and sold; it is

also that thing in it which can be read, interpreted, and deciphered in such a way that every instance of decryption or encryption can also be bought and sold. Money lies in the meaning that lies hidden in a good. A good to eat must also be a good to think with, or to experiment with in a laboratory. This encryption of value, the codification and concentration of capital to its densest and most agile form is what we understand to be intellectual property.

How valuable is intellectual property?

How valuable is intellectual property? In attempting to find an answer to a question such as this, it is always instructive to look at the knowledge base that capitalism produces to assess and understand itself. In a recent paper titled "Evaluating IP Rights: In Search of Brand Value in the New Economy," a brand management consultant, Tony Samuel of Pricewaterhouse-Coopers' Intellectual Asset Management Group said:

This change in the nature of competition and the dynamics of the new world economy have resulted in a change in the key value drivers for a company from tangible assets (such as plant and machinery) to intangible assets (such as brands, patents, copyright and know how). In particular, companies have taken advantage of more open trade opportunities by using the competitive advantage provided by brands and technology to access distant markets. This is reflected in the growth in the ratio of market-capitalized value to book value of listed companies. In the US, this ratio has increased from 1:1 to 5:1 over the last twenty years.

In the UK, the ratio is similar, with less than 30% of the capitalized value of FTSE 350 companies appearing on the balance sheet. We would argue that the remaining 70% of unallocated value resides largely in intellectual property and certainly in intellectual assets. Noticeably, the sectors with the highest ratio of market capitalization to book value are heavily reliant on copyright (such as the media sector), patents (such as technology and pharmaceutical) and brands (such as pharmaceutical, food and drink, media and financial services).[1]

The paper goes on to quote Alan Shepard, sometime chairman of Grand Metropolitan plc, an international group specializing in branded

1   Tony Samuel, PricewaterhouseCoopers' Intellectual Asset Management Group, Evaluating IP Rights: In Search of Brand Value in the New Economy http://www.pwcglobal.com/Extweb/service.nsf/docid/210123EF9AEBAC1885256B96003428C6

food, drinks and retailing, which merged with Guinness in 1997 to form Diageo, a corporation which today controls brands as diverse as Smirnoff and Burger King.

"Brands are the core of our business. We could, if we so wished, subcontract all of the production, distribution, sales and service functions and, provided that we retained ownership of our brands, we would continue to be successful and profitable. It is our brands that provide the profits of today and guarantee the profits of the future."

We have considered brands here at some length, because of the way in which brands populate our visual landscape. Were a born again landscape painter to try and represent a stretch of urban landscape, it would be advisable for him or her to have privileged access to a smart intellectual property lawyer. But what is true of brands is equally true of other forms of intangible assets, or intellectual property, ranging from music to images to software.

The legal regime of intellectual property is in the process of encompassing as much as possible of all cultural transactions and production processes. All efforts to create or even understand art will have to come to terms, sooner or later, with the implications of this pervasive control, and intellectual property attorneys will no doubt exert considerable "curatorial" influence as art events, museums, and galleries clear artists projects, proposals, and acquisitions as a matter of routine. These "attorney-curators" will no doubt ensure that art institutions and events do not become liable for possible and potential "intellectual property violations" that the artist, curator, theorist, writer or practitioner may or may not be aware of as being inscribed into their work.

III. The Worker as Artist

What are the implications of this scenario? The worker of the twenty first century, who has to survive in a market that places the utmost value on the making of signs, finds that her tools, her labor, her skills are all to do with varying degrees of creative, interpretative, and performative agency. She makes brands shine, she sculpts data, she mines meaning, she hews code. The real global factory is a network of neural processes, no less material than the blast furnaces and chimneys of manufacturing and industrial capitalism. The worker of the twenty first century is also a performer, a creator of value from meaning. She creates, researches and interprets, in the ordinary course of a working day to the order that would merit her being considered an artist or a researcher, if by "artist" or "researcher" we understand a per-

son to be a figure who creates meaning or produces knowledge.

Nothing illustrates this better than the condition of workers in Information Technology enabled industries like Call Center and Remote Data Outsourcing, which have paved the way for a new international matrix of labor, and have given a sudden performative twist to the realities of what is called Globalization. In a recent installation, called *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)*[2], we looked at the performative dimension in the lives of call center workers.

The Call Center Worker and her world[3]

A call center worker in the suburb of Delhi, the city where we live, performs a Californian accent as she pursues a loan defaulter in a poor Los Angeles neighborhood on the telephone. She threatens and cajoles him. She scares him, gets underneath his skin, because she is scared that he won't agree to pay, and that this will translate into a cut in her salary. Latitudes away from him, she has a window open on her computer telling her about the weather in his backyard, his credit history, his employment record, his prison record. Her skin is darker than his, but her voice is trained to be more white on the phone. Her night is his day. She is a remote agent with a talent for impersonation in the IT enabled industry in India. She never gets paid extra for the long hours she puts in. He was laid off a few months ago, and hasn't been able to sort himself out. Which is why she is calling him for the company she works for. He lives in a third world neighborhood in a first world city; she works in a free trade zone in a third world country. Neither knows the other as anything other than as "case" and "agent." The conversation between them is a denial of their realities and an assertion of many identities, each with their truths, all at once.

Central to this kind of work is a process of imagining, understanding, and invoking a world, mimesis, projection, and verisimilitude as well

2   A/S/L: A video, text and sound installation by Raqs Media Collective that juxtaposes the protocols of interpersonal communication, online labor, data outsourcing, and the making/unmaking of remote agency in the "new" economy. Presented at the Geography and the Politics of Mobility exhibition, curated by Ursula Biemann for the Generali Foundation, Vienna, (January - April 2003). http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2003/01/17/30667.html http://foundation.generali.at/exhibit/2003_1_geo_indexe.htm

3   Raqs Media Collective, "Call Center Calling: Technology, Network and Location", Sarai Reader 03: Shaping Technologies, February 2003. http://www.sarai.net/journal/03pdf/177_183_raqsmediac.pdf for more on the call center industry in India, see - Mark Landler, "Hi I'm in Bangalore (But I Dare Not Tell)", *New York Times* (Technology Section) March 21, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/21/technology/21CALL.html?ex=1054353600&en=7576033f99208ca6&ei=5070 India Calling—A Report on the Call Center Industry in India http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/2387/

as the skillful deployment of a combination of reality and representation. Elsewhere, we have written of the critical necessity of this artifice to work, (in terms of creating an impression of proximity that elides the actuality of distance) in order for a networked global capitalism to sustain itself on an everyday basis. But here, what we would like to emphasize is the crucial role that a certain amount of "imaginative" skill, and a combination of knowledge, command over language, articulateness, technological dexterity, and performativity plays in making this form of labor productive and efficient on a global scale.

IV. Marginalia

Sometimes, the most significant heuristic openings are hidden away on the margins of the contemporary world. While the meta-narratives of war, globalization, disasters, pandemics, and technological spectacles grab headlines, the world may be changing in significant but unrecognized directions at the margins, like an incipient glacier inching its way across a forsaken moraine. These realities may have to do with the simple facts of people being on the move, of the improvised mechanisms of survival that suddenly open up new possibilities, and the ways in which a few basic facts and conceptions to

do with the everyday acts of coping with the world pass between continents.

Here, margin is not so much a fact of location (as in something peripheral to an assumed center) as it is a figure denoting a specific kind or degree of attentiveness. In this sense, a figure may be located at the very core of the reality that we are talking about, and still be marginal, because it does not cross a certain low-visibility, low-attention threshold, or because it is seen as being residual to the primary processes of reality. The call center worker may be at the heart of the present global economy, but she is barely visible as an actor or an agent. In this sense, to be marginal is not necessary to be "far from the action" or to be "remote" or in any way distant from the very hub of the world as we find it today.

The margin has its own image-field. And it is to this image-field that we turn to excavate or improvise a few resources for practice.

A minor artisanal specialization pertaining to medieval manuscript illumination was the drawing and inscription of what has been called "marginalia"[4]. "Marginalists" (generally apprentices to scribes) would inscribe figures, often illustrating profane wisdom, popular proverbs, burlesque figures, and fantastical or allegorical allusions that occasionally constructed a counter-narrative to

the main body of the master text, while often acting as what was known as "exempla": aids to conception and thought (and sometimes as inadvertent provocations for heretic meditations). It is here, in these marginal illuminations, that ordinary people—ploughmen, peasants, beggars, prostitutes, and thieves—would often make their appearances, constructing a parallel universe to that which was normally populated by kings, aristocrats, heroes, monsters, angels, prophets, and divines. Much of our knowledge of what people looked like in the medieval world comes from the details that we find in manuscript marginalia. They index the real, even as they inscribe the nominally invisible. It would be interesting to think for instance of the incredible wealth of details of dress, attitude, social types, and behaviors that we find in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, or Pierre Breughel as marginalia writ large. It is with some fidelity to this artisanal ideal of using marginalia as exemplars that we would like to offer a small gallery of contemporary marginal figures.

V. Five Figures to Consider

As significant annotations to the text of present realities, and as ways out of the dilemmas that we have faced in our own apprehensions of the world, we find ourselves coming back repeatedly to them in our practice—as images, as datums, and as figures of thought, as somewhat profane icons for meditation. We feel that these figures, each in their own way, speak to the predicament of the contemporary practitioner.

Figure One: The Alien Navigates a Boat at Sea

A boat changes course at sea, dipping temporarily out of the radar of a nearby coast guard vessel. A cargo of contraband people in the hold fleeing war, or the aftermath of war, or the fifth bad harvest in a row, or a dam that flooded their valley, or the absence of social security in the face of unemployment, or a government that suddenly took offence at the way they spelt their names—study the contours of an unknown coastline in their minds, experiment with the pronunciations of harbor names unfamiliar to their tongues. Their map of the world is contoured with safe havens and dangerous border posts, places for landing, transit and refuge, anywhere and everywhere,

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4. Andrew Otwell, "Medieval Manuscript Marginalia and Proverbs," 1995. http://www.heyotwell.com/work/arthistory/marginalia.html

encircled and annotated in blue ink. A geography lesson learned in the International University of Exile.

Figure Two: The Squatter builds a Tarpaulin Shelter

Tarpaulin, rope, a few large plastic drums, crates, long poles of seasoned bamboo, and quick eyes and skilled hands, create a new home. A migrant claims a patch of fallow land, marked "property of the state" in the city. Then comes the tough part: the search for papers, the guerrilla war with the Master Plan for a little bit of electricity, a little bit of water, a delay in the date of demolition, for a few scraps of legality, a few loose threads of citizenship. The learning of a new accent, the taking on of a new name, the invention of one or several new histories that might get one a ration card, or a postponed eviction notice. The squat grows incrementally, in Rio de Janeiro, in Delhi, in Baghdad, creating a shadow global republic of not-quite citizens, with not-yet passports, and not-there addresses.

Figure Three: The Electronic Pirate burns a CD

A fifteen square-yard shack in a working-class suburb of northeast Delhi is a hub of the global entertainment industry. Here, a few assembled computers, a knockdown Korean CD writer, and some Chinese pirated software in the hands of a few formerly unemployed, or unemployable young people turned media entrepreneurs, transform the latest Hollywood, or Bollywood blockbuster into the stuff that you can watch in a tea shop on your way to work. Here, the media meets its extended public. It dies a quick death as one high-end commodity form, and is resurrected as another. And then, like the Holy Spirit, it does not charge an exorbitant fee to deliver a little grace unto those who seek its fleeting favors. Electronic piracy is the flow of energy between chained product and liberated pixel that makes for a new communion, a samizdat of the song and dance spectacular.

Figure Four: The Hacker Network liberates Software

A community of programmers dispersed across the globe sustains a growing body of software and knowledge—a digital commons that is not fenced in by proprietary controls. A network of hackers, armed with nothing other than their phone lines, modems, Internet accounts, and personal computers inaugurate a quiet global insubordination by refusing to let code, music, texts, math, and images be anything other than freely available for download, transformation, and distribution.

The freedom is nurtured through the sharing of time, computing resources, and knowledge in a way that works out to the advantage of those working to create the software, as well as to a larger public, that begins swapping music and sharing media files to an extent that makes large infotainment corporations look nervously at their balance sheets. The corporations throw their lawyers at the hackers, and the Intellectual Property Shock Troops are out on parade, but nothing can turn the steady erosion of the copyright.

Figure Five: Workers Protect Machines in an Occupied Factory

Seamstresses at the Brukman Garment Factory in Buenos Aires[5] shield their machines against a crowd of policemen intent on smashing them. The power of the Argentine state provokes a perverse neo-luddite incident, in which the workers are attacked while they try to defend their machines from destruction. The Brukman Factory is a "fabrica ocupada," a factory occupied by its workers, one of many that have sustained a new parallel social and economic structure based on self-regulation and the free exchange of goods and services outside or tangential to the failed money economy—a regular feature of the way in which working people in Argentina cope with the ongoing economic crisis. Turning the rhetoric and tactics of working class protest on its head, the seamstresses of the Brukman factory fight not to withdraw their labor from the circuit of production, but to protect what they produce, and to defend their capacity to be producers, albeit outside the circuit desired by capital.

