

PEAKING DUCK

PEAKING DUCK DIARIES

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DUCK

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Peaking Duck Diaries is a publication of the Peaking Duck Network a Bangalore based network of inter-disciplinary, like-minded creative practitioners who have come together towards a common vision and goal. Our hopes:

- To explore collaborations between practitioners working in different art practices and disciplines within the network
- To create an environment for peer to peer critique, nurturing and learning with a view to developing a shared critical vocabulary that can enhance discussion and strengthen our work
- To raise the level of the discourse on the social life of artistic practice in Bangalore
- To share common resources in terms of space, infrastructure, skills and opportunities
- To become familiar with each other's practice towards imagining process-driven work in the following years
- To develop creative ways of intervening in social and political debates in the city of Bangalore

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Welcome to the first issue of the Peaking Duck Diaries! This slim, but hopefully not slight, volume brings together some threads in the conversations that have unfolded in the first six months of the Peaking Duck Network.

BY WAY OF AN EDITORIAL

We are an inter-disciplinary group of creative practitioners drawn together by the desire to engage each other with joyful seriousness. We share works in progress, risk collaborations across disciplines, and hope in time to evolve a critical vocabulary adequate to our individual and collective artistic intentions.

Every group cultivates its own ethos. Our accent is on process, on the granular aspects of practice; an equal attentiveness to the how, the what and the why. For it is arguably within this triad that the most complex confrontation is to be had in - and with - any creative endeavor. These questions matter to artists as well as to those who receive their work. The network is not indifferent to outcome or to questions of effect. It is more that in a period in which a narrowly construed notion of impact trumps all else, we think it important to return to the arts the reflective dimension that they have traditionally imbibed, expressed, and sought to inspire. Such an orientation is equally consonant with

contemporary practices (sonic, visual, performative etc.) that may ground themselves in an avowedly different aesthetic vocabulary. For they share with the older forms the desire to transform the viewer, reader or listener in some way; to effect a shift in perception or heighten some aspect of the senses, perhaps even both.

Given the emphasis on process we call this semi-annual publication the Peaking Duck Diaries. The diary is a record of sorts. It is not exhaustive. It begins as a personal journal or workbook but can, in time, cross over into the public realm. It contains the flow of activity, ideas in their infancy, scribbles, glimpsed potential, and explorations one would not, as yet, risk sharing. Though it has had a strong class and gender bias (most surviving diaries are of literate middle and upper class males) it has also historically served as an incubator for experimentation and a refuge for those without a public platform. For all these reasons the concept of diary serves us well.

One of the challenges of an interdisciplinary network is that language cannot be taken for granted. A single word may have a different meaning or valence or else summon a very different set of debates. The probability of cross-talk is high but inherent also is the possibility of juxtaposing varying conceptions and exploring the provocations they represent. It clarifies one's locatedness in a particular discursive context and unsettles one's purview as self-evident. It was from one such "unproductive" discussion that the idea for multiple takes on "gesture" emerged. It is likely that "performance" will be subject to a similar exercise in a future issue.

The Diaries maintain a degree of informality by design. Contributors have cited thinkers or writers without complete references and we have not insisted that these be furnished. This is intended to honor the fact that most are self-taught bricoleurs. We are putting together our own intuitions with ideas we have serendipitously discovered in books, DVDs, pod casts etc., from someone else's library or reading list, or from our own and others' rummaging in bookstores or on the internet. This kind

of critical self-education has been necessitated by the woeful state of the curriculum in our institutions whether in the arts or beyond. It may involve informal note-taking practices: ad-hoc summaries, notations made on scraps of paper, compiling quotes that speak forcefully to us without regard for publisher or page. In these and other ways ideas, images, turns of phrase enter and gradually become part of our cognitive world. This method has its strengths but there are also drawbacks. Unfamiliarity of the history and context for the emergence of an idea, technique or formal device, makes its deployment in another time-space even more fraught than is usual with acts of translation. The fact that this does not generally reveal itself as a “problem” and why this might be the case will hopefully provide grist for the mill of discussion in the months to come.

And in the meantime, tentativeness as well as confidence, maps for future projects as well as synthesizing analysis of past work will have free play in these pages. We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue!

Lata Mani

for the editorial team

P.S. In case you are wondering about the name, an extract from our concept note!

The network has been started to celebrate our creative passions instead of lamenting our limitations and the paths we have yet to traverse. The network acknowledges that we as artists always seek to intensify our individual and collective experiences – with an aim to keep peaking. To do so collectively would allow us to hope and imagine a Bangalore which would move beyond the half promises we have so far witnessed. This is why we have decided to call ourselves the “peaking duck” network.

And for a glimpse of our meetings, peakingduck.in/video

Anitha Santhanam reflects on her collaboration with choreographer Brinda Jacob Janvrin in bringing together authentic movement, text and image in *Disbelieve*

FROM DANCE TO DANCE THEATRE

“It is a sign for you to explore the feminine,” said my teacher Thomas Prattki after watching me move the colour Orange in a solo improvisation. “What is the feminine Thomas,” I asked? “Who knows what it is for you? Explore it,” he said.

A few months later, I found myself reading Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves* and Marion Woodman, *Leaving My Father’s House*, books I had previously kept away from, knowing they were dangerous. To a daughter of patriarchy, who I was at that time, the books were a complete devastation and a freedom. *Disbelieve* is my first collaborative exploration of the feminine both in process and content.

In the last week of July 2012, I was in Chennai holding a ticket to Bangalore. I felt a sense of urgency that I needed to be there soon but had no clue as to why. I had got a call from Brinda the night before my journey.

“Ani, where are you?” she had said, “There is this piece that we have a started working on, Priyanka, Nidhi and me. I really want you to come and work with us. When can you come?”

“Bri, I’m coming tomorrow. Let’s start,” I replied, not knowing anything more about the project.

At the first rehearsal I just watched. The movement material they had generated had energy, heart and deep personal resonance. And they were clear that the process of developing it further had to be both art-making and personally transformative. I too was clear that this was the way forward for the piece. Besides the personal movement material, all three dancers felt strongly connected to, and inspired by, *Disbeliever*, a poem by Mohja Kaif.

In her book, *Leaving My Father's House*, Marion Woodman writes, "The essence of energy is movement. Movement in the psyche reveals itself in images. If they are contemplated upon, they continue to interact and transform. If they are ignored they repeat or stop. Then we are not only stuck but we regress. Staying in the process is what matters; where it is leading we cannot know."

The challenge of performance was ahead of us. We believed that wherever the process led us, we would create a dramatic platform for sharing. That was my job. My first task was to get the dancers to integrate breath into the movement. Respiration facilitates contact between motion and emotion. As dancers the natural tendency is to hide the breath, breathing before or after the movement phrase. The integration of breath was the first step in the movement from dance to dance theatre.

The challenge of performance was ahead of us. We believed that wherever the process led us, we would create a dramatic platform for sharing. That was my job. My first task was to get the dancers to integrate breath into the movement.

Once breath entered the creation, movements revealed emotional states and emotional states created characters and dramatic choices. Who surrendered to the movement, who was on top of it, who an unwilling participant? Soon we had not merely dancers in the space but also actors moving and being moved.

From respiration to voice was the next natural progression. Where breath connects motion to emotion, voice connects inner to outer. This was a big step for the dancers to whom movement is the default language. Voice was both a journey of trepidation and access. Voice naturally lead to text; created from the poem and through dramatic improvisations.

While improvising with movement, breath, voice and text, it became clear that power and patriarchy were the invisible other in the space: power was revealed in external events of individual and public lives and patriarchy inhered in the 'musts and shoulds' of our inner universe. We began to embody power - as text, as rhythm, as gesture, in movement and through the guise of people in power from the dancers' own life experiences.

