

Raqs media collective: The contribution will draw on some texts, conversations and images. It will be attempt to invoke our perplexity, amazement and anxiousness about the neurological processes and it's examination.

### Six Nervous Fragments

From the Work and Notes of The Raqs Media Collective

#### I. Neural Time and Outer Time

[Notes for a conversation between Raqs Media Collective, Dr. Arani Bose (Neuro-Surgeon) and Dr. Steve Pacia (Neurologist) at a conversation on the third evening of 'The Pupil Dilates in Darkness' a Public Seminar (Night School) New Museum, New York, 2009]

The neural explosions that constitute the building blocks of all our thoughts are as compressed as nano seconds, sometimes even briefer. As artists in a collective of three people, that means three sets of neurons firing away constantly in order to make our working together possible.

Between the pulse that initiates the process of forming a thought, image or question and its more expanded form as an articulated expression there lies a great difference in time.

For even a half-baked idea to course through our nervous system and on towards articulation it has to appear almost as if it were in slow motion in contrast to its initial impulse.



How do these two registers of time work in relation to one another ?

Our default brain is full of chatter. We are not always aware of this chatter. We are told that in meditation practices, this chatter emerges and plays around in the spotlight of consciousness for days on end. That is what many call the "fighting the demons" inside. This chatter is extremely evaluative and fearful. It calls into motion all our sedimentary instincts of survival and all our apprehensions of limit experiences. In advanced meditation they say that you can move beyond this chatter and experience something deeper. The chatter subsides, and something else is supposed to reveal itself. That deep is termed illumination. Darkness is chatter and when the darkness subsides, we glimpse illumination. Art takes place in the half-light between darkness and illumination.

#### II. Inside & Outside

[From 'The Capital of Accumulation']

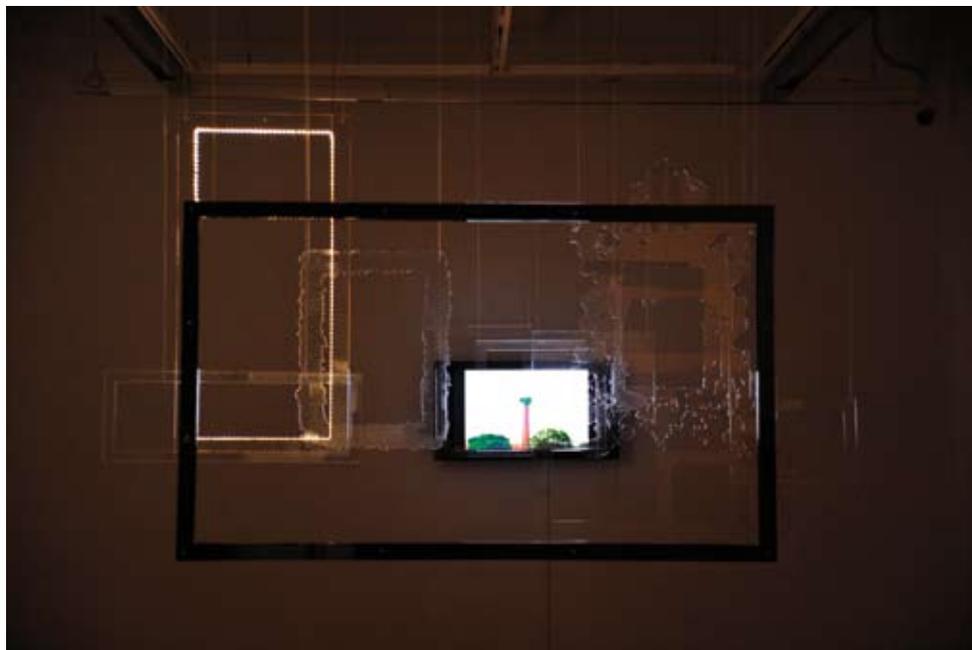


Voice 1: Inside, I am on the side of outside.

Voice 2 : If you twist and fold a ribbon of space, what was inside a moment ago could end up as the outside. When a surface cracks, the crack is the surface. The outside is as much within something as without.

### III. Neuropolitics and Networks

[2 Fragments from 'X Notes on Practice']



#### Neuropolitics

Recently in a book on neuropolitics, (William E. Connolly, "Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed", Theory Out of Bounds, Number 23, Univ. of Minnesota, 2002) we came across an experiment which is now considered classic in studies of perception, (The Held and Heims Experiment) which might give us an interesting direction to follow now.

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

The two groups of kittens develop in very different ways. When the animals are released after a few weeks of this treatment, the first group of kittens 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 recognizing 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 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.

