

Constellations on the Move

New Media Art in the ‘Contemporary’

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation titled **Constellations on the Move: New Media Art in the ‘Contemporary’** submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Visual Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **Constellations on the Move: New Media Art in the ‘Contemporary’** submitted by M.Srinivas Aditya at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Visual Studies, is his own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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School of Arts and Aesthetics
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Prof. Parul Dave Mukherji
Supervisor

*For my Mother **Kalyani Mopidevi***

Who pushed me into this sea called visual arts.....

*For my Father **Krishna Swamy Mopidevi***

Who continues to inspire even in his absence.....

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here.....

M. Srinivas Aditya

*Like a Shark, a new media art work must keep moving to survive.....Fixity equals
to Death*

- Ippolito Jon

*One never sees a new art, one thinks one sees it; but a 'new art,' as people say a
little loosely, may be recognized by the fact that it is not recognized*

- Derrida Jacques quoted by Galloway Alexander

*The best new media artifacts are not necessarily websites or installations: they
may well be the artifacts of new organisational forms, linking local to global
struggles, building solidarities*

- Mariátegui, José-Carlos, Cubitt, Sean and Nadarajan, Gunalan

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INTRODUCTION

THE ELUSIVE FIRST ELEMENT

To initiate a discussion, for that matter a dissertation on the New Media Art ¹ in the cultures of the contemporary, there occurs to me, no single thread from where one could begin. To begin somewhere makes me look around for the so called first element, the origin, the possible beginning place/time of the vast technological phenomena, which came to be known as new media since the final decades of the twentieth century. Even, when one looks out for the beginning, a possible line of temporality, one is lost in the enormity of references and positions made accessible by the different anthologies, authors, texts and art works that are produced in and around the field. This over-flow of potential first elements and in some cases their negation by the practices themselves, makes one think beyond the historicist's conceptions of temporality and its long lasting relationships with the origin.

The notion of monadic origin or the first element in the conventional discourses of history and art history is seen like the starting check-post on the highway called the past that is destined towards the present. Journeys on this highway are often understood to be

¹ In its literal definition, New Media Art has been considered to be a field that is constituted in the conversation between art practice and new media (mainly digital) technologies. However, beyond this literal definition what is included in the broader category of New Media Art fluctuates from book to book and context to context, based upon the individual focus and choice. For Instance, the book *New Media Art* describes it in reference to projects that make use of emerging technologies and are concerned with the cultural, political and aesthetic possibilities of these tools. On the other hand, the book *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, sees New Media Art as broadly, art that is made using electronic media technologies and that displays any of the three behaviors, namely *interactivity*, *connectivity* and *computability* in any combinations. (Refer to the 'New Behaviors' section in Chapter – II). However, it is not to say that one definition over-writes or dismisses the other, rather there is an enormity of definitions, categorical divisions and even serious contentions that term and the field of New Media Art noticed. (refer to the 'Novelty of the New Media' section in Chapter – II) *New Media Art*, Mark Tribe, Reena Jana and Uta Grosenick (ed.), Taschen , Los Angeles, 2006 p.6. also Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010 p.6.

ones that move linearly in time, linking and appropriating multiple and even distinct registers of temporal durations to the pace of its travel. Paradoxically, this journey appears to be operating in an exactly reverse process. Given that the present is what necessitates the past for its own mobilization, it is the present that is looking back in time to find a possible or convincing destination, namely an origin.² Standard methods of art history that trace a genealogy of art forms temporally and spatially defy the study of new media. The nature of communication network and the spread of information technology that underlie the emergence of new media lack a sense of fixed origin. It is more through dispersed spatiality and interconnectivity between multiple points of origin that new media constitutes itself.

Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective poses the debate of the origin in the specific case of new media cultures. He observes that,

“The notion of a Eurocentric, or Transatlantic, or Sinocentric, or Indocentric or whatever-centric new media culture is only an illusion, because it is based on the fallacy that communication cultures arise in isolation from each other. Nothing does in the realm of culture, least of all with respect to cultures of communication. Some people would go so far as to say that nothing does at all.”³

² In the past few decades, the conceptions of monadic origin have been under thorough scrutiny across the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences, majorly influenced by the formulations of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michael Foucault. For Instance - the method of *genealogy* as proposed by Foucault (drawing from Nietzsche) opposes itself to the search of “origins” in the process of conceptualizing the past. Instead, it cultivates and closely attends to the details and accidents that accompany every beginning. Michael Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, *The Foucault Reader*. Ed., Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984 pp.76-100.

³ Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Raqs Media Collective, ‘The Fickleness of Novelty: Notes Towards a Speculative History of New Media in South Asia’ in Alka Pande and Nils Roller Ed., *Visual Arts - The India Habitat Centre’s Art Journal*, IHC, Vol. 9, April 2008 - March 2009, p.13.

The myth of the monadic origin, Sengupta argues, has been used by the dominant discourses of history as a method to pin down a possible time and place, as the so called first element of the practice. This pinning down has been an imposition and claim on certain kinds of practices as one's own, thereby fuelling hierarchies of order amongst the various participants in the cultural processes.⁴ Sengupta introduces the idea of 'dependent origination' (drawing from Mahayana Buddhism) as a radical denial of the origin or a singular centre of practice. Following this concept, there is no single point where communication technologies are configured. Rather, there are clusters and nodes through which such networks are produced and circulated.⁵

With awareness of these methodological problems in conceptualizing histories, this dissertation marks no singular site as the first element of new media practice. Instead, it thinks of New Media Art as convened by fluctuating technologies, tendencies, terrains, opinions and practices that are unevenly dispersed and located amongst the wider domains of the 'contemporary'.⁶ The invocation of 'contemporary' here is an attempt to loosen the field of definition from 'contemporary art' which as a specific generative field, has been under critical scrutiny for its extended streaks of modernism and western hegemony.⁷ Instead, the 'contemporary' is seen here as being operative as spatial

⁴ *ibid* p.13.

⁵ *ibid* p.14.

⁶ Having said that, the motive of this dissertation is not to provide an encyclopedic account of various artistic and cultural lives that are said to be lived under the umbrella called 'New Media Art', given the danger that the encyclopedic mode already presumes the homogeneity in its conceptualization. Instead, the intention here is to be guided and misguided by the postulations of new media practice and their various conceptual positions.

⁷ Okwui Enwezor, 'The Post Colonial Constellation : Contemporary Art in the State of Permanent Transition', *Research in African Literatures*, Volume 34, Number 4, Winter 2003, pp. 57-82 Published by Indiana University Press.

constellations facilitating different patterns of fields, practices, realities, histories and temporalities to co-exist in a frequent transition of relations. The study borrows this understanding from the concept of ‘post colonial constellation’ proposed by curator Okwui Enwezor in reference to the contemporary field of cultural practices. The ‘postcolonial constellation’, as suggested by Enwezor, is seen as a collection of sites that expand the definition of what constitutes contemporary culture and its affiliations in different domains of practice. The ‘postcolonial constellation’, he further asserts, “is an understanding of a particular historical order that configures the relationship between political, social, and cultural realities, artistic spaces and epistemological histories, not in contest but always in continuous redefinition”.⁸

Enwezor’s suggestion of looking at the ‘contemporary’ as a constellation of diverse practices, histories, realities and processes fuels the key conceptual paradigm of this dissertation. Placed within the larger context of the contemporary, new media practice inhabits the state of permanent transition because it is driven by the technology that perpetually faces the risk of obsolescence. Further, the invocation of spatial metaphor (constellation) is to argue that teleological approaches of art history cannot adequately deal with the dispersed and disoriented proliferation of contemporary cultures within which new media practice is located.⁹ However, the task at hand is not a process of pasting stars (art works) into constellation of New Media Art. Rather it is an attempt to speak through a range of techno-cultural and curatorial sites/processes/discourses within and through which New Media Art as a field is produced, conceptualized and convened.

⁸ *ibid* p.77.

⁹ The introduction to the third chapter entitled Digital Constellation in the ‘Contemporary’ takes up the issue of time and temporalities within the ‘contemporary’ into detailed discussion.

METADATA ¹⁰

In brief, this dissertation is structured into three broader chapters, each engaging with different sets of interrelated and even contrasting issues. The first chapter entitled ‘New Media Art Of (f) India’ puts together a history of media based practices from India with reference to some of the existing practices, institutions and theoretical frameworks. It also brings into question the location of media based practices, and the specific challenges they pose to the existing conceptualizations of New Media Art from India. In its methodological approach, the chapter aims not to produce any specific chronology of New Media Art. Instead, it generates conceptual sequences, linkages and differences mobilized by the practices and institutions themselves. Further, the aim of this chapter is to pay closer attention to multiple layers of temporalities embedded in such an ensemble, while in some cases evading the linear logic of the historical timeline.

In the recent past there has been heavy contention that new media technologies and their cultural practices can no more be considered as ‘new’ for the reason that, they have already acquired greater familiarity, given the fast dissemination of technologies. However, the novelty of the new media has taken the centre stage of debate amongst the fields of new media studies, art history and curatorial theory. The second chapter, ‘The Newness in the New Media Art’ takes up this question for discussion by mapping various positions on the novelty of the new media. It also introduces the questions and challenges new media as a technology poses to the existing domains of artistic representation,

¹⁰ Metadata within the domain of digital culture are understood to be short and brief descriptions of actual data, and can be seen in resonance with ‘introductions’ to dissertations for their briefing of the actual dissertation data.

conventional structures of the archive, and the processes of curatorial imagination. The chapter also discusses the attitude of art history and curatorial theory that has for long limited the scope of discussions on New media (art), dominantly through the frames of its technological newness, while overseeing its many other disruptive potentialities. The concluding discussion of this chapter takes a conceptual detour from new media to the digital, arguing that the utopian possibilities envisaged by the 'new' in the new media is dislodged by the controlling mechanisms of the digital.

The discussion on digital is elaborated in the final chapter of this dissertation. It initially embarks on the question of capital and time in the larger domain of the 'contemporary' and the field of contemporary art, bringing together reflections from artists, art historians, curators and philosophers. Consequently, the chapter attempts to locate the digital within these landscapes of contemporary, seeing it (digital) as a combination of forces, mediums and processes operating through different level of intensities and inconsistencies. Further, it moves into the challenges of territorially framed art historical approaches, while engaging with the fluid mobilities of digital practices. In response, the chapter puts together a curatorial assemblage, one that brings together the metaphors and figures of ships, seas, solids, liquids, *impostors* and *missing persons*, as multiple points of reference to think along the impulses of digital constellation in the cultural landscapes of the 'contemporary'.

While working with the metaphor of the constellation, there is a possibility to assume 'spatiality' as a static configuration and therefore will remain unaffected by the multiple co-presences and interactions of/amongst various practices and their temporal patterns.

This precisely means that the stars/practices (no matter how mischievous they are) may not move, disrupt or reconfigure the constellation's static ground. Keeping in mind the possibility of such a deviation, this dissertation is titled 'Constellations on the Move' — Firstly, to identify itself as speaking through a multiplicity (constellations) and secondly, to remind that they exist in mode of continuous mobility and reconfiguration (on the move). However, the task in what follows is not a mere process of tracking the velocities of these different transitions. Rather, the central thrust lies in identifying the specific conceptual problems and provocations they pose to the existing understandings of New media practice in the 'contemporary'.

In its selection of art works, projects, exhibitions and other references, this dissertation chooses to consider examples that are closer to its conceptual framework. Methodologically, many of the central research questions themselves emerged from my close engagements with the practices of *Multiplicity*, CAMP, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (to name few), apart from the elaborate conversations with Raqs Media Collective. Further, the larger presence of practices from India (including one whole chapter) persists in light of my close proximity and familiarity with them as a researcher over the past few years.

CHAPTER – I

NEW MEDIA ART PRACTICES OF(F) INDIA

This chapter puts together a history of New Media Art from India with reference to an arena of practices, institutions and theoretical frameworks. In its methodological approach, the chapter aims not to produce any specific chronology of New Media Art, instead it generates conceptual sequences, linkages and differences mobilized by the practices and institutions themselves. The aim of this chapter is to pay closer attention to multiple layers of temporalities embedded in such an ensemble, while in some cases evading the linear logic of the historical timeline. Further, the chapter attends to the mobilities of technology based practices and the questions they pose to the territorial specific framings of cultural histories.

ON-SHORE: A POSSIBLE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proliferation of media technologies such as audio & video began in India, quite simultaneous to that of the West. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s the audio and video media (predominantly cassettes) started circulating extensively, through piracy and its consequent distributing networks of local television operators, video libraries and theatres.¹¹ These 'parallel infrastructures' (as Ravi Sundaram terms them) were seen to be instrumental in dislocating the sovereign control of the state over media production and circulation (Radio and Television).¹² Piracy's porosity has placed media in a new form of materiality, one that anticipated constant breakdowns, continuous recycling and re-invention of methods to bypass the legal enclosures and sites.¹³ The rise of the digital in the 1990's added fluid dimensions to these proliferations, with computer mediated

¹¹ Ravi Sundaram, 'Revisiting the Pirate Kingdom', *Third Text*, Vol 23, Issue 3, May 2009, pp.335-345.

¹² Ravi Sundaram, 'Post Colonial Media after the Informal', a public lecture given at the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne on 24 March 2011. Video record available at - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUtLDhyI2tQ> Accessed June 20, 2012).

¹³ Ravi Sundaram, 'Introduction', *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Medi Urbanism*, Routledge, 2010 p. 2.

technologies beginning to duplicate and edit the copies of various existing media forms such as audio and video. Further, the arrival of the World Wide Web set in place yet another expanded domain of creation and circulation, conceptualizing newer spatio-cultural imaginations of the world. In these changing landscapes of the 1990s, the field of contemporary art in India saw two main shifts, while trying to forge its connections with the technologies that have just become visible in its shores.¹⁴ One group of artists and filmmakers like Baiju Parthan, Shilpa Gupta, and Raqs Media Collective (who later co-founded Sarai at CSDS - Centre for Studies in Developing Societies, Delhi) began engaging with the World Wide Web and the new 'techno-utopias' the net cultures opened for access. (Refer to Interruption, Disruption and Recension below).

Another group of artists such as Subba Ghosh, Sonia Khurana, Vivan Sundaram, and Nalini Malani began to experiment pre-dominantly with video, facilitated largely by their travels to various locations abroad, either for education or for participation in artist residencies and exhibition projects.¹⁵ These mobilities in terms of opportunities abroad (mainly in the West) were seen in the larger context of economic expansion in the wake of a globalization which also paralleled the miniaturization of digital technologies (video cameras and softwares) across the world.¹⁶ The curatorial context for the initial

¹⁴ The specific invocation of shores here is to see them as spaces/places that resonate of various mobilities and trade.

¹⁵ Other seminal exponents of the field include, Ranbir Kaleka, Sharmila Samant, Tejal Shah, Surekha, Umesh Maddanahalli, Kiran Subbaih.

¹⁶ Many of the artists who began working with video were trained in academies abroad. Kiran Subbaih, Subba Ghosh, Vivan Sundaram and Sonia Khurana studied in the UK, Nalini Malani went to France. Sharmila Samant, Surekha and Umesh Madanahalli have visited various locations in Europe for the

experiments by practitioners from India was provided by the Dutch art historian and curator Johan Pijnappel. 'The World Wide Video Festival' in Amsterdam (1998) conceptualized by him saw the first public presence of the works by Indian artists.¹⁷ Following this, Pijnappel's engagement with video/New Media Art from Asia in general and India in particular, has extended to a number of curatorial ventures, lectures and publications.¹⁸ In a recent article, Pijnappel points out, that ever since its inception, video art from India has largely been produced and displayed elsewhere, especially in Euro-American locations and exhibitions.¹⁹ This was seen in the light of a persistent lack of avenues and institutional support that could lay the ground clear for its efflorescence. Apart from the support by cultural institutions like Goethe Institute and British Council in terms of workshops and exhibitions, the state institutions such as Lalit Kala Akademi and the National Gallery of Modern Art had not been able to take on board video and new

purpose of residencies and exhibitions during the late 1990's. Tejal Shah was trained in Melbourne and Chicago in Photography, Video and Film.

¹⁷ It screened, *Couples* and *House/Boat* that Vivan Sundaram had made in Canada in 1994, the performance *Is It What You Think?* (1998) by Rumanna Hussain, and *Memory – Record Erase* (1996) by Nalini Malani. Besides these a new video installation called *Remembering Tobatek Singh* made by Nalini Malani with the financial support of the Prince Claus Fund and the Festival Fund was also on view at the same festival.

¹⁸ Johan Pijnappel has curated a number of exhibitions solely on Indian and Chinese video art in Amsterdam, Mumbai, New Delhi, Seoul, Brisbane and Beijing. *Indian Video Art: History in Motion*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2004, *The Third Seoul International Media Art Biennale*, 2004/5, *Dutch participation of the India Triennial*, 2005, and the video art programme of the *New Narratives: Contemporary Art from India* at The Zimmerli Art Museum, curated by Betty Seid in 2008 to name a few. Johan Pijnappel. 'Profile'. MAAP website, <http://www.maap.org.au/collaborators/curators/johan-pijnappel/> (Accessed July 17, 2012).

¹⁹ Johan Pijnappel, 'New Media Art on the Indian Sub-continent', *Experimenta Mesh 17 – New Media Art in Australia Asia* <http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh17/pijnappel.htm> (Accessed June 5, 2012).

media as art worthy of support and patronage.²⁰ Moreover, in most cases, the funding for these practices came from locations elsewhere.²¹

Having said that, the establishment of Sarai Programme at CSDS (Centre for Studies in Developing Societies, Delhi, 2000) co-founded by the members of Raqs Media Collective and Khoj - International Artists Association (1997) were two seminal spaces to initiate conversations between cultural practices, media technologies and urban ecologies facilitating collaborations across artists, urban planners, environmentalists, writers, critics, programmers and so on. In contrast to the spectacularly curated art exhibitions, these domains and their affiliated networks valued process over product ²²(See Micro Climates below). The major institutional presence of New Media Art in India came with the establishment of Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi, being one of the first galleries to be dedicated completely to Media Art. This played a crucial role, not only in introducing media art from across the world to audience in India, but also facilitated many media artists from India, to show their works on their home ground.²³ It is only in

²⁰ In few occasions, the state institutions have seen the potentials in the media based practices, despite their ideological pre-occupations with mediumistic modes of art production (such as painting and sculpture). The landmark exhibition of video art at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, titled *Crossing Currents: Video Art and Cultural Identity* (2004) is a good example. This exhibition, conceptualized by Johan Pijnappel, consisted of works by video artists from India and across the world. This was the first large scale group curatorial venture in India that opened up a critical enquiry into the possibilities of technology based art practice, dealing with the issues of cultural differences. It also opened for conversation certain fundamental issues that the genre of video art raises in the context of production and reception of art. Johan Pijnappel Ed., *Crossing Currents : Video Art and Cultural Identity*, editor in English Ratan Barliwala, New Delhi, Royal Netherlands Embassy, 2006.

²¹ Johan Pijnappel, Indian Video Art in Exile?, *Art India*, Volume X, Issue I, quarter I 2005 pp.32-38.

²² Shukla Sawant, 'Modernity And Its Visual Response: The Last Six Decades', *The Art and the City*, E-Journal of The Goethe Institute, Max Muller Bhavan, New Delhi, 2009. <http://www.goethe.de/ins/in/lp/prj/kus/bil/en5107287.htm> (Accessed May 29, 2012).

²³ Under the curatorial supervision of Pooja Sood, Apeejay Media Gallery, for the first time in India. Massive media works by Nalini Malani were shown in the year 2002 as an opening event of the gallery. This was followed by a range of exhibitions of video art from China, Iran, Mexico and museum exhibitions

the recent past, few other private collectors, foundations, museums and galleries began showing interest in New Media Art on shore.²⁴

In some of the prevalent historical approaches on New Media Art from India, there has been a tendency to merely domesticate the widely proliferating practices of New Media Art from India. Johan Pijnappel's extensive curatorial engagement in overseas locations quite significantly reiterates what he terms as 'Video Art in/from India' or 'Indian Video Art'.²⁵ Nancy Adajania, in a recently called for a specific contextual understanding of media based practices from India, by beginning to see them as 'new context media'.²⁶ My contention to such framings lies in the inadequacy of their historical moorings to register the dispersed existence of media based art practices. The problem also lies in their underlying assumption that lives of the practices (such as new media) are located in a fixed site of belongingness.

This chapter is marked by the difficulties which underlie such endeavors and hence entitled as "New Media Art Of(f) India". The of(f) here has a double bend, one to highlight the proliferation 'of' media practices in India. Secondly, to highlight the of(f) shore (abroad) circulation of New Media practice from India. The latter dimension is to

from Germany, the UK, and France. Before its temporary closure in 2007, Apeejay showcased two massive shows by Shilpa Gupta and Amar Kanwar from India. Pooja Sood Ed., Video Art in India, Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi, 2003.