Drawings: Brinda Jacob Janvrin

Meanwhile, work continued on the solo pieces. As the person watching I invited and provoked the dancers to pursue and engage with what their bodies were proposing. When was a movement alive in the space? When was it

POEM



KISS



WALL (dolls, shooting)



ARMY → MARCH PAST (regimented, controlled puppets?)



BRI'S SOLO (breaking tree, legs broken)



WHISPERING - 3 women / psyches, 3 heads 1 body, voice in the head



BUILD UP - FALLS - VIOLENCE → (Darina)

NIDHI'S SOLO → (stone girl) → (Devils Doll)

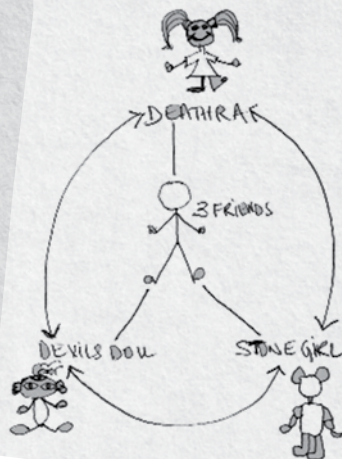
DANCE → PRIYANKA SOLO (letting go, acceptance, new self)



3'S SOLOS-



WALL



empty? What needed more time and repetition? What was the mind resisting? Where did the movement lead? What needed to be amplified? How can that which is hovering on the edge of the conscious become fully conscious and integrated?

These were dangerous and exhausting explorations and not always pleasant. But they had to be made, because it was out of ourselves as human beings and artists that we were creating *Disbelieve*. It was an intuitive process that demanded from us presence and grace. On some days, some journeys could not be made because they were too emotionally overwhelming.

With more and more material emerging – as image, text and movement, I began to construct the narrative and the layers of the piece, trying them out in rehearsals. Some of it worked straight away, some of it not and some lead us to even more potent combinations. There is a notion that “anything goes” in devised work since there is no definite text. But this is not so. As a theatre maker I am always aware of the audience. And it is important to me to facilitate their journey into a piece through careful construction of space, text, image and rhythm.

One of my fears in writing about the process of making *Disbelieve* is that it may be reductively interpreted as a technique for creating work. For me it is a continuous exploration. How does one allow what is alive in oneself in relation to a theme to emerge? How do I make the invisible visible? How do I make sure that we are really grappling with a theme not merely indulging in it or skimming its surfaces? How can we pursue that which is unknown, exciting and dangerous? How can a piece of work be personal but not private?

As an artist, making a piece of work like *Disbelieve* is extremely important to me. Making theatre out of our own personal journeys with texts created from the tapestry of our own lives and that of other artists is a path into the future.

GESTURE: THREE PERSPECTIVES

Gesture In Dance, Shabari Rao

It's Just A Gesture, Namita Aavriti

Mise-En-Geste Or Framing Gestures, Nicolás Grandi

Picture a dancer.
Still.
– Nothing moving except...

A flick of the foot
A twitch of the shoulder
The uncurling of fingers

In contemporary dance terminology these would be gestures: movements that do not involve carrying the weight of the whole body as the dancer moves through space. Raising an arm would be a gesture. Stepping forward would be a transfer of weight. Gestures are movements in which weight is not transferred.

How does gesture convey meaning?

In contemporary dance an entire sequence of movements can be created with gestures performed by different parts of the body. A string of everyday gestures can be arranged to form a sequence – the wave of a hand, the shaking of the head, the buckling of the knee. Or a dancer might use gesture more sparingly within a larger locomotive sequence. While a dancer is jumping or turning, she

A gesture can be used to evoke an emotion or create an image. The use of the gesture is suggestive and open to interpretation.

might add a gestural movement with her fingers. Or after a sequence that takes her across space she might add a moment of stillness that emphasises a gesture. How a gesture adds to the impact or meaning of the choreography is specific to each instance, to the image, energy or dynamic that the dancer is looking to create. A gesture can be used to evoke an emotion or create an image. The use of the gesture is suggestive and open to interpretation.

Within the context of Indian classical dance the discussion of gesture is often restricted to mudras or hand gestures. Hand gestures are used both to tell a story or as decorative or ornamental movements. Abhinaya or the story telling part of classical dance uses hand gestures much like a sign language. Often audiences are familiar with the story being narrated and thus are able to interpret the language of the mudras. Mudras form a complex, stylised language that convey specific meaning. Indeed the Natya Shastra lays out the scope of meaning for each of the hand gestures, the finite set of meanings that can be conveyed through each mudra. This makes it difficult to imagine other possibilities within Indian classical dance.

While the meaning of gesture is far more open in contemporary dance, the basic function of gesture in both classical Indian and contemporary dance forms is similar. Gesture has a decorative purpose or is an aesthetic means to create meaning. However, while in contemporary dance the meaning of a particular gesture is not pre-decided, in classical dance it most often is. This difference changes the way the audience assimilates gesture in the two traditions.

It's Just A Gesture, Namita Aavriti

At a recent literature festival, some of us who took part were given a handmade card that said, "Thank You.". The card was probably made by dropping a blob of watery paint on thick paper and then tilting it in different directions.

A young author who had just read from his new novel (a far more weighty accomplishment than a handmade card) looked in puzzlement at this object that was neither money, nor a plaque, nor a certificate, nor a gift voucher for an expensive bookstore... Noting his expression his friend helpfully said – “It’s just a gesture”.

While acts propel narrative or instigate diversionary arcs in epics, what do we know of gestures?

The easy use of gesture here seems to put it in the company of unnoticeable girls who are wallflowers or other things that are not supposed to register much in our consciousness. In that sense, a gesture is devoid of gravitas (weight) and consequence – it doesn’t change the course of larger events and its relation to history or time is tenuous at best.

And yet it is the innocuousness of a gesture that according to Walter Benjamin, makes it hard to fake. In writing about Bertolt Brecht and epic theater Benjamin expounds on gesture, saying that it was falsifiable only up to a point and this was its advantage over opaque actions or highly deceptive assertions that people make. The more inconspicuous and habitual a gesture, the more unrelated to conscious thought, the harder it is to falsify – the flick of a wrist while ash-ing a cigarette, the tilt of a body or its sway while walking, a way of rolling down socks, of wiping your hand against the mouth after eating or a certain way of talking into a mobile phone. While acts propel narrative or instigate diversionary arcs in epics, what do we know of gestures? After all it’s not redemptive action that is denied to Sisyphus, but the gesture of wiping his brow; or rather if he did, we are not told how that slight moment of relief might have felt.

Will we be able to recall our gestures from a mere 10 years ago, or longer, when hand-drawn cards were not suspicious objects? It takes an odd moment of watching

a music video from Pakistan in the '80s (*Dosti*) to realize we moved like this, with shoulders slightly hunched into the music while shuffling our feet side-to-side. This was something we tried hard to forget about ourselves in 1991, our uncool pre-liberalization selves, before we saw the *real* disco from the West.

In film, gesture is like a crystallized social memory, and Giorgio Agamben claims that our gestures are returned to us through film just as we are forgetting them. For me, the poignancy and curious impetus of gestures is perhaps clearest to those who perform something other than what they are born as – whether class, caste, gender or other such affiliations. It is the gender-queer person who understands that their gender is often the conglomerate of their gestures – of how they sit, talk, stand, gesticulate and act; and it is just that easy to perform, or that hard to fake.

Mise-En-Geste Or Framing Gestures, Nicolás Grandi

Can we go back to the basics or to put it in terms of poetics, to the minimum units of composition? And through this try to glimpse what a "frame" could be.

The frame is something that holds things together, contains them in order to provide some sense or order to what happens within it.