VI. Significant Transgressions

These five transgressors, a pentacle of marginalia, can help us to think about what the practitioner might need to understand if she wants to recuperate a sense of agency. In very simple terms, she would need to take a lesson in breaking borders and moving on from the migrant, in standing her ground and staying located from the squatter, in placing herself as a link in an agile network of reproduction, distribution, and exchange from the pirate, in sharing knowledge and enlarging a commons of ideas from the hacker, and in continuing to be autonomously productive from the workers occupying the factory.

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5   Naomi Klein, "Argentina's Luddite Rulers: Workers in the Occupied Factories Have a Different Vision: Smash Machines," *Dissident Voice*, (April 25, 2003) http://www.dissidentvoice.org/Articles4/Klein_Argentina.htm

The first imperative, that of crossing borders, translates as scepticism of the rhetoric of bounded identities, and relates to the role of the practitioner as a "journeyman," as the peripatetic who maps an alternative world by her journey through it. The second, of building a shelter against the odds of the law, insists however on a practice that is located in space, and rooted in experience, that houses itself in a concrete "somewhere" on its own terms, not of the powers that govern spaces. It is this fragile insistence on provisional stability, which allows for journeys to be made to and from destinations, and for the mapping of routes with resting places in between. The third imperative, that of creating a fertile network of reproduction of cultural materials, is a recognition of the strength of ubiquity, or spreading ideas and information like a virus through a system. The fourth imperative, of insisting on the freedom of knowledge from proprietary control, is a statement about the purpose of production—to ensure greater pleasure and understanding without creating divisions based on property, and is tied in to the fifth imperative—a commitment to keep producing with autonomy and dignity.

Taken together, these five exempla constitute an ethic of radical alterity to prevailing norms without being burdened by the rhetorical overload that a term like "resistance" invariably seems to carry. They also map a different reality of "globalization"—not the incessant, rapacious, expansion of capitalism, but the equally incessant imperative that makes people move across the lines that they are supposed to be circumscribed by, and enact the everyday acts of insubordination that have become necessary for their survival. It is important to look at this subaltern globalization from below, which is taking place everywhere, and which is perhaps far less understood than the age-old expansionist drive of capitalism, which is what the term "globalization" is now generally used to refer to. It embodies different wills to globality and a plethora of global imaginaries that are often at cross-purposes with the dominant rhetoric of corporate globalization.

The illegal emigrant, the urban encroacher, electronic pirate, the hacker, and the seamstresses of the Brukman Factory of Buenos Aires are not really the most glamorous images of embodied resistance. They act, if anything, out of a calculus of survival and self-interest that has little to do with a desire to "resist" or transform the world. And yet, in their own way, they unsettle, undermine, and destabilize the established structures of borders and boundaries, metropolitan master plans and the apparatus of intellectual property

relations, and a mechanism of production that robs the producer of agency. If we examine the architecture of the contemporary moment, and the figures that we have described, it does not take long to see five giant, important pillars:

(5)The consolidation, redrawing and protection of boundaries

(6)The grand projects of urban planning and renewal and

(7)The desire to protect information as the last great resource left for capitalism to mine—which is what intellectual property is all about,

(8)Control over the production of knowledge and culture and

(9)The denial of agency to the producer.

Illegal emigration, urban encroachment, the assault on intellectual property regimes by any means, hacking and the occupation of sites of production by producers, each of which involve the accumulation of the acts of millions of people across the world on a daily, unorganized and voluntary basis, often at great risk to themselves, are the underbelly of this present reality.

But how might we begin to consider and understand the global figures of the alien, the encroacher, the pirate, the hacker, and the worker defending her machine?

VII. Capital and its Residue

The first thing to consider is the fact that most of these acts of transgression are inscribed into the very heart of established structures by people located at the extreme margins. The marginality of some of these figures is a function of their status as the "residue" of the global capitalist juggernaut. By "residue," we mean those elements of the world that are engulfed by the processes of Capital, turned into "waste" or "leftovers," left behind, even thrown away.

Capital transforms older forms of labor and ways of life into those that are either useful for it at present, or those that have no function and so must be made redundant. Thus you have the paradox of a new factory, which instead of creating new jobs often renders the people who live around "unemployable": a new dam, that instead of providing irrigation, renders a million displaced; a new highway that destroys common paths, making movement more, not less, difficult for the people and the communities it cuts through. On the other hand sometimes, like a sportsman with an injury who no longer has a place on the team, a factory that closes down ensures that the place it was located in ceases to be a destination. And so, the workers have to ensure that it stays open, and working in order for them to have a place under the sun.

What happens to the people in the places that fall off the map? Where do they go? They are forced, of course, to go in search of the map that has abandoned them. But when they leave everything behind and venture into a new life they do not do so entirely alone. They go with the networked histories of other voyages and transgressions, and are able at any point to deploy the insistent, ubiquitous insider knowledge of today's networked world.

Seepage in the Network

How does this network act, and how does it make itself known in our consciousness? We like to think about this in terms of seepage. By seepage we mean the action of many currents of fluid material leaching onto a stable structure, entering and spreading through it by way of pores, until it becomes a part of the structure, both in terms of its surface, and at the same time as it continues to act on its core, to gradually disaggregate its solidity. To crumble it over time with moisture.

In a wider sense, seepage can be conceived as those acts that ooze through the pores of the outer surfaces of structures into available pores within the structure, and result in a weakening of the structure itself. Initially the process is invisible, and then it slowly starts causing mold and settles into a disfiguration—and this produces an anxiety about the strength and durability of the structure.

By itself seepage is not an alternative form; it even needs the structure to become what it is—but it creates new conditions in which structures become fragile and are rendered difficult to sustain. It enables the play of an alternative imagination, and so we begin seeing faces and patterns on the wall that change as the seepage ebbs and flows.

In a networked world, there are many acts of seepage, some of which we have already described. They destabilize the structure, without making any claims. So the encroacher redefines the city, even as she needs the city to survive. The trespasser alters the border by crossing it, rendering it meaningless and yet making it present everywhere—even in the heart of the capital city—so that every citizen becomes a suspect alien and the compact of citizenship that sustains the state is quietly eroded. The pirate renders impossible the difference between the authorized and the unauthorized copy, spreading information and culture, and devaluing intellectual property at the same time. Seepage complicates the norm by inducing invisible structural changes that accumulate over time.

It is crucial to the concept of seepage that individual acts of insubordination not be uprooted from the original experience. They have to remain embedded in the wider context to make any sense. And this wider context is a networked context, a context in which incessant movement between nodes is critical.

VIII. A Problem for the History of the Network

But how is this network's history to be understood? To a large measure, this is made difficult by the fact of an "asymmetry of ignorance" about the world. We are all ignorant of the world in different ways and to different degrees. And that is one of the reasons why the "Network" often shades off into darkness, at some point or another. This is what leads to global networks that nevertheless ignore the realities of large parts of the world, because no one has the means to speak of those parts, and no one knows whether people exist in those parts that can even speak to the world in the language of the network. Thus the language of the network often remains at best only a mobile local dialect.

A media practitioner or cultural worker from

India, for example, is in all likelihood more knowledgeable about the history of Europe than could be the case for the European vis-a-vis India. This is a fact engendered by colonialism that has left some societies impoverished in all but an apprehension of reality that is necessarily global. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has reminded us:

"Insofar as the academic discourse of history is concerned, "Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'"[6]

But this very same fact, when looked at from a European standpoint, may lead to a myopia, an inability to see anything other than the representational master narrative of European history molding the world. The rest of the world is thus often a copy seeking to approximate this original.

All this to say: not merely that we have incomplete perspectives, but that this asymmetry induces an inability to see the face in the wall, the interesting pattern, produced by the seepage.

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[6]   Dipesh Chakravarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts," *Representations*, no. 37 (Winter, 1992).

We may inhabit the anxiety, even be the source and locus of the destabilization and recognize the disfiguration, but the envisioning of possible alternative imaginaries may still continue to elude us.

IX. Towards an Enactive Model of Practice

Recently in a book on neuropolitics[7], we came across an experiment which is now considered classic in studies of perception, (The Held and Heims Experiment) which might give us an interesting direction to follow now.

Two litters of kittens are raised in the dark for some time and then exposed to light under two different sets of conditions. The first group is allowed to move around in the visual field and interact with it as kittens do—smelling things, touching them, trying out what can be climbed, and where the best places to sleep are. The kittens in the second group, (though they are placed in the same environment) are carried around in baskets rather than allowed to explore the space themselves, and thus are unable to interact with it with all their senses and of their own volition.

The two groups of kittens develop in very different ways. When the animals are released after a few weeks of this treatment, the first group of kittens behave normally, but those who have been carried around behave as if they were blind; they bumped into objects and fell over edges. It is clear that the first group's freedom to experience the environment in a holistic way is fundamental to its ability to perceive it at all.

What is the significance of this? Within neuroscience, such experiments have served to draw neuroscientists and cognitive scientists away from representational models of mind towards an "enactive" model of perception in which objects are not perceived simply as visual abstractions but rather through an experiential process in which information received from this one sense is "networked" with that from every other. Vision, in other words, is deeply embedded in the processes of life, and it is crucial to our ability to see that we offset the representations that we process, with the results of the experiences that we enter into. We need to know what happens when we take a step, bump into someone, are startled by a loud noise, come across a stranger, an angry or a friendly face, a gun or a jar of milk.

In a sense this implies a three-stage encounter that we are ascribing between the practitioner and her world. First, a recognition of the fact that

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7   William E. Connolly, "Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed," *Theory Out of Bounds*, No. 23 (Univ. of Minnesota, 2002).

instances of art practices can be seen as contiguous to a "neighborhood" of marginal practices embodied by the figures of the five transgressors. Secondly, that "seeing" oneself as a practitioner, and understanding the latent potentialities of one's practice, might also involve listening to the ways in which each of the five transgressive figures encounters the world. Finally, that what one gleans from each instance of transgression can then be integrated into a practice which constitutes itself as an ensemble of attitudes, ways of thinking, doing, and embodying (or recuperating) creative agency in a networked world.

For us here, this helps in thinking about the importance of recognizing the particularity of each encounter that the practitioner witnesses or enters into, without losing sight of the extended network, of the "neighborhood" of practices.

It is only when we see particularities that we are also able to see how two or more particular instances connect to each other. As residues, that search for meaning in other residual experiences; or as acts of seepage, in which the flow of materials from one pore to another ends up connecting two nodes in the network, by sheer force of gravity. Here, it is the gradients of the flow, the surface tension that the flow encounters and the distance that the flow traverses, that become

important, not the intention to flow itself. Intentions, resistances, may be imputed, but in the end they have little to do with the actual movements that transpire within the network.

X. Art practice and protocols of networked conversation

What does art and artistic practice have to do with all this? What can the practitioner take from an understanding of interactive embeddedness in a networked world? We would argue that the diverse practices that now inhabit art spaces need to be able to recognize the patterns in the seepage, to see connections between different aspects of a networked reality.

To do this, the practitioner probably has to invent, or discover, protocols of conversation across sites, across different histories of locatedness in the network; to invent protocols of resource building and sharing, create structures within structures and networks within networks. Mechanisms of flexible agreements about how different instances of enactment can share a contiguous semantic space will have to be arrived at. And as we discover these "protocols," their different ethical, affective, and cognitive resonances will immediately enter the equation. We can then also begin to think of art practice as enactment,

as process, as elements in an interaction or conversation within a network.

For the acts of seepage to connect to form new patterns, many new conversations will have to be opened, and mobile dialects will have to rub shoulders with each other to create new networked Creoles. Perhaps art practice in a networked reality can itself aspire to create the disfigurations on the wall, to induce some anxieties in the structure, even while making possible the reading of the face in the spreading stain, the serendipitous discovery of an interesting pattern or cluster of patterns, and possible alterities.

THE SURFACE OF EACH DAY:
QUESTIONS FOR COSMONAUTS

The surface of each
day is a different planet.