²⁴ For Instance - In the year 2008, two large scale exhibitions dealt with the phenomenological potential of media based art practices. *Mechanisms of Motion*²⁴ curated by Marta Jakimowicz tried to conceptualize the ways in which artistic production and thereby the spectatorial experiences have been altered by the generic motions of technology. *Still Moving Images*²⁴ a compilation of the works from the collection of Devi Art Foundation curated by Deeksha Nath also placed itself on a similar conceptual plane drawing upon the centrality of the moving and the still images in India's public domain. Apart from the above instances, media based art also figured in many other major group curatorial projects.

²⁵ Johan Pijnappel, 'New Media Art on the Indian Sub-continent', *Experimenta Mesh 17 – New Media Art in Australia Asia* <http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh17/pijnappel.htm> (Accessed June 5, 2012).

²⁶ Nancy Adajania, 'New Media Overtures Before New Media Practice in India', in Gayatri Sinha Ed., *Indian Art and Visual Culture 1857-2007*, Marg Publications, Mumbai, 2009pp.266-280.

push for the acknowledgment of challenges in conceptualizing New Media Art histories based solely on the conventional art historical category of the nation-state.

The five broader conceptual threads within which this chapter is organized is an attempt to produce temporary collaborations between practices and activities of new media practice from India. The first section on the *Interruption, Disruption and Recension* focuses on the invocation of web cultures of cyberpunk and open source in specific reference to the works of Baiju Parthan and Raqs Media Collective. The second section goes on to see Khoj and Sarai as *Micro Climates*, where an arena of interdisciplinary engagements are convened broadly basing themselves on the interstices of technology, ecology and urbanism. The third section on *Looped Selves and Subjectivities* highlights the larger presence of body and subjectivity within the field of video art by taking up three case references from the works by Kiran Subaiah, Sonia Khurana and Tejal Shah, to speak of the self that is specifically rendered in its conversation with the video loop. The fourth section on the *Incomplete Stories* introduces some of the crucial phenomenological shifts proposed by New Media Art especially in reference to Video installation and Interactive video projection. The fifth section on *Documents and Fictions* deals with the documentary turn within contemporary art basing it in the specific site of Documenta 11, where documentary filmmakers and photographers Amar Kanwar, Raqs Media Collective and Ravi Agarwal began their transitions in to the spaces of contemporary art.

INTERRUPTION, DISRUPTION AND RECENSION

In a provocatively argued account Nancy Adajania addresses the aesthetic and political questions 'Net Cultures' throw up to the field of cultural practices.²⁷ Thinking along the pace of the newly proliferating telematic technologies²⁸, she suggests us to look at the practices working through domain of the web as moving in the *fast lane*, and the conventional practices as moving in the *slow lane*.²⁹ Staging the web as a utopic domain, Adajania envisions a more de-hierarchised state of art, pointing to possibilities Internet as a domain offers for culture practices and its politics.

Adajania also brings to our attention some of the key conceptual and the phenomenological shifts brought forth by the technologies of the digital and the Internet.³⁰ She outlines the ideas of interruption, disruption and recension as some the conceptual shifts and questions posed by digital practices and can be very well noticed in the works of Baiju Parthan and Raqs Media Collective. Baiju Parthan's *A Diary of the Inner Cyborg* (2001-02. Fig. 1.1) invokes the idea of 'Asystotle', a cardiological term that describes the unexpected pause in otherwise regular pulsation of the human heart. Taking the point of Asystotle as a disruption in otherwise regularly flowing temporal durations of the heart, Parthan evokes the variations between the state of existences in the

²⁷ See Nancy Adajania, 'Net Culture: Between the Fast Lane and the Slow', *Art India*, Vol. VII, Issue I, 2002 pp.26-33.

²⁸ The branch of information technology which deals with the long-distance transmission of computerized information.

²⁹ Adajania's account of the fast lane and slow lane resonates with an observation art historian George Kubler makes when he tells us to look at the durations in terms of fast and slow happenings. He argues that the problem with the calendrical timeline of history has been its failure to register the different velocities and speeds through which cultural formations take place. See George Kubler, *The Shape of the Time : Remarks on the History of things*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, first published in 1962, paperback edition, 2008.

³⁰ See Nancy Adajania, 'Net Culture: Between the Fast Lane and the Slow', *Art India*, Vol. VII, Issue I, 2002 pp.26-33.

meat (real) domain and the metal (virtual) domain.³¹ He elaborates that the Cyberpunk literature invariably deals with the future world where we humans are at the mercy of the technology we created.³²



Fig. 1.1. Baiju Parthan, *A Dairy of the inner Cyborg – Asystole – Disrupting the flow*, 2001-02, Multiple Media Interactive Installation consisting of back lit panels, computer interface built upon HTML, Java Script(wav) files, animated and static images, LCD Projector, © Baiju Parthan.

This work he elaborates, is a kind of conversation with the notions of selfhood expressed as a digital (cyber) construct, an ‘avatar’ existing and transcending the limitations imposed by the material, temporal and socially defined reality space.³³ The cyber characters that Parthan creates, also exhibit an anxiety of not being the real in its totality. This is visible, for instance in the text where one of the 3D avatar speaks - ‘ I have no body either, I am an array of vertices stung together; X,Y and Z axis woven together into a 3d mesh’. Avatar transits between real and virtual spaces. While he is confident of being the integral part of the virtual world, he also has doubts of his unresolved real

³¹ Meat domain is a slang used in the Cyberpunk cultures for the real world, while the virtual world is referred to as the Metal domain.

³² Cyberpunk is a literary movement, born in the 1980's, that seeks to completely integrate the realms of high tech and of pop culture, both mainstream and underground, and break down the separation between the organic and the artificial. Classic cyberpunk characters were marginalized, alienated loners who lived on the edge of society in generally dystopic futures where daily life was impacted by rapid technological change, an ubiquitous data sphere of computerized information, and invasive modification of the human body.

³³ Baiju Partha, *A Dairy of the inner Cyborg*, <http://www.baijuparthan.info/orph1.htm> (Accessed June 15, 2012).

identity. The use of 'Asystotle' is another conceptual marker where the heart of the avatar made in the 3D meshes works with a disrupted sense of pulsation, inhabiting a pace of non-linear time and temporality.

In another register of the conversations with the real and the virtual, Parthan's work *Brahma's homepage* (1999. Fig.1.2) places the physical painting (on the wall) and its virtual image on a computer placed in front of the painting. As the viewer/user slides the mouse pointer towards the image on the computer screen, hot links show up, leading us into a series of web-pages. In the process of experiencing through hyperlinks, Parthan attempts to disrupt the established conventions of viewing the painting as a contemplative process.



Fig. 1.2. Baiju Parthan, *Brahma's Homepage*, Multiple media installation, 1999, Acrylic on canvas, HTML interface on computer, 48" X 72", 1999, © Baiju Parthan.

Further, the many links that pop-up do not allow each viewer to access the work in the same sequence or order. In other words, Parthan turns the architecture of website into a metaphor, or mythical motif, one that encodes the experience of the newly emerged hyperlinked and non-linear world.³⁴ He invokes here the Hindu mythological figure *Brahma* in the form of a virtual *avatar* and places his image in the syntax of the HTML

³⁴ Baiju Parthan, *Brahma's Home Page*, <http://baijuparthan.info/brahm1.htm> (Accessed September 5, 2011).

language on a computer screen, making links as the points of access, anticipation and more crucially disruption.³⁵

While *Brahma's Homepage* (1999) tries to situate the painting in a cyberspace, *Global Village Health Manual Version 1.0* (2000. Fig. 1.3) conceived in collaboration with Mrityunjoy Chatterjee by Raqs Media Collective programs an interactive interface by using the reprints of nineteenth century Calcutta woodcuts. Speaking in terms of the conceptual motivations behind this process they note –

“Pictures, stories, news and rumour, speculations and skirmishes in info-wars, databases and image banks, hard facts and harder fictions are all streaming into our desktops, just as cheap paper prints once piled up in our great-grandparents' closets, or crowded the walls of the cities they walked in. This work wants you to bridge the distance between the data stream of the present and the fading imprint of the recent past. It asks that you look through yesterday's web of images at the bitmap of where you are today. Contemporary elements have been taken from an array of sites on the World Wide Web. They have then been edited, re-framed, rendered and transformed to embody a new sensibility. The artists, coders and writers who generated the materials that we have used here are our co-workers in this work. In this sense, and in other senses that you will discover as you navigate through it, this body of work is a work about work.”³⁶

³⁵ In a different register, Shilpa Gupta's *Blessed Bandwidth* takes up the discourse of religion and ritual for performing a parody. In this work that is conceived few years later to *Brahma's Homepage* by Parthan, Gupta mocks the religious tourism that was being propagated through online sites of spiritual centers. With a research of rituals and superstitions based on religion, gender and caste, Gupta play acts a parody of these online spiritual sites that in their attitude function as virtual manifestations of real spiritual centers across India.

³⁶ Concept brief of the project by Raqs Media Collective and Mrityunjoy Chatterjee at the Kingdom of Piracy – Artists Projects page, <http://kop.kein.org/KOP/artists/html/a2.html> (Accessed June 15, 2012).



Fig. 1.3 Raqs Media Collective, *Global Village Health Manual, Ver 1.0*, 2002, HTML work consisting of re-purposed material found in web searches. © Raqs Media Collective.

The configuration of *Global Village Health Manual Version 1.0* (2000) suggests us to think of it as a multiplicity of processes engaged in re-working on diverse images, texts, references and links placed in a new curatorial form of the interface. Further, the existence of the work, as a version 1.0 anticipates another re-versioning of its life and form, a possible material and conceptual *recension* in the future. The term *recension* in its dictionary definition means a revised edition of a text. In the specific cultures of the open source, *recension* is often used in relationship to the computer data and code to mark their consistent revision and reframing. In their first open source project *OPUS-Open Platform for Unlimited Signification* (2002. Fig.1.4), Raqs Media Collective quite fundamentally evoke this idea of the *recension*. They began with an intention to build OPUS as an open online platform ‘to build a creative commons with a community of media practitioners, artists, authors and the public from all over the world. Here people

can present their own work and make it open to transformation besides intervening and transforming the work of others, by bringing in new materials, practices and insights.’³⁷

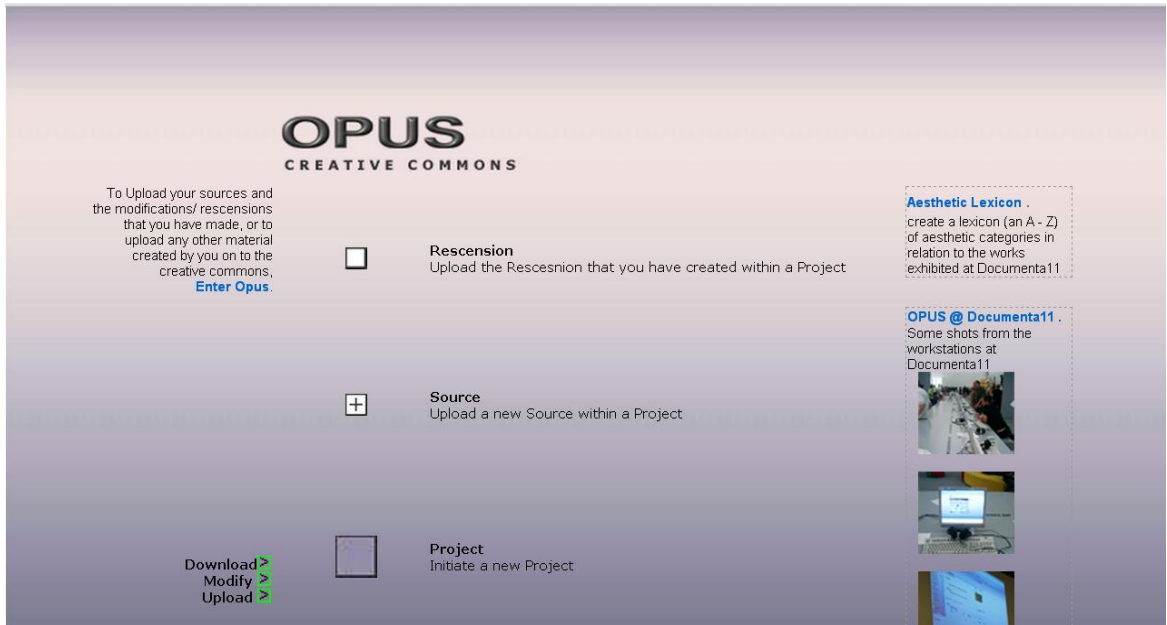


Fig. 1.4. Raqs Media Collective, *OPUS (Open Platform for Unlimited Signification)*. Online software for a digital commons. Released at Documenta11 Kassel, Germany, 2002.

These exchanges and sharing can happen in a variety of forms such as image, video, audio, text and software code. The participants of this network generate what Raqs calls “Rescensions”, by remixing or otherwise altering these found sources and contributing their new works back to the *OPUS* system. Each media object here is tagged in an online database with extensive metadata, such as keywords and descriptions that facilitate the search and retrieval. In distinguishing between the source files, derivative works and their rescensions, Raqs uses the genetic metaphor of parents (source files) and children (derivative works). As they observe – “A Rescension is neither a clone, nor an authorized or pirated copy, nor an improved or deteriorated version, of a pre-existing text, just as a

³⁷ Raqs Media Collective quoted in the book *New Media Art*, Mark Tribe, Reena Jana and Uta Grosenick Ed., Taschen, Los Angeles, 2006 p.76.

child is neither a clone, nor an authorized or pirated copy, nor an improved or deteriorated version of its parents”³⁸

Though utopian in its vision, *OPUS* does open up interesting conversations on the structures of participation, collaboration and sharing in the existing field of cultural practice. In a material logic that recognizes every individual entity as any other (without hierarchising some over the others), it generates what one can call many micro climatic conditions, where multiple registers of practice (data, text, image and video) co-exist in the shared and continuous process of *Unlimited Signification*.³⁹

MICRO CLIMATES

The attempts such as *OPUS* were conceived by Raqs Media Collective in a larger context of generated interests on media, urbanism, technology and the Internet (to name few) at *Sarai-CSDS* (Centre for Studies in Developing Societies) an institutional space they co-founded in 2000 with Ravi Vasudevan and Ravi Sundaram. The thrust behind the formation of *Sarai* is to develop a climatic culture of collaboration and commons⁴⁰, one that could generate a range of discursive methodologies to deal with what Ravi Sundaram calls, the ‘messiness’ of the contemporary.⁴¹

The collaboration was in the form of encounters and processes that entail a synergy between discrete forms, practices and cultures. *Sarai* began closely engaging with the

³⁸ *ibid.* p.76.

³⁹ The final chapter of this dissertation shall take up the issues of interruption and disruption more elaborately.

⁴⁰ Commons are understood to be resources and knowledge systems that are shared in common. In the cultural sphere after the Digital and Internet technologies, the commons as a concept has come to use quite extensively considering the open domains of sharing information these technologies have generated.

⁴¹ Monica Narula, ‘Sarai - One Year in the Public Domain’ in *TELEVISION & NEWMEDIA* Vol. 3 No. 4, November 2002 pp. 404–412, Sage Publications, 2002.

multi-layered realities of urban landscapes, its cultural forms and its changing temporalities through formats of research fellowships, pedagogic projects, exhibitions and collaborations between media practitioners, writers, computer programmers, visual artists, performers and so on. The paradigm of research based practice was one of the central approaches in all these collaborations, a process that does not begin with any specific formal goal. Instead, it tries to generate newer applications, interfaces and forms for presenting the outcomes of the research.

For instance one of their initiatives, *City as Studio*, quite literally attempts to inhabit the City as a studio space. It generates a range of interdisciplinary processes towards the engagement of the city bringing together participants from across disciplines. It creates contexts for engagement and conversation at different locations of Delhi and at the *Sarai* space in CSDS. The outcomes of these processes are not fixed in their forms; they might be ‘art works, participatory performances, temporary archives, media works, and transmissions of different kinds of signals’.⁴²

The idea of looking at city as a studio space is quite interestingly evoked also in the *Cybermohalla* project initiated by *Sarai* that focuses more closely on conversations of the locality (within the city). This project was initiated in 2001 with association of *Ankur* a Delhi based NGO, as an alternative pedagogic practice with established *Compughars* (computer labs) at various slum areas in Delhi. *Cybermohalla* (Fig.1.5) attempted to bring the complexly framed technologies to mundane areas and to make digital-based

⁴² City as Studio, Sarai website <http://www.sarai.net/practices/media-forms/city-as-studio-edition-2> (Accessed June 18, 2012).

works, animations and web installations dealing with multiple aspects of the urban landscape.⁴³



Fig. 1.5. Cybermohalla Ensemble, From “*I Am In Time*”, in “Cybermohalla Hub” (Sternberg Press, 2012). Image courtesy Cybermohalla Ensemble

A diverse range of media forms are produced in the *Compughars* ranging from wall magazines to html pages, animation, stickers and diaries (texts, audio recordings, photographs). Significant numbers of the projects at these labs are centered on the *basti* (locality) and the neighborhood (apart from some experiences during their occasional excursions within Delhi and to other nearby cities). As their initial stages of work

⁴³ As early as 2002, in response to one of her visits to *Cybermohalla* lab Nancy Adajania noted that “When I visit the young members of the *Cybermohalla* project at their meeting, which takes place in one of the DDA Slum Development buildings with Jeebesh Bagchi, I realize how important it is for real communities to develop in parallel with virtual communities.” Adajania further notes, “Here hypertext is used not only as a language device on the Net, but also as an archival trope: it links every part of the locale into a web of family recensions, translating topography into experiential history.” Nancy Adajania, ‘Net Culture: Between the Fast Lane and the Slow’, *Art India*, Vol. VII, Issue I, 2002 p.30.

process, the material collected at these labs are largely textual narratives, reflections and descriptions written individually by all the members and shared amongst the group.⁴⁴ These are collaboratively conversed and reworked before being taken up as concepts to be executed in any particular forms. These conversations amongst the members are seen as critical to the process of what they call ‘concept making’ at *Cybermohalla* (Fig. 1.6).⁴⁵

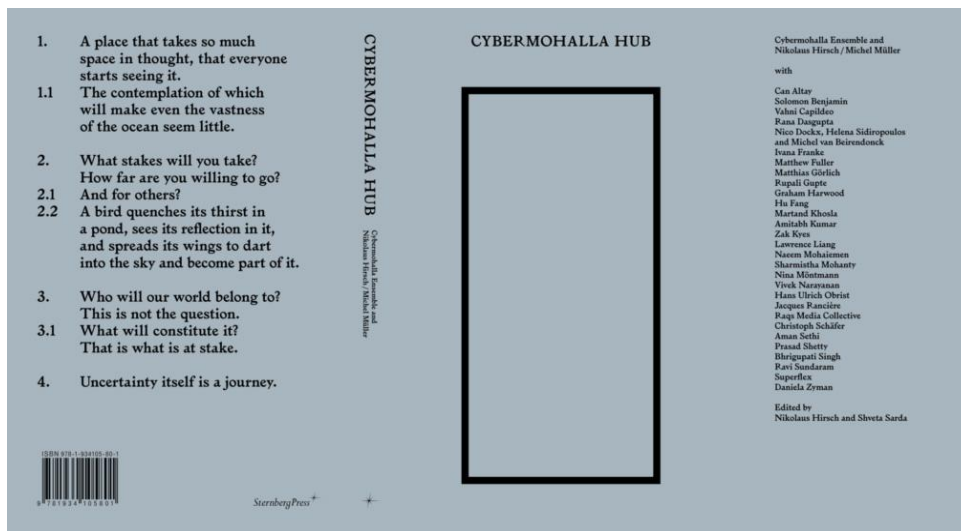


Fig. 1.6. Cover of *Cybermohalla Hub*, Sternberg Press, 2012, Image Courtesy Cybermohalla Ensemble.

The contexts of engagement with localities and the dynamic of the urban-scapes are also central to the practices and activities initiated by Khoj-International Artists’ Association (1997). Founded initially by a small group of artists, Khoj’s seminal goal was to initiate

⁴⁴ Geert Lovink, ‘Visit to Sarai New Media Centre’, October 2002, <http://geertlovink.org/texts/visit-to-sarai-new-media-centre/> (Accessed June 17, 2012).