But let us displace our interest from what holds things together to what is actually being contained. What are those things that are within a frame, that act in an interdependent way and actually allow the frame to exist? After all if there is nothing to frame then there is no frame!

Gestures are one of the things being contained, and we can track them in the ways our dances take shape from the straight lines of Indian Bharatanatyam, to the hip centred movement of the African juba dance, or the intense striking of feet in the Argentinean malambo. We can also see them in the patient

To examine the way we have carried our bodies in different time periods is to build some kind of history of life.

camera observing two minute ants crossing the frame when all of a sudden one shifts direction ever so slightly. Or also when a series of quick cuts are increasing the tempo and the tension of a video sequence in which a performer is going through an intense implosion and explosion of movements. The gestures of a cinematic body can also include the relationship that sounds want to establish with the image, like the continuous repetition of a word sung in a padam or a remixed soundtrack of a Mizoguchi film over the desert landscape of the Raan of Kutch.

It is fascinating to see how the history of the arts - dance, cinema, performance, painting, sculpture – bear witness to the changes occurring in gestures over time. To examine the way we have carried our bodies in different time periods is to build some kind of history of life. The different mediums, the various arts, have each left their own gestural imprints.

One painting by Raphael, *The School of Athens*, shows Plato and Aristotle having a conversation. If we look close we can see Plato pointing up and Aristotle extending his hand in front of him with the palm facing down; two very distinctive gestures. Plato indicates the borders and limits of the frame above inviting us to go beyond them. Aristotle grounds his gesture in the frame, pointing in front of him, to the realm of the others, of relationships. Aristotle and Plato are encompassed by the frame, but it is their gestures that give meaning to the composition, to the dialogue they are supposed to be having, and ultimately to the frame as a whole.

SOUND REASON: LAWRENCE LIANG

On Abhijeet Tambe's Russell Market, part of his Blackbox project, a sound art initiative that interweaves city sounds, conversations and stories.

Growing up in Shivajinagar I was privileged to have one of the largest playgrounds in the country, one which was coterminous with the entire neighborhood. Cycling or running through the alleys behind Russell market was an adventure of the senses. After many misadventures involving crashing into burkha-clad women whose range of bangles were only matched by the variety of their abuses, you trained yourself to develop a less than sensitive ear and disengage with the competing sounds designed to decrease your enjoyment of the visual thrills of the neighborhood. But Shivajinagar changed for me entirely when I encountered its silence in the middle of the Munna riots in the eighties. Curfew had been declared and we were huddled up at home awake the whole night and the only sound that one heard was occasional gun shots and glass bottles shattering. The absence of the hullabaloo of everyday life that we had so taken for granted heightened our sense of fear and loneliness, and the end of the threatening silence that had taken over for a few days marked a return to normalcy.

Abhijeet Tambe's soundpiece on Shivajinagar skillfully constructs a rhythmic soundscape of everyday life that intervenes at a critical juncture in the history of one of Bangalore's oldest and most exciting neighborhoods with the BBMP threatening to demolish Russell market, the symbolic and commercial heart of the area. The piece begins and ends with what sounds like a school song cum elegy to the state and the nation and serves almost as an

ironic quotation that frames the experience of locality. Using the incessant clanging of workshops as a foundation that runs through the work, Tambe's piece builds up the tempo like a slowly speeding train to incorporate the sonorous call to prayers at the Masjid along with the solemnity of the organ from St Mary's church testifying to the syncretic nature of locality. He also intersperses the piece with fragments of conversation about the rich past and uncertain future of Shivajinagar managing to capture the unique cadence of Dakhni (which other language would have phrases to equal the melody of '*Kya MIyan, Tiya piya? Or 'Zyada Baatein kiya toh, chappala khaati soh'*) providing us with a sense of what it may mean to listen to the pulse of a city via an attention to the ambient diversity of one neighborhood.



Photo: Jerome White

The Greeks, who of course had a term for everything, include in their lexicon the word – acousmatic – indicating a sound which is heard without the causes from which it originates being seen and it was a Pythagorean virtue to speak from behind a screen so that sight would not distract from the purity of the aural experience. And yet listening to Tambe's piece seems like a violation of an acousmatic contract as you can immediately picture the Gurjari with its own Blacksmith Blakeys drumming out the swings and stresses of metal on metal. This is perhaps what Michael Chion described as audio vision- where sonic experiences link visual ones and where visual memory without an accompanying soundtrack would be a silent film. There is always a danger in working with a space with the sensorial density of Shivajinagar of putting in too much and Tambe's piece chooses to work with a few core sounds to create a repetitive rhythm which allows us to picture a specific rather than a generic image of the locality.

Most writers who seek to describe neighborhoods work with a distinct disadvantage of having to convey a sense of space only through words but we all know from our experience of navigating Indian cities that our ears act as auditory guides that allow us to access subterranean forms of knowledge and pleasure. Tambe's piece opens us out to a way of thinking of aural histories of space which can supplement

our lonely planets with a not so lonely toolkit of sounds where urban epiphanies and euphonies merge.

In one of the conversations in the piece a man tells us that they want to replace Russell market with a mall and it has been said of shopping malls that they are spaces where you are least likely to meet people who are least like yourself. It is evident on listening to Shivajinagar mix that if the market is replaced by a mall you are also least

likely to hear people and sounds who are least like yourself. But rather than making the standard political and social argument against malls the piece invites us to imagine and feel the consequences of such a transformation. If politics has always been aesthetic and political rhetoric has been shaped by a language of the senses (we speak of people who are ‘invisibilised’, ‘silenced’ – all sensorial categories) then Tambe’s piece speaks against a modernizing impulse exemplified by malls not via a language of loss but through the invocation of a living and moving space eliciting us to value what is stake via what William Connolly describes as our ‘visceral modes of appraisal’. Perception is never passive, it is instead a sensate value that does not

require any economic or political theory to strengthen its case. In his remarkable reflections on ethical soundscapes Charles Hirschkind likens nuanced listening to a process of sedimentation whereby a narrative reveals its secret depths only through multiple retellings, by the ‘accumulation of layer upon layer within the soul of the listener, like coats of lacquer applied to a wooden box that becomes clearer with each new layer’.

Through his use of multiple layers of sound Tambe has assembled a work that calls upon us to pay attention to the quotidian because even the seemingly humdrum is never drab and as the very word suggests it is filled with hidden harmonies.



Photo: Jerome White

“BEING PHYSICALLY CREATIVE HAS ALWAYS EXCITED ME”

Deepak Kukri in conversation with Shabari Rao

SR: What has been your journey in contemporary dance? Has your sensibility, approach and understanding changed?

DK: I started as a Bollywood dancer and worked in Kannada movies when I was 12. I became part of the contemporary scene in 2002 when Attakkalari auditioned for trainee dancers. I was in the first batch and became part of a 3 year pilot program which later became the diploma. We were the guinea pigs! At the end of those 3 years I realised that I was into it.

I started dancing for Jay [Jayachandran Palazhy]. We did a lot of tours. Different styles of teaching, pedagogy, dancing, choreography, site specific work...all this opened up. And then in 2006 I decided I need to learn more. I joined SEAD. Once I was done I was given an opportunity to work with the company as a dancer and production manager because I was basically good at lighting. Again I got to work with different choreographers and teachers, being in their piece, doing the lighting, the production, the rehearsal direction. After three years I felt I was just doing work for the Europeans, being an Indian for the Europeans. It was just getting on my nerves. I decided to come back.

SR: Did you get to make any of your own work there?

DK: Yes, I did one, as part of school work. I created a quintet for 5 dancers. It was a 40 minute piece which was shown in different places. And I did a duet with a girl which was 15 minutes. And Abilash and I did a piece with a group of immigrant kids. It was a collaboration between us, 5 teachers and 100 kids. I was also part of a group project called Area. But I was mainly dancing. I also did a street work in Holland where I was a dancer with a

company. They gave all the dancers a slot. I did a solo that went on the streets for a month.

