

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

Raqs Media Collective

+ I. The Figure of the Artisan

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

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

Yet, the artisan has neither the anonymity of the worker drone, nor the hyper-individuated solipsism of the artist genius. The artisan is neither faceless, nor a

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

II. Immaterial Labour

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

The combination of widespread cybernetic processes, increased economies of scale, agile management practices that adjust production to demand, and inventory status reports in a dispersed global assembly line, has made the mere manufacture of things a truly global fact. Cars, shoes, clothes, and medicines, or any commodity for that matter, are produced by more or less the same processes, anywhere. The manufacture of components, the research and design process, the final assembly and the marketing infrastructure no longer need to be circumscribed within one factory, or even one nation state or regional economic entity. The networked nature of contemporary industrial production frees the finished good from a fidelity to any one location. This also results in a

corollary condition - a multiplication of renditions, or editions (both authorised as well as counterfeit) of any product line at a global scale. Often, originals and their imitations are made in the same out-sourced sweatshop. The more things multiply, the more they tend towards similarity, in form and appearance, if not in function.

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

Today, the value of a good lies not only in what makes it a thing desirable enough to consume as a perishable capsule of (deferred) satisfaction. The value of a good lies especially in that aspect of it which makes it imperishable, eternally reproducible, and ubiquitously available. Information, which distils the imperishable, the reproducible, the ubiquitous in a condensed set of signs, is the true capital of this age. A commodity is no longer only an object that can be bought and sold; it is also that thing in it which can be read, interpreted and deciphered in such a way that every instance of decryption or encryption can also be bought and sold. Money lies in the meaning that lies hidden in a good. A good to eat must also be a good to think with, or to experiment with in a laboratory. This encryption of value, the codification and concentration of capital to its densest and most agile form, is what we understand to be intellectual property.

How valuable is intellectual property?

How valuable is intellectual property? In attempting to find an answer to a question such as this, it is always instructive to look at the knowledge base that

capitalism produces to assess and understand itself. In a recent paper titled 'Evaluating IP Rights: In Search of Brand Value in the New Economy' a brand management consultant, Tony Samuel of PricewaterhouseCoopers' Intellectual Asset Management Group says:

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

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

The paper goes on to quote Alan Shepard, sometime chairman of Grand Metropolitan plc, an international group specializing in branded food, drinks and retailing which merged with Guinness in 1997 to form Diageo, a corporation which today controls brands as diverse as Smirnoff and Burger King.

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

We have considered brands here at some length, because of the way in which

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

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

III. The Worker as Artist

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

Nothing illustrates this better than the condition of workers in Information

technology enabled industries like Call Centre and Remote Data Outsourcing, which have paved the way for a new international matrix of labour, and given a sudden performative twist to the realities of what is called Globalisation. In a recent installation, called *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)*,² we looked at the performative dimension in the lives of call centre workers.

The Call Centre Worker and her world³

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

Central to this kind of work is a process of imagining, understanding and invoking a world, mimesis, projection and verisimilitude as well as the skilful deployment of a combination of reality and representation. Elsewhere, we have written of the critical necessity of this artifice to work (in terms of creating an impression of proximity that elides the actuality of distance) in order for a networked global capitalism to sustain itself on an everyday basis, but here, what we would like to emphasise is the crucial role that a certain amount of 'imaginative' skill, and a combination of knowledge, command over language,

articulateness, technological dexterity and performativity plays in making this form of labour productive and efficient on a global scale.

IV. Marginalia

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

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

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

A minor artisanal specialisation pertaining to medieval manuscript illumination was the drawing and inscription of what has been called ‘marginalia’ (Ottwell 1995). ‘Marginalists’ (generally apprentices to scribes) would inscribe figures, often illustrating profane wisdom, popular proverbs, burlesque figures and fantastical or allegorical allusions that occasionally constructed a counter-

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

V. Five Figures to Consider

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

Figure One: The Alien Navigates a Boat at Sea

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

landing, transit and refuge, anywhere and everywhere, encircled and annotated in blue ink. A geography lesson learnt in the International University of Exile.