Cosmonaut, how do you recognize signs of life when you see them on your voyage?
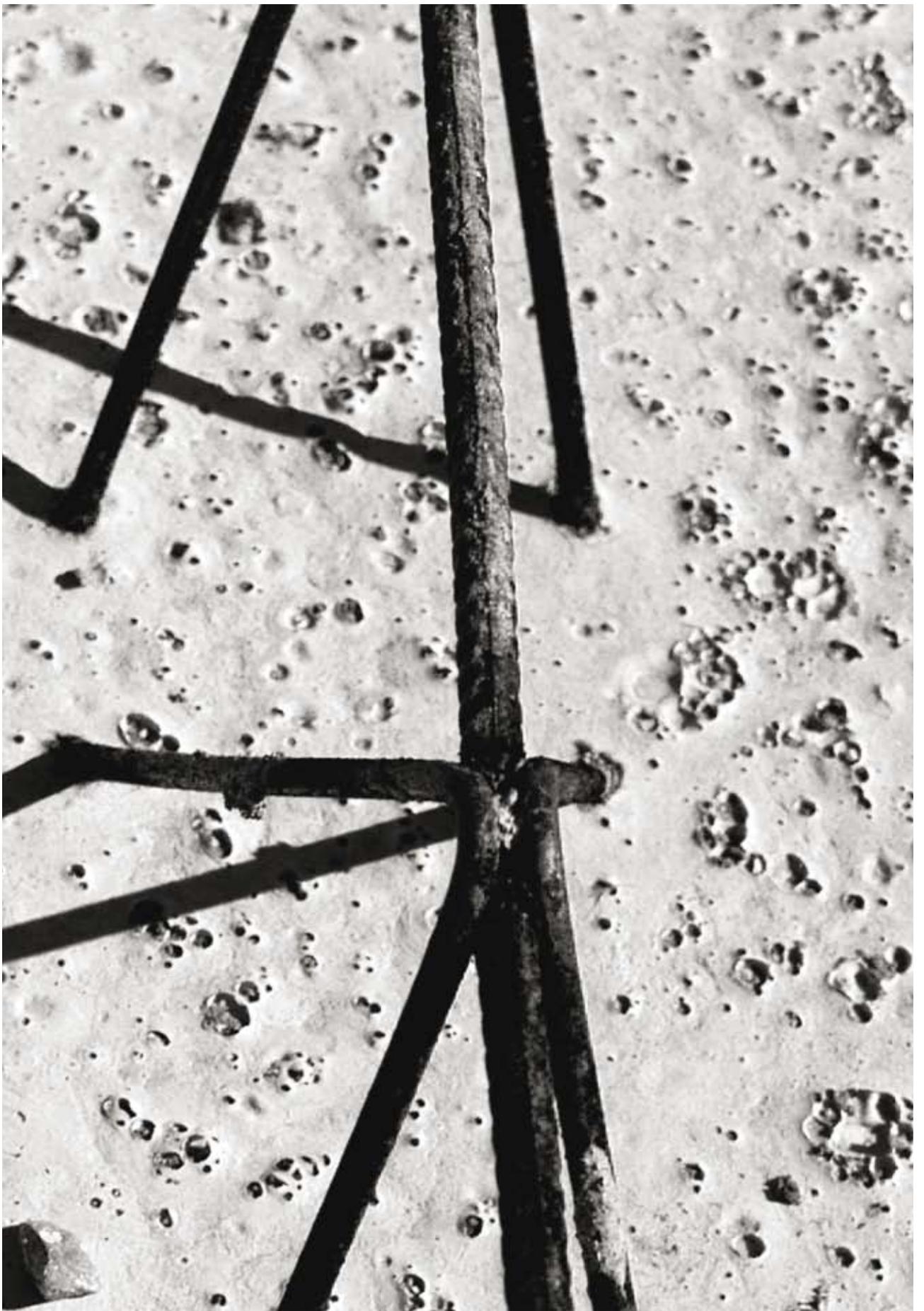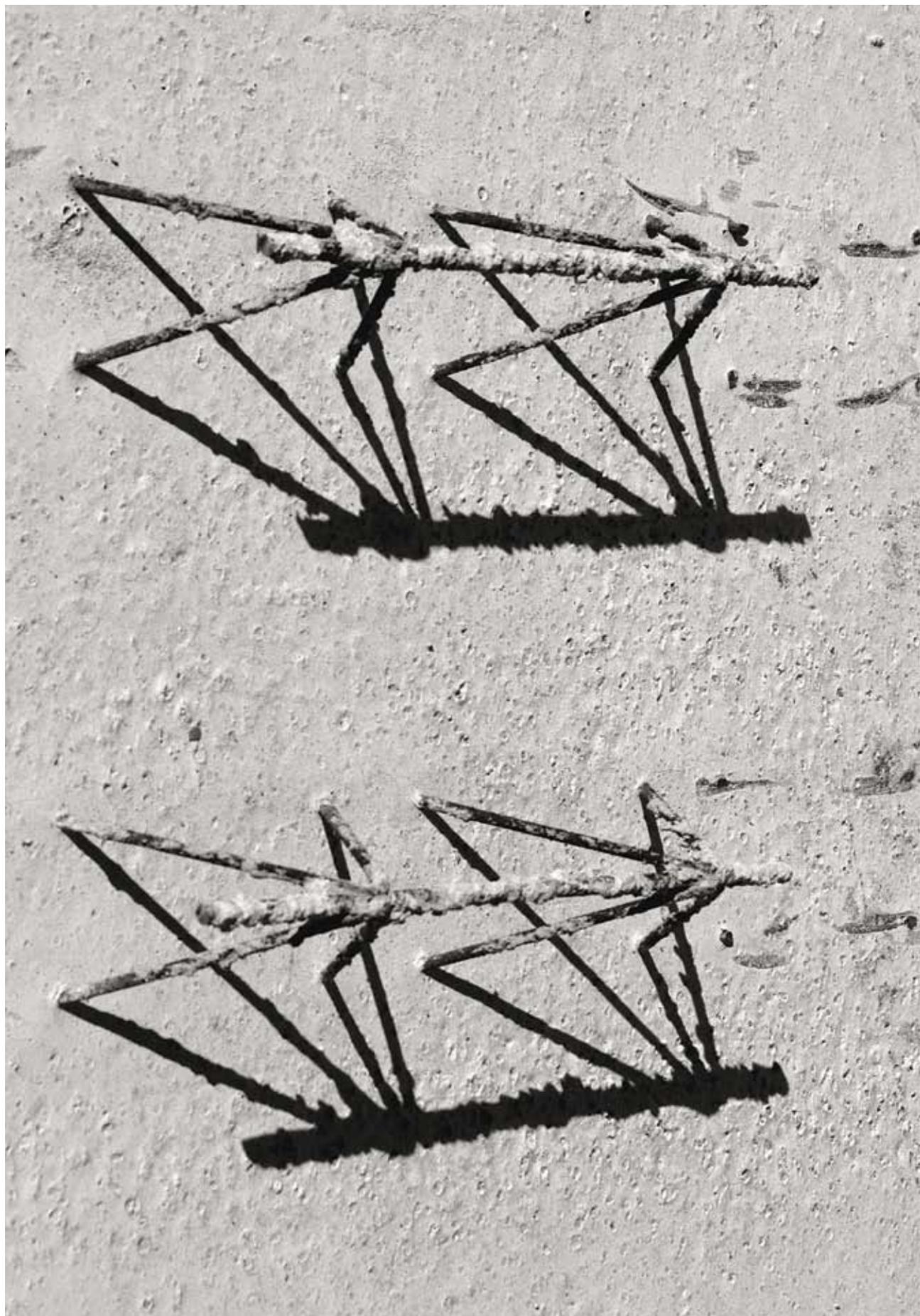
In your logbook, how do you distinguish arid from fecund?
Past animation from present vitality, or even from life yet-to-be?

How do you avoid confusion between prayers, prognoses, and prophecy?

How do you make sure that you do not mistake the relics of past voyages for the fossils of giants?
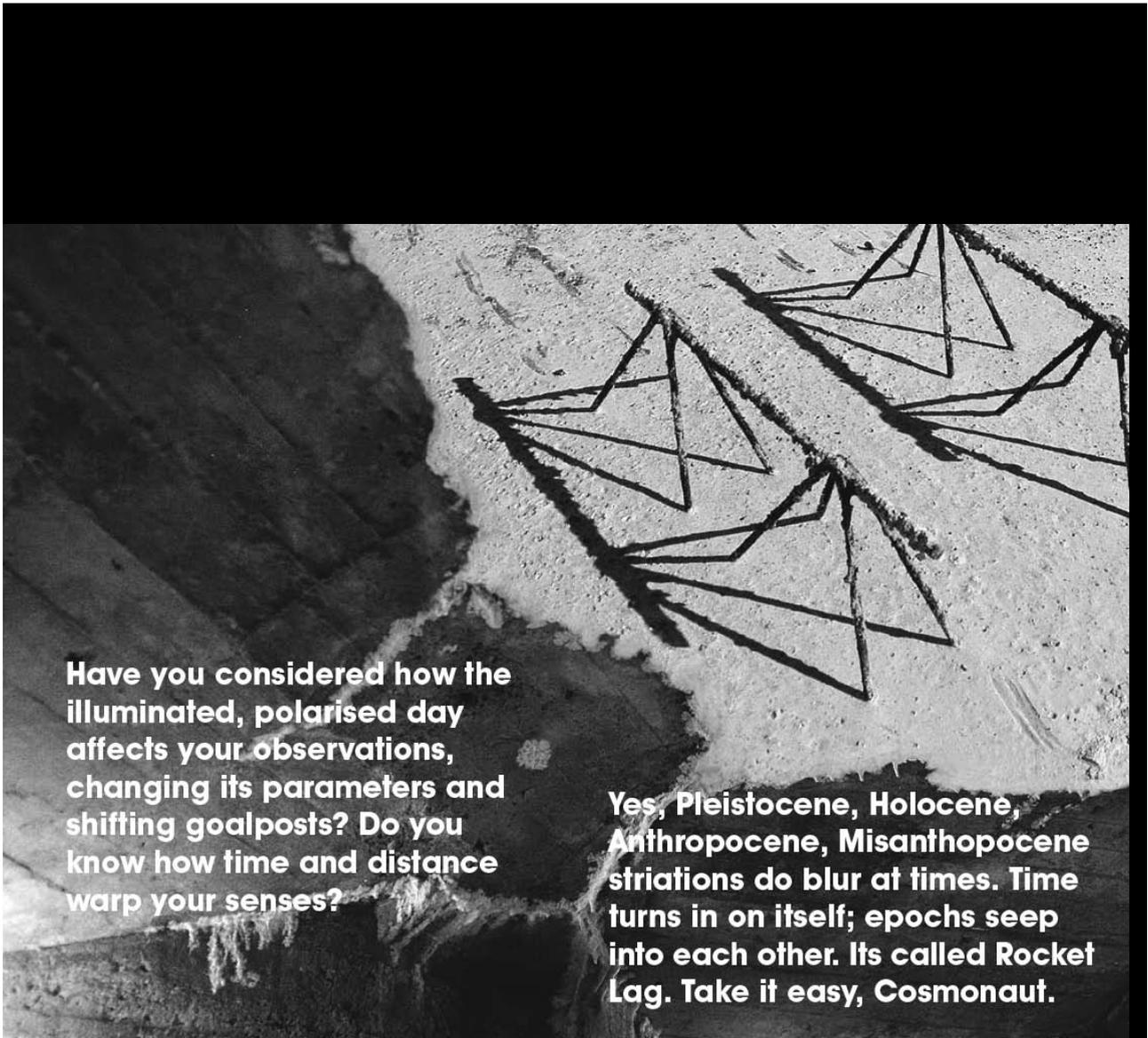
Have you considered how the illuminated, polarised day affects your observations, changing its parameters and shifting goalposts? Do you know how time and distance warp your senses?

Yes, Pleistocene, Holocene, Anthropocene, Misanthopocene striations do blur at times. Time turns in on itself; epochs seep into each other. Its called Rocket Lag. Take it easy, Cosmonaut.

Have you considered how the illuminated, polarized day affects your observations, changing its parameters and shifting goalposts?
Do you know how time and distance warp your senses?

Yes, Pleistocene, Holocene, Anthropocene, Misanthopocene striations do blur at times. Time turns in on itself; epochs seep into each other. It's called Rocket Lag. Take it easy, Cosmonaut.

FIELD NOTE FRAGMENT

"...following touchdown and a brief period of anticipatory quarantine, the surface of the day was investigated for the presence of organic traces of animate matter. Preliminary reports from the first batch of samples continue to demonstrate the usual anomalies. The important question: 'What Constitutes a Sign of Life?' remains in suspended animation. Metabolism, Growth, Sentience and Reproduction may all be expressing themselves in ambiguous ways, and it is possible that the test criteria being applied in order to identify them are insufficient to this task. How do we know what metabolism or sentience or reproduction look like in hitherto unknown, or unimagined life forms? How can we know? There is a danger that we may be projecting our own characteristics onto the surface of the entities we are exploring. On the other hand, we may be looking at a mirror, and yet we may be misidentifying the image that we see reflected. No certain conclusions can be reached at present. Further investigations will continue to be necessary."
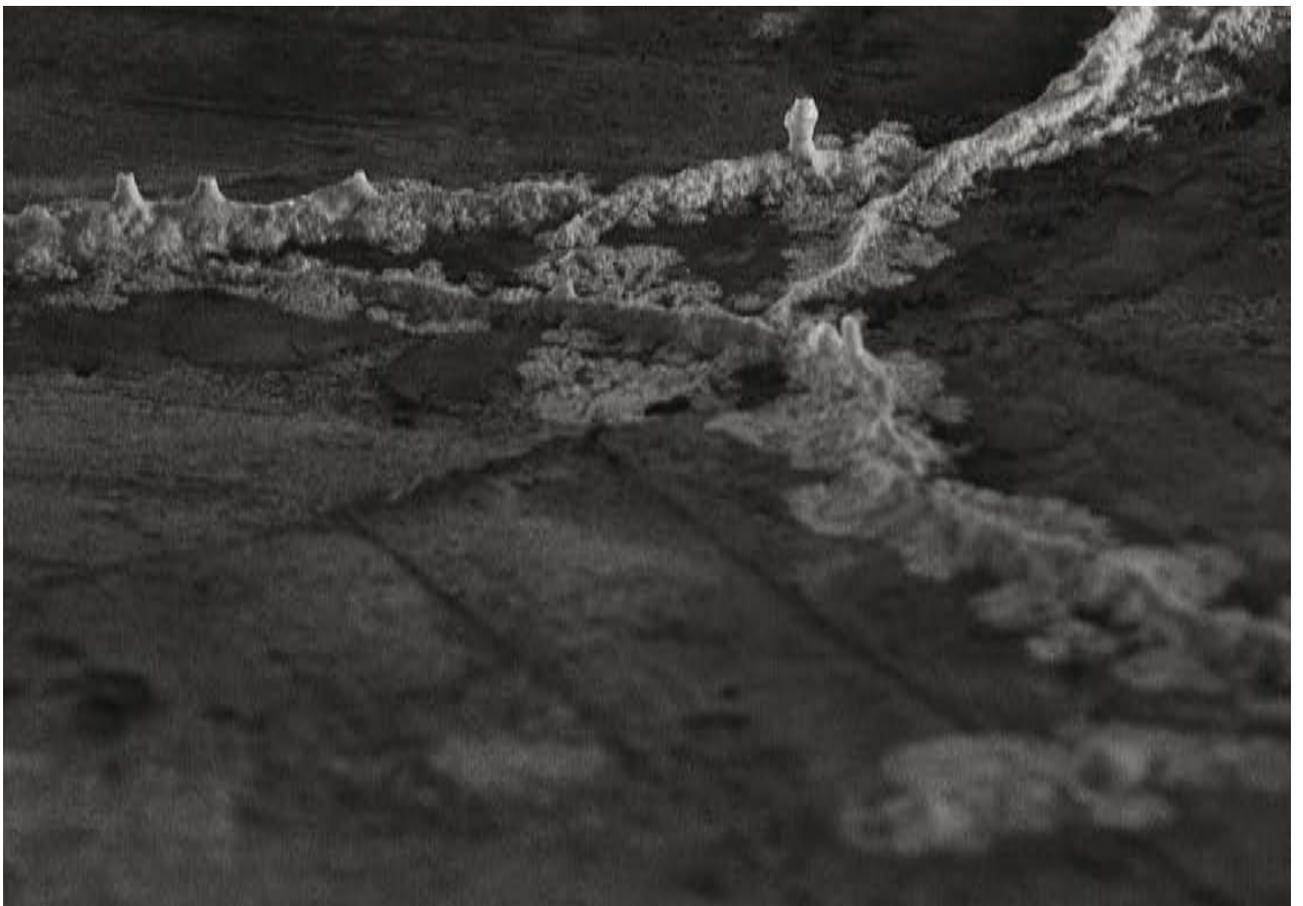
Farewell Cosmonaut, have a safe journey.

