‘With Respect to Residue’
Raqs Media Collective, Decolonial Museum as UFO

Natasha Eaton

Singing an elegy to the fluttering heart bird.
A chaos of awakened wonders.
A lapsed constellation still shines.
The surface of each day is a different planet.
A fizz of aroused expectations.
A mosaic of minute hopes.

Raqs Media Collective

In a seminal essay for Third Text, Rustom Bharucha questioned what it might mean to be ‘Beyond the Box’.

In the age of globality and so-called ‘worldly affiliations’, can the museum survive ‘the art of secularism’? For Bharucha, ‘To what extent does this ‘Asia’ continue to be part of a residual Orient that refuses to die…?’

Post-memory, anachronism, obsolescence, iconopraxis, rubbish, ruination; perhaps the museum is best seen as the abject colonial space par excellence. An Yountae raises the question of the decolonial condition as abyss. Here,

Research for this essay was funded by a Philip Leverhulme Prize and a Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust, and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. I am grateful to Professor Kishur K. Basa, then Director, and Mrs Das, Education Officer at the Indian Museum, Kolkata; Professor K Islam, BIRLA Museum; Mr D Mukherjee, Education Officer, Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM), Kolkata; and the staff at the B M Birla Science Museum, Hyderabad; the Anthropological Museum, Port Blair; the Ethnographic Museum, Kolkata; the Gitanjali Museum, Bolpur; the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad; and the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya Museum, Bhopal.

Any errors are my own.


3 Bharucha, ‘Beyond the Box’, op cit, p 11
abyss is meant in terms of negative theology, German idealism and the refrains of Afro-Caribbean philosophy.\(^4\) What might be the decolonial wording of the museum now?\(^6\) Can it be thought of as a possible space for re-enchantment? What is its fragile inheritance?

The Delhi-based artist group Raqs Media Collective’s take on the postcolonial museum as UFO form the subject of this essay. In playful terms, the museum as anachronism, as oblivion, always on the brink of dust, is provocatively captured in several of Raqs’s works. They question the ethics and even the existence of the decolonial museum. Can the museum be thought of as an expanded field? What is its relationship with a grass roots/subaltern populace who have limited or no access to public culture?\(^7\) Is it possible to (re)conceptualise the decolonial museum as *un espejo negro* through a magical evocation of spirits, pictorial tricks or the *mestizaje*?\(^8\)

Formed in 1991, Raqs Media Collective has forged multiple platforms and collaborations – perhaps most famously Sarai, the interdisciplinary and incubatory space at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. Sarai initiated processes that the artists believe ‘have

\[\text{VA:}\]

\[\text{NA:}\]

\[\text{EA:}\]

\[\text{AS:}\]

\[\text{FA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{PA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]

\[\text{SA:}\]

\[\text{HA:}\]

\[\text{LA:}\]

\[\text{RA:}\]

\[\text{GA:}\]
left deep impact on contemporary culture in India’. Together, the artists Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi and Shuddhabrata Sengupta speak to the power of collective play, which although often ludic is also politically motivated in intent. What inspires their practice is the agency of triangulation. As opposed to the familiar ontological definitions of duality, recognition, the dialectics of the screen, for Raqs it is the pulling apart by the insertion of a third being that can enable real dialogue to take place. Conducive of a ‘restless stillness’ their rhetoric speaks to ‘the spirit of a mobile triangulation between reason, intuition and the fabulous’ whereby ‘delirium demands analysis’ and the ‘scaffolding of propositions’. Possibly the luminescence of the three-way can pertain to parhelia, (solvarg) the sun dog, each artist taking it in turns to reflect... Raqs’s diverse corpus embraces divers, immersion (aerial), poetry, themes of destruction, faith, constellations lost and the Imaginary. The museum as Imaginary, perhaps. Quasi-iconoclastically, one exhibit from ‘It’s possible because it’s possible’ (CA2M, Madrid, 2014), throws ‘Das Kapital’ off kilter perhaps because of the diver’s luminescence (Fig. 1). Diver as the subaltern, perhaps – as in their contribution to the second Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2014, Whorled Expectations, dereliction and the oceanic sublime provides the rhetoric as dive (Figs. 2, 3). The bends might warp the wall: ‘Storm gathers momentum, comes rapidly ashore, knocks on the door and the windowpane, vortex hovering at the threshold’. So ‘(i) How to face a storm? (ii) How to wait it out? (iii) How to be altered by storm-light?’. Looking to ‘the horizontality of localized exchange’ and ‘informal

9 The Sarai Readers Collection (est. 2001) concentrated on such themes as the public domain, the cities of everyday life, shaping technologies, crisis/media, bare acts, turbulence, fractions, fear, projections. See www.sarai.net Raqs have also worked with/as Cybermohulla to establish five ‘urban laboratories’ across Delhi. Each of these laboratories is equipped with three computers, dictaphones, digital and bromide print cameras. The laboratories are self-regulated.


11 Most commonly known as the sun dog, this form of parhelia is a doubled mock sun. See Aristotle, Metereology, III.2, Aratus’s Phaenomonea, Artemidorus, ‘On the Interpretation of Dreams’. Scientists surmise that these half mocked suns are formed by the refraction of sunlight created by ice crystals in the atmosphere. These are formed when clouds drifting at low levels appear as ‘diamond dust’. The crystals act as prisms that bend the rays passing through them at 22 degrees. This creates an ice halo for the sun. It is likely that the etymology of sun dog is from the Swedish dag (dew or mist), which resonates with Norse mythology and the lost constellation of two wolves hunting the sun and the moon.

12 Raqs’s exhibition ‘It’s Possible Because It’s Possible’ posed a long-term reflection on the emergence of what the collective has dubbed ‘political contemplation’, which asked what personal and social spheres have relevance for revisiting ideas of the contemporary. The project resulted from a collaboration between CA2M (Madrid, 2014), MUAC (Mexico City, 2015) and Fundación PROA (Buenos Aires, 2015) that began at a seminar called ‘The Constant Baptism of Recently Created Things’ organised in 2013 by Raqs Media Collective in Madrid. The economy of the oceanic is a recurrent motif in the work of Raqs, as is a palette of blues. Unusually Adrift from the Shoreline (2008/2017) plays with the beam of a lighthouse intended to reach all parts of the exhibition, bringing them together on an imagined sea.

13 The second Kochi-Muziris Biennial (2014), curated by Jitish Kallat, took as its remit the fourteenth to seventeenth century ‘epoch’ as the age of discovery, combined with the astronomical propositions made by the Kerala School of Astronomy and Mathematics. Kallat wished artists to make gestures across these axes of time and space. Submitted artworks should interlace the bygone with the immanent, the terrestrial and the celestial. Contributors included Anish Kapoor, Adrian Paci, Dayanita Singh, Gulammohamed Sheikh, Nikhil Chopra and Mona Hatoum. For the politics of the global south and biennial, triennial ‘culture/culture’, see Anthony Gardner
philosophizing, song and so forth’, the Biennale sought to navigate what the organisers termed ‘southern precarity’.14

Elsewhere in the exhibition, ecclesiastical tranquillity reigned: ‘Calm reigns inside. We have heard the sea talking in its sleep, in morse code.’ The figure of a female diver and her fifty-nine second immersions is increasingly prescient… As the rooms become bluer, she asks ‘How many fathoms deep is a breath of fresh air?’15 Such underwater immersion brings to mind Renate Dohmen on cinema qua Peruvian shamanism.16 What does it mean to be immersed? Is to be submersed the equivalent of being drowned?


15 Blues are a constant point of reference in the work of Raqs, whether this be the ocean or an imaginary/spectral elephant wandering the streets of Delhi at night. Natasha Eaton, ‘Subaltern Rustle: Raqs Media Collective, the Colour Blue and the Colonial Archive’, MARG 57.1, September 2015, pp 1–9; Carol Mavor, Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour, Reaktion Books, London, 2013.