⁴⁵ Apart from the things I have noted above, *Sarai* at the CSDS was also involved in different kinds of research, publications, events, media production/events, both in-house and with the collaboration of various local and international organizations/practitioners/collectives. More importantly *Sarai* was first of its kind that has been engaged in the archiving process of different facets of contemporary popular culture, urban space and media forms with an intention to make them available to a large number of practitioners, researchers, scholars and students. Sarai website <http://www.sarai.net/about-us> (Accessed June 17, 2012).

conversations between practitioners across cultural locations through sustainable workshops and residency formats (Fig.1.7).⁴⁶



Fig. 1.7 (left) Khoj Studios, Delhi (Right) Video Installation on the outside wall of the Khoj Studios building as part of the project *Untitled Square*. A project initiated by Rohan Patankar and Vidisha Saini as participants of Urban Typhoon, a Khoj- Urbz collaboration. © Khoj International Artists' Association

Khoj has been instrumental in the development of inter-disciplinary practices by incubating itself as a collaborative laboratory for many visual artists, designers, filmmakers, musicians and other cultural practitioners. Apart from its long lasting engagement with the city, ecology and the different configurations of public life, there has been a continuous conversation with the very locality in which Khoj Studios are situated. For instance, practicing artist and coordinator at Khoj, Aastha Chauhaan, facilitated around nine art projects that deal with the areas surrounding the Khoj studios, including a migrant colony called *Khirkee* Extension. Interfacing through different kinds of media ranging from conversations, photographs, collections, radio and video, Aastha's

⁴⁶ Statistically speaking over 200 artists from India and over 400 artists/practitioners from countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Uganda, Kenya, Turkey, Pakistan, Japan, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Korea, UK, Germany, France, Mexico and America have been through Khoj in terms their of involvement in various festivals, residencies, workshops and other activities. Khoj website http://www.khojworkshop.org/book/about_khoj (Accessed June 17, 2012).

collaborative effort has been centered on the multiple processes of living and sharing amongst few square miles area surrounding the Khoj studios.⁴⁷

A number of other practitioners especially those who are from cultural locations outside Delhi, considered these surrounding square miles for different forms of artistic intervention. Over the years these interventions filled up an archive of responses to the different spatialities of this migrant colony. A recent project commissioned by Khoj called *1 Square Augmented Mile* (2011. Fig 1.8) created a layer of information, images and text over one square mile around Khoj. The layer can be accessed and discovered, using augmented reality application on smart phones.⁴⁸ While we walk with the smart

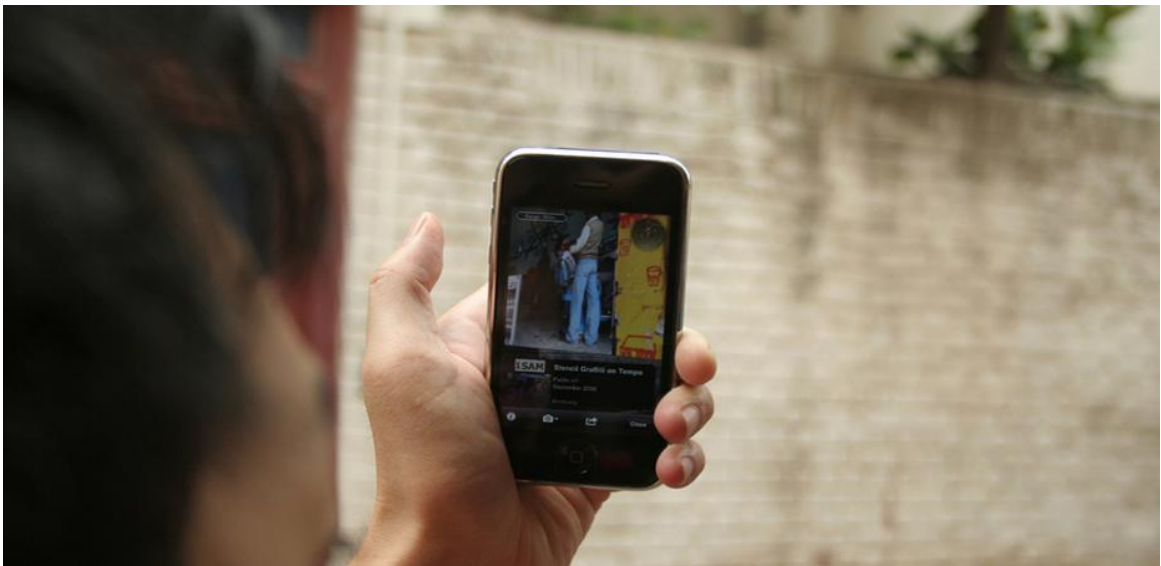


Fig 1.8. *1 Square Augmented Mile* project created a layer of information, images and text over one square mile around Khoj studios, which can be seen and discovered, using augmented reality applications on smart phones. © Khoj International Artists' Association

⁴⁷Aastha Chauhan, 'profile', Khoj International Artists' Association, http://www.khojworkshop.org/user/aastha_chauhan (Accessed June 20, 2012).

⁴⁸ Augmented reality is related to a more general concept called mediated reality in which our view of reality is mediated by a computer. It is generated through technological applications that aim for enhancing our experience of reality.

phones enabled with *Layar*⁴⁹ (an augmented reality interface) across the 1 square mile around Khoj, you can see a constellation of images and information appearing and disappearing, giving us a gist of the works and projects that were realized in the past by the practitioners who visited Khoj studios.⁵⁰

The recent curatorial project by Leon Tan (a curator in residence at Khoj) titled *Khoj Online* (2012. Fig.1.9) expands the scope of the archival material by placing them in a curatorial logic using majorly networked platforms including *Panoramio*, *Google Earth* and *Google Maps*. Leon Tan tells us that the project yields a selection of geo-located archival material, particularly visual documentation of Khoj's workshops, residencies, and events placed on these web platforms. Its intention is to expand the scope of these images to a global scale of audiences who use these applications.



Fig. 1.9. Leon Tan, *Khoj Online – Experiments in Digital Curation*, 2011 1. Augmented reality archives © Khoj and Han Bing 2. *Yog Raj Chitrakar Visits Lal Chowk* © Khoj and Nikhil Chopra 3. *Khoj Online - Networking archival images in Google Earth* © Khoj and artists

Tan notes that this project – “also builds on Panoramio’s integration with the Layar an augmented reality browser, such that audiences in India using Layar on their handheld

⁴⁹ *Layar* is a browser operating on devices such as iPhones, iPads and Android phones, which superimposes virtual layers (in this case digital images) over actual sites using the devices in-built camera view, in this way ‘augmenting’ the real world with digital information.

⁵⁰ 1 Square mile Augmented Reality was project commissioned by Khoj to Blue Ant Digital Intelligence, in 2011.

devices, in close proximity to Khoj's historical art activities across the subcontinent will encounter images from the archives linked to contextual information.”⁵¹

Unlike the anxieties that are fore-grounded by the Cyberpunk cultures in their distinguished identity with the real worlds, the activities of *Khoj* and *Sarai* take up the real space of the city, locality and urban initiating various ranges of conversations between the digital and the real. The material flexibility of the digital is diffused into the process of imagining the city, as a site and even as a studio. This diffusion emits a variety of artistic impulses, currents and energies producing the picture of the city as a rhizomatic configuration of sites and climates.⁵² Within these flexible mechanisms of urban everyday *Khoj* and *Sarai* act as incubatory ambiances, working without any set conventions and rules. And as flexible mechanisms, they place the engagements of cultural practice in an open-ended plane, where the departures are multiple and the boundaries are porous. While many endeavors in these climates manage to take off to new terrains of circulation, some depart to off track locations, some disappear and some settle in hibernation, waiting for their turn to reappear. These micro climates are also challenges to art history as they don't reproduce any singular pattern of practice. Further, they operate and exist only through the continuous reinventions of the practice itself. For the field of art history that for long has been engaging with static objects, these climatic flexibilities are yet to be actively registered, certainly not as mere experiments but as interlocutors in the very landscape of cultural production. While above were the contexts of media technologies fuelling varied conversations with cities and its localities in the

⁵¹ Leon Tan, 'Khoj Online, Experiments in Digital Curation', *Augmenting Practices – Experiments from IFA-Khoj Curatorial Residency 2011*, Khoj International Artists Association, New Delhi, 2011. pp.21-25.

⁵² This concept of 'micro climates' is discussed by Raqs Media Collective in upcoming publication, *Raqs Media Collective : A Case Book*, Philip Monk Ed., AGYU, Canada.

conventional spaces of the art galleries, they began introducing newer experiential set-ups reconfiguring the existing domains of spectatorship. The section that follows, will take this up in to more detail.

LOOPEL SELVES AND SUBJECTIVITIES

In one of his observations on the production of self and subjectivity, French Philosopher Michael Foucault suggested that the self as such is not already given to us, but we have to create it ‘ourselves’ as works of art.⁵³ Foucault’s suggestion becomes a reminder not just to think of self as pre-given, but also as one that is discursively produced by us in relationship with a constellation of social institutions. Further, it also identifies that the self as such is not composedly static and single; instead it is flexible, fragmented and changeable.⁵⁴ Departing from this position, this section takes references from the field of video art, to bring together the idea of the artist’s body and that of the loop. This collaboration of sorts is to think through the questions of, what happens to the configuration of self and subjectivity in a prolonged – repetitive duration called the loop? What are the different kinds of recognitions and misrecognitions it caters to in its existence within the gallery spaces? In case reference to works by Sonia Khurana, Kiran Subbaih and Tejal Shah this section shall try to engage with these issues.

Sonia Khurana’s two channel video *Closet* is a looped projection in which the enactment of self is caught up in the continuous process of change. Khurana makes use of the trope

⁵³ Liz Eckermann, ‘Foucault, embodiment and gendered subjectivities: The case of voluntary self-starvation’, Academy for the Study of the Psychoanalytic Arts <http://www.academyanalyticarts.org/eckerman.htm> (Accessed June 25, 2012).

⁵⁴ *ibid* (Accessed June 25, 2012)

of clothes to work out this mode of change. Engaged in the playact of neurosis, the figure is shown here turning into a hysteric state. The narcissism is quite visibly foregrounded the way she looks at her image in the mirror. As she realizes that the self she wants to enact (again, by making use of the cloth imagery) has failed to materialize, she collapses on the bed all exhausted. Having lost hope of realizing her desires, Khurana goes onto perform a mockery of conventions and costumes, ones that historically are stuck and stitched to the flesh of the female bodies in the name of the beauty.⁵⁵

Adopting the tropes of portraiture, *Trans* (2005. Fig.1.10) by Tejal Shah in collaboration with Marco Polla Rola questions the categories of male and female, and thereby the established borders/boundaries of gendered social roles. Provoking and poking through a drag cultural aesthetic, *Trans* is a video performance that shifts identities from ‘masculine’ to ‘feminine’ (in terms of appearance) during the course of the performance and reverses the same while working in a loop. The process foregrounds the fluidity in which the specific modes of performing femininity and masculinity is done and undone and set in continuous loop of re-signification.⁵⁶ The gendered self here, as the drag performance suggests, is never solid instead, it slides between and through shifting patterns of appearances and identities.

⁵⁵ Geeta Kapur, *Gender Mobility : Through the Lens Of Five Woman Artists in India*, Global Feminisms, Exhibition Catalogue, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, 2007

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, Introduction, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, 1999



Fig.1.10. Tejal Shah, *Trans* (in Collaboration with Marco Paulo Rda) Video Stills from two channel video Installation, 12 minutes with sound, Courtesy of the Artist ©Tejal Shah

In a comparatively distinct register, Kiran Subbair's *Reality and the Mirror* (1999.Fig.1.11) initiates a monologue looking at his own image in the bathroom mirror. The differences that exist in the interaction with the real world outside and the enclosed space of the bathroom are staged here in the form of a monologue. The third person narrative in which the speech

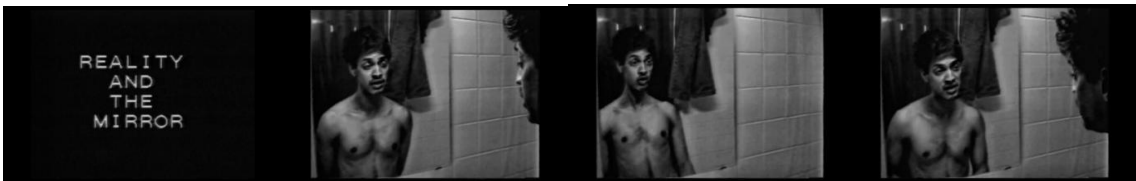


Fig.1.11 Kiran Subbair, *Reality and the Mirror*, Video Stills Single Channel Video projection with sound, 1999 © Kiran Sunnaih

is structured marks the high point of the performance as it clearly suggests an awareness of the artist of being watched, perhaps by the video camera. Indeed, the closing sentences of the video reinstate the idea that there is a 'third eye' (perhaps a Big Brother) watching any act/performance you enact, which not only holds you to a thorough surveillance, but for which one performs as well. The frame of the bathroom mirror, as the artists suggests, opens possibilities for the invocation of unconditioned real self, one

that is seen to be temporarily devoid of any technologies of control.⁵⁷ But the very configuration within which this monologue is rendered overturns the question of the same by showing us the device (camera) through which the self is recorded and mediated.

Khurana, Shah and Subbaih stage distinct reworkings and reappropriations of gender, body and performing selves through their works. Interestingly, all three of them take up the mirror as the key site of processing subjectivities through different levels of contemplation and recognition. While *Closet* stages the act of looking at the mirror as an invocation and critique of the stereotyped feminine self, *Trans* considers performing drag by making the very lens of the camera the mirror, in which the performers simultaneously play the double act of looking at themselves (in the mirror) and at the viewers. *Reality and the Mirror* sees an enclosure (such as bathroom) as where the real self can perhaps be approximated. Collaboratively seen, the existence of these works in the form of the loop seems like they are caught up in an endless repetitive urge to achieve the desired position of self and subjectivity. Quite contrastingly, they are indeed intimating us of the anxieties and inconsistencies that are instrumental in its very configurations of self, which in its every presence always remains fragmented. The self imagination/enaction here remains an 'attempt', a trial, not a finished attempt, but a process, which is marked by the consciousness of its own incompleteness. These conceptions of the fragmented and the incomplete self which seem to be centrally at work here are taken to a different plane of discussion by the following section.

⁵⁷ Kiran Subbaih, *Reality and Mirror*, <http://vimeo.com/16281546> (Accessed June 27, 2012)

INCOMPLETE STORIES

There are two registers of incompleteness I want to refer here to speak of the phenomenology brought in by media based practice. Though the spectatorial premises conceptualized by video and New Media Art are multiple, my reference here is limited to the video installation titled *Game Pieces* by Nalini Malani and the interactive video projection *Shadows* by Shilpa Gupta. While the former dislocates the experience of the spectator by creating a chaotic installation atmosphere, the latter collaborates with the spectator almost behaving like a play station. In the work titled *Shadows* (2006. Fig. 1.12), a dark room (black box) that has a white screen is created for the spectators to walk in. The projection screen performs here like a live computer game of simulated landscapes, objects and their shadows.⁵⁸ The visitors who walk in-to-this enclosed space are not expected to behave like the passive audiences of the cinema hall; instead they are made to



Fig.1.12 Shilpa Gupta, *Shadow 1*, Interactive video projection incorporating the viewers' simulated shadow, 2006, 236.2 inches/600cm © Shilpa Gupta

⁵⁸ Shilpa Gupta, 'Profile', HEART, <http://www.heartmus.com/shilpa-gupta-3365.aspx> (Accessed July 21, 2012).

collaborate in the simulated play that unravels before them. Being captured live, they appear like computer generated silhouettes, whose dimensions are sharp and visible against the light background of the screen. Configured for a collective experience, the work *Shadows* behaves like a multiplayer video game, where spectators/players could walk in and walk out at any point in time. Here, the sequences and simulations are collaboratively unfolded by the spectators. While a number of pre-programmed images are jumping in from various sides of the screen, often sticking to the image of the spectator/player, the response is anticipated always to be mixed and multiple. On a personal register, this process dissolved my physical presence in the room (psychologically) and made me like a shadow-like virtual avatar who is caught up in responding to the objects and effects of the simulated world unraveling in front of me. Further, the spectatorial crowd is moving- while some walk in between and some walk out. These *Shadows* that play with each other both displays and demands different economies of attention based on the multiple spectatorial patterns of being and inhabiting the time, space and the screen.⁵⁹ Though predominant in public spaces such interactive environments are increasingly being staged by gallery and museum despite their demand for architectural rearrangements. Unlike the mediumistic practices – or even time based works, these collaborative sites remain incomplete – or rather inactivated without the physical presence of the spectators.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The idea of co-presences is noted in the context of contemporary art by Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective as part of a panel discussion titled 'Has the Moment of Contemporary Come and Gone?', See Raqs Media Collective, Ravi Sundaram, Daniela Zyman, 'Has the Moment of the Contemporary Come and Gone?' *Field Notes*, Asia Art Archive, Issue 1, 2012, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Details/1192> (Accessed June 23, 2012).

⁶⁰ This aspect will be elaborated with additional examples in the 'New Behaviors' section of the following chapter.

Moving in a different direction from the shadows produced through simulation, Nalini Malani works with actual shadow plays in a combination of painted figures on transparent cylindrical objects, displayed along with video projections and sound, predominantly producing theatrical and chaotic spaces of experience. In the work *Game Pieces* (2003.Fig.1.13), a shadow/ video play by Malani, a structure of 6 Mylar cylinders painted on the reverse with images of gentle and vulnerable creatures is constructed from two parallel iron rings. The rings are lit by the video projections of nuclear bombs and the mushroom clouds from “Fat Man” and “Little Boy” the atomic bombs that destroyed Nagasaki and Hiroshima.⁶¹ When the rotating Mylar cylinders that bear the painted images are lit up and left in rotation, the devastating images of death and destructions couch the panoramic video screens, creating a spectacle of shadows intensified with the variations of sound.⁶²



Fig. 1. 13 Nalini Malani, *Game pieces*, Video/Shadow Play, 4 minutes looped, 2003 © Nalini Malani

This spatial configuration leaves no room for linearity of viewing, instead, it dislocates, interrupts any attempt to find a narrative logic by the spectatorial eye that for long used to perceive stories, from the beginning to an end. From no single location, the wholeness of

⁶¹ "Little Boy" was the codename for the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, by the United States Army Air Forces. It was the first atomic bomb to be used as a weapon. The second, the "Fat Man", was dropped three days later on Nagasaki.

⁶² Nalini Malani, *Game pieces* <http://www.naliniimalani.com/video/game.htm> (Accessed June 23, 2012) also *Game Pieces* by Nalini Malani (video on YouTube) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7YDnMannYA> (Accessed June 24, 2012).

the work can be experienced, and the spectator could perhaps have only partial experiences of the work or in other words, can only experience in fragments. Both these instances introduce an intensified level of dislocation from the linearity of viewing, moving one step further from the prolonged and repeated duration of the video loop.

DOCUMENTS AND FICTIONS

Quite contemporaneous to the experiential realms I have mentioned above, there has also been a rise in the presence of documentary films in the diverse spatial organizations of art spaces. The documentary as a form that is historically understood to be one of the most politically charged forms of representation, saw its first major presence in the context of contemporary art at the Documenta 11, Kassel curated by Okwui Enwezor. Mounting pre-dominantly documentary films and footage that ran together into a total filmed duration of around 600 hours, *Documenta 11* was not only instrumental in the massive expansion of documentary presence in the art context, but also seminal in the broader representation of practices from non-western locations in Europe.⁶³ For some of the documentary filmmakers, photographers and media practitioners like Raqs Media Collective, Ravi Agarwal and Amar Kanwar *Documenta 11* opened a distinct platform of display and operation, and a whole new paradigmatic configuration of what constitutes contemporary culture practice.

⁶³ *Documenta* is an exhibition of modern and contemporary art which takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. It was founded by artist, teacher and curator Arnold Bode in 1955 as part of the Bundesgartenschau, a federal horticultural show which took place in Kassel at that time. Over the decades *documenta* has grown to be one of Europe's most prestigious exhibition venues framing practices of modern and contemporary art in western continents and also from other parts of the world. *Documenta 11* was seminal for many non-western cultural practices because of two reasons. One, for the first time in the history of *Documenta* a non-European curator, Okwui Enwezor was given the task of chief artistic direction. Two, this has over-turned the very logic of *Documenta* having a maximum representation of art from non-western cultures, conceptualized within a larger paradigm of the 'post colonial'.