YOU LIKE LOOKING AT MAPS?

You like looking at maps?

I find new places to think about.

Are you planning journeys?

No, but I like to think about how things and people move.

Do you like old maps better or new ones.

I like maps, not how old or new they are.

What do you like about them.

I like to see a picture and think about
where a ship changes course, where a road
crosses the hump of a mountain, where a country
abruptly comes to an end, you can do it for
hours at a stretch. And I like to think about how
place moves in and out of a map; I like to follow

the curve of a mountain range across a conti-
nent, or the course of a river to the sea,
I like the way the colors change.
They use four colors to make a map of the world.
Just four colors can take care of everything.
But the map doesn't say all there is.
There are lots of things that a map doesn't say.
There are some names that are not on the map.
You can look hard for them but you wont find
them, not even with a magnifying glass.
Perhaps it is a question of scale.
That's the explanation.
I keep making mental maps, with all the missing
places in, and all the rest out. Just to see what

it would look like.

You mean, you take a place that is missing between here and there. Or, it's halfway between the bend on that river that is marked on the map, and this line of the border. And you ink that in and get rid of the rest.

I don't draw it, I just think what it would be like if it were there. It takes hours to fill in all the missing places. And then you can change the way the four colors are arranged.

And you have a world you wouldn't recognize.

You mean a world that is in this one.

It's kind of in between places that are on the map.

A map can't have everything.

I know, still, I wonder what makes one place count and not another.

It's not the number of people in a place.

It's not how big it is.

It's not how old a place is.

It's not how many roads lead to and from it.

It's not how far it is from somewhere else.

There are exceptions to all of these reasons.

So why does a place disappear, or never appear?

I don't know. I don't decide what gets put in a map, I just look at maps.

Would your map be of a different world, or would it be a different map of the same world?

I don't know, what do you think?

I don't know, I would have to try it out in my head first.

I do it all the time.

You like looking at maps?

I find new places to think about.

obstructor fetid sampler tempter desperate mercenary cream alien apparition elastic austere forbidden omnipresent steely epochal exchanger misanthrope unguided hard conurbation inconsiderate attractor addictive certitude dominator siphon neocon eloquent terminator archaic dredge factor autarch ostentatious repellant impasse prefect sensex concordat licentiate displacer computer effortless chaos warhead exceptional fabulous sleazy excavator eroder cockpit expansionary spearhead cruncher registrar telepresent bank enclosure coalfield unfriended developing saccharine slayer general regulator asset sting transformer transmitter elemental fiscal unfriendly hatchet contestant encounter spectacular fever pragmatist saturated enmeshed agent enlister drum syndicate abettor impaler bombsight defender accidental stock grandiose effervescent anima attacker fiat state terrestrial bomb incandescent adventurer exemplar inhibitor creditor squanderer abominable avenger interpolator victor killer tamasha humvee transporter eater strong observer frenetic redux unaffected torturer seething tractor taxman paratrooper lobbyist scarer ineffaceable warden abandoner indenturer showdown territorial sophisticated bloated dislocator allocator affidavit unfordable digester sledgehammer convergent

VALUE AND ITS OTHER IN ELECTRONIC CULTURE:
SLAVE SHIPS AND PIRATE GALLEONS

The slave ships have come ashore, and are off-loading their precious cargo on the docks. They are are waiting to take other goods in exchange. Out in the high seas the pirates are waiting in agile vessels anchored in the bays of islands not visible on the map. They wait for the tall ships to cross the channel on their return journeys and then strike under cover of darkness, recovering abundance from scarcity, restoring the nothing that is mined for gold, into the void depths of the sea.

"The bank hath benefit of the interest on all moneys which it creates out of nothing...."
William Paterson, founder of the Bank of England, in a prospectus written to the Bank's potential investors, 1694

For capitalism to be what it is, large amounts of wealth need to be generated out of *nothing*.

This is as true today as it was in 1694. If then, the "nothing" essentially consisted of "new worlds," "new lands," and "other people" that capital could mold in its own image, then today the void is the relatively uncharted terrain of information, the high seas of data and culture, which precisely because for millennia they have grown through a process of the exchange of ideas and expressions undertaken essentially in the spirit of gift giving, are now up for grabs for a new rule of the commodity. They are like the rain forests of ideas—containing many centuries of a biological diversity of cross-fertilized cultures and information systems, making them prime targets for the pharmaceutical corporations of knowledge.

The spirit of the age demands the making of scarce goods out of things, such as stories, ideas, images, music and numerical expressions, which were until recently considered inexhaustible, even when shared, and abundantly so, by all of humanity. The zero, after all, did not cease to be an expression with some use in the context in which it emerged when it passed from one culture of mathematics to another. Were the zero to be discovered today, it would promptly beg the question as to whose property it could become. There is money to be made out of nothing.

And so, even if stockpiled inventories far outnumber sales, even if theaters run empty, electronic warehouses choke with unsold products, and media channels pile losses upon losses, the promotion of the latest desirable cultural good

premises itself on the fact that if you don't buy it, you won't have something that everyone else (or at lease anyone worth considering) has, and if you don't buy it "now" ("while stocks last"), everyone else will buy it before you, and then it won't be yours to buy any longer. Hence, buy it, even if it costs you a fortune.

If you "accessed" the worth of that good by other means (as you would have traditionally done, given that it is a cultural or intellectual good), or by payment of a lesser sum of money in exchange for a replica which gave you the same results and gave you access to the same "worth," you would be doing something wrong. Typically, you would either have worked out how to crack the code that imprisons the value of the good, and made its equivalent for yourself, or you would have paid someone a far lesser sum of money for a good enough copy. It could be a CD, a DVD, a text, a game, perhaps a string of code.

After all, information—and all things that carry information inscribed into them, like all cultural and informational goods—is the gold, silver, tin, rubber, and cotton of our times. They are the primary commodities which add "value" to the world of material goods. They are the signs that rule over all things, they are the engines of desire; they apportion the values that accrue to goods from their real or notional scarcity.

In sharp contrast, the counterfeit item, the pirated good, the unauthorized copy that stalks each manufactured sign and cultural good openly, in the back streets and grey markets of every global city or small town, defies the laws that govern the making of money out of nothing today. It does so by challenging the real or presumed scarcity of any good with its ubiquity—the lush, fecund abundance of the copy, which can pass from hand to hand, from user to user to user in such a way as to reveal the specter of "high values" to be nothing other than the processed illusion that it is.

The idea that a cultural good can be marked as an "original," and is therefore of higher value, is in turn premised on the idea that goods, once sold (or purchased, or in any other way transacted), perish, at least in an economic sense. Here, it is held that the transaction, and the transference of ownership onto the consumer, "consumes" the value of the good. It is as if the life of a thing is short-circuited when it is sold. It can no longer enter the chain of circulation (except at a diminished value) as a thing that could be used for different purposes by different people. Hence, once bought, an object becomes, "second hand,"

"used," "depreciated," or in some general sense, "degraded."

While this may be true of some material goods, (and is strictly true only for rapidly perishable goods) it is difficult to imagine how it can be true for non-material goods today—a recording of sounds or images, an arrangement of text or numbers, or a piece of software, loses nothing when it is reproduced, or is passed on from one user to another in a digital environment. We are well aware of the fact that with the arrival of digital encoding of information, it no longer makes sense to distinguish between an original (which attains only the status of an event, or an instance of its first emergence) and a copy, because the act of making copies in and of itself need not involve any perceivable loss of information.

In fact, with each instance of a data object moving from person to person, the information content contained within it may actually increase. It does not make sense to speak of "end users" of digital information; rather it would be more accurate to speak of custodians who nurture pieces of information when they receive them, as part of a networked community of receivers who are also always givers—of users, who are also potentially, if not actually, producers. Thus, each person who becomes a custodian of the "material" has

the possibility of adding to it something that was not present before, before passing on a copy. It is in this way, for instance, that ever-lengthening playlists of music make their way from hand to hand, or rather between disc to disc in a community of aficionados.

There is nothing new in this process. The epics, stories, songs, and sagas that represent in some ways the collective heritage of humanity have survived only because their custodians took care not to lock them into a system of "end usage," and embellished them, adding to their health and vitality, before passing them on to others. When codes or languages closed in on themselves, allowing no "interpolations" or trespasses after a point, they rapidly haemorrhaged. However, the contemporary digital environment does tend to give to this process an unprecedented velocity. Unlike commodities, gifts can accrue value to themselves as they pass from one person to another in a network of gift exchange.

Anything, be it gift exchange or piracy, that forces open a thing that has been sequestered away from the commons in the name of an illusory or debatable originality or scarcity, challenges regimes that seek to impose limits on the formal or informal socialization of the products of labor and creativity. People share culture, and

create durable networks of informal sociality to enable that sharing, not necessarily because to do so is to be radical, but simply because it makes sense to share things that do not diminish in value when they are distributed. The person who shares more gains more social prestige and recognition, and this fact alone is sufficient motivation for the feats of generous bravado in online networks. Today's pirates like a good yarn about themselves (the grapevine's recounting of their real or imagined redistributive feats) as much as their ancestors did. The shadow of the pirate galleon sneaks in on the slave ship, and the slaves stir restless in the hold.

It is this fact that gives to electronic piracy, and to any act that frees information from the prison of artificial or illusory "originality," its true cutting edge. It does so not out of any radical intent to subvert the laws of property and the commodity, but because it makes eminent common sense for people to share information in any community through networks of informal sociality, especially if the act of sharing brings with it no depreciation in the value of that which is shared. Rather, the person who shares more gathers more prestige to herself. And by now we are all accustomed to extraordinary feats of electronic generosity (which sometimes carry with them an aura of "bravado") as means of earning reputations within tightly-knit online communities. The new pirates are just as desirous of chronicles of their adventurous heroism as their ancestors!

The shadow of the pirate galleon sneaks in on the slave ship, and the slaves stir restless in the hold.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when capitalism was but a rash young beast, still taking catastrophic baby beast steps out into the world, there were two prime engines that propelled its progress. The first amongst these were the institutions of slavery, (its still-born precursor, off which it still took its nourishment) and later, indentured labor, both of which could produce high volumes of primary commodities like cotton, tobacco, sugar, rubber, and minerals in "new worlds" (which were then processed to produce other goods) at low costs. There was of course also outright the allied institution of plunder which worked just as well, and was often engineered through the mechanisms of war and conquest, (early slaves were essentially prisoners of undeclared wars) so as to later found plantations, mines, banks and of course, a few parliaments.

The second was the expropriation of the commons, which "freed" large territories for capi-

talist agriculture, logging, mining, and speculation in land, and created at the same time a vast army of the dispossessed who were then "freed" to become wage earners in new industrializing areas at home or abroad, or criminalized through harsh laws that imposed penal servitude in the "colonies." Tall ships carrying slaves, indentured laborers, or the new "workers" (freemen or convicts), and large holds of primary commodities, gold, silver, cotton, sugar, opium crossed the seas, and sometimes fell prey to pirate ships. The crews of these ships often consisted of runaway slaves, mutinous convicts, and the otherwise adventurous dispossessed of the then known world. They would ransack the tall ships, and set their commodities into other conduits of usage and exchange, setting off eddies and convulsions in the then global economic system.