The ethic of Raqs’s practice is to privilege the slight space for the ‘artist-researcher-shaman … [who] flies, gets too close to the sun, founds flocks, sings entwined songs … A lapsed constellation still shines’.\(^\text{17}\) Possibly there are tensions and interplay with governmental attempts to project, literally to drive the museum into the subaltern in ways perhaps equally (if at times unintentionally) ludic as ‘a chaos of awakened wonders’ and ‘a flash of recognition of the limits of the everyday’ abandoned bus.\(^\text{18}\) An early collaborative work, *Global Village Health Manual* (2000) (Fig. 4, with Mrityunjay Chatterjee) is an assemblage of material found in web searches that suggests the fragility of the body, especially the labouring body in cyberspace. It signposts the exhilaration as well as the exhaustion that characterises early forays into virtuality. Links to cloning, repetitive strain injury, cyborgs, data bodies, virtual prostheses, anthropometry and innovative methods of torture are presented through an interface that invokes mid-twentieth-century popular/didactic print culture.\(^\text{19}\) All bring to mind the limits of what Arjun Appadurai terms ‘grassroots globalization and the research imagination’.\(^\text{20}\)

---


\(^{18}\) Ibid, p 13


Also playing upon the subaltern and the everyday, Raqs’s *With Respect to Residue* (2004) toys with the idea of the map, emplacement, trompe l’oeil (Fig. 5). Raqs circulated 10,000 tablemats emblazoned with a map of the world. Overlaid with fish bones, teabags, cigarette butts and other such remains of the everyday, such a map is that of the magic real, possibly of Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘angel of surplus’21 and Nikola Tesla’s ‘Talking with Planets’.22 More than Tagore, it is Tesla’s wild experiments and proclaimed interactions with the moon and extraterrestriality that inform Raqs’s practice and, perhaps unwittingly, the governmental agenda of India’s science museums. For Tesla, the magnetic motor, his concerns with a rotating magnetic field, X-ray imaging, his experiments with Hertzian waves and the Egg of Columbus (making a copper oeuf-esque instrument stand on end) in many ways culminates in ‘Talking with Planets’. In this essay, which works contra the principles of Einstein’s physics, Tesla set out many plans that corroborate his work on memory and his desire to photograph the retina as recourse to thought:

Owing to some interference of the oscillations, veritable balls of fire are apt to leap out to a great distance and if anyone were within or near their paths, he would be immediately destroyed. A machine such as I have used could easily kill in an instant 300,000 persons.23

Viewed less a catastrophe, for Tesla ‘the argument is made that there is only a small probability of other planets being inhabited at all. This argument has never appealed to me.’24 Consequently, ‘I have devoted much of my time over the years to the perfecting of a new small and compact apparatus by which energy in considerable amounts can now be flashed through interstellar space to any distance without the slightest dispersion’.25 This would work by way of a longitudinal wave through transmissions, which Tesla believed could make sense of strange radio broadcasts from outer space, to confirm his belief that alter beings had unsavoury designs on planet earth.26 Searching for futurity, the Teslascope was intended to communicate with beings from other planets.27

---

21 Many of the quotations that follow are not paginated as they come from Raqs’s webpages. See www.raqsmediacollective.net. Raqs have been remarkably prolific in their writings and explanation of their work, curating, and what we can dub their ‘worldview’. They are involved with the editorial boards of the journals Third Text and ArtMargins. Curiously, there is less secondary literature on the artists, although they have invited numerous scholars to contribute essays that refer directly and more elliptically to their work. See, for instance, Elena Bernardini, ‘Raqs Media Collective: Nomadism in Artistic Practice’, in Global and Local Art Histories, Celina Jeffrey and Gregory Minissole, eds, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2007; Ranajit Hoskote, ‘The Raqs Media Collective’, in Art Asia Pacific 37, January to March 2003, p 52. See also the book-length study by Ferran Barenbilt and Cuauhtémoc Medina, Raqs Media Collective: Es posible porque es posible, Madrid, 2014.


23 Tesla, ‘Talking with Planets’, op cit, p 120

24 Ibid, p 120


26 Guglielmo Marconi also claimed to have heard alien voices through an alien transmitter

Supplementing their interest in science/science fiction, Raqs’s rhetoric is a self-proclaimed ‘dictionary of future meaning’, as evinced by many of their works – most recently *Passwords for time travel* (2017) and *Presentomorrow* (2017). Wonderfully awkward, their hybrid terms suggest a world akin to a medieval augury where strange creatures and words collide. They claim their ‘optimysteries’ ‘arise from non-causal synchronicity best expressed as enigmatic epiphanies, despite all odds’. This is a universe (manifested as text and video) of such absurdities as Nostalgae, Xerosen and Abbracadastral. Abbracadastral pertains ‘to spells put on maps and survey documents that transform commons into property with the twitch of a nib’. In the work, letters tumble down the screen like rain against low-resolution landscapes whose pixels flicker in and out of focus: seascapes, fenced-off limits, the stairwell of a glassy skyscraper, a sunset in loop. Characteristically, such (un)earthly wonders speak to ‘possibly habitable worlds waiting to hatch’. For Raqs, the museum should resemble a space determined by ‘nishastagah’ – a place not (yet, ever) inhabited by memory.

In several works and interviews, Raqs mobilise the rhetoric and the decolonial practice of trigonometry as the astronomical and colonial means of grasping the world. As a collective,


their willed self-perception reads as an ecosystem ‘operative of imaginative knowledge’. As an acronym, Raqs is ‘Rarely Asked Questions’; in Persian, Arabic and Urdu, raqs brings to mind the whirling of Sufi dervishes and whorled expectations.

I am concerned here with Raqs’s self-proclaimed tripartite play, their fascination with collecting and the archive, the obsolete thing, their melancholic chromatics and a certain desire to immerse us in the mimetic frisson of ocean and the stars – and the UFO.30 Theirs is a ‘universe’ of liquid traces, blueprint, dilation, sediments, echoes; Nature as actant, smoke, a cube of keyholes, geographical disjuncture (‘Brahma beer at a bus station in São Paulo’), UFOs, Darwinian earthworms, dust – a veritable shadowed labyrinth. Their eccentric research into forensic oceanography sees the past as a ‘spill’ that refracts light, which creates ‘a vivid prismatic field, endlessly shape shifting over time’. This might involve threads of spider silk, spun in darkness within the space of the gallery (‘Blinded by the glare of the universe the astronomer learnt to see cosmic filaments in the intricate geometry of a spider web’) or curatorial strategies focused on dilation. Their recent curating at the 11th Shanghai Biennale in 2017 posed twenty-two questions, the most pertinent being:

4: What does the eye of the hurricane see?
5: What does the revolt of sediments look like?
6: Is it necessary to find the axes of illegible orbits?
12: How pliable are the membranes of place?
13: How chromatic is the fragility of spectres?
21: How long are the shadows?

In choosing to work with the conservationist Jorge Pilos, in their curatorial practice Raqs have sought out the eccentric, silence and rubble. The abandoned spaces of Delhi – eg their excurses on Gherra, flattened in 2006 – or what they term the curious ‘UFO’ building in the grounds of the Indira Gandhi Centre, New Delhi (since demolished). As part of their engagement with this ‘theatre of shadows in the suburbs’ and beyond – the dereliction of Delhi – a mask walks up to the eye of the camera and grins; the street takes no notice. Such intimacy with architectural ruination also performs with all vitreous viscerality with regards to what they term ‘the aleotoric’. Drawing on Tesla and on Jacques Rancière’s ‘Nights of Labour’, their aphorisms can, in their own terms, be referred to as ‘daresay’.31 A propos Tesla, they claim: ‘A single ray of light from a distant star falling upon the eye of a tyrant in

The term ‘UFO’ was first coined in 1953 by the US Air Force with recourse to the Robertson Panel (CIA) transactions of 1953, following the work of the Flying Saucer Working Party of 1951 as follow up to Project Blue Book, est. 1947, which ran until 1969. Numerous governments, including India, the UK and Brazil, have undertaken extensive investigations into the high volume of UFOs in their aerospace. For UFO and the ‘crisis’ of the modern to the postmodern condition, see Carl Jung, Flying Saucers, Routledge, London, 1977 [1958]. It is beyond the scope of this study, but it would be intriguing to consider the relationship between Jung and Tesla.

bygone times might have altered the course of his life, may have changed the destiny of
nations’. If this involves a rhetoric of precision, with a slight echo of Walter Benjamin’s
mimetic faculty where he draws attention to how a word might resemble a star, admittedly
read here with a more sinister bent, magic might be there:

A map or
Diagram
Of infinity
Must know
When to
stop being
A picture
And start
Being a
spell, or a
Dwelling.

Raqs’s take on the ‘Doctrine of the Similar’ thinks of dust as chaff, as steam.

Glimpse: Raqs, nautonomy and the museum of imaginary beings

Glimpse – as in gleam, glimmer, faint and transient appearance, momentary or imperfect view, to shine faintly, intermittently

Raqs ask ‘Can one create a nothing by simply pointing to its presence, or, more accurately to
its absence?’ 32 This might envisage ‘nautonomy’, which for the artists ‘is more than
autonomy. It is nautical, voyaging and mobile … A Nautonomat is a craft of autonomy. It is a
vehicle, a scenario, a loose, changing evolving protocol … conceive of it as a spaceship of
the imagination’. 33 Raqs have sought to breach consensus in the name of immanence – ‘that
which lurks just beneath the surface of whatever exists, the secret adversary’. 34 In favour of a
multiplicity of sites and what they deem to be the pop-up, we can envisage ‘places to rest and
things to read in the labyrinth. These are signs taken for wonders and wonders disguised as

32 Raqs Media Collective, The Play of Protagonists, 2014, p 1
https://www.raqsmediacollective.net/images/pdf/92208d7c-caad-40fd-82f8-1a9120017156.pdf

33 See Raqs Media Collective, nautonomat operating manual, a draft design for a collective space of ‘nautonomy’
for artists and their friends, 2015 https://www.raqsmediacollective.net/images/pdf/751bedc7-57cb-4a12-9d27-
4bcea8097aa2.pdf

punctuations inserted between signs’.\(^{35}\) As they speak of a ‘cargo of futures’ and ‘tangents of time’, perhaps a kind of cargo cult can be offered up for stray messianic objects in the space of the uncertain museum.