This was the first major occasion in which the works of Ravi Agarwal, Amar Kanwar and Raqs Media Collective were displayed in a fully fledged art context. Amar Kanwar's film *A Season Outside* (30 minutes) was presented at the Museum Fridericianum, one of the exhibition's main venues, sharing the venue with the artists like Shirin Neshat, Chantal Akerman, Fiona Tan, Eyal Sivan and Alfredo Jaar, all prominent for their work with still and moving images, investigating notions of ethics, subjectivity, fact and fiction, while treading sensitive political territory.⁶⁴ *A Season Outside* (1998.Fig.1.14) that was displayed at the Kassel by Kanwar invokes the border as the site of conversation and conflict, basing as the central premise the Wagah border, where soldiers from India and Pakistan go through a peculiar ritual each evening before they close the gates, through which trade is conducted during the day. This event of closing the doors is attended as a spectacle on a daily basis by large numbers of local and international audience.⁶⁵



Fig.1.14. Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*, Video Stills, 1998 © Amar Kanwar

A Season Outside is understood to be a personal and philosophical journey through the shadows of the past generations, conflicting positions, borders and time zones, almost like a nomad wandering through these lines of separation and their residual scars of past

⁶⁴ Rattanmol Singh Johal, 'Displacing the Objective Interlocutor, Infiltrating the Gallery : Notes on Art Documentary', *Augmenting Practices – Experiments from IFA-Khoj Curatorial Residency 2011*, Khoj International Artists Association, New Delhi, 2011. pp. 12-19.

⁶⁵ Amar Kanwar, *Season Outside*, <http://peterblumgallery.com/exhibitions/2004/amar-kanwar-a-season-outside-1997/press-release> (Accessed June 26, 2012).

violence.⁶⁶ Ravi Agarwal's showed a photographic series that was shot across urban locations of Delhi and Rajasthan mainly focusing on their public life and landscape.

Raqs Media Collective's installation, *Co-ordinates 28f28" N / 77f15" E* (2002.Fig.1.15) at *Documenta11* assembled video, text, sound, print and signage. Stickers, declaring *Entry Permitted. Access Denied*, along with many others were pasted on the streets and underpasses of Kassel in four different languages – Hindi, English, Turkish and German.



Fig.1.15. Raqs Media Collective, *Co-ordinates 28.8N 77.15E*, Installation using video screens, sound, print, and stickers. Presented at Documenta11, Kassel, Germany, 2002 © Raqs Media Collective

As the Collective tell us the *Co-ordinates* installation –

‘works with documentary and found material to create a matrix of meanings around urban dispossession and the mark of the law in the city. It frames legal texts and official orders against the images of a city that regularly destroys its own spaces of habitation by depleting the fragile commons that exist in urban spaces. It connects the way the city is embedded in a world full of transmitting signs to the daily acts of labour that ensure survival. It maps the daily tussle between legality and illegality, between security and survival, between the master plan and

⁶⁶Raqs Media Collective, *Co-ordinates 28.8N 77.15E*. <http://www.yidff.jp/99/cat061/99c072-e.html> (Accessed June 26, 2012).

the moment. Visitors to the installation can take away with them a broadsheet that connects legal prohibitions, public inscriptions, private signs, and the search for questions and doubts about the ways in which we inhabit space”.⁶⁷

The context of *Documenta* 11 is particularly important to understand the wider proliferation of digital documentaries and mocu-mentaries within the spaces of contemporary art. Artists who are primarily filmmakers not only began exhibiting quite extensively in gallery and museum setups, they also introduced new curatorial patterns by working with home videos (Ayesha Abraham), found footage and so on. The documentary as a form has come a long way by becoming today, one of the central presences of global contemporary art. These proliferated documentary practices (digital) are not tied to a single genre; rather they are engaged in a constant process of expansion and diversification, yet sharing a common urge to represent specific realities, being aware of the ideologies and apparatuses that are governing them.⁶⁸

Hito Stereyl suggests that the digital documentaries within the contemporary art today are dominantly produced through a wide collection of resources shared amongst the ‘common’ networks of global databases, people to people networks, and other file sharing platforms. This brings our attention to questions of copyright and artistic authorship while humans and their creative imaginations are continuously organized in ever-shifting combinations of data dispersed throughout geographical locations. These volatile networks of experimental documentary producers could also become new nodes

⁶⁷ Raqs Media Collective ‘Co-ordinates 28°28' N / 77°15' E’ <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/resultCC.aspx?id=81&type=works>. (Accessed June 27, 2012).

⁶⁸ See Introduction in Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl Ed., *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, Stemberg Press, Berlin, 2008.

of what Steyerl calls a 'private public sphere', one that exists beyond the control of both nation and the capital.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

This chapter considered some of the works by seminal new media practitioners from India, thinking of their practices through specific conceptual threads and contexts such as *Micro Climates*, *Documents and Fictions*, *Interruption*, *Disruption and Recension*, *Incomplete Stories* and so on. These are to be seen as groupings that can be reoriented and dismantled in the process of imagining newer relationships amongst other practices in the field. Beginning with the engagements on Cyberpunk and Open Source cultures by Baiju Parthan and Raqs Media Collective, the chapter moved on to speak about the climatic conditions fuelled by *Khoj* and *Sarai* that initiated various levels of interfacing with the city, locality and the neighborhood (*mohalla*). The focus on the phenomenological shifts by New Media Art, guided our attention to the prolonged and repetitive rendering of the (artist) selves in the temporal duration of the loop. The video installation took this one step further by consciously evading the linearity of viewing, thereby catering to an incompleteness of spectatorial experience. The reference to *Documenta 11* highlighted the broader context in which the documentary filmmakers and photographers began and continue to achieve greater visibility across locations of global contemporary art.

⁶⁹ Hito Steyerl, 'A language of Practice', Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl Ed., *The Green Room : Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, Stemberg Press, Berlin, 2008.pp.224-231.

CHAPTER – II
THE ‘NEWNESS’ IN THE NEW MEDIA ART

THE NOVELTY OF THE NEW MEDIA

Considering that it has been a while since New Media technologies arrived on the contemporary art scene, the legitimacy of the 'new' in new media has been under debate in discourses of new media studies, global contemporary art and curatorial practices. One of the major contentions to the argument in favor of the novelty of new media is to perceive new media objects/forms as clear disjunctures from the conventional media forms such as cinema and television. The danger of novelty is seen in its obsessive preoccupation with continuous refashioning, which might overlook the possible continuities and links between cultural forms of old and new media; for example, between cinema and interactive installation. As early as 1999, Roger Silverstone posed the question, 'What is new about new media?' in the editorial preface to the first issue of the journal of *New Media and Society*.⁷⁰ This provocation by Silverstone clearly raises doubts as to whether there is anything that is remarkably new about the new media forms. Or, are they new manifestations of the older cultural forms we have already been familiar with? To question, '*What's new about new media?*' for him is, of course, to question the relationship between continuity and change; a question that requires an investigation into the complexities of innovation as both a technological and a social process."⁷¹ He further states that, 'The supposedly distinct characteristics of new media: digital convergence; many-to-many communication; interactivity; globalization; virtuality, are arguably, with the possible exception of the specifically technical, not new at all'.⁷²

⁷⁰ Roger Silverstone, 'what's new about new media?', in *New Media and Society*, Vol1(1), SAGE Publications London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, Copyright © 1999 pp. 10-17

⁷¹ *ibid.*p.10

⁷² *ibid.*p.11

Four years after this thesis by Silverstone, the editors of the book *New Media 1740-1915*, Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, made this provocation the title of their introduction: What's New about New Media?⁷³ Gitelman and Pingree argue that every media form is 'New' in its own time and context and therefore, the novelty attached to only specific media forms produced with the technologies of the digital computer merits some critical revisitation. They also elucidate that all media forms are historically contingent and do not retain their newness once they get assimilated into the larger social psyche. Therefore, retaining the 'newness' of any media form, solely because it is mediated by certain forms of technologies flagged as 'new' seems to be a skewed proposition. Bringing together texts that offer perspectives on histories of Stereoscopes, Zograsopes, Phonographs and Telegraphy, Pingree and Gitelman envisage a different trajectory of media history, keeping their focus at 1915, decades before new media emerged both as nomenclature and cultural process.⁷⁴

Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective takes this debate forward. For him - "Novelty is a fickle companion, as the 'New' just doesn't stay new for very long anymore. Today's killer application is tomorrow's exhibit in a technology museum. Today we have e-mail anxiety attacks; once upon a time, our hearts skipped a beat at the sudden, staccato arrival of a telegram. In Hindustani, the idiomatic mode of conveying urgency, immortalized in the plea that the distraught heroine in a village far from the nearest telegraph office makes to her lover in the distant city in innumerable Hindi films

⁷³ Geoffrey B. Pingree and Lisa Gitelman, Ed., *New Media 1740 – 1915*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2004 pp.11-22

⁷⁴ *ibid*

from the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s is - “*is chitthi ko telegram samajhkar aana*”, or “consider this letter a telegram and rush back posthaste.”⁷⁵

Lev Manovich, David Bolter and Richard Grusin considered this problem of the ‘new’ through somewhat similar lines. They evoke the concept of ‘remediation’, which is supposedly “the representation of one medium in another.”⁷⁶ In contrast to the views that celebrate new media as a complete break with old media, ‘remediation’ sets the ground for conceptualizing the relationship between old and new media, not as oppositional, but as connected to the previous ages of media development. Manovich, for instance, observes that discrete representation, multimedia capability and random-access memory, which are commonly seen to be distinctive qualities of new media, are in fact to be rejected as principles for distinguishing between new and old media, for each is to be found, or at least prefigured, in early cinematic technologies.⁷⁷ But he does refer to some fundamental shifts that new media technologies have brought into the field of cultural production. He postulates five principles of new media which are understood, not as defining principles, but as common tendencies within new media. They are — Numerical Representation, Modularity, Automation, Variability and Transcoding.⁷⁸ These five are

⁷⁵ Shuddhabrata Sengupta, ‘The Fickleness of Novelty – Notes towards a Speculative History of New Media in South Asia’, *Visual Arts* (The India Habitat Centre’s Art Journal), India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, 2009 p.12

⁷⁶ Liliana Bounegru, ‘Remediation and premediation as Medium Specificity in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’, <http://lilianabounegru.org/2011/02/remediation-and-premediation-as-medium-specificity-in-jay-david-bolter-and-richard-grusin/> (Accessed 17th July 2012)

⁷⁷ Nicholas Gane and David Beer, ‘Archive’, *NEW MEDIA: The Key Concepts*, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York 2008 p.84

⁷⁸ Lev Manovich in his influential book, *The Language of New Media* outlines the constituent elements of New Media Art that extends the vocabulary of this practice beyond the formal visual elements of line, colour, form, mass and volume. He has identified five attributes that define the language of new media. They are: *Numerical Representation* by which the image or object can be digitized and explained using a mathematical model, *Modularity* in which distinctive parts make up a whole while individual parts retaining their independence, *Automation* in which user-friendly technology is harnessed for creative ends, *Variability* which underscores the importance of a multitude of choices, and *Transcoding* where the

the technical definitions or qualities that distinguish between older media and the new media. According to Manovich, when existing media forms (say, photographs) are remediated into their digital life (say, Adobe Photoshop), they inhabit some of the fundamental qualities (say, numerical data) that transforms their life into programmable and manipulatable terrains.

Nicholas Gane and David Beer, the authors of *New Media: Key Concepts*, argue that it has been a decade since some of the central new media devices such as networked computers, mobile phones and MP3 players have been in mass circulation. They can perhaps no longer be bracketed under the umbrella term ‘new media’. Gane and Beer suggest the need to drop the term ‘new media’ and imagine instead, a different umbrella term that would enable us to take a more nuanced and critical look at the interplay of emergent technologies, sociality and culture. They further recognize the challenge of not being able to signpost any term that can even approximate the ever changing quality of current technologies. They suggest that we think through a different range of key conceptual devices such as archive, network, and interface to engage with their various expansions, versions and redefinitions, seeing them as some of the key concepts of the digital media. These conceptual devices, unlike the totalizing term new media, help us in thinking how various multiplicities are continuously produced in the ever expanding

computer interface translates the image into a “cultural layer” which often exists in tandem with an earlier vocabulary of art. See Lev Manovich, *The Language of the New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001 p.43-70

landscape of the digital.⁷⁹ The specific field of curatorial practice proposes another paradigm of looking at New Media Art, not just as medium based, but as practices that exhibit different patterns of behavior. By behavior, they mean the ways by which the technologically configured artistic practices operate and collaborate with the spectators in a given time and space. The following section will discuss this aspect of behavior in detail.⁸⁰

NEW BEHAVIOURS OF PRACTICE

In the book *Rethinking Curating: Art after the New Media*, Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham offer novel ways to engage with the shifting combinations within which New Media Art is produced and circulated. They introduce the behavioral logic of understanding New Media Art works (in contrast to attributing medium-specific names) by arguing that it is not about what the works are made of, but how they behave in collaboration with the spectators/users. Steve Dietz, a curator, also sees New Media Art not solely as a practice that uses technologies to make art, but one that invents new behavioral patterns (in terms of art works themselves and the ways spectators experience them). In this context, Dietz introduces three broader categories for New Media Art: namely *interactivity*, *connectivity* and *computability*.⁸¹ While *interactivity* is the quality of an interface that works in reaction to the presence of physical objects and bodies, *connectivity* extends the horizons of practice by sharing it with other parts of the world (say on the Internet). *Computability* is more of a self-referencing of technologies and their effects in processing imaginations. While translating these otherwise technological

⁷⁹ Nicholas Gane and David Beer, 'Archive', *NEWMEDIA: The Key Concepts*, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York 2008 p.131

⁸⁰ Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010

⁸¹ *ibid.* p.6

terms into the process of artistic practice, Sarah Cook identifies the attitude of these processes as collaborative, distributed and variable. In short, all these curators subscribe to the understanding of New Media Art, as art that is made using electronic media technology and that displays any or all these three aspects. a) collaborative behavior of *interactivity*, b) distributable attitude of *connectivity* and c) the variable nature of *computability* in any combinations. These shifting combinations as they further argue, both pose challenges and open possibilities for the field of curatorial practice that sees a consistent necessity to re-invent and expand its theoretical, and institutional infrastructures to conceptualize the practices of new media.

Interactivity that is considered to be one of the central aspects of New Media Art functions in various levels and intensities. Web-based works, for instance, are by their very nature, interactive, and can only be activated by consistent commands from the users. In the conceptualizations of new media practice at museums, galleries and open public spaces (such as gardens, city squares), a range of tracking devices and applications are used, to track the movements, breath and sometimes even the heartbeats of the spectators through sensors in the process of rendering varied levels of interaction.⁸² These diversities can be very well seen in the practice of Montreal and Mexico City based Rafael Lozano Hemmer. Considered to be one of the pioneers of New Media Art in the global contemporary art scene, Hemmer produces interactive installations of massive scale, that base themselves on the increasing surveillance of global landscapes. In his recent work *Pulse Index* (2012. Fig.2.1), Hemmer invokes the image of the thumb

⁸² The dimension of public space interactivity is one of the dominant model of new media art as many state and private cultural institutions (like Canada Arts Council) fund artists to produce new media works that exhibit the interactive works in public spaces and squares. One major section of what has come to be known as Public Art adopts the possibilities of interactive technologies for building up conversations in outdoor public spaces and sites.

impression, the most commonly used biometric image for identification. A large-scale interactive installation, *Pulse Index* records the heart rates and the finger prints of the



Fig. 2.1. Rafael Lozano Hemmer, “Pulse Index”, 2012, “Time Lapse”. Site Santa Fe, Mexico, 2012. Photo by Kate Russell © Rafael Lozano Hemmer

participants and shows them together in a stepped display that creates a horizon line of the skin. The participants introduce their finger into a custom-made sensor equipped with digital microscope and heart rate sensor. Their finger print immediately appears on the largest cell of the display, pulsating to their heart beat. As more participants continue to interact with the installation, the old recorded finger print travels upwards until it disappears altogether. The piece operates like a huge collation of different finger prints in motion resembling the heart beat.⁸³ Hemmer’s piece was conceived to be a ‘memento mori using fingerprints, the most commonly used biometric image for identification.’⁸⁴

⁸³ In another register of working with the pulse rates of the audience, Hemmer’s public space installation *Pulse Park* is comprised of a matrix of light beams that graze the central oval field of Madison Square Park, in the City of New York. The intensity of light beams is entirely modulated by a sensor that measures the heart rate of participants and the resulting effect is the visualization of vital signs, arguably our most symbolic biometric, in an urban scale. In *Pulse Park*, evening visitors to Madison Square Park have their systolic and diastolic activity measured by a sensor sculpture installed in the North end of the Oval Lawn (one of the sections of the park). These biometric rhythms are translated and projected as pulses of narrow-beam light that will move sequentially down rows of spotlights placed along the perimeter of the lawn as each consecutive participant makes the contact with the sensor. The result as Hemmer notes ‘is a poetic expression of our vital signs, transforming the public space into a fleeting architecture of light and movement’. Rafael Lozano Hemmer, *Pulse Park*, http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/pulse_park.php (Accessed July 19, 2012)

⁸⁴ Rafael Lozano Hemmer, *Pulse Index*, video documentation, http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/pulse_index.php (Accessed July 12, 2012)

Connectivity, the second aspect of New Media Art as suggested by Dietz can be dominantly seen in all the web-based works placed in the intricately connected network of the Internet. A few gallery and museum-based installations, even though displayed in enclosed spaces, expand their connectivity by streaming live (on the web) footage of spectatorial presences. Swiss artists Monica Studer and Christoph Van Den Berg worked precisely with this logic in their gallery based installation work titled *Package Holiday*(2005. Fig.2.2).



Fig. 2.2 Monica Studer & Christoph van den Berg: *Package Holiday*, 2005. © Monica Studer & Christoph van den Berg

A large – scale digital print of a computer graphic representation of an alpine landscape was pasted on the gallery wall, facing which were benches for viewers to sit on. A video camera observed the viewers on the bench, and a small screen on the opposite wall showed the closed circuit video feed from the camera. The recording of the audience enjoying the mountain view was streamed live to a web site, and the text sign in the gallery informed the users of this detail.⁸⁵ The *connectivity* aspect of the work to the

⁸⁵ In another instance of connectivity, New Delhi based artist Asim Waqif recently has done a event entitled *Asim Waqif + Sin;drome + 9 Circuits* at Khoj Studios, 2012. It was conceptualized to be an interference and feedback between sound, installation, electronics, video and performance. Hosted as an evening at the currently renovating site of Khoj studios this piece engaged with the spatial charecteristics of architecture the video of the event/performance was streamed live on to a website where anyone can log in a experience the work.

World Wide Web extended its life work beyond the space of the gallery, also raising several issues about being watched, relayed and revealed live on the Internet, to a wider public that shall register various presences and absences in front of the work at different points in time.⁸⁶ In the work *Untitled – 2* (2003, Fig. 2.3), Shilpa Gupta quite visibly foregrounds the *computability* aspect of new media works by making the mouse the visible point of access. An approximately 20 square foot video projection on the wall displays the artist's body in seven disguises. The click of a mouse on any of these enacted figures changes their body movements and speech. Staging a mock military act, Gupta renders here a critique of global capitalist values and their visible effects on bodies and behavior.⁸⁷

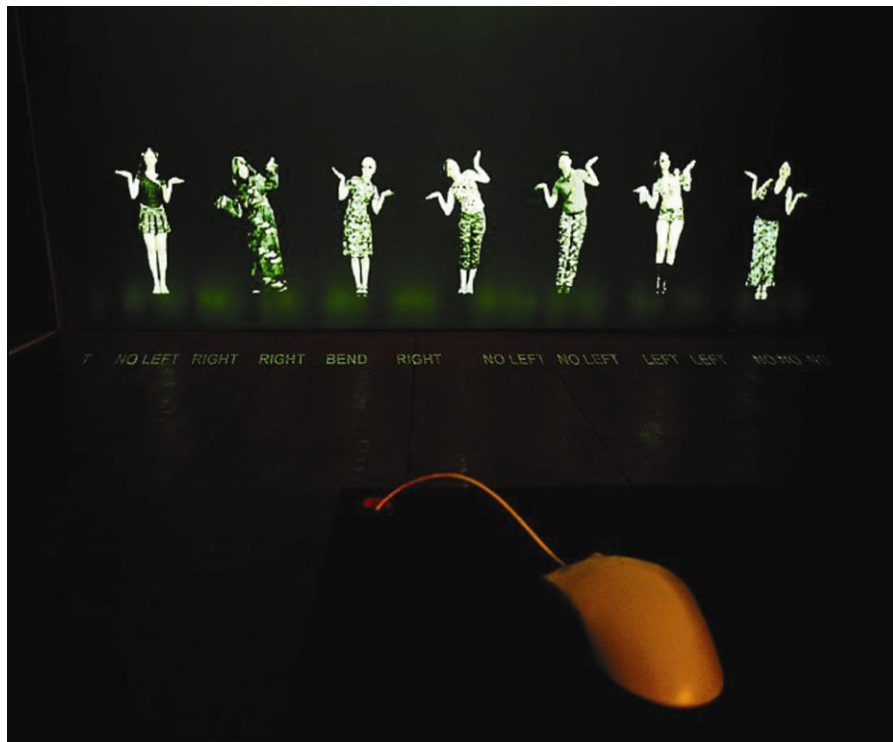


Fig.2.3. Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled – 3*, Interactive Video Projection with Sound, Mouse, 2003. © Shilpa Gupta

⁸⁶ Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook Ed., 'Introduction', *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010 pp.1-11

⁸⁷ Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled – 2*, <http://www.flyinthe.net/pages/earlyworks/04untitled2.htm> (Accessed July 13, 2012).