SR: And then you came back to India?

DK: Yes, I came back to India hoping I would get into the company I had been with. Then I realised if I go back there, I go back to where I started. Aesthetically they were at a place I had exited. So I told Jay I can't be part of your artistic work, I can only be a teacher. I started looking for other connections in Bangalore. With Mirra we started something called Move Art but that didn't work. Then Veena and I started H2O. We did a few works here and there. Then she went off to London and that dropped away. And then I found Nakula. We have registered ourselves as Kha. We have done 10 projects so far...some pedagogy, some workshops, some performances. One of the reasons I came back to India was to do creative work in Bangalore and to an extent I am doing it. It's not to the same extent as when I was with a company but I am trying to achieve it.

One of the reasons I came back to India was to do creative work in Bangalore and to an extent I am doing it.

SR: What kind of work would you like to make? What has your work has been about?

DK: I never went into dance thinking I will use the grounding of Bharatanatyam or the strength of Kalari to do my work. That was not the starting point. Also, the way I treat a choreography is influenced by Europe...simple things like coming to the front of the stage and changing and going back, keeping it lay [non-stylised], keeping it straight forward – super European. I did not judge this. I convinced myself that this was Indian because I'm starting my work in a very local space. I started something called 'crazy art shift' which was about the call centres, and then did something with water, construction and hierarchies in Indian society.



LVOE

Photo: N.K. Surjit

It's a vicious circle, you go to Europe and you start treating choreography the way they treat it. So for the past 3 years I have been investigating it, asking how I can use the wisdom I have but not fall back into the Pina Bausch or the Sasha Waltz way of treating choreography. I am at a point where I am trying to create work that finds a balance between being Indian and being trained in Europe. Sometimes you watch a video of a performance of yours and you realise "ah that's nothing, that's not Indian or European' that's just there because it's there." There are a few moments like that but mostly I could say, "That's European, I saw that there."

SR: What do you get out of being a dancer? Why do you do what you do?

DK: I've always been a person who never made anything romantic or philosophical or bigger than life. I go to a studio and dance because I enjoy it, that's it. Words like passion were never part of my grammar. Sitting in Europe, cleaning vessels, working in bars and god knows what, you ask, for whom am I dancing? I don't know why I'm dancing! And then you go back to the studio and you start dancing and somehow everything falls in place. I've never been able to answer why I dance...I have asked a thousand times – why am I doing this?

SR: What do you get out of it?

DK: I don't know, just the... satisfaction of being creative. I tried doing other things, lighting, a bit of acting, accounts; but I never felt at home. I felt at home when I was doing movement – be it kallari, martial arts or dance. Just the fact that I am creative and physical makes me stay here. Even teaching physical things would excite me...being physically creative has always excited me.

SR: What is the life of a piece? You have said that for you a piece is not a work in progress but when it is performed it's done as far as the creative process is concerned. What happens after that in terms of responses, in terms of your attachment to that piece?

DK: I never put up work which is in progress. It should be at a stage where it is presentable. Will I develop it – surely, yes. But when I put something on stage it is not a work in progress. It deserves to be watched but that doesn't mean that that is the end of it.

SR: So what is your relationship with the work after the performance?

DK: This is how I look at work. I start a journey with point A being the start of the work and point D being the premier which locks the work, after which the work does not change. And if I show in between, say I decide to show a work at B, it might be a part that I know I will definitely use in the piece...For example, in choreographing *Under Construction* I had four dancers and a 6 month period. I showed it at Chitra Kala Parishad, Cisco, at a park and at KR Market. And it was never a work in progress. I went to CKP and invited all the artists there and said this is done, just watch. They watched and gave me feedback and then I went to Cisco. I was still working on it, but I said this is the piece, watch. I don't get into this thing of work in progress presentations. When I feel confident about a work, when I am ready to take judgement on it, I just leave it.

LVOE

Photo: Soumit and Soumita



And about the relationship to past work, one pattern I realise is that after one or two years I can look at the work and say that was shit! When you do the first performance everything about it is good. But when I see the *Facets* video, for instance, I think what was I doing there? Why did I make 4 people stand against the window? They look like they are in a prison! You develop as a human being and your perception changes. For a Pina Bausch the life of a work was 20 years...you would still stand and clap for it. For me it is until I take the next step!

SR: How do you balance form and content?

DK: I go into a studio saying I will do a physical piece. The content is *being physical*. And how I go about it is dictated by that. So when I say physical I would try to box it. What is physical? Is me being slow physical? Yes. Me being fast

is physical. So I pick and choose what I want to do and then start devising from there. If I make something slow, how can I formulate it in such a way that it has a structure? Somehow the content becomes the form for me after a while. In the relationship of the ideas and the physicality of it...somewhere in-between I find the form.

For example, in NH7 we were talking about construction. It started with the idea that everything has been constructed. Then we needed to make a physical representation of that. We tried everything from cars to bulldozers. Then we realised that the first thing that gets affected is traffic. And it just melted down to the point where we were going and stopping, going and stopping. Then going fast and stopping. So that's the form – we move and stop, move and stop. Stop and start – that became the structure...So I go in, take a subject or an idea, just throw things onto it. And at some point it becomes a form.

SR: Does any of your work start from a dance form? You were saying that you don't really start from a formal base or a foundation –

DK: No, I don't have the knowledge to do it. I don't have the knowledge of taalas or dance history as such. I was never into that but into being physical, just moving. So it's easy for me to go with content. Even choreographically I was trained to convert ideas to physicality.

SR: If you were to describe your journey from Bollywood dancing to Attakkalari to SEAD to working in the various companies and coming to where you are now – if you were to look at this journey in terms of the relationship between form and content...

DK: I'd say there's a dancer's brain and a choreographer's brain. When I am dealing with a choreographer and his history, I just fit in there... I know I need to get this line and I work towards it. I completely trust the choreographer. I don't question why am I doing a line in a diagonal? If you want me to do a teermana I would do it. If I'm not the best I will learn it. As a dancer you are forced to fit into someone



UnderContrAction

Photo: Pawan

else's aesthetics. You are forced from outside and you start becoming very competitive, "I need to get this, I need to get my kalari kick."

As a dancer my starting point was always the form. When I finally had the freedom to be myself, the first thing I did was drop the form...I realised I could just let it go. I could keep the wisdom of all the things that I learnt but I could let go of the form. I think that summarises the whole thing. And it is still like that, if I go and work for a choreographer I will get the form. I may not get it 100% but like before going to Mandeep I went to Bharatanatyam classes for 3 months every day. Would I ever be a bharatnatyam dancer? No. I can't put myself physically or mentally there. But the positive thing for me was struggling to get the form.

SR: And what would you say is a choreographer's brain? Where does form fit in a choreographer's brain?

DK: When you work with different choreographers, even if you don't like their work, you start respecting what they do because you see things from inside. For instance if I look at Jay's work, his starting point is the Indian way of moving. All his choreography tends to highlight the curvature of the body or the precision of a mudra or the brownness of a brown person or the sound of India, the visuals of India. This is the starting point. And he is good at that. And if you work with someone who is doing Laban for that matter it is all about the space and the body and if you work with someone who is 'release' it's all about how organically you can move. I was influenced a lot by a person called Salva Sanchis who



worked for Rosas company. Here it is the other extreme; you start dancing and the movement takes you over.

I respect all these ways of working. I see form as really good but at the same time as a luxury: To go and appreciate someone who is moving, where the starting point is 'moving'....you have to be socially and mentally in a place to appreciate it. When I came back and started my choreographic work I realised that I can't put up a work in which I am just moving. I might like it. I might like someone dancing amazingly for 20 mins. I might like an ensemble of 20 people doing complex choreographic patterns. But in the context of my work, do I relate to it? Do I have the luxury of watching a complex contemporary dance piece which has no relationship to what I am?

