

Where Do the Walls of the Museum Go When They Are Forgotten?, artwork by Ali Eyal (in *Hands*, 2021, curated by Madhusree Dutta and Ala Younis): A failed museum project on sloping land on an imaginary farm is transported to another/*safer* location in an oversized torn jacket. The curator of the failed museum has met some sleeping caterpillars who came to the site attracted by the nutrient rich colors of the destroyed artworks. The jacket-museum now turns into a womb for the caterpillars, wrapped in fragments of Iraqi paintings (copied by the artist) that went missing during the US-led invasion.



Speaking Nearby¹

Stories on Leakages

MADHUSREE DUTTA

1 "I do not intend to speak about. Just speak nearby," Trinh T. Minh-ha, in the spoken commentary in the film *Reassemblage*, 16mm, 1982. She elaborates on the idea later as "[a] speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition—these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language." Nancy N. Chen, "Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review*, 8, no. 1 (1992) 82–91.

I. Expansivity

for

Bini Adamczak on *Anthroponarcissism: How can you be reflected in water that is itself so densely populated and animated?*

Monika Rinck on *Time in Translation—Die übersetzte Zeit*

Moritz Altenried, Manuela Bojadžijev, and Mira Wallis on *Logistical Futures: The Chinese Dream, Debordering Labor, and Migration*

Nobody would think that the UDGs are a problem; they are not even some serious nuisance. They are a sort of gentle inconvenience, like the darkness of the night that one may experience on holiday in the countryside—slightly enigmatic, vaguely alarming, quite unfamiliar. But nothing really serious. And occasionally, there could be a whiff of romance in that, too. Anyway, they are in the sky and who has the time to keep staring at the sky to follow the UDGs. Except for the CBs who do nothing significant else than staring up at the UDGs, anxiously following their pattern of crying. Oh yes, the UDGs cry a lot. They cry while dreaming of the future and while remembering the past. The present, though, is not so evocative for them. When they actually feel like crying, they cry in a certain way. For love, there are some dozens of different ways of crying that are practiced. When they chat or argue, it may sound similar to the performance of Rudali.² And when they want to laugh out loud, which is very rare, they just wail.

The Other Ghosts do not like to socialize with the Upside Down Ghosts, the UDGs in short. It is blasphemous to shed tears in the Ghostdom—which is all about fun, pranks, and impersonations. The Other Ghosts do not know that when the UDGs cry, they do not always actually cry. In their previous avatar on Earth they lived in different language zones, and so when they came to the sky the only expression that remained common to all of them was crying. Over time, with certain disciplining and some coercing by the linguists among them, essential signs and idioms from those disparate languages got loosely transformed and codified into the generic structure of crying.³ Since the system is made of tears, the cry-words are also semitranslucent. Often on a clear day, the *original* word

2 In some parts of South Asia women from elite families are not allowed to mourn the death of the family members in public. The professional mourners, Rudalis, are hired for this purpose. A poignant narrative of the practice is available in the Bengali short story *Rudali* by Mahasweta Devi; see English translation: Mahasweta Devi and Usha Ganguli, *Rudali: From Fiction to Performance*, trans. by Anjum Katiyal (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 1997).

3 The making of the Cry language would be closer to Creole though not completely as it does not ascribe to any unconscious or naturalized mixing of languages. But it should certainly not be confused with Homi Bhabha's articulation on postcolonial hybridity, which proposes a space "in-between" with negotiated and contested contributions from both sides. The temporality in the case of Cry is different where simultaneous practices need to be artificially mashed into a singular and simpler form in order to make the X space function. Hence Cry can be considered as an after-language that is engineered.

from one of the earthly languages can be seen under the tear drops. Sometimes it gets complicated with the hint of more than one source-word floating under the current form. When the tear breaks it wipes out the source-words, too. Such things happen so fleetingly that it mostly goes unnoticed.⁴ There have also been attempts to incorporate some full-size earthly stories into Cry. But one must admit that in Cry, those stories are barely recognizable for large amounts of sediment sneak into them during the long passage from the Earth to the sky. Besides, the teary saline water eats up the edges of the stories making them frameless.