#### Networks

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

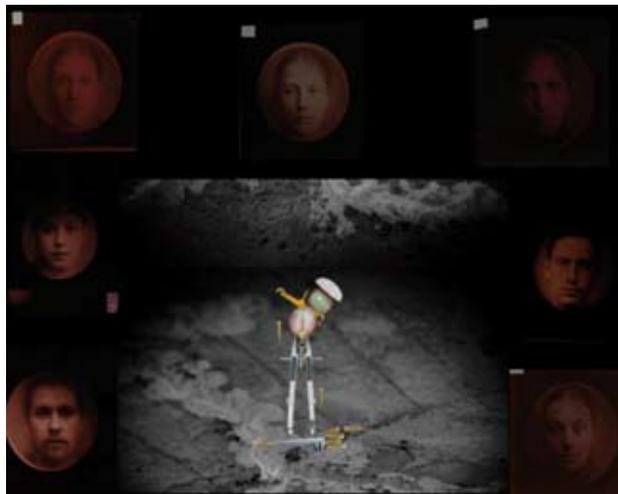
To do this, the practitioner probably has to invent, or discover, protocols of conversation across sites, across different histories of locatedness in the network; to invent protocols of resource building and sharing, create structures within structures and networks within networks. Mechanisms of flexible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

For the acts of seepage to connect to form new patterns, many new conversations will have to be opened, and mobile dialects will have to rub shoulders with each other

to create new, networked Creoles. Perhaps art practice in a networked reality can itself aspire to create the disfigurations on the wall, to induce some anxieties in the structure, even while making possible the serendipitous discovery of an interesting pattern or cluster of patterns, and possible alterities or the reading of the face in the spreading stain.

#### IV. Francis Galton's Wager

From 'The Surface of Each Day is a Different Planet'



Faces light up like coal in a brazier. Ablaze, Radiant, Pensive, Troubled, Hungry, Calm, Assured, Insane, Inflamed.

Piling eye upon eye, ear upon ear, wrinkle upon wrinkle, feature upon feature, smile upon grimace, Francis Galton, mathematician, statistician, polymath and Victorian colossus wants to see his picture of the world when he looks at a crowd of faces. His world is small, his laboratory crowded, his assistants are tired, their calipers are falling apart. They have never measured so many in so little time.

When he files away thousands of faces or fingerprints into numbered and indexed folios he isn't just creating a repository of physiognomies. He is collecting and classifying the content of souls, turning, he thinks, the keys to the mysteries of the locked cabinet of human character.

But The 'ghost' image of a composite of madmen from Bedlam has strangely gentle eyes. Galton's wager, that if you were to stick the faces of eighty six inmates of the Bedlam asylum on top of each other you would end up looking into the eyes of madness - has gone oddly awry. Criminal composites produce a saintly icon. A quest for the precise index of what Galton thinks is ugliness in a row of sullen East London Jewish schoolboys yields amazing grace.

"The Individual photographs were taken with hardly any selection from among the boys in the Jew's Free School, Bell Lane. They were the children of poor parents. As I drove to the school through the adjacent Jewish quarter, the expression of the people

that most struck me was their cold, scanning gaze and this was equally characteristic of the schoolboys. The composites were made with a camera that had numerous adjustments for varying the position and scale of the individual portraits with reference to fixed fiduciary lines, But so beautiful the results of these adjustments are, if I were to begin entirely afresh, I should discard them, and should proceed in quite a different way. This cannot be described intelligibly and at the same time briefly."

The faces and fingerprints whisper a thousand secrets to Galton, but they do not let him in on their greatest mystery. The face of the crowd is a face in the crowd, fleeting, slippery, gone before you blink, always gentle, always calm, always someone you think you can recognise but can never recall.

#### V. Visibility, Perception, Imagination

[From a transcript of a Raqs Media Collective performance-lecture 'Watches of the Night' - as part of 'Pupils Dilate at Darkness', The Night School, New Museum, New Museum, 2009]



Let us return to the question of darkness and illumination.

Shuddha : Could the relationship between the question of visibility by day and night be roughly compared the relationship between perception and the imagination, between two modes of apprehending the world, one with the eye in our eye sockets and another with the eye in our minds? Where is that inner eye located? How does it open? When does it awake and when does it sleep? Does it ever rest?

Monica: Can the work of art, or the work of the imagination, which interpolates an other layer...

Shuddha : And another layer...

Monica : and yet another layer, of what was not necessarily there, of what did not need to be there, on to the reality of what was necessarily there, be seen as an extension of the effort made to see things when seeing itself is made impossible, or at least appreciably difficult?

We know little, yet we cling to what we know because there is a photograph or a news report that offers us a slight thread of knowledge in a deluge of darkness.

#### VI. The Cosmonaut's Field Note Fragments

[From 'The Surface of Each Day is a Different Planet']



"...Following touchdown and a brief period of anticipatory quarantine, the surface of the day was investigated for the presence of organic traces of animate matter. Preliminary reports from the first batch of samples continue to demonstrate the usual anomalies.

The important question: 'What Constitutes a Sign of Life?' remains in suspended animation. Metabolism, Growth, Sentience and Reproduction may all be expressing themselves in ambiguous ways, and it is possible that the test criteria being applied in order to identify them are insufficient to this task. How do we know what metabolism or sentience or reproduction look like in hitherto unknown, or unimagined life forms? How can we know?

There is a danger that we may be projecting our own characteristics on to the surface of the entities we are exploring. On the other hand, we may be looking at a mirror, and yet we may be misidentifying the image that we see reflected.

No certain conclusions can be reached at present. Further investigations will continue to be necessary."