Piracy was troublesome in the way it led to sudden redistributions of wealth, which even if they were minor, were considered enough of a menace to make the mastery of the high seas a top military and political priority in the external policies of the leading mercantile powers. In a way, piracy was as troublesome then, as what is considered to be "piracy" today. It not only plundered plunder, it also advocated a "pirate ethic" of the high seas, where the laws of emerging nation

states were held in abeyance, where slaves became captains, and mutineers founded precarious and momentary island pseudo-republics that abolished private property and the formal institutions of the state; not because they were ideologically committed to an anarchist programme, but because it was convenient and expeditious to dispense with laws and the other paraphernalia of the state in the wilderness of the high seas, so as to better undertake the serious "business" of redistributing the wealth of the world.

Today, intellectual property, the new cluster of primary commodities made up of culture and information, is also brought into the world through trans-continental networks of new "indentured" labor, made in virtual vessels that pass each other in the global working night, on the high seas of data. These tall ships of our times that fly many flags of convenience are the software sweatshops, the media networks, the vast armadas of the culture industries, and the lifestyle factories. They produce high value primary commodities, stars, stories, sagas, software, idols, lifestyles, and other ways of ordering meaning in an increasingly chaotic world. Typically, even though they sell the fantasies of place and identity in an increasingly enmeshed world, they are produced in a global everywhere, and delivered through electronic pipe-

lines everywhere, and when necessary more or less instantaneously, through telecommunication networks.

Their ubiquity, and their global reach is also the hallmark of their greatest vulnerability; for like their precursors, the cargo of the tall ships of the new economy is just as vulnerable to piracy attacks. The new electronic pirates are located in the precise interstices of the global culture economy, which are the nodes that make the network viable in the first place. If we cannot imagine a global media industry without the technology that made possible the phenomenon known as "peer-to-peer networking" on intranets, then it is precisely the same technology on the Internet that renders any attempt to police the distribution channels of media content in the interests of proprietary agencies almost impossible.

Just as the piracy of the past disturbed the equilibrium composed of slavery, indentured labor, the expropriation of the commons, the factory system and penal servitude, the electronic piracy of the present is destined to wreck the culture industry either by making the economic and social costs of policing content prohibitive, or by ushering in a diversity of new protocols of usage, distribution, and reproduction of cultural and intellectual content that will make the whole enterprise of making vast sums of money out of the "nothing" of data and culture a difficult business.

The culture industry, by insisting on stricter anti-piracy laws and instituting harsher protocols of encryption, is at best buying itself some time. Their ships have been struck, and are sinking. For the foreseeable future, the pirates will be hoisting their standards, stowing away the "nothings" of culture to their grey market archipelagos of the global information commons that mark the map of the high seas of data with their volcanic peaks of electronic abundance.

EROSION BY WHISPERS
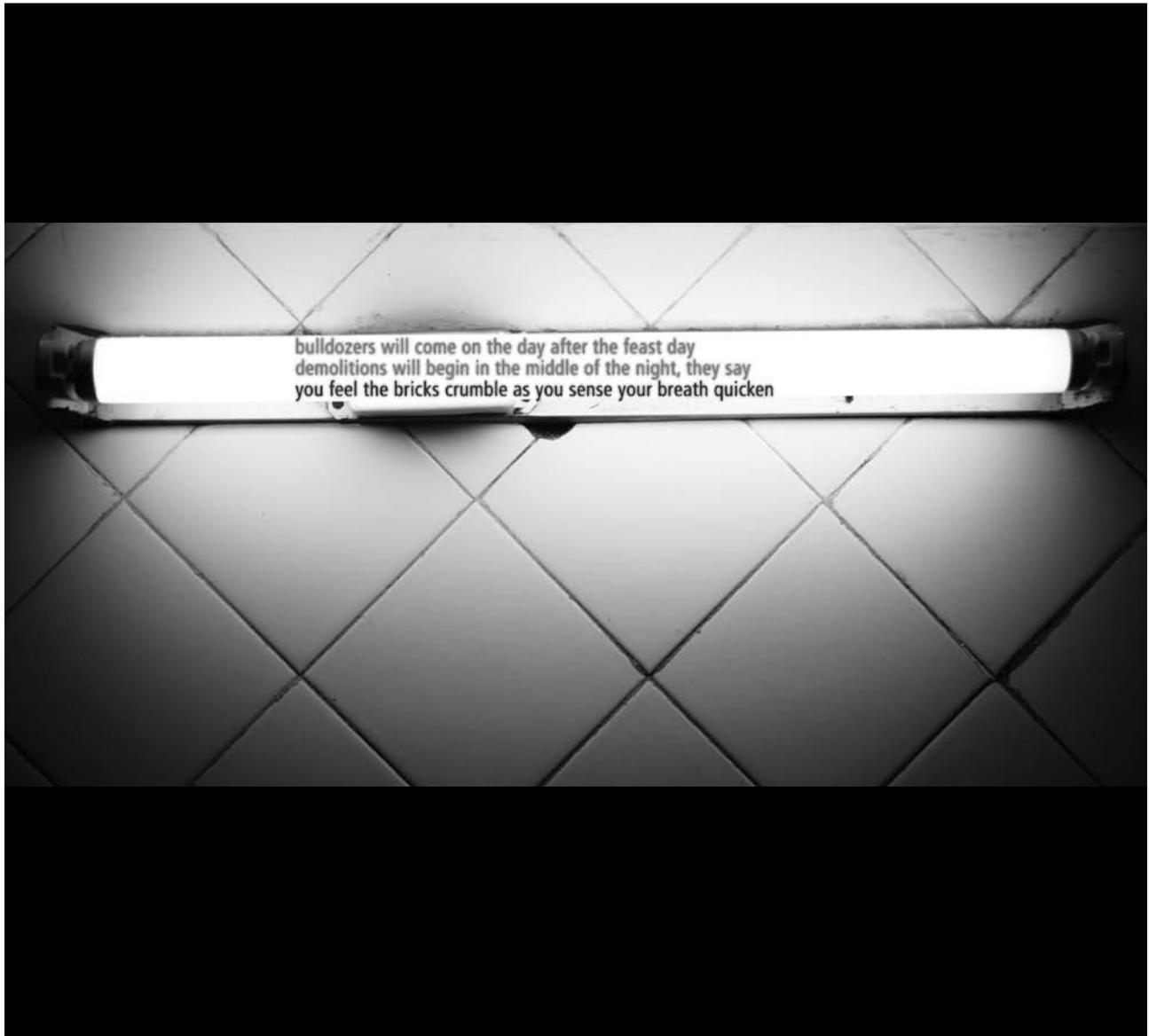
bulldozers will come on the day after the feast day
demolitions will begin in the middle of the night, they say
you feel the bricks crumble as you sense your breath quicken
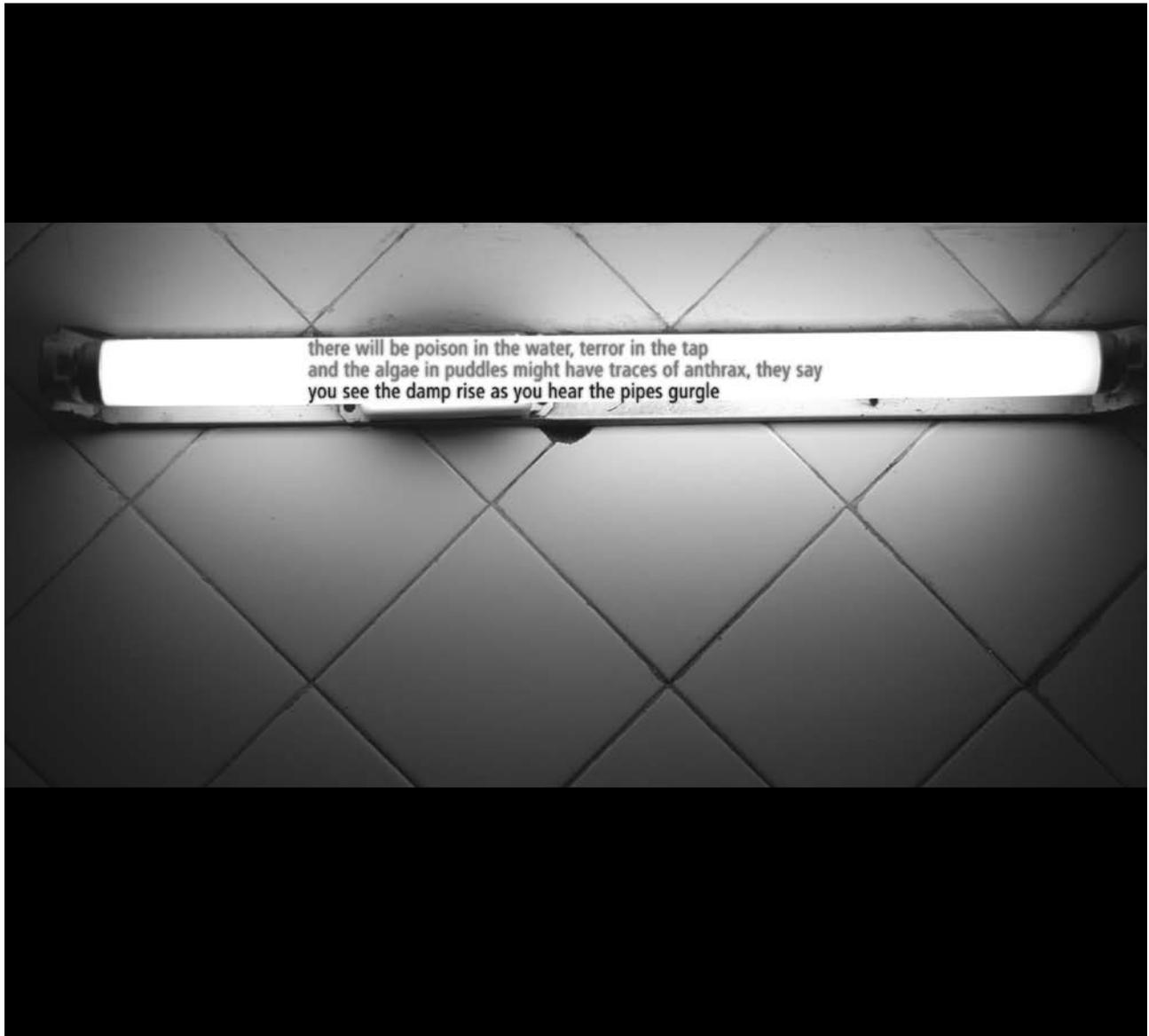
there will be poison in the water, terror in the tap
and the algae in puddles might have traces of anthrax, they say
you see the damp rise as you hear the pipes gurgle
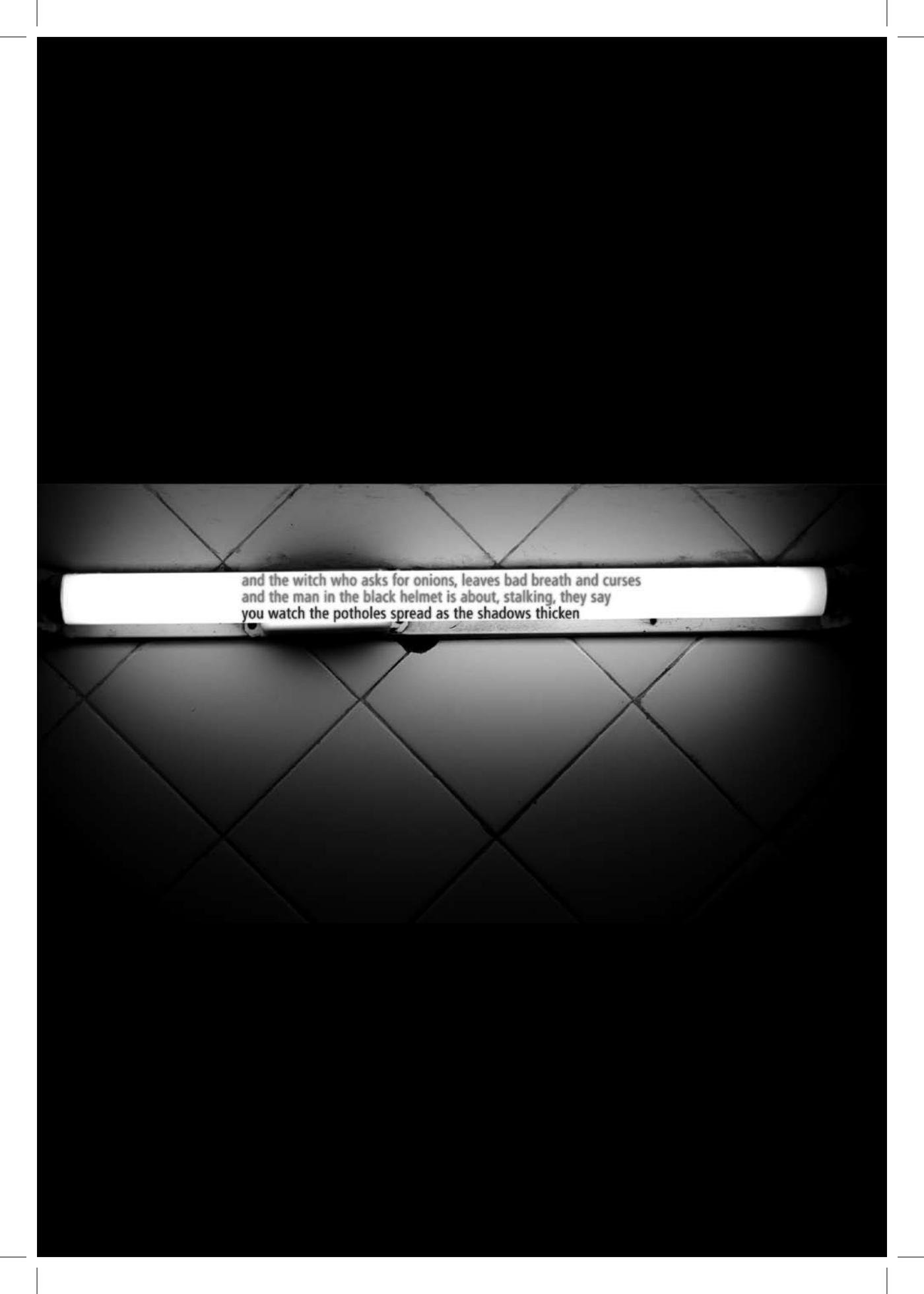
and the witch who asks for onions, leaves bad breath and curses
and the man in the black helmet is about, stalking, they say
you watch the potholes spread as the shadows thicken
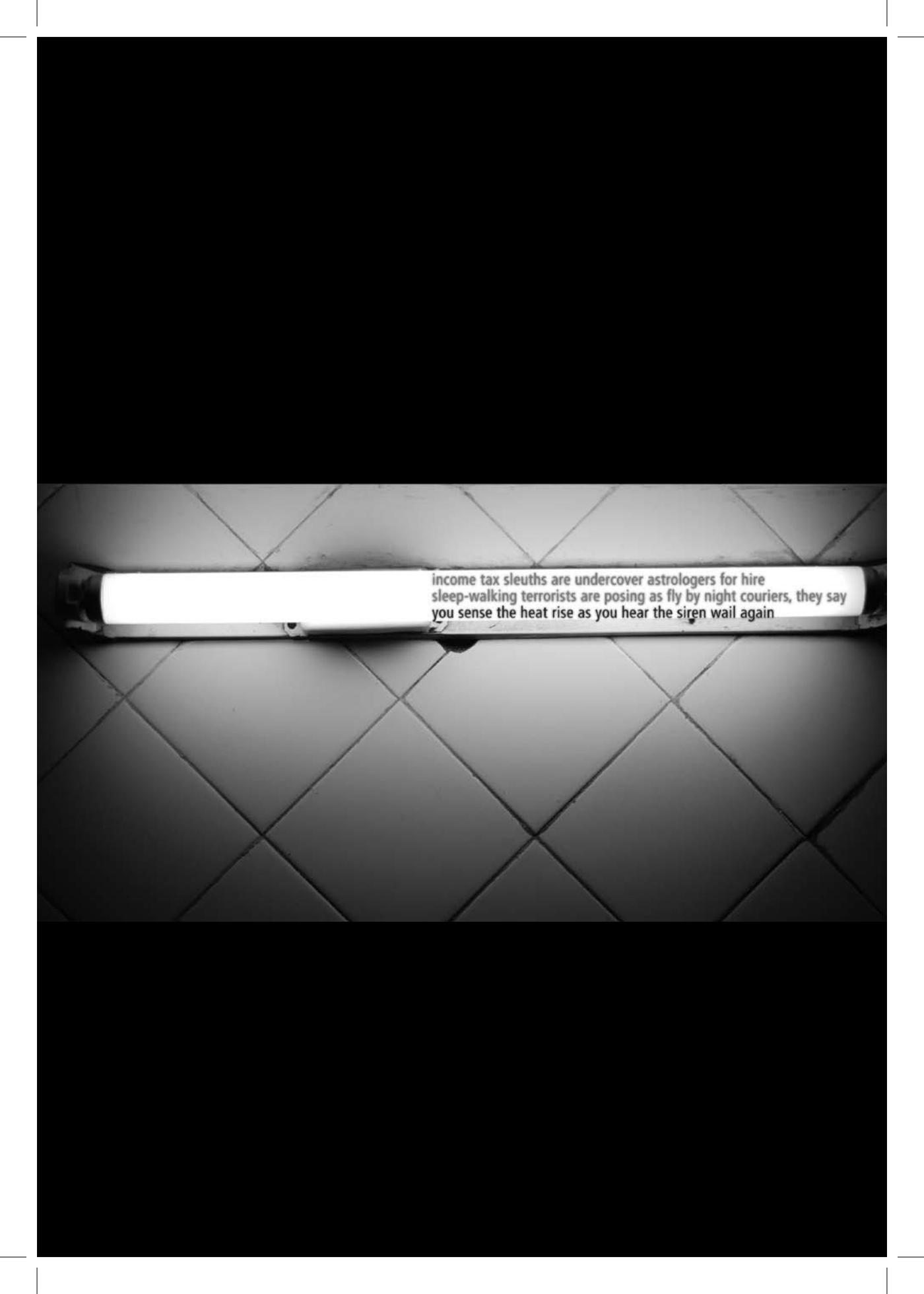
income tax sleuths are undercover astrologers for hire
sleep-walking terrorists are posing as fly by night couriers, they say
you sense the heat rise as you hear the siren wail again
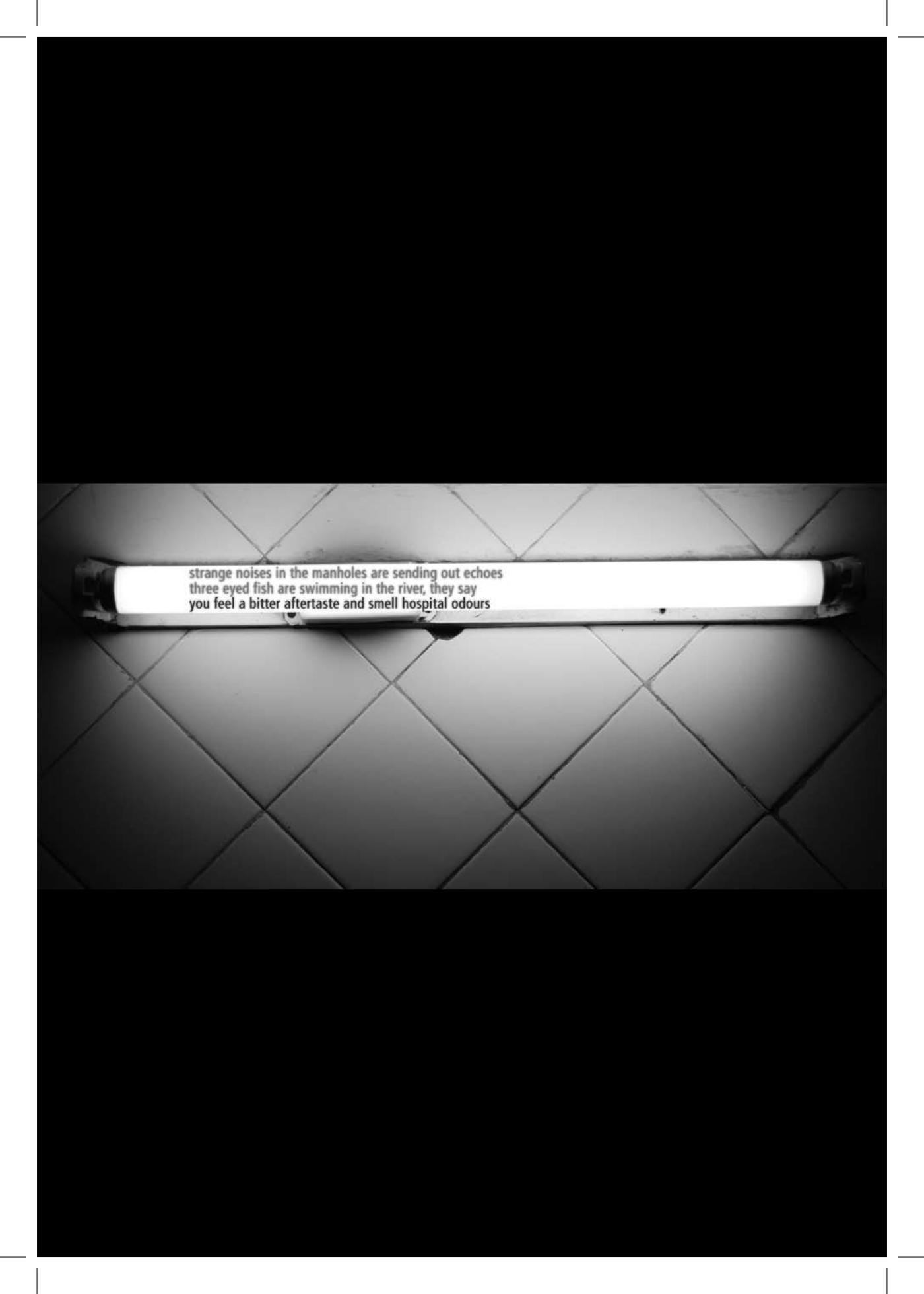
strange noises in the manholes are sending out echoes
three eyed fish are swimming in the river, they say
you feel a bitter aftertaste and smell hospital odours