The monolingual Other Ghosts have little patience for such a meandering structure of language-ing, and simply get suspicious by the clumsy moaning and howling of the UDGs. Their suspicion increases further as UDGs always stay and move around in dense groups. Whereas the Other Ghosts, smart and trendy as they are, venture out on solo trips and consider individualism as one of the prized values of the Ghost civilization. But UDGs are irreverential. They are neither curious nor subservient to the norms of the Ghostdom. Their focus is on different temporalities for they are completely absorbed in what the elderly UDGs call "lost homeland" and the young ones call "homeland 2b." They carry a lot of baggage—another blasphemy for the footloose lifestyle of the Ghostdom. Almost everyone carries broken cots and beaten pots between their legs while sliding around the sky upside down. The same cots and pots that they carried from their worldly homes when they were ejected. Not everyone was ejected, though—some got leaked out, and yet others had opted out. Not from everywhere on the Earth either, only from where a certain kind of bacteria live.

So the UDGs are immensely forgettable characters except for their crying. It is doubly annoying that they should cry while being upside down. The tears then roll up. The more the Upside Down Ghosts cry, the more saline water gets extracted from the Earth and shoots up. On certain days you may be able to see the jets of streams going up into the sky. You may take it for some fancy fountains deployed by the municipality, but actually they are UDG tears. This mainly happens on UDG days of remembering. On those days, they hover over some settlements, such as NY, MUM, JHB, BLN, SAO, JRS or LDN and perform commemorative crying-crying. These are the places from where they got ejected, leaked, etc. The skyscrapers of those metropolises pay the price for the UDGs' ritual of collective crying. No, the sound is not the issue. The frequency-decibel equation of UDGs' wailing sound is so different that it does not reach the human settlements. But the upwardly going tears make the skyscrapers dry. They suck the moisture out of the concrete. In dry concrete the CBs cannot survive. And the survival of the

4 "Change certain habits of mind: the authority of the text is provisional, the origin is a trace; contradicting logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time," writes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak while annotating the Derridean concept of "writing under erasure (sous rature)" as "to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)" In Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1974], Translator's Preface, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), xxxii.

CBs is crucial. In fact, they should not only survive, but also be in a good mood to reproduce at a large scale. Their reproductive attribute is much in demand and currently features high on the stock market.

Till recently, the urban populations and urban planners loved the magnificent concrete structures that were dry and not full of moss and insects. Structural engineers tried to protect the historical buildings by drawing abstract patterns with some cement glue over the cracks in the concrete. The old cities were full of buildings with lines of cement drawings on their bodies. Those lines were proof of the old age of a building, and that enhanced its commanding status within urban history. But that was yesterday. Now it has been found that only CBs, the Concrete Bacteria, can increase the longevity of the concrete.⁵ Without the bacteria the concrete degenerates fast and eventually crumbles—cement glues do not play much of a role in manipulating the mortality range of the concrete buildings. Imagine dry and brittle concrete blocks without any bacteria in their bodies collapsing one after the other at the rate of consequential eventuality! Hence, the CBs must reproduce fast and at a massive scale to be able to crawl over the vast surfaces of concrete across the metropolises.

But these CBs are the Global South type. They are smart to recognize an opportunity even through chaotic signals. They are even smarter to predict that the sudden change in their fortune is transient and whimsical, and thus it needs to be handled tactically.⁶ So they demand a special infrastructure for engaging in reproductive activity—the moist bed that gets built when moss accumulates in the cracks of the concrete. The cracks in the concrete, heretofore considered as an impediment, need to be revitalized as the lifeline of the cities. Moreover, the cracks would need to be kept wet and mossy for the CBs to fornicate. Going by appearances, the cracks are similar to the urban ghettos—crooked body lines, shallow depth, dingy, sunlight deprived, mossy, and quite smelly, too. Ideal site for promiscuous reproductions of the unauthorized citizens—the CBs in this case.⁷ Hence the ghetto-look-alike cracks are to be reclassified in urban planning as essential to stitch the concrete city together in order to insure the homes of the elites, palaces of the kings, offices of the banks and corporations, centers of knowledge and information, expanses of the highways, and the heights of the memorial sculptures. The former unauthorized types have turned into covet-

5 See Henk M. Jonkers and Erik Schlangen, “Development of a Bacteria based Self-Healing Concrete,” in *Tailor Made Concrete Structures*, eds. Joost C. Walraven and Dick Stoelhorst (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 425–430; doi: 10.1201/9781439828410.ch72.

6 “The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances [...] because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing,’” in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, General Introduction, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 20.