I had to take a decision at some point: should I take a path of what I call indulgence, emphasise my training and execute a particular technique at its best for an hour? Or should I use the training I have and address something I strongly believe in? It may not be the most important thing in the world, but something I believe in. And in college I made that decision. I wouldn't glorify my training, I wouldn't glorify the way I move, the ability of the body, what it can do. So I don't indulge myself by working with just the space and the body. But at the same time all of these spill into how I treat my content. After a point if I realise I have the content but it's not aesthetically coming together, I can just go to this side of things and pull in a whole range of tricks.
<https://vimeo.com/26973384>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thiwwqT03uQ>

ON VIDEOPOEMS

By The Videopoetry Collective

Poetry offers the possibility of remaking experience through its continual experimentation with language. Is it possible for this to be transposed to video, in order to allow for a rethinking of the audiovisual language in our era of excess?

Can a coming together of text, image and sound create the possibility of refreshing our relationship with the image? Or is the idea of videopoetry – of creating an experience with one person's recorded images and another person's words – not true to either? Can the thoughts of one person in one time, resonate or translate into that of another person from another time?

What if in translation something essential about the original work gets lost? What happens to technique and effect that is only obtainable in the original language? How can video move beyond being illustrative of the text, a burden the moving image has carried especially in its form as realist narrative film?

Our attempts at creating a form of videopoetry may be seen as an exploration of all these ideas and processes. Our unease with the translation of a text into another language is at the core of our methods. Our only consolation lies in the knowledge that within the history of poetry, translation has been integral to the way style, ideas, poetic technique and strategies have traveled and migrated to previously unknown linguistic universes. The movement into foreign universes of these new modes of thinking and doing things has sometimes been seen as an invasion and rejected for being a little too alien. But equally often the move toward newer, more exciting, realms has energized familiar ways of operating.

Josune: The photographer + The poet



1

Taking solace from this history, we set for ourselves some parameters in devising a framework to explore different methods of creating videopoems. In the first set of poems we worked on the 'form' of a videopoem. In the second we set about 'disrespecting the poet'. We saw this as a way of not following the exact structure or meter or logic of the text, so as to experiment with more ways in which videopoems could stand on their own, be independent of what one would expect from a conventional poem. At another level we tried to work on poems based on themes; 'desire', 'nudity', 'correspondence' were such themes.



2

Irrespective of the theme or framework, in the course of our process we have repeatedly thought about, questioned and debated particular issues. What defines a poetic image? What if anything can be called the minimum unit of a videopoem? Can we think of the relationship between images and text in the video poem through what Andre Bazin called a lateral montage, where the montage is forged from ear to eye?



some movements
can be taken
shots of angles
form a cultural
construction.

The Poetic Image

While poetry uses words, language, what it commemorates is the opposite of words. It could be argued that poetry originates in the visual. What the poet imagines or sees gets described in vivid or imaginative ways and becomes his poem. This poetic image is different from the image recorded on video. We are agreed that it is not just by conforming to an idea of beauty or having a lyrical quality that an image becomes poetic. What then makes it poetic, allowing it to sit in for the poet's original image? As we work with the medium of film, we realize that an image most often takes on a poetic quality when there is something in it that connects it to many other images contained in the memory of experience, thus giving it a universal resonance. A poetic image is one that "stings" the eye, it is an image that activates an interpretive impulse in the viewer and allows one to perceive something beyond material reality – something indistinct, perhaps something that straddles the threshold of reality and



Drawing: Nicolás Grandi

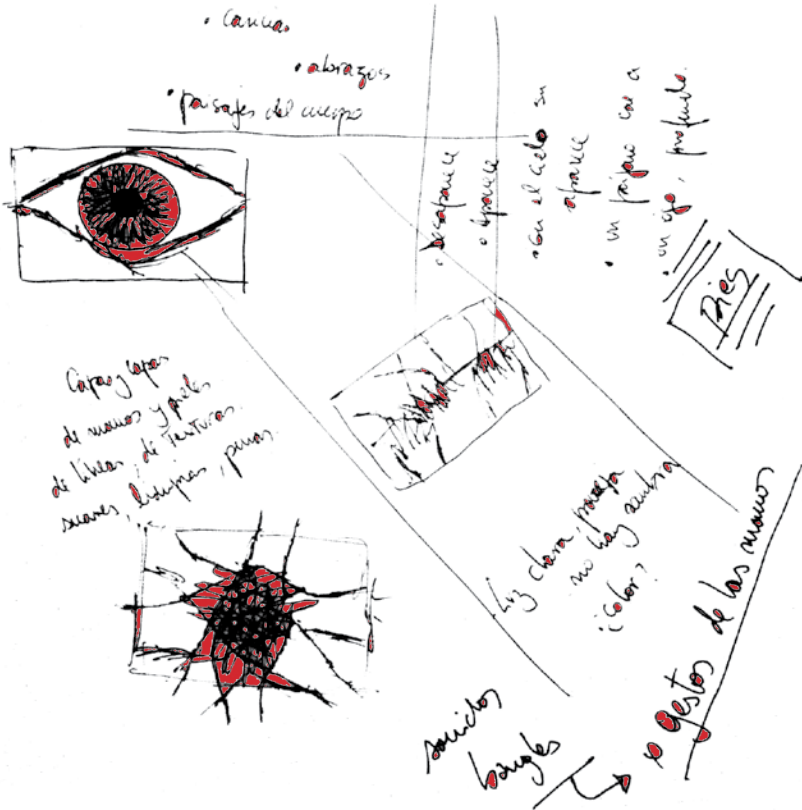
intuitive associations. The *poetic image* rarely stands only for the objects it represents, but is layered with multiple other referents, opening several additional dimensions.

Minimum Unit of a Videopoeem

If a word is taken as the minimum unit of composition in poetry, can gesture be taken as the minimum unit of a videopoeem? In *Notes on Gesture*, Agamben says that it is gestures that are crystallized in our perception and that it is through them we access emotions, narratives and meanings. They are what give shape to our identities, the way we walk, the way we move, the way we talk.

If we allow ourselves to see a film as a body/organism which can produce gestures by sound, movement of elements inside the frame, or through the cutting of shots, can each of these not be seen as gestures arranged in a

Drawing: Nicolás Grandi



certain way to create meaning? This approach can give light to ways in which new transdisciplinary encounters are emerging in form, for example when the gestures of the body of a performer meet the gestures of a cinematic body or when gestures of tradition meet gestures of the digital era, when in a single video, Latin American poets are read aloud alongside Asian scenarios and performers.

From Ear to Eye

We see the videopoem as a dance between two layers, a simultaneous movement between one image and the other and between image and text. The use of sound, and text as voice, complicates this relationship further. These lateral movements become a way to tease out a varied set of meanings and sensations.

Ultimately, a videopoem can be seen as a palimpsest. Layers of sound, text and images that overlap, merge, swivel, chafe against each other in a way that allows meaning to be created and perhaps offer an alternative experience of poetry. Like the palimpsest could the videopoem evade instant legibility? Could it invite the viewer to scratch the surface and discover the patterns that emerge from the arrangement of the different layers? Can it be a mode of exploration that could allow us to restore some measure of freshness to images rendered stale by overuse?

*The Videopoetry Collective <http://videopoems.tumblr.com/> is a group of 6 filmmakers and poetry enthusiasts who have been exploring new relationships between image, sound and text through videopoems. Since January 2012 we have worked on 10 videopoems around the themes of **form**, **desire** and **(de/re)constructing** the structure. The videopoems are composed of a wide range of materials from performance to archival footage and still images. The collective currently includes Nicolas Grandi, Trupti Kanade, Sandhya Kumar, Monica James, Priya Sen and Namita Aavriti.*

"Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places."

– Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 28-29.

IN SEARCH OF LEMURIA

Ekta Mittal reflects on a Lecture by Lawrence Liang

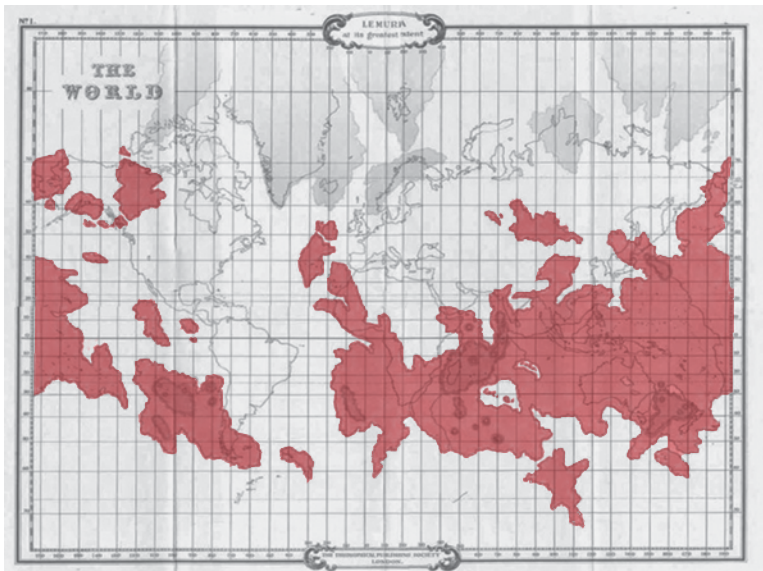
Where are these foreign spaces, these unpossessed places in cities? In cities, where chaos is the order, where shadows have no shape, where reflections are misleading and the present tense is a blur. The crystal ball shows the city as bleak, incomprehensible strange figures, shapes and patterns. A time when we have to reclaim a word like nostalgia from its overuse, a time when we forget, a time when we have to live like the daily newspaper, interpreting reality in facts and reports with little time in which to comprehend or make sense of things. But the sense of loss occurs to us collectively. When we lose sunshine because new constructions come closing down on us, when we have lost our winters to the heat, and when we know a lame drizzle cannot compensate for the rainfall we once knew – it is in such times, imagination sets us free. It is in such times that we go in search of Lemuria.

Lemuria locates itself between and alongside Atlantis and Utopia. It is the lost space, a place that has perhaps fallen off the map. But nonetheless there, somewhere. In his talk,

“Nishastaga: A Conceptual Lexicon of Space and Practice,” Lawrence Liang, asked a pertinent question – how does one lose a space that never existed? We took off with him on a voyage; in a time where the past is evaporating without being noticed and the future is defined by hegemonic blueprints. The coordinates of the map that Lawrence drew were asymmetrical, but clearly in the direction of Lemuria. He referred to Sumathy Ramaswamy’s understanding of “**Lemuria** as a world that resides only within the *place that is the product of varied labors of loss underwritten by place-making imaginations that is characterized as fabulous and catastrophic.*” Lawrence made us pause and think about how Sumathy Ramaswamy’s focus on labors of loss allowed us to consider circumstances and instances in which absence or disappearance leads to an affirmation of the present/presence – a presence of the absent. He reminded us that utopia is not something that we think about but something that we think with. How is that possible?

He took us through stark images of today’s China, where growth is an irrational obsession – where the objective is to

Lemuria Map



look uniform, clear of all forms of diversity - a horrifying propaganda at work. In its current state, it appears as a series of painful farewells to history and the aggressive erasures of memories. A familiar premonition...

How would we negotiate with space and time amidst its violent transformation? Lawrence pointed to the Greek root of poetry, **poesis**, which literally means “making” reminding us that life worlds are partially inherited and partially made by us. He then took us to Borges’ *Tlon, Uqbar and Orbis Tertius* with its quest for mysterious, missing countries existing in an imaginary world of ideas. He showed us the way to these worlds by underlining the relationship between virtuality and the potential. He told us how Deleuze wanted to do away with the binary

Lawrence pointed to the Greek root of poetry, **poesis**, which literally means “making” reminding us that life worlds are partially inherited and partially made by us.

of the real and fictional by thinking of the **virtual as a plane that awaits its materialization in the realm of the real**; and a plane that determines such a movement is also the plane of potentialities. I was reminded of why we called ourselves Peaking Duck, it was not just our imagining an arts network as a delicious dish, but also an expression of how we could strive to peak within this plane of potentialities through the sharing of works in progress, unfinished works, by exploring hitherto unimaginable collaborations and ideas.

Slowly, we fly into Calvino’s world of lightness. One in which Perseus flew with winged sandals over the lightest of things, the winds and the clouds, to slay Medusa without fear of losing his own life. His strength lay in not looking directly at her, but in fixing his gaze upon what could only be revealed by indirect vision. To reach for this purview is to peak within the plane of potentialities, to transcend the boundaries of reality without escaping it. And in this

encounter between Perseus and Medusa, between Calvino and the millennium, we find the most unexpected thing... *“a miracle that follows: when they touch Medusa, the little marine plants turn into coral and the nymphs, in order to have coral for adornments, rush to bring sprigs and seaweed to the terrible head.”*

Here is Lemuria, beyond interpretation and reasoning.

And everyone has their own Lemurias, the anarchists, the government, workers, the middle class, artists, Maoists, academics. The larger question is can all these lemurias co-exist? Is it even possible? Or should they exist in our own imaginariums?

Written in a balcony which overlooks tiny candle lit tenements in the foreground, barren land with parthenium plants in the middle ground, and a high security, lavish apartment complex filled with different kinds of luminance in the background.

THE MOMENT OF VULNERABILITY IS TO THE WORK, NOT EACH OTHER

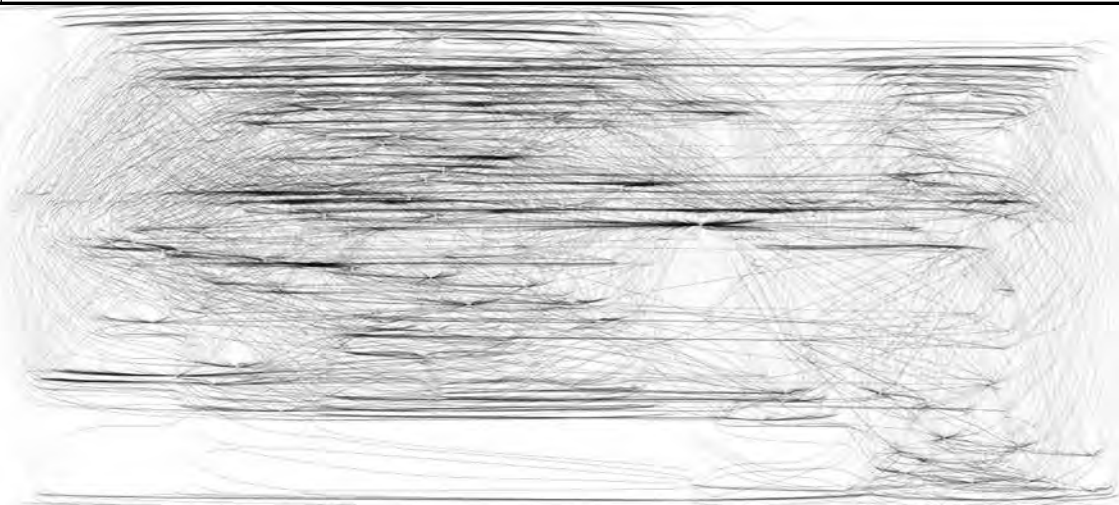
Jeebesh Bagchi

In January 2013 Jeebesh Bagchi of the Raqs Media Collective inaugurated the Speaking Duck series in which artists are invited to address a broader public. The Raqs Media Collective was founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta.