schools of secret lessons are open for students
and markets for all things living, or dying, are thriving, they say
you know erosion by whispers in the bones of your city
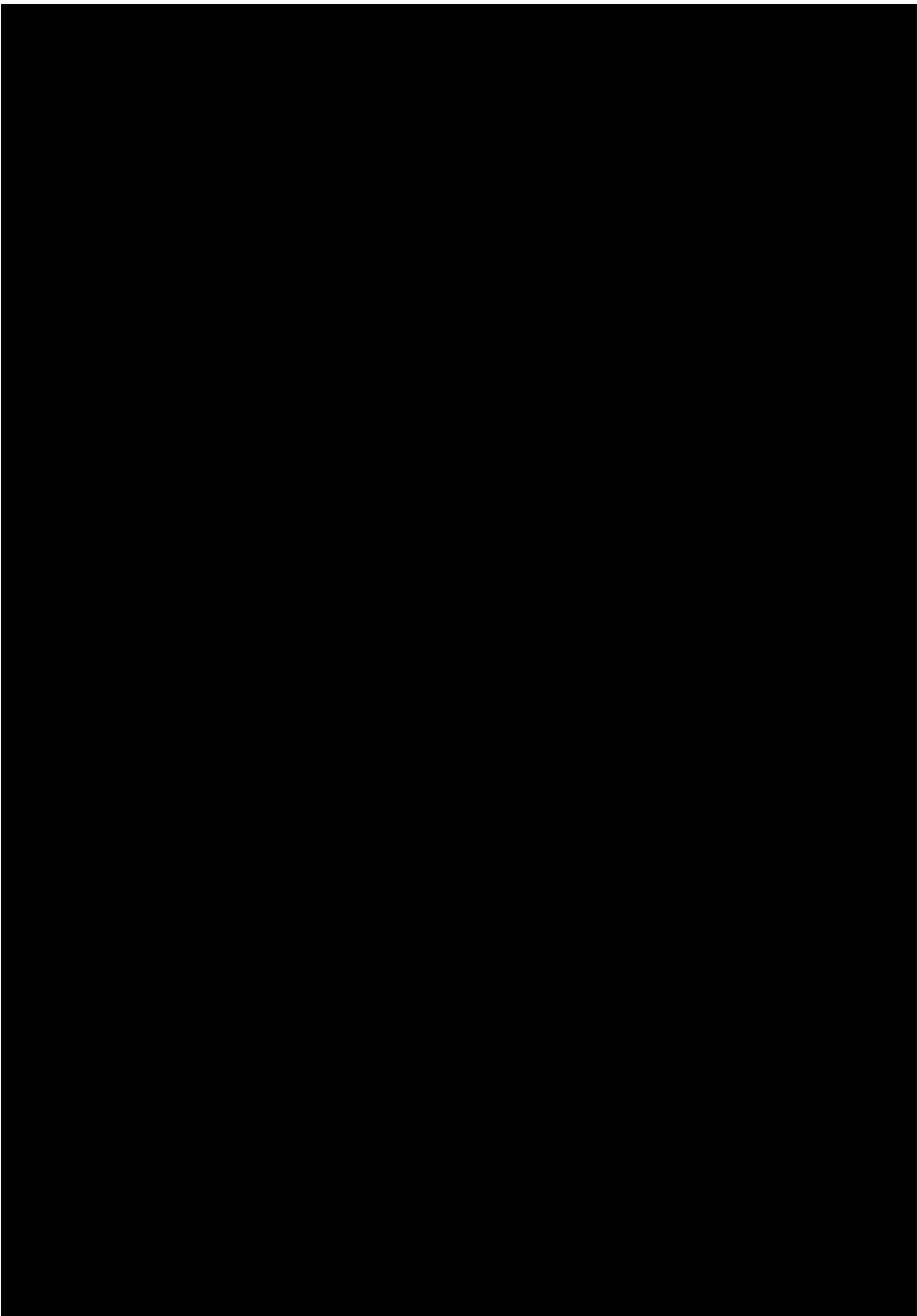
rigid coltan incontestable singular adamant spirit abattoir tacky ferocious unpredictable disintegrator intellectual imprisoning headman compensator estimator lethal specialist agonist enclasping arcane monad corrosive aeronaut seed speculator freighter unflagging sequestered raw predator sharp drug sleek cement checkbook automobile shifter enthusiast invisible monitor god emasculator wall fortress freeway fanfare immobilizer indigo purloiner institution ritzy grinder omniscient valuer militiaman procurer purchaser restrainer potent episodic invader road-roller static exchequer jet intangible solemn manager hangman sinister promoter yakuza tornado inferno sterile yuppie ruthless dispatcher money-monger pristine innumerable enumerator fixer zaibatsu trawler incubator lesion indulgent eviscerator express excitable oil panjandrum doorkeeper elephantine imposing whip extractor insomniac statistic sensational marketeer fungal sovereign program engager fierce pundit incalculable waster xerox surgical loanshark realist fanatic mogul unchecked overseer shop disrupter persuader vulture engrossing imp prime hallucination incinerator thrifty imperative merchant ineffable grid mine paradox munitioner orator faceless impenetrable fundamental silicon grand shredder strangler gainful petroleum fac-

NEW MAPS AND OLD TERRITORIES
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YAGNAVALKYA AND GARGI IN CYBERIA

I

We grew up hearing many kinds of stories. Stories of wise animals and stupid gods, arrogant kings and generous subjects, magical machines and speaking trees.