However, by tracing the shifts in the behaviors of the works, and consequently, in the experience of the spectators, New Media Art proposes different combinations from work to work, depending upon the location, concept and circulation process. While gallery-based new media, works take up *interactivity* as the major aspect, web-based works (which are by nature interactive) take up *connectivity* as the central focus, and *computability* acts almost as a default in any combination of these practices. The larger question that persists however is twofold. What does New Media Art, with its changing combinations, propose to the existing field of artistic practice and its spectatorship? What different artistic world views do these practices and their positions seem to cater? And crucially, going back to the book we began with, what challenges and possibilities are seen and foreseen by the curators while working with these behaviors. One of the central tasks of new media artists has been to engage in the creation of diverse experiential domains, both in the closed and open spaces. In these environments, there are no crafted objects on display for the spectators to come and contemplate (painting and sculpture) like in the case of the museum. Instead, some of these experiential setups do not even begin their function without the presence of the spectator. For instance, *Pulse Park* (see footnote no.14) a work by Rafael Lozano Hemmer can only see its light by gathering the pulse rates of the visitors in the park(Fig.2.4). When there are no visitors, there are no pulse rates and the park will just appear plain. By being participatory, the work makes the visitors its participants involving them to collaborative with other participants to activate and experience the Installation.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, 'Space and Materiality', *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010 p.68



Fig. 2.4. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, “Pulse Park, *Relational Architecture 14*”, 2008, Madison Square Park, New York City, USA. Photo by : James Ewing © Rafael Lozano Hemmer

In time based video installation setup within gallery and museum spaces, there is a slightly different experiential logic that is at work. For Instance, in a work titled *Hamlet Machine* (2000. Fig.2.5) by Nalini Malani, a four channel video projection with sound; the three walls of the room are projected along with one projection on the floor at the centre of the room. The projections in loops provide no single still location for the spectator to get a complete view of all the projections. Further, the sound that collaborates these spatial arrangements doesn't allow a contemplative space for the spectator. Instead, it constructs a chaotic space that disrupts the linearity of viewing, making the spectatorial experience in some sense 'incomplete'.⁸⁹ The approaches of these and many other new media works appear to be foreseeing the figure of the spectator right from the inception of the work, where the artists conceptualize how the spectator participates in the very act of viewing and interacting. This also blurs the dividing lines

⁸⁹ Geeta Kapur, “Images Caught in a Beam : Inside a Black Box” , Part of series of lectures presented at Faculty of Fine Arts, The M. S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat , India 2007

between practices of artist and curator as the spectator begins to act as a preface to the artist's practice.⁹⁰



Fig. 2.5 Nalini Malani, *Hamlet machine*, Video Installation, 20 minutes looped, sound, 1999-2004 DVDs, 4 LCD video projectors (2000 Lumen), 4 DVD players, sync with single remote sensor for the four DVD players, sound system: 1 amplifier and 4 speakers, mirrored mylar, glass mirror, 300 kilos of coarse sea salt and 2 black benches. Dimension svariable, © Nalini Malani

These various cluster of combinations that persist in the works of New Media Art has also been a challenge for the field of curatorial practice and discourse. The interactive, connective and collaborative processes of these art works and the environments, their mobilities and constant rearrangements continuously demand change in curatorial methods and models. They mobilize curators not only to reinvent the conventional architectures of museums and gallery spaces, but also activate many other small and large-scale open public spaces like parks, squares, shopping malls, community centres

⁹⁰ Also in the context of technology based art a significant number of artists work in collaborations with designers, computer programmers and other technology geeks while the artist play the role key conceptualizer and supervisor. The scale in which these installations are imagined invite the necessity and possibility for this collaboration . However there is a tendency within discourses to see these helping hands as non-existent or even invisible.

and so on. Curators who specifically deal with New Media Art , some of which I cited in the beginning of this section, think of this both as a continuous challenge and also as a possibility posed by the rapidly changing face of New Media Art. For Instance, Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook argue that, “New Media Art presents the opportunity for a complete rethinking of curatorial practice, from how art is legitimized and how museum departments are founded to how curators engage with the production of artwork and how they set about the many task within the process of showing that art to the audience. They propose that the different behaviours of works of art demand different modes of curating. And as co-founders of CRUMB⁹¹ (Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss) they state that “Once you’ve curated New Media Art you’re unlikely to curate anything else the same way again”.⁹²

This aspect of coping with mobility and continuous reinvention is considered to be one of the fundamental tasks that arise while dealing with the field of new media in general. The following section shall extend this discussion to contemporary online archives and their archival processes in an attempt to elicit the questions and possibilities they throw up to the conventional structurings of the archive and vis-a-vis, knowledge formations.

⁹¹ Building on research into curating new media art since 1993 at the University of Sunderland, CRUMB was founded by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook in 2000 within the School of Arts, Design, Media and Culture, with a Small Grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board. CRUMB's activities cover a range of practices, but are predominantly based around research, networking, and professional development for curators of new media art. ‘Biographies’, CRUMB(Curatorial Resource For Upstart Media Bliss), <http://www.cumbweb.org/getBiosContacts.php?id=4&sublink=3&ts=1343671149> (Accessed July 25, 2012).

⁹² Quoted in Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, ‘Conclusion :Histories, Vocabularies, Modes’, *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010 p.283

ARCHIVE IN THE NEW MEDIA FOLDS

In the conventional sense, the archive is a systematic institution configured through the accumulation of different kinds of documents/data about the past, stored and segregated for historical narratives to emerge or for future retrieval. The significance of the archive, therefore, has not only been in its ability to reconfigure the past for its use in the present, but also for its ability to condition our imagination of the past. In its material reorganization into the digital fold, this very structure of the archive saw a series of shifts, predominantly, in terms of the archival processes and access. In a broader sense, the World Wide Web is seen as the biggest archive of today, where different personal, institutional, organizational data is set to access, intricately indexed by leading web interfaces like the Google search engine, a tool which is considered to be the common door of information today. Like the Google search engine, interfaces in general are understood to be the centre of new media systems and infrastructures for their complex abilities to navigate boundaries between different objects and systems, thereby continuously extending networks into new terrains of access.

Further, interfaces don't necessarily exist as mere navigators from one network to the other. Instead, they produce both the possibilities and limitations of data access and its signification. However, in contrast to the enclosed physical spaces of traditional paper-based archives and their chronological/ teleological organization, a new media archive interfaces the user through the processes of browsing, hyperlinking and tagging, along with more conventional techniques of accumulating data. These new archives according

to Mike Featherstone, facilitate multiple entry points and non-linear associational jumps across material.⁹³

As a case reference in the domain of cultural practice, I shall turn to *Pad.ma* (Public Access Digital Media Archive) an online archive of densely text-annotated video material, primarily of footage and unfinished films, operative from Berlin, Mumbai and Bangalore. *Pad.ma* (Fig.2.6) is a web interface within which various kinds of video data is placed in a constellation of relations and combinations. The peculiar quality of this data is that the focus is not on completed films, instead there is mostly video footage which could not have gained public access otherwise. The availability of video in footage form expands the very logic of representation, where the understandings base themselves not on the crafted completeness of film, but on the fragmented form of the footage. As the initiators of *Pad.ma* quite provocatively state,

‘We see *Pad.ma* as a way of opening up a set of images, intentions and effects present in video footage, resources that conventions of video-making, editing and spectatorship have tended to suppress, or leave behind. This expanded treatment then points to other, political potentials for such material, and leads us into lesser-known territory for video itself... beyond the finite documentary film or the online video clip.’⁹⁴

The video material placed in the form of the timeline is densely annotated/layered with the categorical configurations that mark themselves as places, descriptions, transcripts. While places point to the important geographical locations that appear through the footage, descriptions often are formal readings of the footage referencing to other similar

⁹³ Nicholas Gane and David Beer, ‘Archive’, *NEWMEDIA: The Key Concepts*, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York 2008 p.83

⁹⁴ Public Access Digital Media Archive, ‘About’, <https://pad.ma/about> (Accessed July 12, 2012)

materials or documents. Transcripts are almost like the continuous narrations working as a form of subtitling. Indexed with all these layers, the timeline collaboratively produces numerous possibilities of access and contribution. One peculiar element of the timeline is its interface mode, where the user can intervene to include new annotations, locations and descriptions, almost like a video editing software. Thus, the archival process that *Pad.ma* mobilizes takes a participatory route, where multiple kinds of metadata and other descriptions about the footage are generated to co-exist.

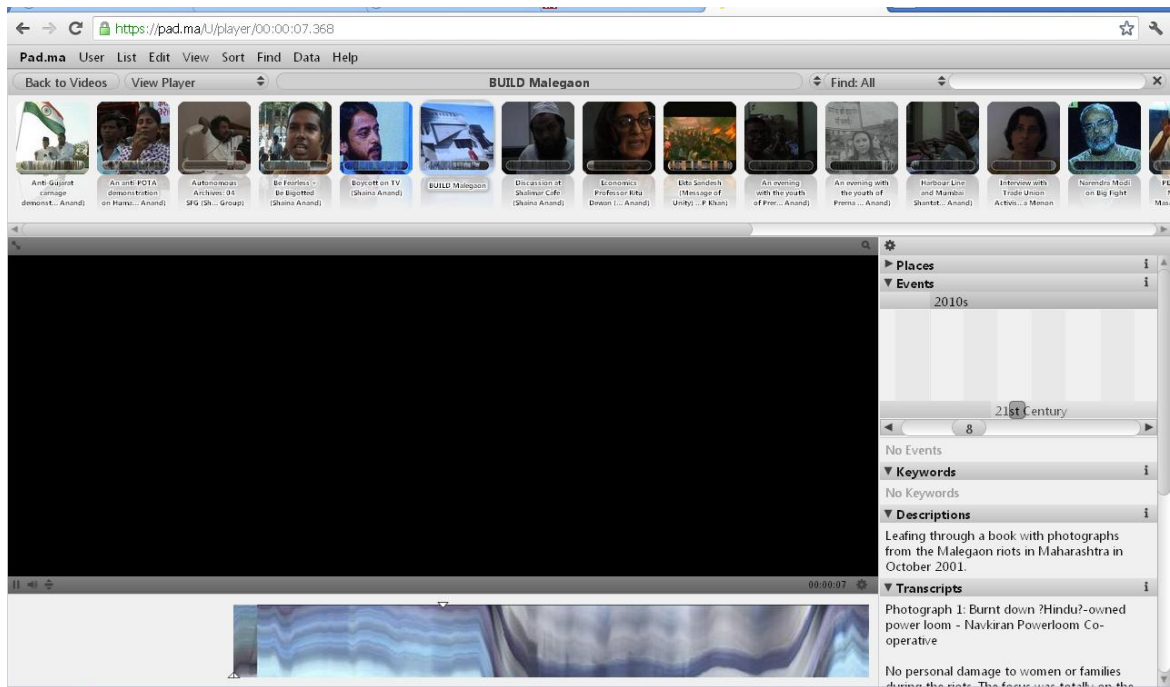


Fig.2.6 Editing mode view of Pad.ma - Public Access Digital Media Archive

My personal involvement in this process began with a workshop on digital archiving organized by the collaborators of the *Pad.ma* project at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. The workshop concentrated on the aspects of film archiving in the digital fold and the specific implications it might have on the discipline of film studies. As participants, we were all collaboratively involved in annotating a specific

piece of footage, describing, marking location and generating keywords as an exercise to see the different levels of inter-textual and inter-visual relationships that can be built. The points of keywords, descriptions and annotations also facilitated hyper linking to other html pages on the web, where the viewer can be directed towards an additional plug-out mainly to free databases such as YouTube and Wikipedia.

With specific demonstrations on the functioning of *Pad.ma* and *OxDB*⁹⁵, a massive online film archive manned from Berlin, the mentors of the workshop raised questions regarding the crisis that persists within discourse after the digital re-organization of film into accessible data. Here the text of the film moves from the movie theatre to the user-controlled database to produce a range of interlinked layers and combinations. This also generates multiple points of access, where the micro temporalities and tonalities (of the timeline) come to the surface.⁹⁶ Though, *Pad.ma* and *OxDB* mirror each other in terms of their interface architecture, the latter deals with completed feature films from across the world and the former engages pre-dominantly with footage from the metropolises of India. The conceptual and material organizations of these archival systems constantly configure an arena of voices and collaborations.⁹⁷ They can be perhaps seen as

⁹⁵ OxDB is a movie database. It is intended to help us rethink the future of cinema on the Internet by pushing the boundaries of what we understand as "web applications". What OxDB proposes is an entirely new approach to visualizing and navigating moving images, and it serve as a point of reference for individuals and institutions who are dealing with large collections of films, <http://Oxdb.org/about>, (Accessed July 15, 2012)

⁹⁶ Both the databases of *Pad.ma* and *OxDB* are based on *pan.do/ra* is a free, open source media archive platform. It allows users to manage, decentralized collections of video, to collaboratively create metadata and time-based annotation, and to serve your archive as archive as a desktop-class web application. *Pan.do/ra* <https://pan.do/ra>, (Accessed July 15, 2012)

⁹⁷ *The World's First Collaborative Sentence*(1994) by Douglas Davis is a classic example of an Internet based art for its collaborative, polyvocal, multilingual and boundless nature, the sentence has become a microcosm of the Internet itself. As a decidedly low-tech "multi-user environment" that allows for combination of textual, visual, and aural components, it is a collective space which, in its broad array of

'polyphonic' formulations of the archive, as suggested by Abdelmajid Hannoum. According to Hannoum, archives are made up of a multiplicity of sources and voices, and can be described as 'polyphonic'.⁹⁸ This impulse of the archive takes an accelerated pace in the domains of the digital and World Wide Web, as data travels through the fluid doors of interfaces, simultaneously connecting to similar nodes and locations across the network.

These user-generated online archives take the idea of polyphony to new extremes, where databases such as Wikipedia allows even competing voices to edit and potentially erase(update/revise) the contributions of one another. *Pad.ma* also operates with the logic of file sharing networks, where the users can upload, download and re-distribute data for free, provided it is used for non-commercial purposes and also if it meets the terms of the *Pad.ma* general working license 1.0.⁹⁹ However, the aspect of shared contribution is comparatively limited in the case of *Pad.ma*, because of the higher degree of user moderation put in place by the core team members based in Mumbai, Bangalore and Berlin, for the exclusive kind of material they host (footage). With respect to the

voices and topics, achieves fluent transitions between the prosaic and the sublime. Whitney Museum, 'Art Port', <http://whitney.org/www/artport/collection/index.html> (Accessed July 16, 2012)

⁹⁸ Nicholas Gane and David Beer, 'Archive', *NEW MEDIA: The Key Concepts*, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York 2008 p.84

⁹⁹ The Pad.ma General Public License 1.0 seeks to capture the spirit of collaboration and exchange through which users can build a public debate around the role of the image, and new practices that may be generated through the sharing of images. The work is provided under the terms of Pad.ma General Public License ("PGPL" or "license"). By exercising any rights to the work provided herein, the users accept and agree to be bound by the terms of this license. The licensor grants the user the rights contained herein in consideration of his/her acceptance of such terms and conditions. The Pad.ma Archive consists of footage of cinematograph films ('film'), literary works, photographs and sound recordings. Subject to the terms and conditions of this License, the Licensor hereby grants the use, in consideration of user exercising the rights, a worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive, perpetual (for the duration of the applicable copyright) license to exercise the rights in each of the Works as provided below. Nothing in this license is intended to reduce, limit, or restrict any rights arising from any fair dealing, statutory right, first sale or other limitations on the exclusive rights of the copyright owner under copyright law or other applicable laws. Public Access Digital Media Archive, 'license', <https://pad.ma/license> (Accessed July 15, 2012)

disciplines of film and media studies, *Pad.ma* proves to be an key interlocutor by virtue of its bringing together distinct processes of representational history and assembling them together as an archive of the incomplete stories, and even ‘leftovers’.

This reorganization of archives in the fold of the digital, therefore, form sites that expand our horizons of sharing, accessing, (re)processing and manipulating varieties of information and data. In these new constellations of relations within which the archive operates, interfaces act as extended limbs, fuelling innumerable layers of relationships and intimacies both with other similar archives and the users in the network. These intimacies and multiplicity of access points to the past(s) can perhaps lead us to different journey(s) where we begin to pause, rewind, forward and annotate the timelines not in any necessary sequential linearity of historical time, rather, perhaps in an interrupted, and diffused logic of temporality. Even though, the interface of timeline appears to us in a linear organization, it is internally sliced into micro time frames whose very existence might make us access the footages and films not only as a whole, but also a collection of stills, colour schemes and even subtitles.

DISPERSIONS OF THE ‘NEW’ MEDIA

To disperse, in its dictionary definition would mean to ‘go and distribute over a wide area’ and also, to ‘thin out and eventually disappear’. In the specific context of new media, both these definitions seem to be at work. On the one hand, the nomenclature ‘New Media Art’ is dispersed to various sites of cultural practice, producing different levels of significations. On the other hand, the category (New Media Art) is thinned out into various sub-categories leading to the dissolution of its overarching role. Software Art, Internet Art, Interactive Art, Algorithmic Art, Crowd Source Art and so on came to

be the sub-divisions of New Media Art, with names based on their specific relationships with the materiality of technology (say software art) or of its behavior (say interactive art). These sub-categorizations were necessitated by the expansion of technology-based practices into various levels of engagement with the digital culture at large.

Further, the dissolution was also facilitated by the heated debate on the novelty of New Media Art, especially at a time when technology has already established itself as a major governing force on our everyday lives. There has also been initial hesitation and resistance to use the term new media. For instance, a seminal new media artist like Rafael Lozano Hemmer shows discomfort in placing his practice under the umbrella of New Media Art. Instead, he prefers to conceptualize his practice under the term Relational Architectures¹⁰⁰ or Crowd Source Art, which refers to works and projects that adopt the crowd as the medium (*See Pulse Park*).¹⁰¹

Contrastingly, in its second level of dispersion, the term New Media Art is staged precisely for the significance of its novelty. In a recent article titled *Printmaking and/as*

¹⁰⁰ Rafael Lozano Hemmer defines the *Relational architecture* as ‘the technological actualization of buildings and public spaces with alien memory. *Relational architecture* disorganizes the master narratives of a building (say museum) by adding and subtracting audiovisual elements to affect it, effect it and re-contextualize it. Relational buildings have audience-activated hyperlinks to predetermined spatiotemporal settings that may include other buildings, other political or aesthetic contexts, other histories, or other physics. However, the Virtual architecture could be differentiated from relational architecture in that the former is based on simulation while the latter is based on dissimulation. Virtual buildings are data constructs that strive for realism, asking the participant to "suspend disbelief" and "play along" with the environment; relational buildings, on the other hand, are real buildings pretending to be something other than themselves.’ masquerading as that which they might become, asking participants to "suspend faith" and probe, interact and experiment with the false construct.’

Rafael Lozano Hemmer, ‘Relational Architecture: General Concept’, <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-archives/nettime-1-9801/msg00056.html> (Accessed July 18, 2012)

¹⁰¹ A very dominant factor in Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s art practice is the public, or the crowd, some times just passersby. Hemmer major body of work are interactive installations that are entirely *crowdsourced*. In this set-ups the public must participate to activate the work. Movement, sound, voice, images, reflections, etc. are all taken into account for inviting different levels of reactions from the installations.

*new media*¹⁰², H.A. Anil Kumar, a historian based in Bangalore, demands an art historiographical shift while beginning to see printmaking as the unrecognized precedent of video and New Media Art practice. Identifying the changing formal patterns within the current day practices of printmaking in India, Kumar calls for new premises within which video art, video installation, photography and printmaking could meet. In building up a trajectory between the conventional practice of manual printmaking with video and new media, Kumar attempts to produce different historical trajectories and linkages to the field of printmaking. In another register, a newspaper feature by New Delhi-based newspaper columnist Georgina Maddox signposted the recent exhibition titled *Urban Testimonies* as a show of young artists from Baroda school of art displaying “spunky New Media Art works” at a gallery based in Delhi.¹⁰³ While the exhibition consisted of works ranging from sculptures, video works and digital photographs, the author noted that the language in which they are made seems deceptively hi-tech and, therefore, finds that they are to be seen as New Media Art works. These instances, one from the methodological approaches of art history by Kumar and other from the field of art journalism by Maddox, take up the term New Media for different kinds of purposes. While Kumar reinvents the trajectory of printmaking, marking it as the unrecognized precedent of New Media Art, the approach by Maddox sum up the diversity of artistic approaches that were displayed in the *Urban Testimonies* exhibition. However, the matter that concerns me in both the cases is not merely their specific attitudes of categorization, rather it centers on the tendency that fuels and facilitates such (historical and journalistic)

¹⁰² H. A. Anil Kumar, ‘Printmaking and/as the New Media’ – The Demand for an Art Historiographical Shift, *Art Etc* art magazine, Kolkata, October 2011, Vol.4, No – 2

¹⁰³ Georgina Maddox, *Twist in the tale*, a feature on the *Urban Testimonies*, a group exhibition, Latitude 28 Art Gallery, New Delhi,, 2010 <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/twist-in-the-tale/647981/> (Accessed Dec 26, 2011)

framings. In both the cases, New Media Art as a term seems to be play acting as a catalyst producing different levels of significations. On the one hand, it caters to the production of a 'new' conceptual locus for the enhanced public visibility of artistic experiments in the *Urban Testimonies* exhibition. On the other, it is mobilized to build 'new' historical linkages with the conventional art practice of printmaking, thereby giving it a new role and lineage. What seems to be predominantly at work in these registers is the novelty that is attached to the term 'New Media Art', even while it exists outside of its own techno-historical specificity.