In an extensive, thought-provoking and generous session, Jeebesh reflected on the work, process and trajectory of the collective whose significance to the contemporary arts scene is widely recognised. We present extracts.

I. The importance of Conversation about Practice:

When Lawrence initially spoke about Peaking Duck as initiating a series of conversations about practice I was really happy. It is something that Raqs has been interested in and something that unfortunately is given little value in our intellectual landscape. In seminars or talks you show your work, say what it is and then people give some, perhaps cynical or skeptical shrugs, and the occasional wow! Basically the encounter is displaced. The encounter with the arts has become displaced to a terrain from which it is difficult to bring the focus back to practice.

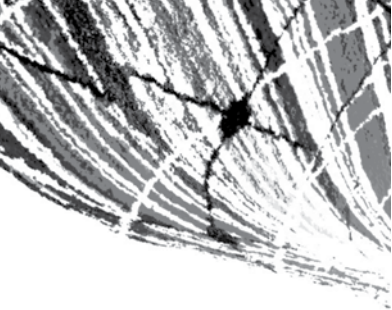


Raqs Conversation Map

I keep saying that in cricket you will find someone giving you a very beautiful description of how a Tendulkar plays his cover drive or how he withdraws from playing his cover drives in the Sydney Test in India-Australia series. There is a degree of appreciation, a sense of something that the person is trying out. Unfortunately this is missing in the arts. The cultural landscape is primarily saturated by popular cinema and secondly by literature of a certain kind. You draw from that literature and go deep with it, and you draw from popular cinema, and more or less your cultural references are over. In that sense, this kind of meeting is very valuable.

I want to begin by showing you this map. We invited a self-trained programmer, a very good friend of ours Suraj Rai, and asked him to map the three of us working in our studio - sending emails, opening Facebook, watching YouTube. We asked him to map the network. He did a little pinging and created a map between different nodes. Here is a map of us working over four or four and half hours. We have not cleaned it up.

What is fascinating is that I cannot produce spatial metaphors to describe the flows and densities represented here, the kinds of knots they produce and the vast empty spaces in between. And if you think of this happening over 20 years between three people, you can imagine the kind



of densities within the duration! We have done about a hundred works and we have done them together, and not under individual names. And if you add in the maps of long friendships with people, then it becomes extremely layered and difficult to even comprehend.

But what I want to start with is the white spaces. These are long period of silences and long fallow periods. No language of practice is possible to be narrated in those long silences, long gaps. It is a kind of invisible, uncertain, terrain, which we can't see or make sense of. A lot of what we make sense of and bring to visibility in our work is from that space of the undefined.

II. The Three Tasters and the Missing Bear

PEAKING DUCK DIARIES: THE MOMENT OF VULNERABILITY IS TO THE WORK, NOT EACH OTHER, JEEBESH BAGCHI



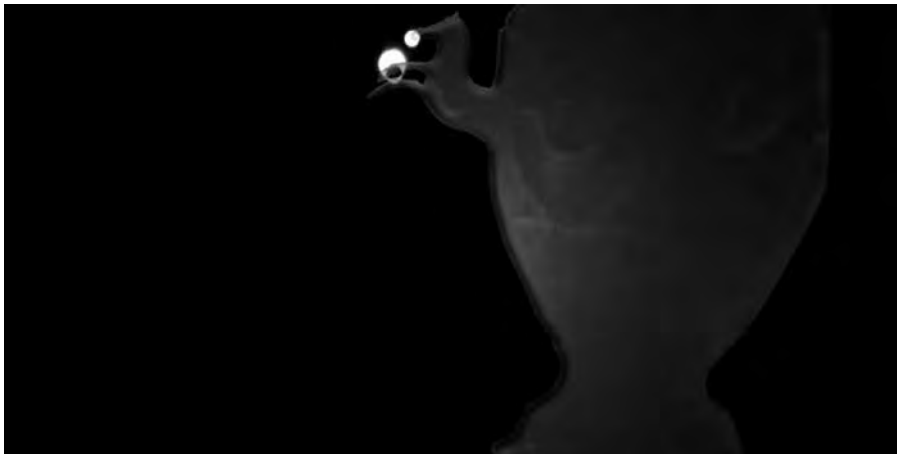
This was a drawing done a year and a half back, and that then became a carpet.

[http://www.gardnermuseum.org/contemporary_art/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/great_bare_mat_and_constellation]

Now this carpet has a story which I want to connect to a series of interests that we have had, how they animate our work and became something else. We were invited by the Gardner Museum in Boston, about three years back, to

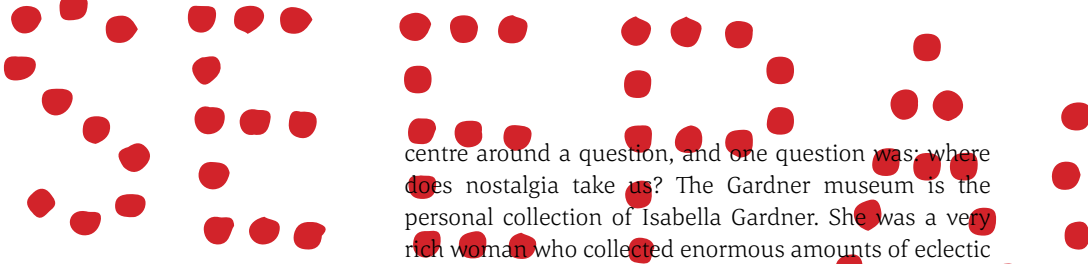
look at their collection and think of a work. We took out an exquisite 16th century painting from their collection called “The Three Tasters”. The figures are Confucius, Buddha and Lao Tzu; obviously they were not contemporaries! They are tasting a vat of vinegar – some say it is wine – and they come to different conclusions as to the nature of the taste. Buddha says it tastes bitter, for Confucius it is sour and Lao Tzu says it is sweet.

The painting was hidden in the collection, and we took it out and placed it, re-placed it, in a sense. In front of it, you have a carpet woven by Bulgarian weavers that Monica had met on one of her journeys. It was hand woven, using common dhurrie colours and lines as a base and on top are these lines which are our conversations. And then you see these stars, the constellation, The Great Bear. While looking around in the Museum we found a beautiful bear



mat-weight from the Han dynasty, 2nd century BC, China; the bear had a hand like a human. We further proposed that we would make this Bear Mat a part of four-cornered conversations in the Museum that we would conduct.

We said we would host “The Three Tasters” and The Great Bear Mat as a constellation for a set of conversations within a conceptual framework that drew from our own research into the Museum. Each conversation would

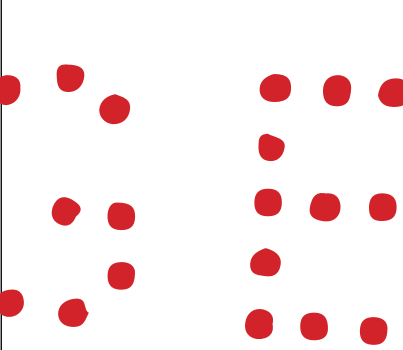


centre around a question, and one question was: where does nostalgia take us? The Gardner museum is the personal collection of Isabella Gardner. She was a very rich woman who collected enormous amounts of eclectic materials from all over the world, and then designed a building, and placed all the objects within it. When she died she left a will that said no changes were to be made to how she had arranged the objects, and if they were, then the whole collection was to be sold and the money given to Harvard!

The Great Bear Mat Exchanges were popular. People were buying tickets to come. It became a site for discussion.