We grew up hearing the story of the wise man called Yagnavalkya and a wise woman called Gargi. And their conversation is a section in the Upanishads—texts which started out life as being interesting and elegant conversations in places where those in retreat from the world could gather (not unlike some chat rooms on the Internet today), and ended up dead as part of a formal philosophical canon in later Hinduism.

Both Yagnavalkya and Gargi were philosophers, natural philosophers, and while it was considered odd that Gargi, forgetting her "woman" self should argue about the nature of "being" itself, she did. And in this argument Gargi asks of Yagnavalkya again and again, so what is the web on which the world is woven.

This fragment of the Upanishads, the sit-here-and-listen parable of secret wisdom, is here reconfigured two for the third millennium of the Common Era. This Neo-Upanishad is a new source code, a manual of digital ontology, a map of how we might come to be. Imagine a new Brhadaranyaka Section (The Debate at the Crossroads of the Great Forest of Cultural Code)

where two reconfigured avatars sit, gendered male and female, named Gargi Vacaknavi (The maker of new codes), and Yagnavalkya (Keeper of the sacrificial flame of pure code). What we want to say is like the small, unfinished conversation between two people who once allegedly occupied finite, distinct bodies—one male, one female.

Yagnavalkya talks of how man invented self, and so brought about other. He speaks of how self, purusha, atman, Brahman, consciousness, mind pursues other; how prakriti, speech, body, form and how she (other) changes her shape, rewriting her operating instructions, every time he (self) makes a new program, a new release version of her. He encrypts; she decodes. She is software, a virus, free to roam and pirate herself; he stays hardwired, logged out and locked into himself. He pursues her, pins her, wins her; she runs away into the jungle of code again. He seeks her out yet again, and in the middle of his endless postulation of the real self and the self that is virtual, the other, her-self, he says to her:

"Gargi, silver-tongued, chat room diva, endless whisperer, cyborg siren, look—the two of us are like two halves of a block, hardware and software, one and zero, man and machine, and between us dangles the web of the world. The World Wide Web. The mesh made of strings of code. Cyberia."

Then Gargi Vacaknavi began to question him, "Yagnavalkya," she said, "tell me—since this whole world is woven back and forth on strings of knowledge, threads of code, what then is the net of code and knowledge woven on? Where on the map is Cyberia?"

Y: "Knowledge and code are woven back and forth on the minds that made the code, on the accumulated electricity of millennia that went into the making of thoughts, that was written down, encrypted, encoded, streamed into machines, read and learned and transmitted and taught and downloaded."

G: "And on what was that woven on, that mesh of thought, how did that get fabricated?"

Y: "On the little fissures where wealth and meanings, both of which we call 'artha,' in Sanskrit, gather between keystrokes."

G: "And where did money and meaning come from?"

Y: "From the worlds of hands weaving back and forth, from the intermittent movement of eyes, both awake and rapidly dreaming, from neo-cortical storms, and from the stream of blood, within and without…"

G: "And what moves these joints, works these muscles and tendons, what makes this flow and ebb and stream?"

At this point Yagnavalkya told her, "Don't ask so many questions, Gargi, or your head will shatter apart! You are asking too many questions about that (the deity) of which it is forbidden to ask too many questions. So, Gargi, don't ask so many questions…" It is said then that, "Thereupon, Gargi fell silent."

This conversation arises from a recognition that cyberspace has suddenly posed strange and new questions even within those of us who live at its farthest frontier, for whom connectivity and access to computers, and to the space they create between them, is not an easy dial-up option. We share computers, and e-mail accounts, and navigate the private spaces that we have created within our computer. We come from a situation where the scarcity of computers, the cussedness of phone lines, the fluctuating voltage, and the simultaneous rush to be on a machine so as not to be rudderless in the world, demands that several people share the same machine. At one time we were seventeen people logging on with the same ID. We are not mere cyborgs; we are evolving constellations of cyborgs. This makes for a proximity that is not unlike looking into each other's cupboards, and closets, catching the whiff of intimate traces of thought and feeling. This has made us look at each other and at ourselves in a new way.

We, as a man, and as a woman, are beginning to ask of each other the question, "What is the ground we stand on?" What are the conscious and unconscious flows of sensory and extra-sensory data between our bodies and minds, and within our common machines that shape our changing—neither binary nor unitary—natures.

II

Two clusters of images for two kinds of migration.

A person steps off a train into a city of fourteen million people, looking for the comfort and the freedom of anonymity, wary of loneliness and the scrutiny of unwelcome surveillance.

A person finds a patch of wall in a shantytown, off a busy street and builds a shelter with tin and packing cases; he begins a new neighborhood, changes the map of the city. A person clocks into a factory, makes up a new name and invents a new self, fills in forms saying: single, childless,
temporary worker, migrant, no permanent address... A person switches on a computer, logs on and toys with a new password. She is looking for the comfort and freedom of anonymity and is wary of loneliness and the scrutiny of unwelcome surveillance. She builds herself a shelter, calls it a website; she begins a new neighborhood, calls it

an online discussion forum. She changes the map, she clocks in at work, and a new day begins at the virtual sweatshop.

In a sense, all those who venture out into cyberspace for the first time are stepping out of a train into a new metropolis. They are looking for the freedom of anonymity, wary of surveillance, building shelters and neighborhoods, clocking in, changing the map. Given that the Internet began as a playground for men in suits, lab coats and uniforms, all others—women and men without suits, lab coats and uniforms, and just about anyone else who is not a part of a networked transatlantic matrix, someone who lives in time zones and meridians on the outer reaches of cyberia— is really a recent immigrant.

It is the malediction of many migrants in the real world that in the new destination they are too often forced to become exiles or indentured into the workforce, where the act of leaving becomes a gesture poised on the thin line between free will and despair. Many of us too may have left the everyday battles for survival, dignity, and recognition somewhere in order to chart a new continent of being, and the world. But when looking back from cyberspace into the everyday, what are the relationships between "virtual" and real "selves" that we now see and seek?

Is the virtual self of the online person only an avatar, a multiplied polymorphous and androgynous cyborg amazon realizing liberatory visions, or is she also a networked datadrudge, divided and multitasked within herself as she logs on to supply and reproduce labor power in a digital, pan-capitalist global marketplace. She has been the vehicle for the reproduction of living labor for a long time. Is she now in danger of being trapped into being the vehicle for the daily reproduction of virtual labor?

Further, is the interface that some of us initially welcomed as the possibility of transcending the determinations of biology, also returning to menace us with more bionic shackles in the prison house of gender. The Web, for instance, has come a long way from being the playground of gender identities. The remaining spaces for play and experimentation with online identities are becoming increasingly sidelined, as e-commerce, with its relentless search for marketing niches within marketing niches, underscores and amplifies the accepted notions of who we are.

Far from the transcendence of gender, we now have a proliferation of "acceptable femininities" that address and hard sell safe images of "womanhood." We are not talking of the sex industry on the Internet, but of mainstream "women's portals" because these are the sites that women are being asked to walk into by aggressive media campaigns. This is where the real action of e-commerce and household-linked purchases, lifestyle products and the cosmetic industry really is. This is really where women are, and are being placed, on the Web.

Of course the beauty of pointcast marketing is that every time you log on, your gender becomes an issue. You fill in a form that asks you your sex, and while your personal details get farmed by data trawlers, you, your gender, and your correlative consumer profile becomes means for the creation of value. This is because every women, every calculable entity, who logs on to a woman's portal is in a sense making room for the next customer, just by being a taxonomically appropriate female. Her presence is value creation. So you are working while you shop online, and it's such a delight that you don't even know it, and nor does anyone else, but those who farm your life. In the way that domestic labor was always "unaccounted for" in the textbooks of political economy, so too the shadow-work that is a part of the simple fact of gendered presence on the Web is an unaccounted reality of cyberspace.

The early days of the expansion of the Internet as a popular medium (around 2000) in India

saw the rise of several competing portals dedicated to women browsers. Some of these — such as, http://sitagita.com/, http://www.naaree.com/ and http://www.idiva.com/— are still active. These portals targeted different aspects of the online feminine. There were portals for the teenage girl, advice about dating games, parental issues, school scores, cosmetics, fashion, and boy bands. The portal for the bride-to-be featured tips on how to get your trousseau in order, lingerie, mother-in-law issues, dowry issues, how to fake an orgasm on your wedding night, conflict resolution, and agony aunts. The portal for the mature middle-aged house wife—pickle recipes, spirituality and health food, and then portal for the corporate woman—how not to antagonize your boss, handling emotions in the workplace, the art of writing the perfect CV, etc.

Several of these portals featured a section called "Career" where women were told about the brave new world of InfoTech (which was just coming alive in the popular imagination at that time). The promoted portals meant that they could now be even better "good" mothers and wives, and also earn money by logging on to piece rate work from the home. The shadow work of logging on— pages per view, hits per day, the further creation of value. A new version of the putting-out system by which you bought a sewing machine to supplement the domestic income by converting the home into a tiny production unit in a dispersed garment factory. "Smartbahu.com" (bahu=wife/daughter-in-law), which is no longer in operation, was particularly interesting in the way that it invited women to directly consider the options of entering the "Call Center" or the "Medical Transcriptions" industries.

The new economy in South Asia is cantilevered on a fortuitous accident of geography and culture, and a long history of reading and writing in the English language. While the Internet for some parts of the world may be "virtual," its experiential dynamics for us are grounded on the geographical coordinates of the South Asian landmass, which make us a workday ahead of the offices and factories in many actual hubs of transnational capital. This means that your secretarial labor pool never sleeps; it only shifts longitudes. And so you have the emergence of the 24-hour workday, and the time-stretched worker. This, more than anything else, is why there are projections of 4 million Internet users in India by 2003, and an exponential growth thereafter.

To give you a simple illustration: you could be calling a General Electric call center in Britain, and the person picking up the phone at the other

end could be a Sunita or a Madhu in our city. She would have been trained to speak in an accent that doesn't give away her location (space, time, ethnicity) and she would be working as a contract worker. Similarly, transcription work is secretarial assistance at a distance. For example, at the end of the day in the east coast of the United States, a doctor in his surgery can record onto disc via the phone, and someone sitting in the mushrooming IT cities (often called Cyberabads) of Bangalore, Hyderabad, or Delhi would take the dictation off the transmitted disc, clean up records, and by the next morning the day's transcripts would be emailed, ready and waiting.

Typically, a large number of the people who "man" the terminals at call centers, at transcription factories, at software sweatshops, and electronic assembly lines all over India happen to be women. Because they are cheap to hire and easy to fire. Because the insecurity of their lives as young, often migrant, single women in urban environments, which are extremely hostile to young, single, migrant women means that their status can always be used to blackmail them into longer work hours, stringent production targets through keystroke monitoring, lower pay, and lack of job security. These are lives led in the shadow of the glamor and mega bucks of the new economy.

These online lives have their own metronomic rhythm. And this rhythm regulates the ebb and flow of laboring on the net to an extent that makes the net take on a character very different from the freedom that we may be tempted to ascribe to it. Just as the history of Internet navigation has been a series of collapsing interactivities as proprietary software and mega e-commerce portals reach out to try and guide every net event, if your primary online experience is one of figure-cracking, eye-straining labor, then every act of logging on—thus eroding the autonomy of the surfer—will result in the net trapping you, and shaping you. And as thousands, and in time, millions more log on to the Internet from home-based work places in India and China, and as many of these online lives become those of networked laboring women, the net itself will change shape. The money being made from mouse clicks will change the meaning of what it is to be online. This is not the future, this is happening even as we speak.

In such circumstances perhaps it becomes all the more important to reclaim the categorical imperative of pleasure, jouissance and affinity for those women and men who labor on the net. If critical reflection in/on cyberspace can reveal the radical disjuncture between work and play in terms of different modes of interacting with the

same technology, if it can advance protocols of subversive and transgressive pleasure in work-places, then it will have reclaimed in some measure the utopian promise of the net. Inter-ventions to take control of our online experience can have repercussions in a much wider arena than just the Internect.