Raqs’s notion of the museum as an allegory for the decolonial has at least one important precedent: Michael Taussig’s study *My Cocaine Museum*. For Taussig, the Museo del Oro situated in the Bank of the Republic, Bogotá, is the spectral *alter* of his exploration of slave labour.\(^{36}\) He sees the museum as a tragic allegory for corruption and capitalism obscene in its extremis. Labouring in the mangroves seemingly has little to do with the ‘civilizing rituals’, the ‘exhibitionary complex’ of the museum.\(^{37}\) The museum, for Taussig, becomes akin to his notebook musings and his exposure of the dystopia that is also the decolonial abyss. But does the decolonial resonate with the subaltern? Long since theorised in terms of the revolutionary, voices, action thought from below, or its philosophical aporia, its cohesion with the vernacular, the subaltern remains for academia a blind spot which the work of Raqs attempts (albeit tentatively) to address.\(^{38}\)

In contrast with the Colombian national bank as baseline, with its ‘idols’ et al, working at the India Museum, Kolkata, it is curious to observe the decay of what might be ‘el museo’. Manuals on museology that are rapidly rotting; a decrepit bus locked up; and the remnants of the demands of ICOM (International Council of Museums) and UNESCO.\(^{39}\) Such publications as ‘Field Manual for Museums’ (UNESCO, 1970), ‘Temporary or Travelling Exhibitions’ (UNESCO, 1963) and ‘Museology and Developing Countries’ (ICOM, 1988) rub their dust with minutes of education and the problems and traditions in museology issued by the Indian Ministry of Education (no date). In the spirit of the *jadhu ghur* (wonder house), the Indian Museum displays with much pride the ‘Exhibit of the Month’. ‘Exhibit of Month’ is – as Mrs Das, long-term Education Officer at the Museum, explained – an attempt to bring the festive to the populace.\(^{40}\) Fans, statues of Kali, placed in a vitrine in the courtyard offer a slither of the auspicious, including such deliquescent treasures as ‘Glimpse of Early Egypt’. Surrounded by *ushabtis* and canopic jars, ‘the mummy being the cardinal attraction has found a congenial atmosphere and the aspiration of the dead to have a better life seems to have

---

\(^{35}\) Raqs, ibid. Raqs continue: ‘There are maps and post-mortems, there is light and darkness, there are life-forms and death-masks, there are incidents and insurgencies, there is bondage and freedom.’


\(^{39}\) UNESCO was established on the 16 November 1945, with its headquarters in Paris. ICOM was formed in 1946, and *Museum International* quarterly in 1948. Today, about 350,000 museums in 137 countries are members. The UNESCO-ICOM Migrations Museums Initiative is the most important of UNESCO’s current initiatives.

\(^{40}\) Interview with Mrs Das, Educational Officer, Indian Museum, Kolkata, 21 March 2010. *Jadhu ghur* means ‘wonder house’.
been fulfilled”. A plaster model of the Rosetta Stone and faded photographs of photographs bring ancient Egypt into a pantheon – a ‘blooming plethora of innumerable deities’. Ambitious in scope, the Cultural Anthropology Gallery aims at ‘indicating the physical feature, economy and the ecological setting of the particular community of the country’. Spanning the Nokoarise, Onge, Naga, Uraly, Riang and Santhals, the display of scheduled castes, tribes and the marginalised, based on information gleaned from the 1981 census, the life-size dioramas speak to an aesthetic owing much to South Indian Company School painting. An aesthetic of the mannequin places great emphasis on collaborative or female labour. As the administrative HQ of the Anthropological Survey of India, the Indian Museum has sought out the modular. By the modular, I mean Benedict Anderson’s notion of the national museum that seeks to reproduce itself in a range of geopolitical contexts. But it is a modular blurred with jadhu. Although now somewhat decried (ie Benedict Anderson’s 1990 revised edition of Imagined Communities, which sought to addend museums to his discussion of nationalism), the modular is still curatorially operative, perhaps no more so than in the museobus.

---

41 Wall text on display, spring 2010
42 Wall text on display, summer 2011
43 Wall text, permanent display, 1990 onwards

45 As part of my fieldwork at the Indian Museum in Kolkata in the spring of 2010 I hung out at the central courtyard with a self-made questionnaire of which I circulated 400 copies and interviewed visitors about their perception of the museum. I also touted the questionnaire at the gateway for people not wanting to go into the museum. Many, it seems, were regular visitors. The idea of a wonder house reoccurred perhaps more than expected. Although Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, in ‘Museums are Good to Think’ (their chapter in No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia, eds. Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, Routledge, London, 2017), make reference to museums in an expanded public field as part of an ocular-scape, I did not find this to be the case. For the majority of the museum viewers I was able to interview, cinema, TV, video and the internet were seen to bear no resemblance to the experience of going to the museum. Many visitors were drawn to the mummy and the mammoth. The ‘Exhibition of the Month’, which would be a small object contained within a vitrine between the entrance way and the courtyard, also garnered some attention.

Gleaned from a now obsolete pamphlet, ‘Mobile Exhibition on Indian History and Archaeology’, the travelling exhibition is presented as a series of ‘replicas in dioramas’. These dioramas gesture towards a project put into operation on 14 April 196, in Hugli district. Its aim: ‘to fight superstition and obscurantism’. Venturing into Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi and the Punjab, to schools, universities, colleges, public libraries, cultural clubs, industrial units, block development centres and village farmhouses, the twenty-eight miniature dioramas (sometimes interchangeable) range from ‘life of primitive man as toolmaker and food-gatherer’, pre-historic stone tools and implements, Harappa Mohenjodaro, the stupa at Bharhut, Gandhara, Bharhut, coinage, script, Akbar’s capital of Fatehpur Sici – and nos. 16–22: ‘A succession of dioramas representing medieval schools of Art in different regions of India like Bengal and Orissa in Eastern India, Khajuraho in Central India, Vijayanagara in the Deccan and Halebidu in Far South’. The emphasis on pre-sixteenth-century culture (the exception being coinage from the 1700s) manifests no other sign of modernity than obdurate desires:

The Indian Museum has arranged this kind of mobile exhibition with a view to spreading education through visual aids and as such this programme involves no financial obligation on the part of the host institution. The following conditions, however, have to be observed on the part of the inviting organisations:

1) To keep an open space near the site for placing the Mobile Bus of size 35”x10”x10”.
2) Provision for 220 to 250 volts 50 Cycle A. C. of Electric supply nearby.
3) A small room in the institution or a nearby place for the stay of the staff accompanying the Bus and for keeping the costly equipments [sic].
4) Night-guards and other suitable safety arrangements for the bus and the exhibits.
5) About 10 hands to act as Volunteers to control the crowd for the Exhibition and guide the visiting public after necessary training by our staff.
6) Suitable publicity in the surrounding localities for the Exhibition.

Intended as ‘extra rural mass education programme’, the museobus had, by 16 May 1987, been pared down to twenty dioramas, some becoming broken or supplemented by natural history displays. Certainly the mobile museum (as bus or train) is the oft-rickety museological

---

47 ‘Mobile Exhibition on Indian History and Archaeology’, Indian Museum, Kolkata; pamphlet in the possession of the author, no date.
48 Personal correspondence from Professor K Islam, Director of the Birla Science Museum, February 2010
49 Museobus pamphlet, not paginated, no date, collection of the author.
accomplice. It is the Birla Science Museum in its mission for governmental medicine that continues to embrace what it sees as a mission of ‘anti-superstition’. As opposed to the ‘Museum Suggestions’ book lodged in the office of the Education Department at the Indian Museum – with its remarks concerning sleeping/rude guards, dust and dirt, no water, no loo, some guard rancour, shop not open – Birla’s museobus reports are aimed at institutions.\(^50\) For instance, the report form for the ‘motion’ exhibition asks directed questions such as ‘Was any similar programme arranged at your school? … Please give your comments about its usefulness and any improvements for the exhibition’:

Kalyani University (Birla Report Form for ‘Motion’ exhibition).