So for about 100 years now nothing, really, has been changed. Now, if you have an object in a Museum which is not supposed to be moved, you face the interesting problem of how light constantly falling on that object actually corrodes it. We spent a lot of time talking to the Museum staff and this came up in our conversations with the conservator. And so the Museum has become dimmer and dimmer and dimmer and dimmer. There is now almost 50% less light than at the beginning. A time will come when the museum will become completely dark to preserve itself! To actually retain the beauty of the object would be to retain what cannot, in the end, be seen.

The Great Bear Mat Exchanges were popular. People were buying tickets to come. It became a site for discussion. One concept that we generated from this and which we are trying to develop further in Gurgaon with Sarai Reader 09 - is called *Art as a Place*. Art becomes a place, and place as you know has density, accrues density incrementally. It loses its authorship after some time and becomes something that is always transforming itself, but in ways that are not very evident or clear. It just transforms, you know. You visit a place after two years and you realize something has changed. So the idea is of something that transforms, moves but becomes embedded in a form. This is one journey of our practice, trying to build from



our relationships, what we enjoy between each other, between the friends that we have made over last 20 years; building these conversations and provocations into our practice and trying to take it back into institutions and structures. This is one trajectory.

III. Scaffolding and Dilation:

Freeing the Work to Breathe

One problem I must discuss in detail is the relationship between scaffolding and dilation. We learned it in context of our work with performance, with performers, and we later tried to produce a text about it. While you are making a work, you may make a series of notes for yourself;

you give yourself little indicators - and you write yourself a little note saying I am working on this and this. You produce a kind of scaffolding. In working on the performance piece *Seen* at Secundrabagh we made a text, and a dialogue with our writings, poems and historical materials.



Seen at Secundrabagh

Working with a performer we realized that slowly, over time, you don't need this text. A lot of the time what the performer was doing was already playing out your texts. Basically, after some time, the work dilates, the rhythm of the work starts dilating and you have to take away the scaffolding. And the most critical and the traumatic thing about work is to know when to drop away the scaffolding because you have to allow the work to actually dilate and breathe freely and come out. In that sense, sometimes it is not so much about interpretation; it is about receiving. You should know how to receive the work, the image. It is not that I have interpreted it; I "found" it. For that, it has to dilate

in a way that is beyond your intellectual comprehension in that moment. Your scaffolding should not become an obstruction.

It is a tension that allows you to actually withdraw from what your starting moments may have been. You have to just kind of pull it down, pull it away.

While working on this performance we realized that, a lot of the time between us, Zuliekha and the performers, we were actually battling the scaffolding. When we had the courage to drop the scaffolding, drop the anxiety of the meaning, drop the anxiety of the words, we actually started breathing differently. It is very interesting that a lot of performers actually do talk about the sense of dilation when they can feel a larger felt body. Dilation is our way of describing it in shorthand but there are many ways in which one could feel this tension between the scaffolding and the dilation. It is not dialectical, the kind of tension that I am talking about. Neither is it the cocoon kind of thing, something you have to leave to become free. It is a tension that allows you to actually withdraw from what your starting moments may have been. You have to just kind of pull it down, pull it away. And something else may emerge which you are not aware of and you don't know what that might be.

Though this is something we first learned while working with the performers we worked it back to our own practice. We realized that a lot of the time we have our own battles between us. There are people who have seen our quarrels and thought - will they come back tomorrow to work?! But it is basically a battle to figure out if I am adequately open to something opening itself, that which is, for the moment, unknown. Basically you are dealing with what is unknown to all three. Arrogance cannot apply there; that moment of vulnerability is towards our work, not to each other. It is to the work that is unfolding. That I think is the charm of working together. If that were not there it would be very boring.

IV. More Salt in your Tears



Sometimes, being an artist is quite fun because you meet people you never thought were there. We met a marine biologist in a laboratory in an archipelago in the Baltic. He described to us the marine reality of the Baltic. When asked, he acknowledged that the Baltic was not really a sea and that the salt level in the Baltic Sea is less than in our tears. If it rises the marine ecology will completely change there. He said that global warming could completely alter the marine ecology of the Baltic Sea. We were researching and we were invited to make a work. We created a textual sculpture on/in the sea. "More Salt in Your Tears" can be seen by passing ships and from the island faraway. It floats. It's written in steel so through the day it changes color. Sometimes it becomes outlined and sometimes it becomes unseeable. <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/works.aspx>

If somebody asks how this work came about, frankly speaking, I don't know! The marine biologist did intrigue us but to reduce what he said to that one line - it took us a year and a half. You have to be convinced to propose it, to ask someone to float a line in the sea. I don't know how that process of distillation happens. I know that three of us sometimes do come to a point where we say that the work is ready. In that sense, there is a pre-work to the work. (For more images and notes on these works visit <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/works.aspx>)

V. Hibernation

One of the concepts we have been working with is hibernation. A book about some of the concepts we think practice through will come out soon hopefully. By hibernation we mean that things hibernate within a constellation and when it is kind of warm enough, they come out. Ernst Bloch has a beautiful phrase “current of warmth.” A current of warmth produces the possibility of emergence. Something hibernates without you knowing that it is going to emerge. So there has to be a current of warmth around it. I think in collectives it is easy to produce that current of warmth.

Coming back to this idea of why we need art as part of our discourse, as part of our reference, if the current of warmth is missing socially and if it is filled with cynicism, skepticism, guilt, you cannot produce art. The possibility of art production will shrink. Art will be produced; I am not talking about that. But not as something that is at the source of the intellectual breath of a culture. Mani Kaul used to say, “I love to live in a ghetto.” I think it’s a perfect position, you know. Even if ten or twenty people have an intense relationship with what they are doing, it’s perfect. The hibernating possibility of art for every human being, or every practitioner, is only possible when that current of warmth is produced. If not, art will shrivel up. It won’t reference anything, it won’t pull anything together. From the 1980’s onwards you have had what is called scandal-auction relationship to art. You know art when it’s up for auction or there is a scandal surrounding it. There is no other possibility.

VI. The Work is Never Finished

When work is done, we put it up, send it, go back, there is no moment of celebration, almost none, very rarely. We are very good at *addas*, hosting big feasts. But it is never about finishing work. This is something we have been discussing with each other. In our head, between us, a

work doesn't end. Some kind of a temporary, provisional form has been arrived at, which will travel, and have a life of its own. But it does not signal for us an end or a closure. The presence of the residual or a yet to be thought through or felt remainder is taken for granted. One of our intellectual obsessions has been with the residual. We did a big exhibition on residue itself.

(The Rest of Now, Manifesta 7. See more details of this at <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/curation.aspx>)

How do things disappear, get buried or dissolve? Actually, there are continuous appearances that you have to figure out. In the end, you discover something that needs further elaboration. This is not unfinished versus finished. It is a certain kind of productive encounter in which you found some opening; found something which was not there before, as an a priori. Even Raqs the collective reproduces itself alongside the work; there is no a priori group. Sometimes we say that we don't have a manifesto. We have a lot of lexicons and lexical tools. We have written a lot of dictionaries.

How do things disappear, get buried or dissolve? Actually, there are continuous appearances that you have to figure out.

We have been working for twenty years now and, for a large chunk of the years, on a daily basis. So, you almost instinctively know when an idea is really fun, has great potential. It could be a random line in a long email, one line. Or expressed in an SMS, not necessarily face to face. How that trigger, that idea, gets the time and duration to unfold and become a work... I don't think that part is documentable. In that sense what I was saying about scaffolding and dilation is the self-conceptual documentation we are doing of the creative process. It is our way of trying to find a language to describe that creative process, to conceptually express it.

Talk transcribed by Reshma Mittal.

Extracts selected by Lata Mani.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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