III

We return to Gargi and Yagnavalkya, only a few pages later. And so to their conversation. If Yagnavalkya wrests the argument, he will walk away with all the modems, and set them to graze on the data-pastures of the net, make them big info-fat, live-stock options. If Gargi Vacaknavi wins, she will rewrite every string of code and change the world. She will let loose the modems, set free the data-cows. Let us listen.

Then Gargi Vacaknavi spoke: "I rise to challenge you Yagnavalkya. The things behind the terminal screen, and the things between data and the body, as well as all those things people here refer to as program, memory, and labor. On what, Yag-navalkaya are all these woven back and forth?"

He replied: "That, Gargi, is the imperishable. And Brahmins refer to it like this: It is neither coarse nor fine, it is neither short nor long, it has neither blood nor fat, it is without shadow or darkness, it is without contact, it has no taste or smell, it is without sight or hearing, it is beyond measure, it has nothing within it and outside of it."

She responded: "All honor to you, Yagnavalkaya. You really cleared that up for me.

What then is this imperishable?"

Then Yagnavalkya said, "This is the imperishable Gargi on whose command seconds and hours, days and nights, fortnights and months, seasons and years, stand apart. This is the imperishable Gargi at whose command monies and meanings flow in their respective directions, some to the east and others to the west. This is the imperishable Gargi on whose command people move between worlds and gods, and governors are dependent on sacrifices, on ancestral demands, and living offerings.

This is the imperishable which sees but can't be seen, which hears but can't be heard, which thinks but can't be thought of, which perceives but can't be perceived. Besides this imperishable, there is no one that sees, no one that thinks, and no one that perceives. On this very imperishable, Gargi, space and cyberspace, the space between the terminal and the body, the space between control and enter, abort and retry, are woven back and forth. This, Gargi, is the integrated circuit of Capital."

Thereupon Gargi Vacaknavi fell silent.

Today, as larger swathes of industrial manufacture become a matter of dispersed assemblies, fluid inventories, and just-in-time deliveries, the proportion of networked keystrokes that will assemble everything from automobiles to GM foods to fabrics will rise.

In addition, a new global proletariat of cyborg-women-men, with prosthetic arms that marry robotic speed and involuntary movement with human faculties of discrimination, will rise. So much so, that the cyborg will be worker and supervisor split within herself, with instructions from a networked-command-control-communications and intelligence node delivered via the Internet and made to interface with her own neuro-muscular coordinates in order to create a complex matrix of voluntary and involuntary movements on the virtual assembly line. In a few years time, prosthetic arms will very easily find favor in the factories that ring our cities, and they would once again problematize Gargi's nagging questions about the relationship between discrete sentient entities and transcendent consciousness, between the resistance of the self and the tug of the other on the prosthetic arm.

Imagine tissue farms in South Asia producing bio-technological products and organ supplements from a dispersed assembly line of networked female bodies. The invasion of microchips into the human body may have begun at the intersections of digital arts, fashion, and cybernetics, but it could with ease find suitable industrial applications, giving rise to factories of fertile women who will have to tap their keyboards, monitor their fertilities, and enter, enter, enter data. Is this a scenario that a migrant will soon be leaving her home to enter? A website that sells eggs from comely, ethnically classified women (www.ronsangels.com) has been in active operation for quite some years. How far is it in the future that we will witness the booming marriage of convenience between e-commerce, genetic engineering, eugenics, and assisted reproduction? In the place where we come from, the take up rate for technological interventions in reproduction has always been high, and female foeticide and the availability of ultrasonography have had a close statistical relationship. How much longer will it take for websites that advertise and guarantee male embryos to get into business in the backstreets of Delhi?

A migrant in the real world remembers "home, with longing and therefore participates in a parallel economy of gifts, remitting letters, and new found resources back home. But is it that instead

of remembering and remitting, much of our online being is lived out in evading the home where we came from? Is the condition of migration into cyberspace already becoming a condition of exile? Many of us endow the cyberspace we are migrating into with our longings and desires for a better world, but this is a journey that we undertake not once or twice in a lifetime but once or twice or many times a day. What are the letters and gifts that we will send back from these journeys?

There is a lot of money and meaning being made in this world between the keystrokes. Money and meaning that imprisons women and men, hardware and software, machines and codes. And consequently, there is a lot of work to be done to reclaim online presence from the territory of an exiled imaginary, and invest it with meaning in such a way as to make it mean real things for most real people and for some cyborgs.

We believe that we must ask the "too many questions," even of our own assertions, as Gargi has always insisted on doing, even if this results in a systems crash, in a shattering of our heads. In that shattering, a whole new repertoire of things that we might become—incomplete, fragmentary, neither men, nor women, nor machines— may well be unleashed; and yet connection and ways of being situated, that are more fulfilling than the binary opposition units that we are accustomed to inhabiting, may yet be found.

To lapse into even ironic silence is to be lost to the possibilities that await us.
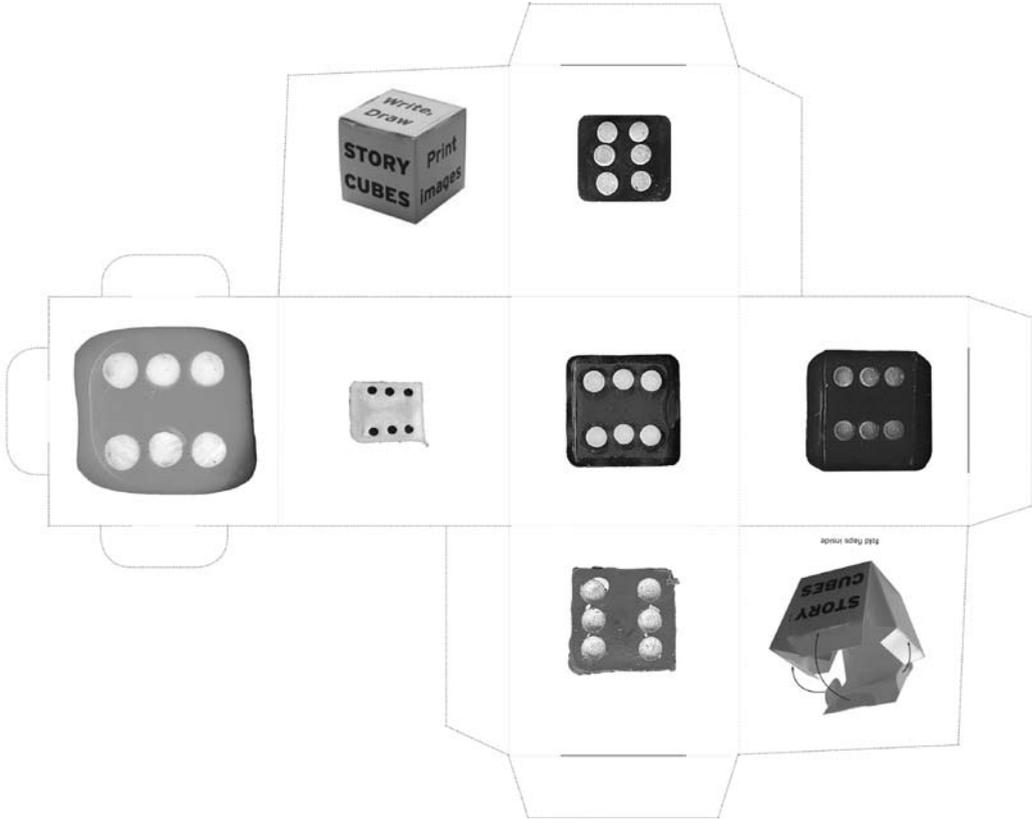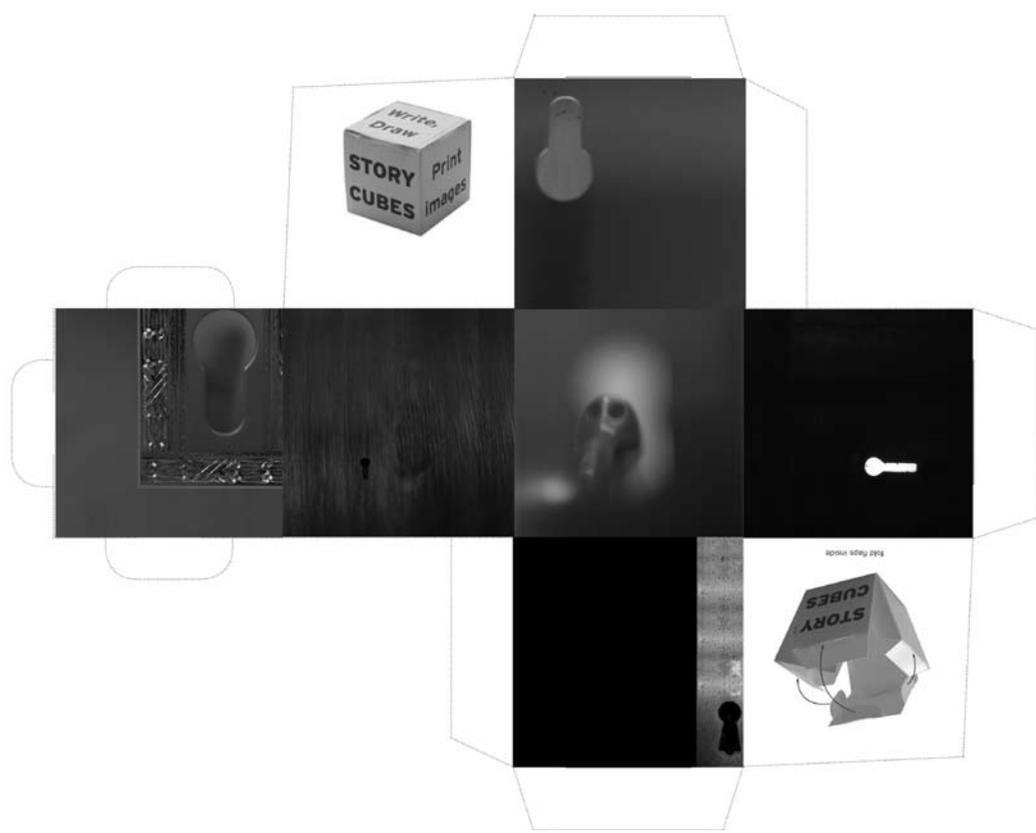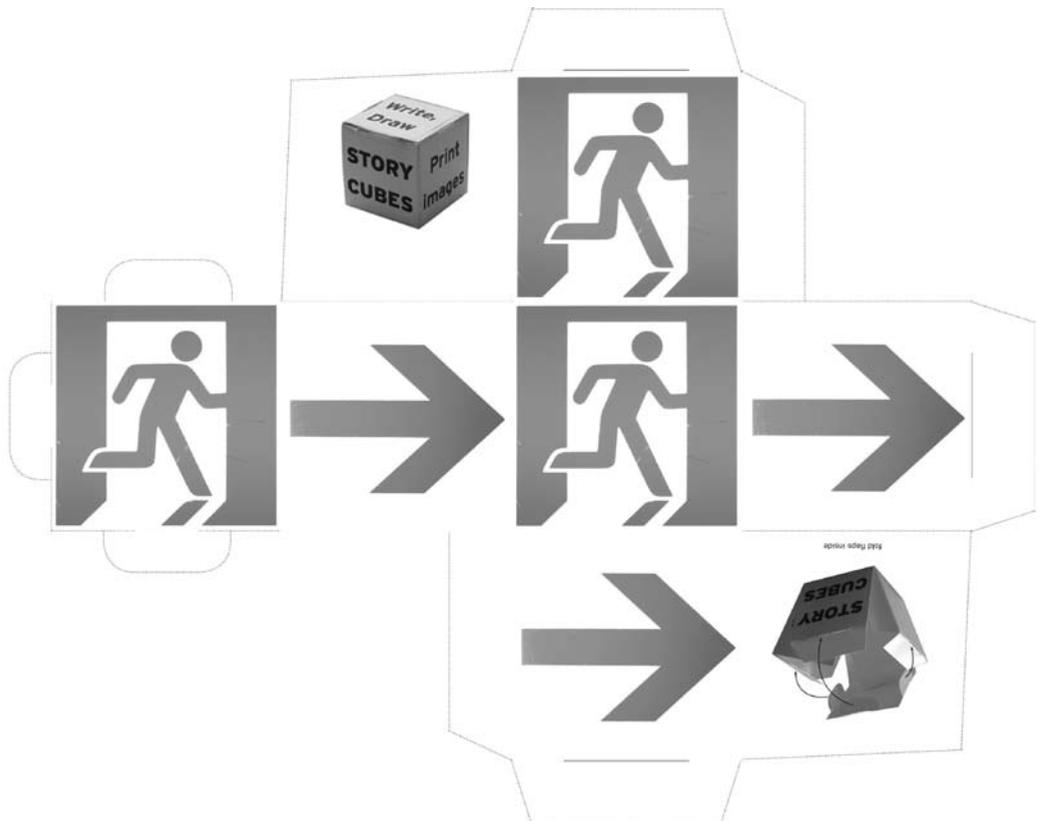
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PUBLICATION AND EXHIBITION HISTORY

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