Yes so many times in the past. About two years ago. But this time it was comparatively elaborate and it has attempted to encompass greater access to the wonders of science … Your exhibits should be at par with their syllabus (Class V–VII) to catch them young.\(^51\)

Less clear is the response to its duration: ‘no a dissatisfaction looms large’.\(^52\)

In museo-literature, the bus rattles by. I spent some time in the Indian Museum library and archive considering their attempts to conceptualise the museum and whether it might be possible to conceptualise (and to realise) a museum without walls. Alongside explanations of ethnographic photography, there is the frequent rhetorical recourse to ‘preserve the good points of tribal culture’.\(^53\) Since 1947, Tribal Research Institutes were established in different states – each intended to advise the Indian government on applied or practical aspects of welfare management. Partly this meant seeking out museums that held so-called ethnographic specimens – with a certain anxiety to keep tribal ‘relics’ because of change. Folk art should be encouraged, due to what the museum perceived to be social change.\(^54\) For numerous writers, the ‘problem of education in India and the museum’s role’ through craft and agriculture had to be addressed\(^55\) – at least in their rhetoric:

The exhibition in a museum gallery is a most efficient way of communication of the up to date knowledge about man’s surroundings to the common people who in turn will be aware of the facts by simply viewing the objects and not required to memorize the knowledge. It has been forever mobilised by the complex image, always to be invoked at will or triggered by association. …

\(^{50}\) Grateful thanks to Mrs Das for sharing the Visitors’ Book with me in April 2010

\(^{51}\) Birla Science Museum Report Form, not dated, single sheet only

\(^{52}\) Ibid


\(^{54}\) The perceived action should be sending lists of specimens, modes of acquisition, purchase, exchange, gift or loan. To fulfil a kind of governmental notion of what culture should be through prescribed schedules, photographic documentation, folk songs and tales.

Since sight is swift, comprehensive and simultaneously analytic, it requires so little energy to function. The world of sound is a tiny bubble in the silence of existence. The universe has its own language of gesture. It talks in the voice of picture and dance. Every object in the world proclaims in the dumb signal of lines and colours, the fact that it is not mere logical abstraction or a mere thing of use, but it is unique in itself, it carries miracle of existence. … Sight carries the information to mind at the speed of light.56

The museum becomes an ambiguous space ‘for loving and respect for his heritage. Hence museum is a suitable place for life adjustment education in a developing country where sense of self worth can be achieved without possibility of growing egocentric personality’.57 With regards to the caste system and the ‘utopic’ belief in its ‘total eradication’, this ‘does not necessarily mean the growth of development attitude in the society … the total eradication of mosquitoes does not necessarily mean complete eradication of malaria’.58

Regarding the travelling museum, the virtual disappearance of the Bauls and Chara poets moving from door to door: ‘This vacuum also may be filled in by extensively distributed museum [sic] with auditorium equipped with TV and Radio which may provide a common place to the rural people in their areas’.59 An initiative of UNESCO, the mobile science museum has now been ‘demoted’ to the travelling exhibition due to its lack of ‘authentic’ artefacts, which still present for the Government of India a critical component of what constitutes a museum. The definitive report of the Mobile Science Exhibition (Calcutta, Delhi, 1983) penned by Amalendu Bose – the founder of the Birla Industry and Technology Museum (1959) – was intended as a modular study of science, travel, pedagogy.60 According to Bose, the museum must bridge the agrarian economy and the industrialising urban populace. It should think in terms of the contemporaneous to the Smithsonian, the Science Foundation Manila, the National Museum in Colombo, and museums in Philadelphia, Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul, Bangkok. Aside from Grace McCann Morley’s influence as Permanent Advisor to the International Council of Museums and the display of India in the US post-World War Two, the notion of the travelling museum looked to a seeming ideological opposite: the Soviet Union.61

---

56 Ibid, p 115
57 Ibid, p 115
58 Wall text, Birla Science Museum, Kolkata, permanent display
59 Basu, ‘Problems of Education in India and Museum’s Role’, p 117
60 Amalendu Bose established the National Council of Science Museums, which initially included the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM), Calcutta, the Visvesvavaya Industry and Technology Museum in Bangalore and the Nehru Science Centre in Bombay. He had also been Director of Museums of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Director of the National Council of Science Museums. See Amalendu Bose, Mobile Science Exhibition, UNESCO, New Delhi, 1983: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_6298febe-59a3-479d-99f9-7b3486377dfa?_=056325engo.pdf
According to Bose, Indira Gandhi, when Prime Minister (1966–77, 1980–84), had expressed tremendous anxiety concerning technology. How should it be disseminated or withheld from the masses? Technology, which I take here in the spirit of enchantment (Alfred Gell), ‘does not percolate’. Bose articulated ‘the need for diffusion of science and technology to the grass roots – a technology which is appropriate to the way of life; a knowledge of science makes them observant about nature and their surrounding and gives them a tool to improve their life’. This type of ‘appropriate’ technology should not be confused with primitive technologies: ‘For example, a simple village cow dung gas plant could make use of modern scientific expertise in the field of microbiology, chemistry, chemical and mechanical engineering’. Or with regard to soap: ‘A village soap manufacturer is producing laundry and toilet soap for the rural and semi-rural and semi-urban areas. His cost of production is not competitive with that of an organized soap manufacturer and he is eking out a miserable existence. Suppose some simple equipment is provided to him to retrieve glycerine out of the oil used for soap making and he will have a comfortable margin of profit and will be able to withstand the urban competition’. This rhetoric of ‘scientific awakening among the masses’ should involve carefully placed partial diffusion. Such ‘awakening’ would supposedly eradicate what the government perceived to be ‘superstitious practices injurious to the health of the individual and to the community’, eg the ingestion of rhino urine as an everyday cure for asthma and coughs sold as an illicit (by)product by Alipore Zoo. The government tried to reason that the eradication of such vernacular practices would improve the ecosystem and lead to a decline of the crime of poaching.

The government desired that there be some kind of recognition or mimetic continuum across archaic and modern technologies – as in the case of soap. But perhaps the absurdity of the museum bus needs to be accounted for. This self-driving technology of the ‘absurd’ sought to take the jadhu ghar to the masses. Dazzling exhibits (‘Electricity and Magneticism’, the ‘Transformation of Energy’) ‘portrayed the sun as the primary source of energy and all the planets revolving around the sun bound by a force of attraction. It shows that the sun acts as a big pump and evaporates water from the ocean which forms into clouds, and then returns as rain back to the earth’. Thought of as analogy qua technology, streams can be dams. According to the feedback for exhibitions, aside from ‘Light and Sight’ it’s ‘Water,  

---

63 Bose, Mobile Science Exhibition, p 1
64 Ibid, p 10
65 Ibid, p 9
66 Ibid, p 10; the zoo was made to admit that it sold seven to eight bottles of rhino urine (8 oz @ 3.50 rupees) every day
67 Bose claimed that rhino poaching in northeastern India could be reduced if rhino urine were outlawed
68 Bose, Mobile Science Exhibition, p 61
Water Everywhere!' that attracted the most attention.\textsuperscript{69} Visitors were told such information as: an earthworm is eighty per cent aqueous, a sunflower seed is five per cent, and the statistics of a pea weevil.\textsuperscript{70} There are gender implications, as irrigation is compared to how a cooking stove draws oil through a wick – ie capillary action, how ‘fine, root hairs underground’ meet the air.\textsuperscript{71}

Although in recent times there has been a turn to participatory aesthetics within the elitist space of the gallery (critiqued by Claire Bishop, Renate Dohmen and Eric Alliez as something of a frivolity), how at a subaltern/grassroots level does this work? Can it be said to involve the museobus?\textsuperscript{72} Perhaps this cannot really be cast as relational aesthetics. Steeped in the idealism of nomadism, relational aesthetics would seem to shy away from such associations with the governmental and the subaltern from within.\textsuperscript{73} Maybe the museobus is more conducive to study through the lens of what Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay has termed the rumour of globalisation.\textsuperscript{74} Here, globalisation is construed in terms of a shared vernacular imaginary that seeks out ‘subaltern globalities’\textsuperscript{75}

Since the 1970s, much money has been poured into museobus exhibits. To pick just a few examples: visitors are encouraged to see colour like a bee; to experience ‘why a rainbow appears on the sky’; ‘then comes the model showing the properties of ultraviolet rays’; how colour can be mixed; and how ‘An eye is basically a camera’.\textsuperscript{76} Perhaps as an anomaly, one of the commissioned models attempted to explain ‘why man becomes blind by trying to see the solar eclipse with bare eyes’.\textsuperscript{77} Alongside spectacles, telescopes, microscopes, which featured so heavily in the travelling exhibitions, several ‘amusing exhibits show how a brain can interpret what an eye can see’.\textsuperscript{78} Primarily it is illusion, and devices that appeal to vision which are paramount. Reflection, refraction, mirrors, lenses, present late modernity as distraction but also as ludic, as bristling with wonders: ‘Two exhibits were popular in this unit. One shows a turning wheel appearing to be stationary or rotating other way round when a

---

\textsuperscript{69} Visitors were asked to choose five exhibits from the twenty-four/twenty-eight on display: ‘This made them go round the exhibition once again and review the exhibits’ (ibid, p 80)

\textsuperscript{70} According to UNESCO, the pea weevil is 48% water (Bose, \textit{Mobile Science Exhibition}, p 23)

\textsuperscript{71} Bose, \textit{Mobile Science Exhibition}, p 61


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p 8

\textsuperscript{76} Bose, \textit{Mobile Science Exhibition}, p 76

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, p 75

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, p 78
stroboscopic light falls on it. The other exhibit explains why the sound of thunder is heard much later than the lightning is seen.\textsuperscript{79}