The specific dispersions of New Media Art, both as a term and a field leave us with contrasting stories. While the continuous sub-categorizations within the field (software art, crowd source art) broadly attempted to move away from implications of newness that is attached to New Media Art. Conventional fields of art practice such as printmaking tend to domesticate it for building 'new' conceptual links with the present and history.

CONCLUSION

By unraveling the artistic, curatorial and archival processes fuelled by the new media, I have posed questions to the field of art history and its associations with teleology. Within the discourses of art history, there have been three larger categories within which the technology based-art so far has been conceptualized. One is by the frame of the avant-garde, tracing its genealogy to Marcel Duchamp and the practices of Conceptual Art. Secondly, by the discourses of Post Modernism, (majorly influenced by Baudrillard, Lyotard and others) guided by the understanding that postmodern technologies have fuelled the New Media Art practices. Thirdly, through the Post-Medium condition

proposed by Rosalind Krauss.¹⁰⁴ Beyond this, the discipline of art history has tried to accommodate the field of New Media Art in a teleological process of signification, thinking of it as a blip on the radar, which did not fulfill its promise or responsibility towards the established histories of representation. The shifts of the New Media Art only began to be majorly explained by the technological terms such as interactivity, connectivity and computability, thereby facilitating its understanding as a mere technological enterprise that behaves in certain distinct ways and produces certain effects on the viewer.

While being aware about the danger of falling in the novelty trap one can't at the same time be completely ignorant about the fact that new media was instrumental in opening the questions of 'newness' outside the history of the avant-garde. It opened unprecedented issues around the entanglement of technology, forms, power, capital, institutions, artistic subjectivity and geographies. What I am hinting is that, the configuration and dissolution of the 'new' in the new media were facilitated through a diverse range of conditions, circumstances and radical displacements which were not adequately registered by the discourses of art history.

Further, the dislodging of the 'new' can be seen as a shift from the domains of the new media to the digital. The utopic imaginative domain of the new media is taken over by the matrix of the digital through extensive geographical remappings of the world, marking sites, networks, nodes and so on. These were channels through which data is built, organized, circulated and consequently, controlled. In a nutshell, this can be seen

¹⁰⁴ Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, 'The Art Formerly Known as New Media', *Rethinking Curating : Art After New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2010 pp.38-50

as a transition from the *The Hybrid Workspace* (Internet utopia) of the new media to the *CTRL [space]* of the digital (surveilled space).¹⁰⁵ The chapter that follows will expand on digital, viewing it not merely as a technology, but as a matrix of forces, mobilities and controls instrumental in reconceptualizing the conventional conceptions of temporalities and territorialities within the cultures of the contemporary.

¹⁰⁵ The Hybrid Workspace was a temporary media lab which operated during the 100 days of Documenta X (Kassel, Germany, JUNE-September 1997). For over 200 participants this was the “summer of content”. Fifteen groups consisting of artists, activists, critics and their guests presented their work, produced new concepts and started campaigns that developed and continued long after the gathering. The sharing of the archive of these documents extends the diversity of languages of today’s independent new media culture in Europe and beyond. On the other hand *CTRL [space]* an exhibition held at ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany in 2001 addressed the rapid rise of the surveillance especially after the 9/11 attacks in New York. The increasing presence of control through Digital surveillance is addressed by this exhibition. Further, the issue of surveillance and that of Intellectual Property Rights are considered to be some of the central forces that dislodged the utopia of new in the ‘new’ media. The Hybrid Workspace Archive, *Documenta X*, Kassel 1997 <http://www.medialounge.net/lounge/workspace/> (Accessed July 20, 2012). Also *CTRL [space]*, ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2001 <http://ctrlspace.zkm.de/e/>, (Accessed July 20, 2012).

CHAPTER III

DIGITAL CONSTELLATION IN THE 'CONTEMPORARY'

INTRODUCTION

The challenge of talking about the past in its general totality is two-fold. Firstly, there is an assumption that history is a single grand linear idea of time that needs to be peeled layer by layer, filled gap by gap, all the while maintaining the objectivity intact. Secondly, a belief, that the chronology of cultural practice and its associated social contexts helps us in contributing to the larger conception of history. Such engagements with past, more often, overshadows and appropriates the multiplicities of cultural processes that exist in and belong to different and even contrasting registers of time and space.

The hesitation to recognize the varied lives of practices by dominant historicist narratives results in the stitched incisions, smoothed interruptions and cemented seepages of those sites that hold the potential to question the most fundamental premises of art history and its dominant teleological approach.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the teleological approach and its ideas of time proves to be inadequate while dealing with the ‘messiness’ of the contemporary¹⁰⁷, where time is simultaneously folded like a paper boat and a paper rocket, and thrown into the vastness of the sea and sky to inhabit the multiple registers of its flows.

American art historian and critic, Hal Foster recently circulated a ‘Questionnaire on “The

¹⁰⁶ In its surgical definition, *incision* is a cut made in skin or the flesh. My specific invocation of this concept refers to a break in the flow of historical time, thereby questioning the very normative logic of linearity. *Interruption*, on the other hand is a halt or break in the continuity of the time and its processes. *Seepage* as referred by the Raqs Media Collective is the “action of many currents of fluid material leaching onto a stable structure, entering and spreading through it by way of pores, until it becomes a part of the structure, both in terms of its surface, and at the same time as it continues to act on its core, to gradually disaggregate its solidity. To, crumble it over time with moisture”. See Raqs Media Collective, *Seepage*, Stemberg Press, New York, 2010, p.112.

¹⁰⁷ Ravi Sundaram referred in Monica Narula, ‘Sarai - One Year in the Public Domain’ in *TELEVISION & NEW MEDIA* Vol. 3 No. 4, November 2002 pp. 404–412, Sage Publications, 2002 p. 407.

Contemporary”” to the art historians and critics of Europe and America, to reflect on the state of the contemporary art history in its many peculiar relationships to contemporary art. Foster considers in this questionnaire two fundamental and paradoxical positions that contemporary art seems to take. On the one hand, ‘ in its very heterogeneity, much present practice seems to float free of historical determination, conceptual definition, and critical judgment. Such paradigms as “the neo-avant-garde” and “postmodernism,” which once oriented some art and theory, have run into the sand, and, arguably, no models of much explanatory reach or intellectual force have risen in their stead’.¹⁰⁸ Paradoxically, on the other hand, ‘ “contemporary art” has become an institutional object in its own right: in the academic world there are professorships and programs, and in the museum world, departments and institutions, all devoted to the subject, and most tend to treat it as apart, not only from pre-war practice but from most post-war practice as well’.¹⁰⁹ The responses to this questionnaire majorly acknowledged that there is a crisis within the existing conceptualizations of contemporary discourse while dealing with these seemingly inconsistent flows of contemporary art practice. Mark Godfrey, an England-based art historian, for instance, responds saying –

‘We should stop worrying about the non-appearance of new paradigms, and question the formulation “contemporary”. We should take up the suggestion of art practice in order to imagine new forms of temporality, new models of relations between art, and time and history, models which do not imply a “lightness of being” or a “floating-free” from the conditions of history (nothing of the sort!) but instead less linear and more entangled forms of historical connection’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Hal Foster, ‘Questionnaire on “The Contemporary”’, *OCTOBER* 130, Fall 2009, p.3

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*p.3

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*p.32

Okwui Enwezor responds to this contention by arguing for foregrounding the drive of contemporary practices towards an off-center principle, namely the multi-focal, multi-local, hetero-temporal and dispersed structures around which contemporary art is often organized and convened. This off-center is not the same as the logic of de-centered locations; rather, the off-center is structured by the simultaneous existence of multiple centers.¹¹¹ Enwezor further suggests,

“The off-center allows the emergence of multiplicity, the breakdown of cultural or locational hierarchies, the absence of a singular locus. In a sense, off-centered zones of production, distribution, and reception of contemporary art articulate a dispersal of the universal, a refusal of the monolithic, a rebellion against the monocultural. The objective is to propose a new alignment, one that could succinctly capture both the emergence of multiple cultural fields, as they overspill into diverse arenas of thinking and practice, and a reconceptualization of the structures of legitimation that follow in their wake.”¹¹²

A recently held panel discussion entitled, 'Has the moment of the contemporary come and gone?' initiated by Raqs Media Collective, along with Daniela Zyman and Ravi Sundaram, has responded to the issues on the contemporary put forth by Foster.¹¹³ In his introduction to the panel, Jeebesh Bagchi (of Raqs Media Collective) introduced the idea of 'insurrection of capital'¹¹⁴ to look at the transformations of the past 20 years within the field of contemporary art and life. The insurrection of capital is understood to be a major upsurge and proliferation of capital flows beyond the limits of the state authority. He argues that Foster and many other critical voices see a certain complicity and suspicion

¹¹¹ *ibid.* p.38

¹¹² *ibid.* p. 38

¹¹³ This panel discussion was put together by Raqs Media Collective as part of the Speaker's Forum at the India Art Fair 2012, New Delhi, INDIA

¹¹⁴ A term borrowed from Kaushik Bhaumik 'The Strange Case of the Serpent who Went to Sleep', upcoming publication *Raqs Media Collective: A Case Book*, Ed., Philip Monk, AGYU, Canada.

around the contemporary as being a big part of this insurrection of capital, and thereby being in a site of contamination. This body of thinking, as he further elaborates, is a mission of voices that are keen to rescue art from the contemporary vis-a-vis the insurrection of capital. Bagchi tells us about certain other trajectories of thinking about the contemporary that inaugurate questions, especially around time, through the focus on the insurrection of capital. The proliferation of institutions, practices, networks and other sites introduces the dynamic of spatiality, which in turn opens up temporality in a new way. The linear, homogenous time of progress of capital is broken, and a fractured idea of time, with multiple entry points seems to be pushing through this rapid insurrection of capital.¹¹⁵

Agamben emerges as a salient frame of reference in this new understanding of the temporality of the contemporary. Taking the idea of fractured and broken time proposed by Agamben in his famous essay, 'What is contemporary', Ravi Sundaram argues that the notion of the contemporary as proposed by Agamben is neither really about the present nor about being out of joint with time, instead it is directed towards the present. So to be contemporary is not to exist out of joint with time. Instead, it is an ability to perceive its darkness. The contemporaries of the contemporary, therefore, according to Agamben, are not the ones who see its shining light, but ones who are able to perceive its shadows, its darkness.¹¹⁶ Drawing from this, Agamben proposes a model for the contemporary which is a notion of broken time. The notion of the broken time as

¹¹⁵ Rags Media Collective, Ravi Sundaram, Daniela Zyman, Has the Moment of the Contemporary Come and Gone?, *Field Notes*, Asia Art Archive, Issue 1, 2012 <http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Details/1192> (Accessed on June 25, 2012)

¹¹⁶ In this context Agamben refers to a poem entitled 'The Century' where Russian poet Osip Mandelstam talks of his own century as a beast and one, that has broken backbone. *ibid*

proposed by Agamben is the time that cannot reach us. Its back bone is broken and we - that is – the thinker, the artist, the practitioner – exist and operate at this fractured point of time. Sundaram further suggests that Agamben’s thesis of the contemporary clubs three things together – firstly, the idea of the untimely proposed by Nietzsche.¹¹⁷ Secondly, that of the archaic which has been there throughout 20th century art, and thirdly, his model of the inversion of darkness and light. Referring to Agamben, Sundaram proposes that the contemporary is neither about the perception of light or an intimation of the new; nor is it about alterity, as the modernists thought about it. It is around an understanding of darkness that the contemporaneity of the contemporary is situated.¹¹⁸

The problem that arises then is, within this seeming crisis of contemporaneity that is produced by and through the insurrection of capital, where and how does one locate the digital? Does one look at it as a process or as a medium? Or as the various micro registers of capital’s fluid re-organization? The rapid insurrection of capital in the contemporary life is itself produced by dispersed financial markets that ride largely on digital networks and play with its speed. Yet their porosity, leakages, breakdowns, crashes, reversals remind the world that it is running through, and is manned, by the chaotic medium of the

¹¹⁷ The idea of the untimely proposed by Nietzsche is first referred in his *Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche postulates untimeliness, as a condition of being out of joint with time, against the historical fever of modernity. This fever is considered to be in accommodation with the present, and to be contemporary is to be out of joint with the present. It is by being out of time and it is by being out that you can actually perceive things that others cannot (like the perception of Darkness Agamben later refers to). Those who are tied to the epoch, particularly to its historical fever, are not contemporaries, because they cannot manage this notion of being joined and yet not joined. Ravi Sundaram suggests that this notion of untimely in the contemporary is majorly invoked by the artists in their practices. Ravi Sundaram, ‘Has the Moment of the Contemporary Come and Gone?’, *Field Notes*, Asia Art Archive, Issue 1, 2012 <http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Details/1192> (Accessed June 25, 2012)

¹¹⁸ Ravi Sundaram puts together views on ‘contemporary’ moving from the postulations of Theodor Adorno, to Friedrich Nietzsche to Giorgio Agamben, also suggesting that after Agamben’s thesis the debate of the contemporary has been on halt. Ravi Sundaram, ‘Has the Moment of the Contemporary Come and Gone?’, *Field Notes*, Asia Art Archive, Issue 1, 2012 <http://www.aaa.org.hk/FieldNotes/Details/1192> (accessed on 25th June 2012)

digital. Further, the digital is also the space of a vast production of contemporary capitalism, where shutdowns, bankruptcies, injunctions and even class struggles are operative.¹¹⁹ It seems to me that there is some difficulty in strictly locating the digital in any specifically defined singularity; instead it can conceptually be taken as a constellation of forces, mediums and processes with varied levels of intensities and inconsistencies.¹²⁰

Thinking specifically through the digital in the larger field called contemporary art, two interdependent dimensions seem to be persisting. One sees the digital as a materiality of communication that fuels speed links (e-mails, websites, file sharing sites) across sites (galleries, publishing houses, museums, foundations, artist-run spaces) through which contemporary art as a field has proliferated. Secondly, one also needs to look at digital as a specialized practice/field of artistic production, diversely engaging with artificial life and intelligence, viewer interaction, political and social activism, networks and telepresence, social networking and other virtual worlds such as Second Life.¹²¹ These practices are often self-referential/critical towards the very domains they adopt and the specific imaginary realities they adhere to. On the other hand, precisely after the famous *Documenta 11*, there has been a sudden upsurge of the documentary form into the spaces

¹¹⁹ In its strict technological definition, digital is understood to be a technological system that converts and produces different forms of information, images, audio and video into discrete and discontinuous data values.

¹²⁰ From the past decade or so, the technologies of digital have generated different forms of lament and celebration. While the lament has been situated in the physical distance and loss, digital produced from touching, turning, folding the physical archival/ material objects. The Celebration has been centered on the afterlife and visibility digital gave to the sites that otherwise didn't occur to the dominant historical retina. For Instance, the material reorganization of sites such as archives is a good example to illustrate both the lament and the celebration. While the lament was in regard to the distance digital archive produced from touching the actual physical documents of the past, the celebration has been regarding newer pace of visibility and accessibility provided through the interface of the digital. Further, the innumerable possibilities of data retrieval and its access gave the very structure of the archive a completely new dimension, where the logics of approaching past are multiple. For detailed description on this shift the 'Archive in the New Media Folds' section of the previous chapter.

¹²¹ Christiane Paul, *Digital Art*, Second Edition, Thames & Hudson world of art, London 2008.

of contemporary art. These digital experimental documentaries and docu-fictions are translated into a variety of installation set-ups, continuously changing their roles, forms and conceptual contexts. Rhetorically speaking, they have been acting as conceptual metadatas of global transformations and conflicts, registering different kinds of anxieties across landscapes of contemporary life. However, there is no strict demarcation of genre or style that can be attributed to media practitioners and collectives. They operate and move through different levels of artistic, philosophical and political engagements in the production of practice. For instance, the research-based practice model with which a majority of these practices work, facilitates a dense historical understanding regarding the sites they research on further, the curatorial formats with which these materials are displayed already puts them into a nuanced conceptual perspective.¹²² These broader formal organizations of digital practice also exist in a continuous mode of transition, as they move across as events, in techno-seminars, moving image film festivals, art exhibitions, museum shows, classroom presentations, dissertation chapters and Internet, precisely engaging in an arena of mobilities and significations.

This massive expansion across geographic locations, cultural processes and curatorial imaginations complicates the logic of conceptualizing these practices as territorially defined terrains. In other words, the landscapes of contemporary cultures increasingly mobilized by the digital need a different historical attitude, one that thinks beyond dominant totalizing categories of the nation-state. These existing historical framings seem to be inadequate especially for their aspirations to build homogeneities of artistic imagination and to perceive the varied inhabitations of contemporary practices, as part of

¹²² Majority of references to works that shall appear later in this chapter will make this point more clear.

singular territorial identity. In this light, borrowing certain conceptual threads from the fields of contemporary art history and curatorial theory, the chapter begins to take up a curatorial approach towards history, where past and the present, and past in the present, can be seen in their multiple co-existences and co-inhabitations, of shifting temporalities and territorialities through the fields of cultural practice. In a nutshell, this chapter works with the idea of curatorial assemblage that brings together the metaphors of ships, seas, solids, liquids, *impostors*, *missing persons* to speak through the multiple dimensions of the digital and vis-a-vis the insurrection of capital postulated for us by some artistic practitioners.

FLUID EXTENSIONS AND ‘SOLID SEAS’

The chapter begins to think through the larger models of fluids and solids, to speak of both the fluid and solid mobilities/fixities of spatiality and borders in reference to the domains of the digital. Departing from the liquid phase of modernity as suggested by Polish Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, it moves through a range of practices and their provocations that build distinct and even contrasting relationships between fluid and solid dimensions of the world, not in contest, but in a state of continuous redefinition.

Zygmunt Bauman proposed the idea of ‘liquid modernity’¹²³ as a response to the changing dynamics of capital and power circulations after the global expansion fuelled predominantly by developments in the cultures of communication. Speaking of his contemporary present, Bauman invokes the metaphors of ‘fluidity’ and ‘liquidity’ stating

¹²³ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Foreword : On Being Light and Liquid’, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, UK 2000 p. 6

that, ‘the melting of solids’ which is considered to be the permanent feature of modernity has acquired a new meaning and above all, has been redirected to a new target. Now it is the turn of the solids not to melt into air, but their turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot, to get involved in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity. In this era, a new type of war persists, not the one which conquers a new territory, but the one that crushes and dissolves the walls and boundaries that come in the way of newly dispersing liquid flows of capital and power. As Bauman notes, “for power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way.”¹²⁴

However, this specific process of modernity is not necessarily considered optimistic. According to Bauman, the restlessness and openness inherent to liquidity as such, cannot but create greater inequality and more social and economic polarization. These inequalities, according to Bauman, shall be generated by the increasing rise of fluid global elite and the dispersed institutional structures of control that together constitute a programme of disenfranchisement of the poor and other marginal people in the name of their welfare and re-organization.¹²⁵

Keeping in mind Bauman’s thesis of liquidity in terms of capital and power flows, I invoke here a metaphor of territorial waters to speak of digital technologies that indeed acted as major instrumental forces in blurring the borders and boundaries. In the conventional sense, territorial waters are waters that exist within the jurisdiction of the

¹²⁴ *ibid.* p.13,14.

¹²⁵ Reviews by Nicholas Gane on ‘Zygmunt Bauman: Liquid Modernity and Beyond’, ‘Liquid Modernity by Zygmunt Bauman’, ‘The Individualized Society by Zygmunt Bauman’, ‘The Bauman Reader by Zygmunt Bauman; Peter Beilharz’, *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 267-275 Sage Publications, Ltd, 2001

state extending at most 12 nautical miles from the shore land of any coastal state.¹²⁶

Though territorial waters (Fig.3.1) are often seen as contesting spaces, their specific invocation here has a different meaning and role. The collision of the word *water* with *territory* gives a fluid dimension to the understanding of territory. This fluid dimension is particularly interesting because of its ability to stage an understanding of territory, not only as solid land, but also to extend it to fluid water. The fluidity of water further extends the directions of its flow, often helping it seep in and out of various territorial limits, lands and formations.