7 For a comprehensive study of spatial logic of urban sprawls see Laura Vaughan, *Mapping Society: The Spatial Dimensions of Social Cartography* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

ed citizens without even going through the standard integration drill and their much dreaded fertility is now considered as patriotic.⁸ The number of these fringe entities must multiply to way outnumber the normative citizens in order to maintain the new status quo.

But until the UDGs stop crying up in the sky none of these strategies are likely to work. UDGs can still render the CBs sterile by drying up their wet-beds through the suction technique of the upwardly moving tears. The war between the reproductivity of the CBs and the right to cry of the UDGs is impending. Hope it has got cleared by now why the entire CB population “do nothing significant else than stalking the UDGs.” Yet it does not seem likely that the UDGs would stop crying anytime soon. The number of souls ejected, leaked etc. from the Earth is skyrocketing—making a population explosion at the Cry nation in the sky. Something needs to be engineered to stop the one-way traffic from the Earth to the UDG camp.

A planet with a strict policy of not to eject, leak, ooze, lock anyone out of its surface? To keep the ghosts inland? Just to save the fertility of some bacteria?

II. Pathways

for

Andreas Niegler on *Intelligence Leaking*

Nanna Heidenreich on *What's in a Name? Invasive Species:*

Transfers, New Kinship Relations, and the Right to Remain

Jan Lemitz on *Post Office*

C-H-A-R is quite a tongue-friendly word. Depending on the elongation of the “a,” it becomes many different things that are not even distantly related to each other:

Most commonly it means carbon, as in charred—burnt or blackened, residual of a somewhat destroyed object.

Lesser known use of the word is for a kind of trout, a land-locked fish—short, agile, quick, that mostly hangs around in shallow water and occasionally swim upstream. (An American inhabitant that was made to “invade” Europe and some of its colonies.)

More recently, char is used as the abbreviation for “character” in computer databases.

8 For more on tangible examples of occasional reversal of utility values in the case of fringe inhabitants in urban centers see Solomon Benjamin, “Occupancy Urbanism as Political Practice”, in *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* [2014], eds. Susan Parnell and Sophie Oldfield (New York: Routledge, 2021), available at Routledge Handbooks Online.

However, in several languages, in the coastal areas around the Bay of Bengal in South Asia where approximately 1.4 billion people live in eight countries, char (pronounced with the shortest “a”) means a temporary land mass that emerges out of a large water body. Chars can be an appendix to the mainland at the estuary or they may emerge as an autonomous land mass at the river delta. Depending on the volumes and velocity of the water around, this land mass may sink or disintegrate as suddenly as it emerged, sometimes even overnight. Throughout its unpredictable lifespan the size and shape of these islands keep changing; when the water accumulation on the land exceeds the absorbing capacity of the soil the extra water bites away chunks of the land before flowing out. Interestingly, this has a poetic-sounding term—surface runoff. The word char is associated with elevation and thus implies an exception to the watery pattern, a kind of land-oasis in the water—marking it out as a space of opportunity, adventure, and also a refuge. Hence it is a perspective from the water. But “silt island,” the English term for such land formations, is about the substance—the silt that builds the soil. Silt is made of sediments, residuals of the matter (mainly rock dust from the mountains) that get filtered out of the sea-going water at the estuary. That is a perspective from the land, about the adjunct and transient area at the land’s end.⁹

The silt island is about deposits and horizontal passage of the water. The water leaves its baggage from its previous river-life, originating from the mountains, on its way to the expansive life in the sea. Or, framing it differently, the river water carries the matter of the local: broken boats, lost stories, cryptic knowledge, stolen books, secret codes, and so on. The sediments of such matter are extracted at the border on the way to the foreign water of the sea. Or even another way of putting it could be: the freshwater of the river leaves its parochial commitments behind before turning into the heavier, calmer, and generic saltwater of the sea. This transition, though natural, is not devoid of agitation and out of that agitation the silt island is born. On the other hand, the char is about emergence and submergence of the land mass. The word does not trace the history or composition of the site, but indicates the action of its becoming and its vertical moves. The land itself climbs out of the water, but it may also create an opportunity for those in the surrounding water or in the slush to climb onto the new land. The transient nature of the phenomenon is also embedded in the word—*char*, a noun derived from the verb *chara* or *chadna*: climbing, and/or from another noun, *charai*: a steep pathway up. An allusion to go for an unknown possibility. A premonition about the inherent volatility in such a nature-dependent phenomenon