Exhibits were not cheap. As a museobus worker you are expected to spend nine months on the road sleeping in the bus, or perhaps on the floors of those schools that acquiesced. The museobus moves within a fifty kilometre radius from the parent museum, requiring programming three months in advance. Given the rough roads ‘the exhibits must work within a minimum of moving parts because of humps and bumps on the road. They must be intriguing’.\textsuperscript{80} ‘To intrigue’ as a verb, is to entangle, to plot, to be intricate; it dances also with a sense of magic and bears the weight of ambiguous obligation. Although currently the National Council of Science Museums (Ministry of Culture) states that there are twenty-five museobuses in operation, there is simultaneous stultification and ‘deification’: According to Hindu scriptures, a Brahmin called \textit{dwija} is someone who is born twice. Mobile Science Museum (MSM) was born twice – first time on November 17, 1965 in Ramakrishna Mission School in Narendpar by Shri Profullal Chandra Sen, Chief Minister of West Bengal and a second time December 26, 1966 in Bamul Vijnan Mandir near Shaktigarh in the district of Burdwan. This doubled deadline was intended to coincide with National Children’s Day, November 14. Exhibits should have a minimum of moving parts as roads are tight. Each exhibit ‘must look different to break monotony’. \textsuperscript{81}

Schools might provide a site of respite.\textsuperscript{82} While ‘carousing’ Amazonia through the wild eyes of Klaus Kinski might enact its own kind of violence of an alienating technology,\textsuperscript{83} the museobus took technology to be embracing, perhaps even liberating in the face of the decolonial. A 16mm film projector and an inflatable dome planetarium are often included as part of the museobus.\textsuperscript{84} It is that ‘magical beliefs are revelatory and fascinating not because

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, p 75
\textsuperscript{80} See Saroj Ghose, ‘Science on Wheels: A retrospective’ \url{www.ncsm.gov.in/science-on-wheels-a-retrospective/}
The Government of India has recently produced several online documents relating to the history of the twenty-five-strong museo fleet of buses.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, not paginated
\textsuperscript{82} The Indian Museum, Kolkata, and Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM) saw schools as the most realistic port of call. In rural areas it was often only the school that could provide both a public space and support the generator needs of the museobus and provide a living space for the driver, technician and educational assistant. Increasingly the museobus relied on student volunteers, sometimes drawn from local schools, to assist with the crowds, which could be huge. The school also acted as an exclusionary space; many villagers and tribals did not feel welcome. Also, the choice of exhibits was largely geared to school children, rather than dealing with issues to do with water treatment, food and nutrition or agriculture. By the mid-1970s these were included as themes, although the focus remained on the spectacular.
\textsuperscript{83} Cf \textit{Fitzcarraldo}, 1982, Werner Herzog, director
\textsuperscript{84} These inflatable planetariums were, again, much indebted to BIRLA. The BIRLA planetarium (est. 1963, and locally known as \textit{tatamandal}) in Kolkata is loosely based on the Sanchi stupa. It is the second largest planetarium in the world. There are two other BIRLA planetariums in Chennai and Hyderabad. The Kolkata planetarium includes a huge collection of paintings and celestial models, a C-14 telescope and solar filter. See Jayanta Sthanapati, ‘History of Science Museums and Planetariums in India’, \textit{Indian Journal of the History of Science}, vol 52 no 3, 2017, pp 357–368.
they are ill-conceived instruments of utility but because they are poetic echoes of the cadences that guide the innermost course of the world. Magic takes language, symbols, and intelligibility to their outermost limits.\textsuperscript{85} Mimetic vertigo, perhaps.\textsuperscript{86}

Unwieldy juggernauts, the early buses lumbered, jerked, capsized.\textsuperscript{87}

If capsize they did, nonetheless such a dramatic dysfunctional entrée is perhaps akin to what Christopher Pinney terms, in his discussion of the motor vehicle in South Asia, the idea of the ‘automonster’.\textsuperscript{88} Automonster might seemingly pertain more to the subaltern vehicle than the governmental bus, but given the rhythm of the roads, the tracks, and the crossings riven, a ‘triste’ tropicalisation can take place...

It seems that the mobile museum (swiftly renamed the mobile exhibition in 1966 due to the lack of ‘original’ artefacts) desired a kind of participation that owed much to Frank Oppenheimer’s work in the US. Oppenheimer was to admit that his modular scheme for global buses put pressure on the spectacle of electricity: ‘I pick only such subjects on which interactive subjects could be developed … Socially relevant exhibits could be animated but not necessarily be made interactive.’\textsuperscript{89} This curious statement is echoed by Saroj Ghose, designer of the early exhibits. The first exhibition in November 1965, intended to coincide with National Children’s Day, showcased ‘Our Family Electricity’.\textsuperscript{90} Cumbersome, faltering exhibits mounted on tubular stands, and which seemingly had little relevance to everyday life,


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p 123

\textsuperscript{87} The museobuses were also designed to cross rivers. Government authorities soon found that the buses, at 32 feet in length, were too long. Their attempt at trailer buses also failed. The twenty-four exhibits of each bus were intended to be experienced both from the inside (often a failure, given the cramped conditions) and from the schoolyard. Saroj Ghose designed exhibits 3’1” x 2’1” x 1’. These modular exhibits, produced at a workshop at the BIRLA Science Museum in Kolkata, continue to be repaired and redesigned there today. As opposed to the Indian Museum, Kolkata, the BIRLA group of science museums has remained committed to the idea of the mobile exhibition (interview with Professor K Islam, April 2010).


\textsuperscript{89} Oppenheimer, as quoted in Ghose, ‘Science on Wheels’, op cit. It seems that Grace Morley’s successor as director of museums really took the initiative in the 1970s to increase the number of museobuses. This is briefly discussed by Kristy Phillips, ‘A Museum for the Nation: Publics and politics at the National Museum of India’, unpublished PhD, University of Minnesota, 2006. Phillip’s case study (chapter 3) is the mobile exhibitions run by the National Museum in New Delhi from 1974. The subject of the first exhibition was ‘Architects of India’s Glory’. It travelled sporadically between 1974 and 1989 and featured numerous photographs of temples, forts and plaster casts from the V&A, London, and the Madras Museum, photographs of which are held in the collection of Jagdish Aurora, Photograph Officer at the National Museum.

\textsuperscript{90} The museobus initiative relates closely to the debates conducted by the Swiss National Committee for ICOM, published as ‘The problems of museums in countries undergoing rapid change’, Report, 1964. It would seem that the museobus initiative project, which was heavily influenced by UNESCO policy, was determined to some degree by Philip S. Rawson, \textit{India–Museology}, UNESCO, Paris, 1965. Around this time Rawson had also been involved with promoting the leftist artist collective Group 1890. For Group 1890, see Natasha Eaton, \textit{Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation}, I B Tauris, London and New York, 2013; Rebecca M Brown, ‘Group 1890’, in Partha Mitter and Parul Dave Mukherji, eds, \textit{Twentieth-century Indian Art}, Arts Alive Gallery, New Delhi, 2017, pp 23–31. UNESCO’s policy was reinforced by Morley’s establishment of ICOM in 1964 as a Regional Agency in Asia based in Delhi, 1967.
were nonetheless celebrated in the official literature: ‘Mobile science museum is something like a festival of science in interior areas otherwise starved of that kind of entertainment’.91

Although Rebecca M Brown and Claire Wintle draw our attention to the quasi-hegemonic presence of Grace Morley and her Berkeley directive in Delhi and the presence of UNESCO, certainly in Calcutta there was another thought – a turn to the Soviet.92 USSR museums provide a mode of consultation, including the museotrain, and, ‘more practically’ in India, the museobus. For many museum officials, the museobus should be entirely focused on displaying urban phenomena: ‘since the cultural element of the rural era differs, the museobus on the subjects under the scope of the scope of the city, museums end up in raising some anxieties and not learning practices to help village people. The villagers must have museums on subjects relating to their own rural environment, from which they can derive practical help’.93 This entailed the use of mobile conservation labs and museobuses that can offer ‘the glimpse of regional culture through them’.94 The rhetoric of ‘environmental perception’ and the power of visual literacy was intended to make the ‘ideal viewer’, ie the villager:

aware of or discover his self independence in relation to his surrounding even without literacy and thus increases his sense of dignity, love for loving and respect for his heritage. Hence museum [sic] is a suitable place for life adjustment education in a developing country where sense of dignity i.e. self worth can be achieved without possibility of generating egocentric personality. 95

In the dilemma of a national policy of education, such travelling museums should allow the villager the chance ‘to handle objects of animated nature’ – especially objects that privilege touch.96

Aside from the glimpse, this rhetoric of the touch pertains to sight by drawing objects into the sphere of what Laurence Babb has termed ‘glancing’.97 Glancing involves visceral visual