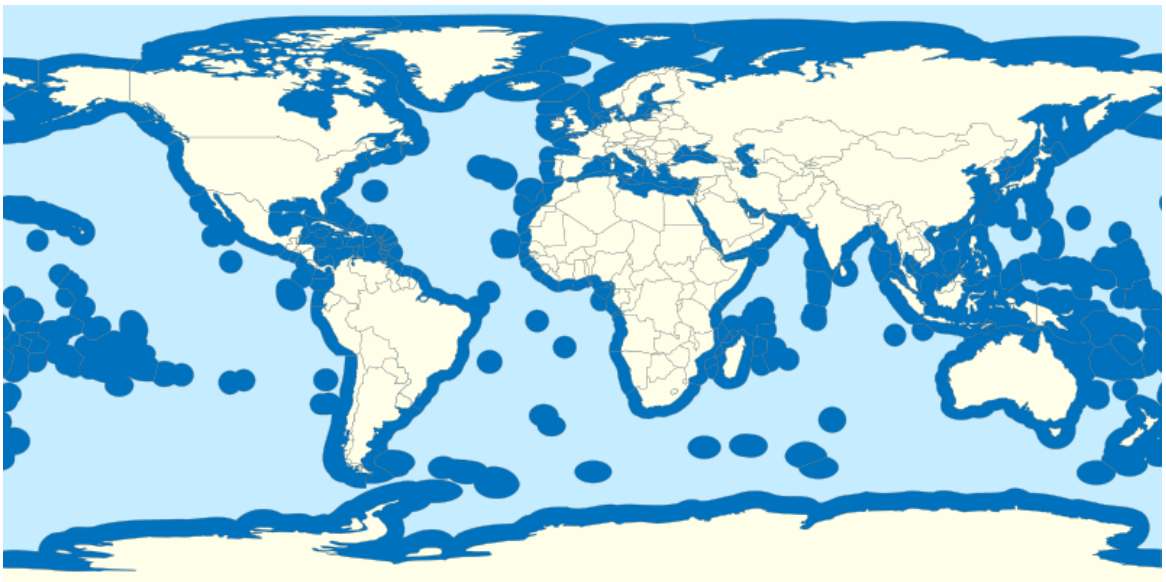


Fig.3.1. Territorial waters of the world, Image courtesy of the Wikipedia – The free online encyclopedia, October 31, 2011

The digital turn in this conceptual frame of territorial waters can be understood as a massive interruption and disruption, perhaps as large as a volcanic eruption, hurricane for that matter even comparable to a *tsunami*, leading many territorial waters to converge

¹²⁶ This particular definition of territorial waters is made by the 1982 ‘United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea’ for an elaborate discussion on territorial waters, Percy Thomas Fenn, ‘Origins of the Theory of Territorial Waters’, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1926), pp. 465-482.

(practices), jump over, spread across and run through to a number of locations and territorial limits.¹²⁷ Every meeting site of these convergences is fragile, as it allows for newer significations/power relations to emerge, often extending beyond the specific baggage of territorial entities they began with. This interruption is also instrumental in variously extending the fluid dimensions of the present in the ways practices are made, shared, across sites and contexts. The concept of interruption and disruption are useful in contrast to something like an intervention in identifying the repercussions of the digital on artistic practice. While an intervention is like an arrow that is pre-figured with some definitive motive to intervene, interruptions and disruptions are like teasers to the very foundations of practice that swing their directions to terrains we have not anticipated or foreseen.

To bring into play territorial waters is also to point our attention to the fact that the baggage of territories within contemporary practice is shrunken, diluted and perhaps dissolved in its circulations and flows. The larger labels of nationality and ethnicity are unpacked to reinvent more mobile forms, where identities and significations liquefy on the move and as they move.¹²⁸

As Irit Rogoff suggests us, the meaning of the work/practice is not immanently hidden but generated as the event unfolds.¹²⁹ According to this logic, every event is a new

¹²⁷ *Tsunami*, is conventionally understood to be a series of water waves caused by the displacement of large bodies of water, such as a sea and ocean. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and other underwater explosions are some of the causes that might lead to a *tsunami*. Given the negative implications and tragic memories that *tsunami* as a term evokes, its specific usage in the context of this chapter is devoid of its actual referent, but taken as a metaphor to mark the intensity of interruptions the digital shift produced in the existing pace of cultural practices.

¹²⁸ Parul Dave Mukherji, 'Classroom and the Plane of the Contemporary', upcoming publication, *Raqs Media Collective: A Case Book*, Ed., Philip Monk, AGYU, Canada .

¹²⁹ Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling : An Embodied Criticality', <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

unfolding, as it allows the practice to acquire a new form, new intensity and more importantly a newer configuration of speech. The instances I cite during the course of this chapter collaborate to produce an event, one that does not have any strictly pre-defined goal. Instead, they unfold to both produce and dissolve a range of postulations on mobility, capital, trade, the digital and subjectivity, moving and building levels of conceptual relationships and contradictions.

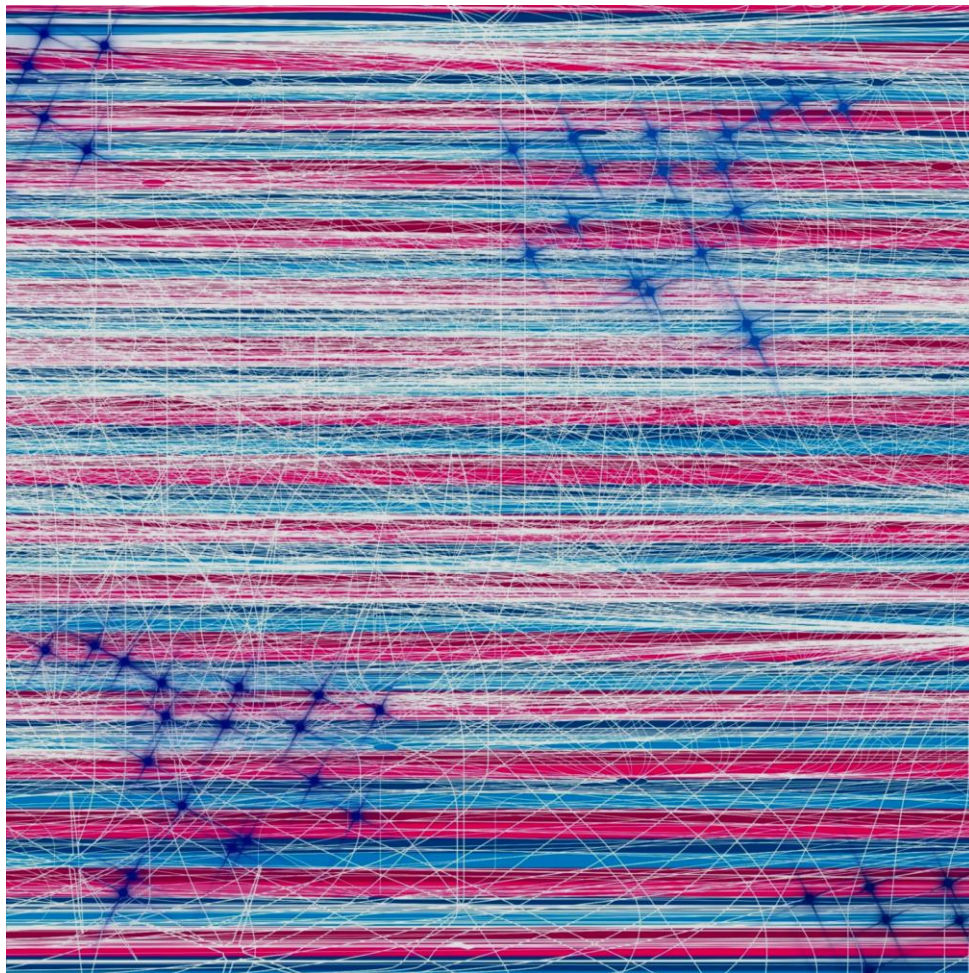


Fig. 3.2. Raqs Media Collective, *Work in Progress*, 2012 © Raqs Media Collective

The digital drawing on the computer screen at Raqs Media Collective's studio is the site from where I shall begin with (Fig.3.2). As a recent work in progress, this image has led my attention to terrains I have not foreseen in the past. Partly resembling a world-scape,

and partly like a memory drawing, the process of this work was actually materialized in reference to the proliferation of the Collective's practice and its frequent voyages. On a second take, the image resonates through/across the lines of experience we inhabit in today's world that is made up of the sign system of graphic scribbles. It suggests to us imaginary geographies beyond a specific cartographic representation, aiding us to see them as threads, lines and color hues, whose beginnings and belongings are multiple and are continuously multiplied.



Fig. 3.3 Raqs Media Collective, *The Knots that Bind are the Knots that Fray*. 2010 Seven screen digital film installation (transferred from HD) Screen One: 1'24", Screen Two: 59", Screen Three: 1'09", Screen Four: 2'10", Screen Five: 1'02", Screen Six: 56", Screen Seven: 1'43". 2010. © Raqs Media Collective

In another register of voyages, transitions and departures, Raqs Media Collective uses found footage of the last voyage of the ship-building cranes down the Tyne River in northern England (Fig.3.3).

“In early April 2009 the last of the distinctive Titan cranes from the Tyneside Swan Hunter shipyard in northern England were loaded up onto a heavy load vessel and sailed out of the River Tyne. These vast iconic forms were dismantled and shipped to a new life at the Bharati shipyard on the West coast of India. This narrative forms the background to the seven-screen video work - *The Knots that Bind are the Knots that Fray*. The ghostly forms within the images allude to floating worlds, to the enchantment of industrial machinery and the life of ships. They remain indefinite and suggestive of place, evoking an archive built by acts of remembering. The video enthusiast's footage of a piece of local history is transformed in this work into vignettes from a fantastical voyage. The work is both about drifting away and coming ashore. The 'knots' of the title can refer both to nautical speed as well as to the complex ties that bind people to histories. Ties hold things together and speed frays them apart. The knots that bind are the knots that fray.”¹³⁰

The dismantling of the cranes followed by its displacement lets its histories float away from northern England and float into sites on the distant west coast of India, acquiring newer forms and perhaps roles. The footage placed in this curatorial form by Raqs Media Collective, is not only the register of the specific voyages that history has not registered, but a reminder for us to think about histories of spaces/places, also, in terms of past/lost voyages and found footage.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Raqs Media Collective, ‘The Knots that bind are the Knots that Fray’, 2010. http://raqsmediacollective.net/result_CC.aspx?id=63&type=works (Accessed April 12, 2012).

¹³¹ In a distinct, but intriguing instance of projects developed with found footage, The Atlas Group’s *I think it would be better*, a work developed from a six – minute video tape that was received in 2000 from some anonymous source offers an interesting take. The group researched thoroughly about the tape and found that it was shot at the Comiche Beirut’s seaside walkway in Lebanon, which was then a renowned as a pleasant place to walk, talk and jog. It was also known to be a favorite meeting place for political pundits, spies, double agents, fortune tellers and phrenologists. In 1992, Lebanese security agents had set up

In a contrasting register of voyage and journeys, a collective named *Multiplicity*¹³² based in Italy argues that the territorial waters have lost fluidity and become solid around Europe. On Christmas night in 1996, a ship which the *Multiplicity* collective calls the ‘the ghost ship’ (Fig.3.4 and 3.5) carrying 283 Tamil, Pakistani and Indian migrants sunk in the Mediterranean sea, leading to their death. The investigation of ‘the ghost ship’ project tells us that despite the statements of the survivors and the discovery of human remains in fishermen’s nets, for five years the authorities of the countries involved in the sinking denied the tragedy. Proof only came to light with the pictures taken by the journalist Giovanni Maria Bellu using an underwater video camera nineteen miles off the coast of Sicily.

From this point of reference, the collective postulates and I quote,

“The Mediterranean is becoming a "Solid Sea". A territory ploughed by pre-determined routes, unsurpassable boundaries and subdivided into specialized and strictly regulated bands of water. A solid space, crossed at different depths and with different vectors by clearly distinct fluxes of people, goods, information and money”.¹³³ Whoever enters the Mediterranean today has to acquire a stable entity, “whether they be immigrants, fisherman, military personnel, cruise passengers, oil

cameras alongside the walkway strip placed in the minivan cafes lined at the strip. The person who posted this video to *The Atlas Group* was one of the operators of camera #17 who diverted his camera away from the designated target towards the sunset each day. He was later dismissed by the authorities, but permitted to keep his sunset footage. When *The Atlas Group* finally found the operator, in an interview he stated that ‘he would focus his camera on the sun when he thought it was about to set and he would return to his duties once it has set.’ See, *The Atlas Group in Documenta 11_Platform 5 : Exhibition Catalogue*, Hatze Cantz Publishers, Kassel 2002 p. 180.

¹³² “Multiplicity is an Italian collective based in Milan which defines itself as a ‘territorial investigation agency’ using the term territorial in a Deleuzian mode that entails a philosophico-political aspiration for deterritorialisation, the breaking down of borders and boundaries. Active in the fields of urbanisation, architecture, the visual arts and culture in general, Multiplicity initiates and develops projects in different parts of the world. This multidisciplinary collective is made up of architects, geographers, artists, urban planners, photographers, sociologists, economists, filmmakers, etc.” Coulter-Smith Graham, ‘The Media Art Alternative: Multiplicity at Documenta 2002’, *Deconstructing Installation Art*, Casiad Publishing, 2006, [http://www.installationart.net/Chapter3 Interaction /interaction05.html#the mediaart](http://www.installationart.net/Chapter3%20Interaction%20Interaction05.html#the%20mediaart) (Accessed July 21, 2012).

¹³³ ‘The Ghost Ship’ is part of the project Solid Sea by *Multiplicity* <http://www.multiplicity.it/index2.htm> (Accessed April 4, 2012).

platform workers, or beach holiday makers, their costumes will not be abandoned until the end of their journey across the water.”¹³⁴

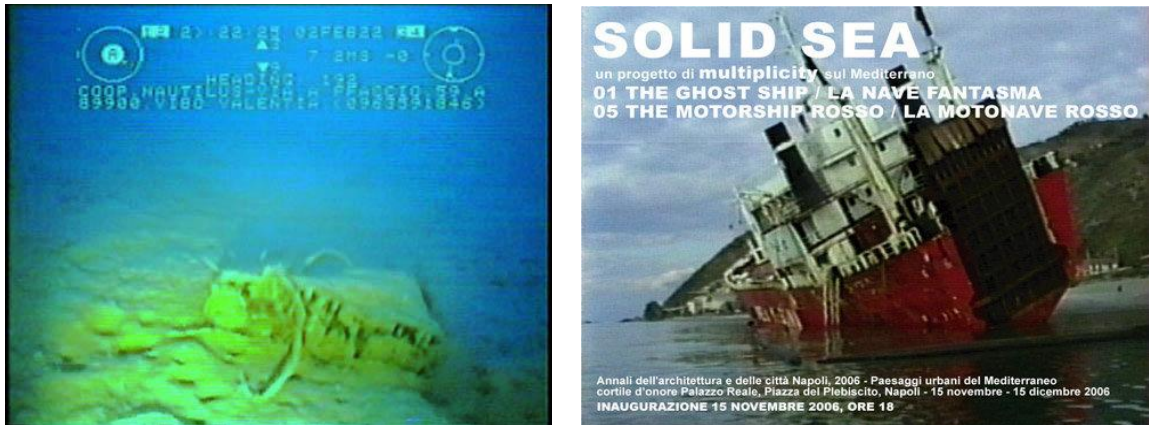


Fig.3.4. (left) The Underwater images of ‘the ghost ship’ have been produced by the newspaper La Repubblica for their reportage “Naufragio Nave Fantasma 1996” (2001) edited by Giovanni Maria Bellu (right) poster of *Multiplicity*, *Solid Sea*



Fig. 3.5 (left) *Multiplicity*, *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship*, 2002, Installation View, detail. (Right) *Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship*, Documenta, Kassel, 2002.

Multiplicity's suggestion of ‘Solid Sea’ leaves us in a paradoxical position, showing us halts in the seemingly interrupted flow of the territorial waters. It also throws light on metaphors other than the Tsunami. Since, digital is not just a single homogenous event of happening (like the *tsunami*), but a cluster of processes and continuous occurrences. Perhaps then, various degrees of fluid intensities such as the flows, ebbs and whirlpools

¹³⁴ *Multiplicity*, ‘ID : A Journey Through A Solid Sea’ in Artists Writing/Project Proposals for Documenta 11, *Documenta 11_Platform 5 : Exhibition Catalogue*, Hatze Cantz Publishers, Kassel 2002 p. 577.

can be mobilized for speech, as all of these co-inhabit the changing dynamics of the floating sea, not as events in any defined sequence, but as multiple and contemporaneous registers of intensities and interruptions. In certain ways, ‘Solid Sea’ brings to our attention a different perception of the supposedly fluid contemporaneity, locating perhaps its darkness that Agamben refers to. It also reminds us of the production of distinct and defined subjectivities, where the movement and mobility as such can only occur within the paradigms and costumes set in place by the state such as citizen and population, as they say, the vast scape of the Mediterranean sea seems to be accommodating only a ‘distinctly defined fluxus of people, information and goods’. This anticipation of completely formed subjects is conceptually displaced and unsettled by the practices and processes of the contemporary. For instance, take Raqs Media Collective’s invocation of figures such as the impostors and missing persons, who are not subjects in the complete sense; , they exist in a continuous flow of becoming, but never actually become. They are figures that are always on the move, in disguise and cannot be easily looked upon within the categories conceptualized by the state.¹³⁵ ‘They are not territorially bound; they are everywhere, dispersed – in time, in space. They come and stand in, like specters,

¹³⁵ For instance, in a work titled *Impostor in the Waiting Room*, Raqs Media collective thinks through the figure of Impostor in relation to what happens when modernity encounters its shadow. They suggest that “As a group of practitioners who navigate routes in and out of modernity, its past, present and future, on a daily basis in Delhi - the city where we live, and in the course of our travels elsewhere, we have come to realize that the world is densely encrusted with ‘waiting rooms’ - spaces for transients to catch their breath as they prepare for the arduous ascent to the high promontory of modernity. The image of the “waiting room” gestures towards the sense of incompleteness and elsewhere that fills those spaces of the world about which the overriding judgment is that they are insufficiently modern – that they are merely patchy, inadequate copies of ‘somewhere else’. Such waiting rooms exist in the very heart of that ‘somewhere else’ – in New York and Los Angeles, in London and Singapore – but it is outside these islands that they have their truest extent. Most of the world, in fact, inhabits such antechambers of modernity. Waiting Rooms everywhere are full of Impostors waiting to be auditioned, waiting to be verified, waiting to know and to see whether or not their ‘act’ passes muster, and whether they can cross the threshold and arrive on to the plane where ‘history is truly made’.” Raqs Media Collective, *Impostor in the Waiting Room* <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/result CC.aspx?id=92 &type=works> (Accessed July 10, 2012).

phantoms, more as intruders into the conceptual worlds, messing up neat partitions and legibility.’¹³⁶ And as non-subjects or not yet subjects, they point us to directions of unbounding and unsettling existing territorial understandings, by postulating conceptual intrusions and teases.

In another project that expands the discussion of mobilities, *Multiplicity* takes our attention to the stories/realities of borders in the Mediterranean that have been continuously reconfigured in the increasing global reorganization.(Fig.3.6) Under the heading Border Device(s), *Multiplicity* looks at boundaries as devised in the forms of Funnels, Pipes, Folds, Sponges, Phantom limbs and Enclosures, a variety of solid passages through which flows of water, people, goods and information are channelized and controlled.