Figure Two: The Squatter builds a Tarpaulin Shelter

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

Figure Three: The Electronic Pirate burns a CD

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

Figure Four: The Hacker Network liberates Software

A community of programmers dispersed across the globe sustains a growing body of software and knowledge - a digital commons that is not fenced in by

proprietary controls. A network of hackers, armed with nothing other than their phone lines, modems, internet accounts and personal computers inaugurate a quiet global insubordination by refusing to let code, music, texts, math and images be anything but freely available for download, transformation and distribution. The freedom is nurtured through the sharing of time, computing resources and knowledge in a way that works out to the advantage of those working to create the software, as well as to a larger public, that begins swapping music and sharing media files to an extent that makes large infotainment corporations look nervously at their balance sheets. The corporations throw their lawyers at the hackers, and the Intellectual Property Shock Troops are out on parade, but nothing can turn the steady erosion of the copyright.

Figure Five: Workers Protect Machines in an Occupied Factory

Seamstresses at the Brukman Garment Factory in Buenos Aires shield their machines against a crowd of policemen intent on smashing them (Klein 2003). The power of the Argentine state provokes a perverse neo Luddite incident, in which the workers are attacked while they try to defend their machines from destruction. The Brukman Factory is a 'fabrica ocupada', a factory occupied by its workers, one of many that have sustained a new parallel social and economic structure based on self regulation and the free exchange of goods and services outside or tangential to the failed money economy - a regular feature of the way in which working people in Argentina cope with the ongoing economic crisis. Turning the rhetoric and tactics of working class protest on its head, the seamstresses of the Brukman factory fight not to withdraw their labour from the circuit of production, but to protect what they produce, and to defend their capacity to be producers, albeit outside the circuit desired by capital.

VI. Significant Transgressions

These five transgressors, a pentacle of marginalia, can help us to think about what the practitioner might need to understand if she wants to recuperate a sense of agency. In very simple terms, she would need to take a lesson in breaking borders and moving on from the migrant, in standing her ground

and staying located from the squatter, in placing herself as a link in an agile network of reproduction, distribution and exchange from the pirate, in sharing knowledge and enlarging a commons of ideas from the hacker, and in continuing to be autonomously productive from the workers occupying the factory.

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

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

to. It embodies different wills to globality and a plethora of global imaginaries that are often at cross-purposes with the dominant rhetoric of corporate globalisation.

The illegal emigrant, the urban encroacher, electronic pirate, the hacker and the seamstresses of the Brukman Factory of Buenos Aires are not really the most glamorous images of embodied resistance. They act, if anything, out of a calculus of survival and self-interest that has little to do with a desire to 'resist' or transform the world. And yet, in their own way, they unsettle, undermine and destabilize the established structures of borders and boundaries, metropolitan master plans and the apparatus of intellectual property relations and a mechanism of production that robs the producer of agency. If we examine the architecture of the contemporary moment, and the figures that we have described, it does not take long to see five giant, important pillars: the consolidation, redrawing and protection of boundaries; the grand projects of urban planning and renewal; and the desire to protect information as the last great resource left for capitalism to mine - which is what Intellectual Property is all about; control over the production of knowledge and culture; and the denial of agency to the producer.

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

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

VII. Capital and its Residue

The first thing to consider is the fact that most of these acts of transgression are inscribed into the very heart of established structures by people located at the

extreme margins. The marginality of some of these figures is a function of their status as the 'residue' of the global capitalist juggernaut. By 'residue', we mean those elements of the world that are engulfed by the processes of Capital, turned into 'waste' or 'leftovers', left behind, even thrown away.

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

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

Seepage in the Network

How does this network act, and how does it make itself known in our consciousness? We like to think about this in terms of Seepage. By seepage, we mean the action of many currents of fluid material leaching on to 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 continues to act on its core, to gradually disaggregate its solidity. To crumble it over time with moisture.