---


93 Bose, Mobile Science Exhibition, p 119


95 Basu, ‘Problems of Education in India and Museum’s Role’, op cit, p 115

contact with the divine. But here in the mobile museum the divine is usurped by science. Not in the case of the divine, but Nature or History – both of which are reigned into the economy of the sacred. Competitions for the making of models and plays (some scripts being suggested include ‘We are Santhals’ or ‘A trip to Sunderbans’, or exhibitions ‘on life through the ages’). Life through the ages supposed a kind of vitalism, one that drew partly on the gallery of mankind in the Indian Museum. To miniaturise the metropolitan diorama might suggest a desire for autocratic containment. This might make the museum appear to be a kind of doll’s house. The miniature is, as Susan Stewart suggests a powerful means of grasping, controlling the world. The miniature becomes the space of longing even if this entails infantilisation. If BITM’s (Birla Industrial and Technological Museum) six museums and the fleet of twenty-five museobuses privileged the ‘wonders of science’, with the singing, simulated water well (a radio in a bucket with refracted mirrors), the Indian Museum in pursuance of its policy of bringing the museum to the doors of the rural population ‘planned to present India’s ancient monuments … to labourers, both agricultural and industrial, illiterate women-folk from the common household, children and the aged’. Subjects of the dioramas included ‘Life of Primitive Man as tool-maker and food gatherer’, prehistoric stone tools, Harappa, the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, the Bharhut stupa, Pala terracotta specimens from Bihar, sixth-century coins, and the Ibadat Khana at Fatchpur Sicri. Monuments, landscapes and labour seem to have been the remit of the model makers. Possibly, there is a sense of movement, a coming together of the animated, the vital that might even simulate the powers of the photographic.

Given the limited access to media such as TV and itinerant cinema, the diorama was mindful of depicting the everyday to the point of being uncannily real. In one official report (1980) dedicated to Grace McCann Morley, models were seen to be childish, shabby, and yet ‘sometimes life size models confuse the visitors as they are often thought to be the originals.

98 Bhownic, ‘Children’s Museum in India – A Study in Perspective’, op cit, p 88
100 Given the Government of India regulations, the Indian Museum museobuses had size regulations and contained twenty-four to twenty-eight dioramas (this is outlined in the Indian Museum’s leaflet ‘Mobile Exhibition on Indian History and Archaeology’, not paginated)
101 For sacred sculpture and the everyday, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, In the Name of the Goddess: The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata, Primurs Books, Delhi, 2015. Kajri Jain has just completed a book-length study of the notion of the monument/monumentality in ‘satellite’ towns in India.
In such cases photographs are considered better than the models.102 ‘To use the diorama in the museum or not to use, is a question which can be compared with the Sanatan Brahma. Only those with higher IQ can understand the idea of all pervading God sung by the Arya Samajis. All other worship Ram or Krisna in their human manifestations’.103 With regards to models of prehistoric man, ‘the visitor gets confused if he forms a wrong opinion’ as ‘the remote past is often beyond the common man’s imagination’.104 Theft of models did occasionally take place, but far more common was for villagers to stone the bus. After all, this alien vehicle bore some resemblance to the sterilisation busses of the 1970s.

The political ramifications of this ‘aesthetic of the ephemeral’ are yet to be determined.105 What did villagers think of the depiction of labour? Suspended animation acts to defamiliarise labour. Initially, to his surprise, Christopher Pinney found that his own artistic photography in the fields (shadows on faces, faces furrowed resonant of fields) was rejected by villagers in Nagda in favour of the photographic studio as a ‘chamber of dreams’.106 In the lighting of the dioramas, top light perhaps makes labour extraordinary; labour to be valorised as representation.107

Although less so, Aby Warburg’s Mnemosyne (1924–1929, unfinished), with its ‘incessant’ shuffling of energy (possibly interpreted through Warburg’s engagement with the writings of Bergson or Burckhardt), there is nonetheless the sense of a doctrine of the similar: ‘how puny he [man] is compared to the universe, galaxy, nebula, star, sun, earth and their objects’.108 In an attempt to counter the dusty environs of the Indian Museum, numerous writers in the Indian Museum Bulletin have stressed repeatedly that the ‘museum has an obligation to the whole community … museum should not be a mausoleum … museum is no longer held as a treasure house, a mere store of curiosities … modern museum pulls down the played-out old concept to construct a necessary new educational fervour becomes the principal mission of the museum’. In so-called developing countries, the museum must do the work of the informal education sector.109 Repeatedly stressed is the contact with objects and a wide range

103 Wall text, Indian Museum, Kolkata. The Sanatana Brahma is one of the four kumaras, sages who roam the universe and are born of Brahma’s mind
104 Asthana, ‘The Use of Dioramas and Models in Indian museums’, op cit, pp 49–50
105 For aesthetic of the ephemeral, see Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996
106 Christopher Pinney, Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs, Reaktion, London, 1997; see also Pinney’s current ERC-funded project ‘Origins of the Camera: Photography and the political imagination’
of subjects: ‘museum specimens act as feelies and thus experienced through handling fills the hiatus of learning’ through ‘seeing and believing yet touching and feeling are even more effective than merely having a look. The visual and tactile qualities of specimens make an appeal to the people, literate and illiterate and such qualities seem to increase their sensitivity and capacity to assimilate information’.110 Amongst ‘the poor’, ‘museum exhibits stimulate in them certain attitudes such as the faculty of objects, logical thinking, imagination and responsibility. The painting gallery of a museum is particularly useful … The style and technique of luminous and natural colours … These paintings can make viewers aware of the intrinsic quality of the life depicted therein … that nurses insight and a sense about the worth of life’.111

According to the then Director of the Indian Museum, Professor Kishur Basa, the museobus might be recommissioned – a policy which would seem to be in line with the reintroduction of the museotrain based in Delhi.112 In the interim it would seem that the policy of the museum was to invite members of tribes and scheduled castes to stay in Kolkata: the city as museum writ large.113

But by now certain museum officials believed that making a trip to the Indian Museum is a luxury and a waste of labour time – hence the renewed need for the museobus.114 Given the governmental concern with illiteracy, there has been an emphasis on tactility, glancing, glimpse, museum games and performance (local plays), supplemented by dressing up in nineteenth-century costume, promoting concerts and visits to archaeological sites, partially directed by UNESCO.115 As early as 1966, museum buses were seen to be ambiguous: the Government of India determined that as they held only original modular things (often in miniature) then they should be dubbed museo-exhibitions and not museums: ‘It is indeed true that one original is better than a few aids together. In museum display originals are old as bearing the full value’.116 From 1969–91, the museobus from the Indian Museum, Kolkata, travelled for two to three days and was supplemented by an audio-visual van from 1987. The idea was to have outdoor museum workshops and to make a film in the ‘big field’ (twenty minutes in length). The museobus should encourage slide lectures. The use of slides required the employment of a mobile lecturer and a projectionist.117

110 Ibid, p 50
111 Ibid, p 50
112 Interview with Professor Kishur Basa, 13 March 2010. Inspired by the use of the train in the USSR during the 1960s.
113 Interview with Professor Kishur Basa, 15 April 2010
114 Bhowwich, in ‘The Use of Museum as a Centre of Education in Under Developed Countries’, op cit, p 52, discusses the notion of the travelling exhibition
115 Ibid, pp 82–83
116 Ibid, pp 82–83. This builds upon earlier literature such as Molly Harrison, Education in Museums, UNESCO, Paris, 1960; Brian Doherty, ed, Museums in Crisis, G Braziller, New York, 1972; see also the ‘Regional seminar on the adaptation of museums in Asia to the needs of the modern world’, SHC/70/CONF 703/9, UNESCO, Paris, 1976
117 Interview with Mrs Das, 16 April 2010

You can, of course, ‘free fall’ in a museum. In terms of arbitrary looking, for art student Amid, with whom I spent some hours touring the Indian Museum, his summation was: ‘I’ve no house, museum is my house’.\(^\text{118}\) For Amin, the museum should owe much to Lenin: ‘with one step forward equals two steps backward’. This is ‘Janus up to death’. It seems that the eighteen-year museobus was no longer allowed into Calcutta. One of the last themes for the travelling exhibition was ‘Motion’. The bus had made it two or three times to Bangladesh.\(^\text{119}\) Recently, the Birla Science Museum in Port Blair (Andaman Islands) has introduced a museobus that will travel out to the remotest parts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands by steam ship.\(^\text{120}\)

**Constellations Lost, Bare**

They alone shall possess the Earth who live from the powers of the cosmos.  
The poetic rapture of starry nights.  

*Walter Benjamin, ‘To the Planetarium’*\(^\text{121}\)

As long as you still feel the stars as something ‘above you’ you have not yet acquired the gaze of a man of deep understanding.  

*Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Beyond Good and Evil’*\(^\text{122}\)

In a letter to Theodor Adorno (1940), Walter Benjamin declared astronomy to be ‘the methodical destruction of experience’.\(^\text{123}\) Benjamin’s fragment ‘To the Planetarium’ (1926) mused on the destruction of cosmological ‘aura’: how astronomy eradicates wonder; how cosmic experience wanes with the waxing power of lenses. The growth of modern astronomy broke with the enchantment of astrology and the possibility of wonders’ trance. In telescoping reason we have lost our rapport with the heavens. What are we to do with the ruins of wonder? Perhaps there are still moments of enchanted unity with the cosmos:

\(^\text{118}\) Interview with Amid Kumar, Indian Museum, 31 March 2010

\(^\text{119}\) Interview with D Mukherjee, Education Officer, Birla Museum (BITM), Kolkata, 2 April 2010

\(^\text{120}\) This harkens back to 1960s policy, which sought to hoister far more cumbersome buses onto ferry launches


To observe a thing means only to arouse it to self recognition. Whether an experiment succeeds depends on the extent to which the experimenter is capable, through magical observations, one might say of getting nearer to the object and of finally drawing it into himself. 124

The planetarium is the necessary aesthetic response to modernity’s slow moving crisis of meaning.125 Nonetheless, it would seem in Benjamin’s thought that the constellation is a means to resist a crisis of meaning. He was intrigued by the idea of a naïve, embodied authentic relation with nature, which reached its most tortured form in the bourgeois idea of the logic of history as a constellation not in the sky but in earthly events.

Benjamin’s thought on astronomy in many ways pre-empted his notion of mimetic faculty. The mimetic faculty refers to our capacity to copy, to produce patterns found in nature begun with imitations of shapes in the sky that alienation from the cosmos that is within us. Outer space is within us. Thus ‘To the Planetarium’ offered not ‘the stars down to earth’, as Adorno called astrology, but ‘earth up to the stars’.126 Benjamin’s thought on astronomy bears recourse to Nietzsche’s Gay Science – ie the notion of having enough chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star or perhaps a constellation of stars: ‘we modern man are determined, thanks to the mechanics of our stormy sky by different modalities; our actions shine alternatively in different colours, they are rarely univocal’.127 Benjamin treated stars less as shaping elements in our lives, as makers of our fated condition, than did Nietzsche, for whom even the ambiguity of our actions is conditioned by the multiple celestial forces acting on us. There is enchantment for Benjamin in the stars. A constellation is more than ‘dialectics at a standstill’.128

---


125 At times in his writings, Benjamin suggests that as moderns we are moving further from the heavens


In his examination of a mid-nineteenth-century engraving by JJ Grandville (1844), Walter Benjamin considered how to marry the planets and/or the stars. From the standpoint of the bridge, it is clear that Saturn’s rings are ‘nothing other than a circular balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn strolled in the evening to get a breath of fresh air’. Planet merges with panorama and brings to mind Warburg’s intention to transform the Hamburg planetarium into a Kosmologikon. His desire was to augment a collection of images that could be traced back to ancient times the history of astrology and astronomy.

The Museum of Lost Constellations is a work Raqs Media Collective created especially for ‘Art of Memory’ and The Observatory Museum, Stockholm, 4 September–24 November 2013 (Fig. 6). Long before astronomy became a profession, any astronomer could identify and name a constellation, with the outcome that every celestial map looked different from the next. Eventually, in 1930 the International Astronomical Union designated eighty-eight official constellations. Many of the constellations consequently ‘disappeared’ (the stars themselves, of course, remained), and stars returned to being individual stars rather than compound, named images. In ‘The Museum of Lost Constellations’ we encounter objects representing these ancient constellations intermingled with The Observatory Museum’s permanent collection. The Reindeer, The Tigris River, The Tortoise, The Flamingo, and others – memories born of the heavens.


129 Benjamin, Passagenwerk, op cit, p 885
130 ‘Art of Memory’ is a series of solo exhibitions at Bonniers Konsthall and surrounding museums
Raqs’s *The Great Bare Mat and Constellation* (2012) is comprised of two works displayed in two distinct gallery installations (Fig. 7). The first features a carpet, a surface for the staging of conversations, displayed at the feet of *The Vinegar Tasters*, a two-panel, seventeenth-century Japanese screen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s collection in Boston. *The Great Bare Mat and Constellation* gains inspiration from two exquisite Han bronze bears in the collection of the Gardner Museum, mat-weights from China that served to weigh down carpets on which debaters would sit and argue philosophical points. Woven by a team of expert Bulgarian weavers, the carpet features a repeated motif that indexes the constellation of the Great Bear against a background of signals, essays, and conversations between three personal computers of the Raqs Media Collective.

The second installation is a silent, looped video projection that transforms, through a series of subtle alterations, the many photographs and film stills the artists recorded while in residence at the Gardner Museum in 2010. The images of the projected video reflect onto an adjacent gallery wall, where a luminous array of shiny metal surfaces mirroring distinct narratives create a crescendo of accumulated images in the mind of the viewer – much like what happens while walking through the galleries of the Museum.
Every samayavali lists and gives chronologies of events as they happen or ought to happen in the course of a given period of time; an asamayavali is an un-chronology. Asamay is both untimely and unlikely time, an unseasonable time. It can also be a time that we wish not to come to pass, or a time of desires and dreams, an imagined time. An asamayavali is an account of a time that is out of sorts; a time that is exciting and sits uneasily on our consciousness. It’s the kind of time that repairs days and nights, cooks the hours, does a bit of gardening of the minutes. It needs other devices – other clocks and calendars – for us to take a measure of its passage. An asamayavali is, by definition, un-retrospective. What Untimely Calendar, the exhibition, offers is a working mill of ideas that face the future and a way of reading contemporaneity; a polyphony on the question of ‘how to be with time’ […] The site of descent is what it’s really all about, isn’t it? Where and when to dive into the thick of things? How much pressure to sustain? How much ballast to offload? How much, or how little oxygen, to take on board? The best thing to do is to identify a rift, some place where tectonic forces are hard at work and play. Where things are hot and thick and close. Signs of volatility mean signs of life. The rift you choose, chooses your questions, throws
them back at you like a submarine eruption. There
is no good time to dive; there is no time that is not
suitable. Tomorrow is not better than today, the past
was not better than the present. The future is as good
as your next dive. Now is as good as ever.
Take a deep breath.

**Imaginary Raqs**

**Stupa/UFO aesthetic: The glimmer**

> It is a house that mimics the sky.
> 
> Raqs Media Collective

Raqs put forward ‘Draft for an Operating Manual, save for choreography, plan for an
exhibition’. Such an exhibition works in tandem with their outreach plans in the disused,
derelict spaces of Delhi, Dara Shikoh Library, Skipper Tower, and so on.\(^{131}\) If dust, detritus
or regeneration make for a kind of *serai* meant as a space for hospitality, this also has its
double.\(^{132}\) Several of Raqs’s thirty collaborators assumed the magic realist posture put
forward by the artists, as can be seen in Sikan Kumar Panda’s *Birth of New Moon* for the Dolls
Museum – a fibrous lunar burst. Like Sikan’s work for NIV, *Birth of New Moon* is an intricate
network of the planetary, which finds its mimetic counterpart in the webs being spun by
spiders at the Shanghai Biennale. According to Raqs, ‘Draft’ as the point of entry for an
imaginary exhibition might be:

> Something that could be a stupa, if it were not a UFO, is transfixed in the
decision of being lifted off into space and burrowing it into the earth’s core.
This is the way to the present, the contemporary inserts itself between history
and hope. It is earthen. It is a house that mimics the sky on the inside and a
mould on the outside.

> It is capacious, stranded and mysterious. Is this a reliquary, a time machine,
a silo, or an observatory? …

> Where does it come from? Where is it headed?  ^{133}\n
---

131 The Dara Shikoh Library became the residency of David Ochterley, Viceroy of the Punjab, a government
college, Madrasah Zila, part of the Municipal Board, the office of the AS (Archaeological Survey of India). It is
now closed off, but it did have 250,000 books in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, the majority of which were
destroyed in the Indian Rebellion (First War of Independence) in 1857–58. It is now located at the centre of the
campus of Ambedkar University. Skipper Tower closed in relation to a provident fraud scam involving the chief
Tejwart Singh; see *The Times of India*, 9 November 2002, p 2.

132 Such hospitality involves a vast range of spaces and institutions, such as Rabindra Rangshala in the Ridge; the
International Dolls Museum in Ito, New Delhi, and the Delhi Public Library opposite Old Delhi Railway
Station; the Crafts Museum, Palika Bazaar Park, Rajir Chowk; and the Hall of Nations, Pragati Maidan, New
Delhi

133 See Raqs Media Collective, ‘INSERT: Draft for an Operating Manual, Score for Choreography, Plan for an
Exhibition’, in *Insert 2014*:
What might this possibly contain? ‘How do we work it? What does it do?’ Possibly the structure can contain within itself its cryptic stance. But for Raqs it must yield its improvised manual for its operation: ‘There are no answers but a door does stand open. There is a parcours.’ Such roaming works within a particular structure. The exhibition/museum – it is not quite clear what it is – should have a passage, be made up of three concentric rings, six gates and twenty four apertures, which should be open like stations in a book of hours. Such a space must account for the anomalous, the political, the immanent, the prescient; haunting, the spider, the Quixotic donkey, the rocket. It should invite ‘the luminous: that which blazes or glimmers but does not blind’. It should be determined by the weave – demolition, the wreck as ‘executive order’. It should look to ‘The Abandon: that willingness to let go … The Wake… The Bound… The Common… The Ground’, which constitute ‘the maze of our time’. There is a staircase, a locked door; the demand to return: ‘we could learn to speak in tongues, in other voices: in the whisper of sedition and heresy, in the songs sung in pleasure in spite of injury, in forensic diction and visionary stammer, in measured timbres and ecstatic tones, in echolalia and laughter. Even in silence, always in poetry.’