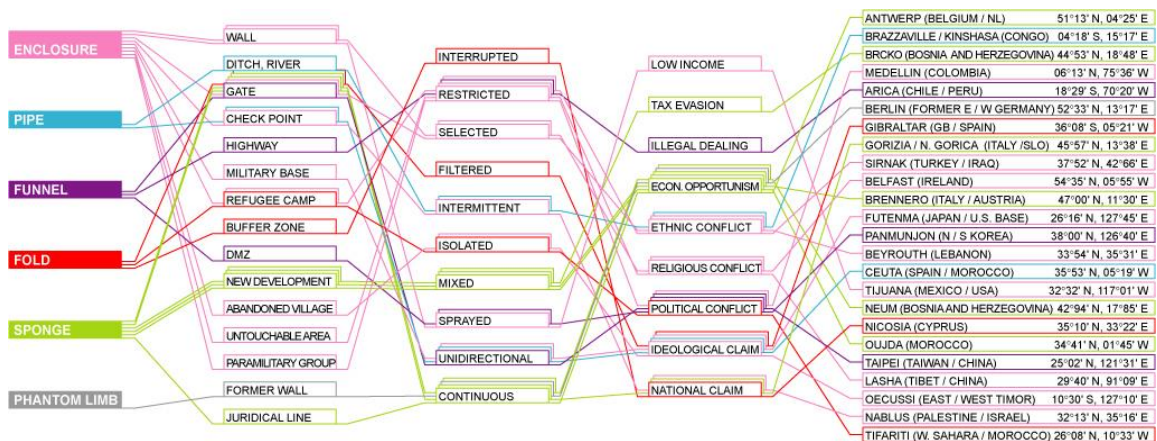


Fig.3.6. Map of the Border Matrix, conceived as part of Border Device(s) project by *multiplicity* in 2003 produced in the occasion of the exhibition territories at the Berlin Kunst-Werke, Germany.

“*Funnels* channel the disorderly flows of objects and individuals to place – along a coast or a border – such as the boats that ferry immigrants between the Mediterranean. Some boundaries are like the impenetrable *Pipes*, like the highways which cross the Israel and Palestine. There are boundaries that emerge

¹³⁶ Raqs Media Collective, ‘Concept Intruder’, upcoming publication, *Raqs Media Collective: A Case Book*, Ed., Philip Monk, AGYU Canada.

between the *Folds* of two territories in conflict, such as the strip of desert cutting through the Nicosia. Boundaries that are like *Sponges* attract populations and investment to create new communities. Like *Phantom Limbs*, other boundaries continue to function even when they no longer exist. But above all, everywhere in the world there are *Enclosures*: barbed wire or concrete barriers, or mobile ones.”¹³⁷

Boundaries they further argue are “the sensors of contemporary world dynamics like dynamic device, borders vibrate with the energy and resistance that drive current history - for better as well as for the worse.” *Multiplicity*'s invocation introduces a diversity of passages leading the so-called flows of practices, people, information and goods. They foreground the relationships between the different range of solid entities and their role in channelizing and controlling liquid flows. This organization and movement works in quite contrast to the proposition by Bauman that sees global expansion precisely in terms of liquid flows, where reconfigured forms of solids (like suggested by multiplicities) still seem to be playing a crucial role. This suggestion by *Multiplicity* further directs our attention towards examples such as culverts, sluices and conduits— some of the very

¹³⁷*Funnels* are like boundaries which gather and select different and dispersed flows within a circumscribed threshold. They normally canalize a flow from one side of the fence to the other, selecting its elements and giving it a direction. Often the diameter/ control of the funnel defines its permeability. The Control can be Unilateral or Bilateral. *Pipes* are cylindrical surfaces surrounding a flow (of people, goods, information). The entrance and exist are normally located at their extreme ends. The control can be unilateral or bilateral. *Folds* are surfaces that pop-up from the doubling up of a principle line and that take on a sort of "third" nature; they are in some way 'other' than the two spheres that the principal boundary line separates: no man's land, interstitial or a residual spaces, characterized for their void condition. Folds are normally controlled whether by a neutral third party or by no one. *Sponges*: Sponges are border-devices generated around a former border, acting as an attractor of flows. People, goods, capitals, buildings are gathered along a border line, often producing a sort of linear environment, A pregnant, double border line. *Phantom Limbs* are Borders which continue to act also if their physical presences disappear. Often the memory - and the enduring presence - of a former situation re-generate the border. There is no control from any of the parties that the original border line separated. *Enclosures* are perimetered environments which host within them, groups of individuals or systems of activity. They imply a principle of protection of what is included in the enclosure, and the exclusion of what is external. The control of the perimeter border is often unilateral. *Multiplicity*, Border Matrix, <http://www.multiplicity.it/index2.htm> (Accessed June 30, 2012).

common solid channels and structures used to channelize, different velocities of liquid flows.¹³⁸

While *Multiplicity's* understandings show that the channels through which borders as ideas are conceptualized and re-conceptualized within the once utopian space of possibilities called the Mediterranean, CAMP – an artist's collective based in Mumbai – through their project *Wharfage* - directs our attention to the domains that exist in the free trade routes/relations between Sharjah and Somalia(Fig.3.7).¹³⁹ “Foregrounding the millennia old nautical ties linking the Gulf, South Asia and East Africa, *Wharfage* recasts the Indian Ocean as a space of connection, communication and exchange”¹⁴⁰. Invoking the ideas of ‘free port’ and ‘free trade’, the project speaks of transacting and sharing goods, traders, sailors and workers between the old port of Sharjah and Somalia – a collection of semi-state entities. This engagement, as CAMP formulates it,

“offers a way to think about how "business" and the spectral lives of these commodities are distinct from "global capital". With war ahead, economic recession at its tail (and pirates in the middle), this movement of goods may trace

¹³⁸ *Culverts* are tunnels carrying a stream or open drain under a road or railway *Conduits* are channels for conveying water or other fluid and *Sluices* are seen in two dimensions, one is a *Sluice gate* which is like a sliding gate or other device for controlling the flow of water, especially in a lock gate. *Sluice way* is an artificial water channel for carrying off overflow or surplus water. Sandip K Luis, in email to Srinivas Aditya Mopidevi, April 27, 2012.

¹³⁹ Since 1991, no central government has controlled the entirety of the country, despite several attempts to establish a unified central government. The northwestern part of the country has been relatively stable under the self-declared, but unrecognized, sovereign state of Somaliland. The self-governing region of Puntland covers the northeast of the country. It declares itself to be autonomous, but not independent from Somalia. The Islamist Al-Shabaab controls a large part of the south of the country. The internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government controls only parts of the capital and some territory in the centre of the nation, but has reestablished national institutions such as the Military of Somalia, and is working towards eventual national elections in 2012, when the interim government's mandate expires.

¹⁴⁰ Murtaza Vali, ‘CAMP’s Wharfage Project: Recasting the Indian Ocean as a Space of Contact and Exchange’, November 1, 2009, *Art East*, http://www.arteeast.org/pages/across_history/265/ (Accessed May 20, 2012).

old trade routes, but maps a contemporary landscape: used objects, a diaspora of Somali traders who cannot return and of giant wooden ships made in Salaya.”¹⁴¹

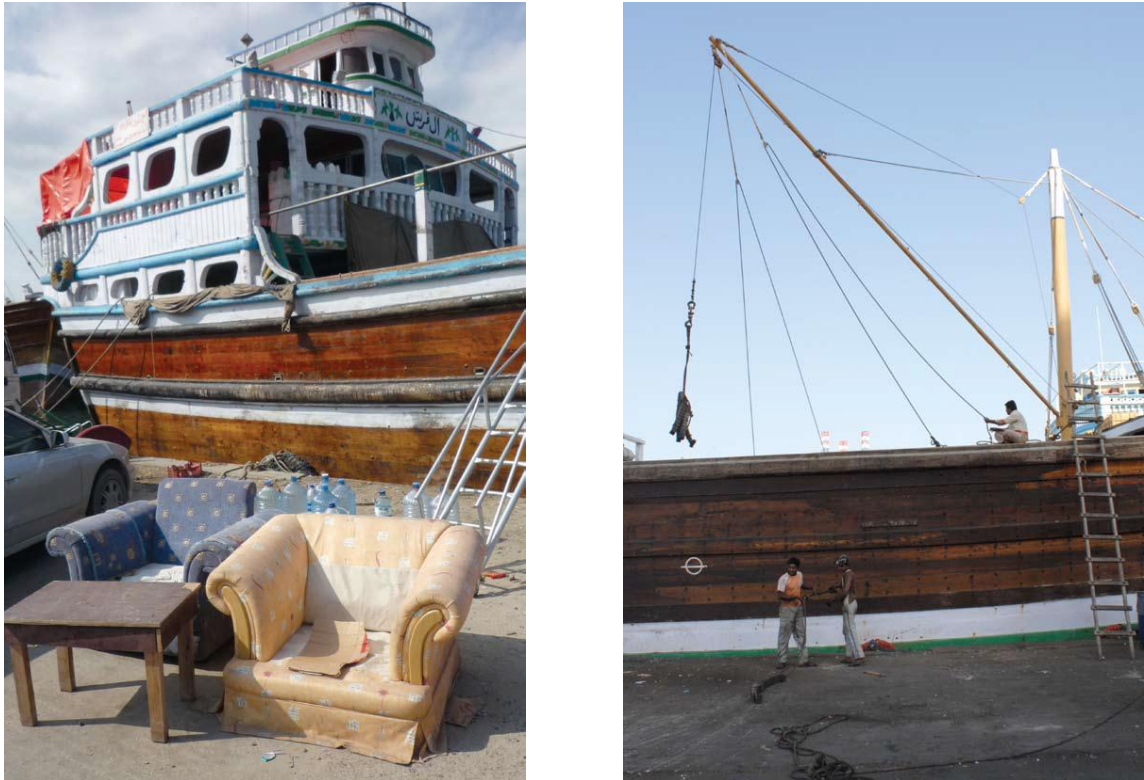


Fig. 3.7. Views of the Wooden Dhows, Photographs from the CAMP’s WHARFAGEa two-part project by CAMP for the 9th Sharjah Biennial. A publication accompanied a series of radio broadcasts at the Sharjah Creek. From 18 –21 March 2009 © CAMP

While CAMP references the free trade and free port, Allan Sekula’s popular *Fish Story* tells us a story of the maritime world, labour and more specifically, the cargo container as the object/sign of capitalism. *Fish Story* (Fig.3.8) speaks of the Maritime world as a world of not only gargantuan automation but, also major presence, of isolated, anonymous hidden work, of great loneliness of workers, their displacement and separation from the domestic sphere.

¹⁴¹ CAMP, *WHARFAGE*, Sharjah Creek 2008 – 2009, this publication accompanied a series of radio broadcasts at the Sharjah Creek. From 18 –21 March 2009, one could tune into Radio Meena on 100.3 FM, within a radius of about 2 kilometres from the port. The project was conceived as part of ‘past of coming days’ a programme curated by Tarek Abou el Fetouh for the 9th Sharjah Biennial 2009



Fig.3.8. Allan Sekula, *Panorama. Mid-Atlantic*, from *Fish Story*, 1988-1995. © Allan Sekula

Sekula's interest as he notes 'is to find a social within the sea'. *Fish Story* is an "art historical" study tracing the lineage of the representation of the sea economy from Dutch seventeenth century painting to the unacknowledged "objective correlative" of the cargo container found in minimalist and pop art, (be it the Brillo Box of Andy Warhol or the serial cubes of Donald Judd). For shippers who speak of "intermodality", the box is more important than the vehicle. So, the package begins to assume a life of its own, a kind of ghostly animation. Sekula speaks of cargo containers as the "coffin of remote labor power" because the labour that produces the transported goods is always somewhere else, located in a fluid, re-assignable sites determined by the relentless quest for lower wages.¹⁴²

The art historical referencing of *Fish Story* is taken to a completely new level by *Periferry* (Fig.3.7), a project mounted by Guwahati-based Desire Machine Collective that

¹⁴² Allan Sekula, *Fish Story: Notes on Work in Artists Writing/Project Proposals for Documenta 11, Documenta 11_Platform 5 : Exhibition Catalogue*, Hatze Cantz Publishers, Kassel 2002 p. 582

transformed a ferry into a physical site of their artistic process. This floating solid space/place titled *Periferry* currently facilitates latent and alternate philosophical and artistic worldviews. Formerly known as M.V. Chandardinga, run by the Department of



Fig.3.9. *Periferry* an Initiative by Desire Machine Collective. Final 3 images – Objects/Origins: Cultural Reimaginings. A site-specific installation by Indrani Baruah at Periferry, 2012

Inland Water Transport, Govt of Assam, India, this vessel was used to ferry people from across the river Brahmaputra and also for transporting cargoes of goods to many places in National waterway 2.¹⁴³ The attempt of the project *Periferry* has been ‘to restore the ferry into a media lab using renewable energy sources and eco-friendly material.’¹⁴⁴ It is also considered to be a turning point to look at the floating relations of the Inland water

¹⁴³ The river Brahmaputra having a length of 891 Km between Bangladesh Border to Sadiya was declared as National Waterway No. 2 (NW-2) on 1st September, 1988.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

transport on the Brahmaputra, an important water body of Asia, connecting Tibet, China, India and Bangladesh. The context of the project largely remains the ferry docked on the river – an ‘in between’ space which is opened up to different kinds of public and private engagements.¹⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

It seems impossible to me, however, to arrest the densely layered solid and liquid flows of digital vis-à-vis ‘insurrection of capital’ by framing them as a constellation, a premise where we began. Perhaps, then ‘moving constellations’ and ‘solid seas’ can be invoked to speak of the relations that persist between different states of mobilities and arrests. In this discontinuous relationship with fluids and solids, digital can be mapped both as a life expanding and life threatening combination of forces. Further, the practices of the digital takes up the task of water diviners tracking fault lines, trapped fluids, seismic zones and even border matrixes.

The logic of looking at the sea or other water bodies as conceptual sites of the social, where transformations can be mapped, realized and argued is seen as the impulse of contemporaneity that the above cited practices share. Bauman’s proposition of the fluid reorganization of power and capital, flowing beyond the barriers and borders of the state is contested by *Multiplicity’s* thesis, by pointing our attention to the solid passages that direct and govern the velocities of flows. In the world that is increasingly communicating through the digital, the border devices are relocated to newer sites, where passwords and plug-ins appear as extended forms of control and surveillance. Yet, the free ports and

¹⁴⁵ Desire Machine Collective, ‘Vision’, *Periferry 1.0*, http://www.periferry.in/about_vision.html (Accessed May 25, 2012) also Sandhini Poddar, Desiring Machines, *Art India*, Volume XVI, ISSUE III, Quarter III, 2011-2012 pp.40-43

trade on wooden *Dhows* continues, unaffected by the changes of the contemporary global capital; ferries get mobilized as Periferrys, for alternate artistic and philosophical imaginations. In a nutshell, all the fishes, all the ships have different stories to tell, of being and belonging, and of politics and possibilities.

CONCLUSION

The preceding pages had attempted not to produce a comprehensive account of the field called ‘New Media Art’ in the cultures of contemporary. Rather, the main impetus was to locate and introduce some focal points from where the conversation on the new media practice can be convened. With reference to some of the central questions, debates and thinking that persist in the field, I have focused on collaborations amongst art practices, historical methods and curatorial interventions.

The focus on the new media practices from India highlighted the diversity of engagements that are anchored across institutions and sites. My specific attention towards the mobilities of these practices was to highlight the limitations of nation-centered approach and its corresponding unilinear temporality in dealing with ensembles such as the New Media Art. In the course of my writing and research, I moved towards various conceptual groupings that I had not anticipated earlier. It thus brought together *Micro Climates, Interruption, Disruption and Recension, Incomplete Stories* within which practices and institutions from India were discussed. Moreover, they attempted to conceptualize a history of New Media Art of(f) (both within and outside) India beyond a necessary logic of the historical timeline. Though the greater visibility of new media practices from India in off-shore locations was seen as one of the crucial issues, the larger intricacies and specific framings of these practices amongst those ‘elsewhere’ locations remain unaddressed during the course of the research, which may be taken up later.

In its engagement with the issue of ‘newness’ in new media, based on views and opinions from the artists, curators and media theorists, the study has explored the problems of seeing new media as a complete break from the older media forms. It had also thought through the ideas such as ‘remediation’ proposed by David Bolter and

Richard Grusin who register new media not as a disjuncture, but as a continuous proliferation from the initial forms of media. The contenders of the novelty also suggested to get away from the 'new' and to mobilize multiple conceptual categories of engagement such as network, archive and interface to break the overarching singularity of the new media. The study's focus on the aspect of the reconfigured lives of artistic, curatorial and archival practices after the new media turn has introduced some of the very fundamental questions to all the three interrelated fields. The conventional artistic object is dematerialized into a process based project, and the artists have begun working in large scale collaborations often blurring their roles with the curators. The practices of the curators that were hitherto confined to enclosed spaces of the museums and galleries had been opened up to different locations and contexts, such as hospitals, parks, malls and streets opening new challenges for the very practice of curating.

The archive in the interface mode almost began overlapping with the curatorial process, where its collection of documents is no more based on the completeness of cultural practices. Instead, (as instances like *Pad.ma* show us) it puts together (almost curatorially) incomplete and leftover stories of past, that might bear the potential to question the very premise of closure. The study argued that these and many other disruptive potentialities of the New Media Art were overlooked by the standard models of art history, that has for long been trying to accommodate it within a teleological process of signification. While imagining a response to the heated issue of novelty of new media, the study arrived at a conceptual terrain of distinction between the 'new media' and the 'digital', registering the former as a utopic imaginative domain of possibilities

and the latter as the extended matrix of control fuelled by rigorous geographical re-mappings of the world.

The impulses of the artistic, curatorial and the archival culminated in certain ways during the focus of this study on the digital practices in the ‘contemporary’¹⁴⁶ The questions of mobility, territoriality and even temporality were also taken to a thorough exploration while locating digital itself as a collection of forces in the inconsistent plane of the ‘contemporary’. Foregrounding the debates on ‘insurrection of capital,’ invoked by Raqs Media Collective and the conceptions of broken and fractured idea of time, initiated by Giorgio Agamben, the study proposed ‘curatorial assemblage’ as a model to think of the digital practices in the ‘contemporary’. By paying close attention to the art practice and its materiality, I have attempted to study a different set of conceptual syntax, one that is thought through the metaphors of fluids, solids, ships, seas, impostors and missing persons, culminating into to a range of paradoxes and possibilities of/through digital practices within plane of the ‘contemporary’.

In a nutshell my attempt through this dissertation was to offer points of departures from the standard art historical modes of creating narratives and move towards potential contestations and re-imaginings - ones that shall perhaps expand our horizons of engagement with the very lineaments of the new media.

¹⁴⁶ Within the methods of practice by *Multiplicity*, Raqs Media Collective, CAMP and Allan Sekula the archival, curatorial and artistic overlap quite often. For Instance - The idea of working with the found footage both by Raqs Media Collective and *Multiplicity* necessitates them to invent curatorial forms to translate these newly visible residues of history. Further, the search for such sites itself begins with a predominant return to the archival to look for the footnotes of the past, perhaps those which have existed outside the logic of the conventional archive.

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- Fig 3.2. Collective Raqs Media, *The Knots that Bind are the Knots that Fray*, 2010. Reproduced from Raqs Media Collective's Website <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/resultCC.aspx?id=63&type=works> (Accessed April 17, 2012) © Raqs Media Collective 2010.
- Fig 3.4. (left) The Underwater images have been produced by the newspaper La Repubblica for their reportage " Naufragio Nave Fantasma 1996" (2001) edited by Giovanni Maria Bellu (right) poster Underwater video camera still of the ship that sunk in the Mediterranean Sea on the Christmas night of 1996. Reproduced from Domus Website <http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/the-solid-sea-installation-in-milan/> (right) Palazzo Reale, Naples 'Solid Sea' Reproduced from Undo.Net <http://www.undo.net/it/mostra/44803> (Accessed July 21, 2012).
- Fig. 3.5. Multiplicity, Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship, Documenta, Kassel, 2002, Installation View, detail, 2. Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship, Documenta, Kassel, 2002.detail 3. Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship, Documenta, Kassel, 2002. Video projection. Referred in DECONSTRUCTING INSTALLATION ART © 2006 Graham Coulter-Smith CASIAD PUBLISHING ISBN 978-0-9548334-4-2. All three reproduced from online version of this book available at <http://www.installationart.net/Chapter3Interaction/interaction05.html> (Accessed July 16, 2012).
- Fig 3.6. Multiplicity, *Map of the Border Matrix*, Border Device(s) project by *multiplicity*. 2003 produced in the occasion of the exhibition territories at the Berlin Kunst-Werke, Germany. Reproduced from the Multiplicity's website <http://www.multiplicity.it/index2.htm> (Accessed July 19, 2012).

- Fig 3.7. CAMP, WHARFAGE , Reproduced from the publication produced for the 9th Sharjah Biennial. 2009.
- Fig 3.8. Allan Sekula, *Panorama. Mid-Atlantic, from Fish Story*, 1988-1995. Reproduced from Drain (online) Magazine Issue ‘SUPERNATURE’ <http://drainmag.com/convergence-zone-the-aesthetics-and-politics-of-the-ocean-in-contemporary-art-and-photography/> (Accessed July 17, 2012) © Allan Sekula 1988-1995
- Fig 3.9. Periferry an Initiative by Desire Machine Collective. Final 3 images - Indrani Baruah, *Objects/Origins: Cultural Reimaginings*. Reproduced from Periferry’s website <http://www.periferry.in> (Accessed, July 21, 2012).