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

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

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

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

VIII. A Problem for the History of the Network

But how is this network's history to be understood? To a large measure, this is made difficult by the fact of an 'asymmetry of ignorance' about the world. We are all ignorant of the world in different ways and to different degrees. And that

is one of the reasons why the 'Network' often shades off into darkness, at some or other point. This is what leads to global networks that nevertheless ignore the realities of large parts of the world, because no one has the means to speak of those parts, and no one knows whether people exist in those parts that can even speak to the world in the language of the network. Thus the language of the network often remains at best only a mobile local dialect.

A media practitioner or cultural worker from India, for example, is in all likelihood more knowledgeable about the history of Europe than could be the case for the European vis-a-vis India. This is a fact engendered by colonialism that has left some societies impoverished in all but an apprehension of reality that is necessarily global. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has reminded us, 'Insofar as the academic discourse of history is concerned, "Europe" remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian", "Chinese", "Kenyan", and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe".' (1992)

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

All this to say: not merely that we have incomplete perspectives, but that this asymmetry induces an inability to see the face in the wall, the interesting pattern, produced by the seepage. We may inhabit the anxiety, even be the source and locus of the destabilisation and recognise the disfiguration, but the envisioning of possible alternative imaginaries may still continue to elude us.

IX. Towards an Enactive Model of Practice

Recently in a book on neuropolitics, we came across an experiment which is now considered classic in studies of perception (The Held and Heims Experiment),

which might give us an interesting direction to follow now (Connolly 2002).

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

The two groups of kittens develop in very different ways. When the animals are released after a few weeks of this treatment, the first group of kittens behaves normally, but those who have been carried around behave as if they were blind; they bump into objects and fell over edges. It is clear that the first group's freedom to experience the environment in a holistic way is fundamental to its ability to perceive it at all. What is the significance of this? Within neuroscience, such experiments have served to draw neuroscientists and cognitive scientists away from representational models of mind towards an 'enactive' model of perception in which objects are not perceived simply as visual abstractions but rather through an experiential process in which information received from this one sense is 'networked' with that from every other. Vision, in other words, is deeply embedded in the processes of life, and it is crucial to our ability to see that we offset the representations that we process, with the results of the experiences that we enter into. We need to know what happens when we take a step, bump into someone, be startled by a loud noise, come across a stranger, an angry or a friendly face, a gun or a jar of milk.

In a sense this implies a three-stage encounter that we are ascribing between the practitioner and her world. First, a recognition of the fact that instances of art practices can be seen as contiguous to a 'neighbourhood' of marginal practices embodied by the figures of the five transgressors. Secondly, that 'seeing' oneself

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

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

It is only when we see particularities that we are also able to see how two or more particular instances connect to each other. As residues, that search for meaning occurs in other residual experiences; or as acts of seepage, in which the flow of materials from one pore to another ends up connecting two nodes in the network, by sheer force of gravity. Here it is the gradients of the flow, the surface tension that the flow encounters and the distance that the flow traverses, that become important, not the intention to flow itself. Intentions, resistances, may be imputed, but in the end they have little to do with the actual movements that transpire within the network.

X. Art practice and protocols of networked conversation

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

To do this, the practitioner probably has to invent, or discover, protocols of conversation across sites, across different histories of locatedness in the network; to invent protocols of resource building and sharing, create structures

within structures and networks within networks. Mechanisms of flexible agreements about how different instances of enactment can share a contiguous semantic space will have to be arrived at. And as we discover these ‘protocols’, their different ethical, affective and cognitive resonances will immediately enter the equation. We can then also begin to think of art practice as enactment, as process, as elements in an interaction or conversation within a network.

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



This text draws from a presentation by Monica Narula (Raqs Media Collective) at ‘Globalica: Conceptual and Artistic Tensions in the New World Disorder’ symposium (WRO biennale, Wroclaw, Poland, 2003). It is also published in Marina Vishmidt & Melanie Gilligan (eds.) (2004) ‘Immaterial Labour: Work, Research & Art’, London/New York: Black Dog.

NOTES:

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

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

3. See Raqs Media Collective's 'Call Centre Calling: Technology, Network and Location' (2003); for more on the call centre industry in India, see Mark Landler's 'Hi I'm in Bangalore (But I Dare Not Tell)' (2001), and 'India Calling - A Report on the Call Centre Industry in India' <<http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/2387/>>.

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