In addition to a kind of sketchy blueprint for this ‘Library of Babel’ as if it were a museum, Raqs claimed to have found a site that could serve as museum as UFO. Not the controversial desolate Skipper Tower much written about by members of Sarai, but what Raqs deemed to be a UFO SITE.

---

Figure 8

---

134 All the quotes in this paragraph are from ibid
For Raqs, dereliction contains within itself redemption (Figs. 8, 9). The House of Everything and Nothing (2013) is Raq’s’s exploration of the infinity of worlds that they inhabit. Raqs asked a software programmer to devise an algorithm which could help render the pattern generated data harvested from the ‘conversation traffic’ between their three personal computers in their studio in Shahpur Jat, New Delhi, and the world. This pattern is the way in which they understand their inhabitation of the world. In The House of Everything and Nothing, Raqs translated this pattern into a texture that clad the surface for the Gujral house in Jor Bagh. They have already worked with this pattern, rendering it into a carpet that was shown as the Great Bare Mat. From the surface of a carpet, this trace of their presence in the world now moves on to the walls of a house. The artists believe that ‘the work made the house look and feel ethereal, intangible, as if it were afloat and adrift. As if it were made of nothing but light. At the same time, the surface of the house seemed to be scored over by a web of signals that would communicate a dense infinity, a plenitude of connections, a mesh-work of light. This way, the work transformed the building into the house of everything and nothing, of infinity and absence, of form and the dissolution of form.’ A disused haveli (house) becomes a space for the artists’ neon algorithms and rumination in the prescience of the THING.

The haveli is thought somewhat eccentrically referred to as ‘forensic architecture’, which allows Raqs recourse to the projects of Eyal Weizman.135 For Weizman, two of the most evocative ideas of space to inform current theories of forensic architecture are Frances Yates’s classic study of oratory (Simonidez, Cicero, Quintilian), where objects perform as temporary presence within rooms, courtyards, corridors,136 A fountain might stand for a naval battle, a bed for a love affair. By contrast, for poet Jacques Roubaud (another critical source for Weizman and Raqs) objects disrupt primarily as anachronistic presences. They might appear in the wrong speeches; their haunting of the oratorical structure can be fraught with tension and the rhetorical building overburdened by a palimpsest of object ghosts: ‘every vision of the past is a vision of the blind’.137

All that a world could be, no matter what,
is, somewhere, in some way.
fullness of possibles, consistency.
no matter which talking head, mine
for example, adjacent to my body
and
why not
against my face, the angel’s, the black shadow face itself … 138

135 Eyal Weizman, Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability, Zone, New York, 2017
138 Ibid
Figure 9

Although for Roubaud ‘the fact that every vision of the past is a vision of the blind’, rooms are cluttered spaces as the traces of objects can never be removed. When they become too cluttered with the ghosts of objects, such buildings must be exorcised, abandoned, destroyed, turned to ashes so that nothing remains. For forensic architects, the trauma of things can never be removed. Mir Ali recounts flesh that stuck in a fan after a bomb attack. To speak out in the face of objects is to engage with parrhesia – to speak everything with things. In ancient Hebrew, it is to be ‘in the face of the public’. For Foucault, it is used as the courage to risk one’s life to tell an unpopular truth – courage in the face of danger. In an extreme form it can be the fight between life and death. For Raqs this might pertain to Being and Nothing and what they term ‘The Necessity of Infinity’ resonant of ‘The Museum of Lost Constellations’. Elsewhere, Raqs have sought to grasp the planet through doubled alterity – alien as surjection with stark iridescence. Glistening, perhaps stark.
Perhaps this can be read as a playful long distance adjunct to the inflatable planetariums of the museobuses.\textsuperscript{139} These ‘structures’ have long since moved out of the museobus to be farmed out by a private company – Constellation Mobile Education and Learning Technologies (CMELT), based on a model imported from the US.\textsuperscript{140} Made from nylon and reinforced inside with aluminium, the tent, which can accommodate thirty-five students, contains a computer-generated star field generator and a rotating projector that can create a star field. As a kind of planetary consciousness, the simulated planetarium also manifested weather patterns, constellations, and the plate tectonics shaping the face of the earth.

**Nishastgah, To Tread the Stars**

If, according to Raqs, *nishastgah* is a space not yet inhabited by memory, it is also an astrologer’s seat that might exist. Just in front of the Treasury in Fatehpur Sici in Uttar Pradesh is a small pavilion of 9.75 square feet, elaborately carved with ‘Caterpillar’ struts. For Raqs, *nishastgah* is a space where the gaze is not yet fixed and time has not yet been disciplined. Nobody – as yet – has been described as a ‘vagabond’. The force of the making of this place comes from its state of suspension, as seen in their 2006 work in the landscape of Ghevra, a ‘resettlement colony’ in northwest Delhi.

Raqs’s planetary consciousness and their ethics of dust might show us the glimpse of an art of/for the commons. It might also suggest how we might think about the much contested idea of contemporaneity qua the ‘politics of the governed’.\textsuperscript{141} If contemporaneity has been the subject of significant debate in the field of contemporary art, does it have relevance for governmentality and the commons? Or does this return us to the differend?\textsuperscript{142}

Does the museum really have relevance for rural/subaltern communities? Does, as Renate Dohmen proposes, relational aesthetics beyond the gallery bring other forms of participation into being?\textsuperscript{143} Raqs’s commitment to the museum without walls in terms of relational dereliction and their plans for museum as ‘spider woven’ UFO is perhaps analogous with BITM projects of the singing bucket, the exhibit of water as a teardrop, portable stars. Perhaps to see the world as is: labyrinthitis.\textsuperscript{144} For Raqs, the labyrinthine pertains to Borges’s Funes and other notions: ‘There is no need to build a labyrinth when the

\textsuperscript{139} The ancient Greek polymath Archimedes is attributed with creating a primitive planetarium device that could predict the movements of the sun and the moon and the planets. The discovery of the Antikythera mechanism proved that such devices already existed during antiquity, although probably after Archimedes’s lifetime. Campanus of Novara (1220–1296) described a planetary equatorium in his Theorica Planetarium, and included instructions on how to build one. The Globe of Gottorf, built around 1650, had constellations painted on the inside. These devices would usually be referred to today as orreries.

\textsuperscript{140} This US model is from the firm Learning Technologies


\textsuperscript{142} J F Lyotard, *The Differend: Phases in Dispute*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1989 [1983]

\textsuperscript{143} Cf Dohmen, *Encounters Beyond the Gallery*, op cit

\textsuperscript{144} Medically, labyrinthitis is an inner ear disorder that can cause dizziness and nausea
entire universe is one.’ Perhaps there is no escape from such a labyrinth of solitude. ‘Why wander in these labyrinths? Once more, for aesthetic reasons; because this present infinity, these “vertiginous symmetries,” have their tragic beauty.” Their glimmer of astronomical silence. Stars as tread of the everyday. For ‘as long as you still feel the stars as something “above you” you have not yet acquired the gaze of a man of deep understanding’.

---


Natasha is one of the Editors of *Third Text*.

---

List of Figures:

Figure 1: Raqs Media Collective, *Explore Depth*, 2014, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 2: Raqs Media Collective, *Whorled Expectations*, 2014, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 3: Raqs Media Collective, *Whorled Expectations*, 2014, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 4: Raqs Media Collective, with Mrityunjay Chatterjee, *Global Village Health Manual*, 2000, courtesy of the artists

Figure 5: Raqs Media Collective, *With Respect to Residue*, 2004, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 6: Raqs Media Collective, *The Museum of Lost Constellations*, 2013, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 7: Raqs Media Collective performing *The Necessity of Infinity* on the ‘great bare mat’ carpet at the Sharjah Biennial, 2017, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective and the Sharjah Art Foundation

Figure 8: Raqs Media Collective, *The House of Everything and Nothing*, 2013, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Figure 9: Raqs Media Collective, *The House of Everything and Nothing*, 2013, courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

---

145 ‘He had no document but his memory; the training he had acquired with each added hexameter gave him a discipline unsuspected by those who set down and forget temporary, incomplete paragraphs. He was not working for posterity or even for God, whose literary tastes were unknown to him. Meticulously, motionlessly, secretly, he wrought in time his lofty, invisible labyrinth … We can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences.’ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, Penguin, London, 2000 [1962], p 21

146 Borges, *Labyrinths*, op cit, p 124

147 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, op cit, p 88