9 For some basic information about the terrain of char islands in the Bay of Bengal visit <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Char>.
For a documentary narrative of the continuous erosion and accumulation of silt-land on the banks of the Mississippi river in the USA, see Elisabeth Kolbert, “Louisiana’s Disappearing Coast,” *The New Yorker*, 25 March 2019. Available at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/01/louisianas-disappearing-coast?verso=true>.

is also hinted at in the generic name. A kind of spiritual recognition of the cyclic nature of things and yet an action call for making the best of the transient present. Hence, silt islands and chars are not a translation of each other, but two complimentary phenomena from different geopolitical and sociocultural sites.¹⁰

Thus, through the endless cycles of consolidation of sediments and surface runoff, the uncharted land of the chars materializes and dematerializes. And scraps of knowledge, intuitions and codes, in tandem with various disenfranchised entities, fleetingly crisscross the transient land. Beliefs and whispers, such as the coastal villages that got washed away in the previous years have resurfaced as chars, circulate in the watery wind. Some newly emerged chars are even named after the villages that got submerged years ago. On some rainy nights, shadowy creatures on shallow boats in the middle of the river try to locate with bamboo poles where the next char will “climb.”¹¹ It is not a site, nor a phenomenon, but a tight noose of an intimate relationship—fraught, carnal, and voluptuous. The mundane turns into a mythical collapsing of the notion of time. The memory and the desire, entangled in a vicious grip and smeared with dark silt, become indistinguishable and lay between the soil and the water.¹² But official efforts to map these enigmatic creatures, their intuitive knowledge, and the attributes of its soil into a palpable system have often had hilarious results. The char may just impetuously ebb away on the eve of its ceremonial solemnization into the world of border treaties and satellite surveillance.

Hence, the no-man’s-land of chars has become a primary choice for the site where the L-O-Es (the leaked outs, the opted outs, and the ejected outs) can be quarantined before they may escape to turn into UDGs. Since this could stretch into a long phase of transition (deep dissolve in filmmaking terms) between their Earth-life and the Sky-life, we should now get familiarized with the L-O-E.

L: The Trout (the char namesake fish); the leaky type who swim out to the deep and cold water when things heat up near the land and then leak back in

10 We may recollect here Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on geological strata and stratification: “The first articulation chooses or deducts, from unstable particle flows, metastable molecular or quasi-molecular units (substances) upon which it imposes a statistical order of connections and successions (forms). The second articulation establishes functional, compact, stable structures (forms), and constructs the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (substances) [...] But each articulation has a code and a territoriality; therefore, each possesses both form and substance.” In Chapter 2, “10,000 BC: The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think It is?),” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1988), 47.

11 I have borrowed this image from the documentary *Char: The No Man’s Land* by Saurav Sarangi, 2012, 97 min. <http://www.finalcutforreal.dk/char-the-nomans-island>. The documentary traces the precarity of lives on a char through two teenage boys as protagonists.

12 It reminds me of an almost hundred years old literary work, *Padmanadir Majhi* (The Boatman of the River Padma) by Manik Bandopadhyay. In this seminal Bengali novel the author draws an elaborate trajectory of the journey of the protagonist, the boatman Kuber, from an impoverished life, infested by the land-owners and the waterowners of the mainland, to a certain abstruse promise of autonomy and gratification on a mythical island: *Moynadweep*. The promise was spun like a web by an obsessive native colonialist around the able-bodied people who could not make ends meet. (Written in 1936, one of the current editions is *Padmanadir Majhi*, Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2020. English translation: *The Boatman of Padma*, trans. Ratan K. Chattopadhyay (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2012).)

calmer times. They are known for their ability to swim upstream when the occasion demands it. In some codifying systems they are referred as smuggled goods as well as smugglers' bodies. Well, it is not as confusing as it sounds. The goods are often inside the body of its carrier, and so the system reads the goods and the bodies as the same.¹³

O: The Franks (the runaway freaks and the escapists): the opted out type. But their motivation is not to be confused with the excess fatigue syndrome of the truck-riding nomads of the USA. The Os are edgy, opinionated, and cultish. They move, navigating in the dark, to reach a new destination by the morning, and not simply to watch sunsets at day-ends. It is another matter that, more often than not, they fail to reach the destination simply because such a site does not exist. An engaging depiction of such figures and their *operation opt out* through a night is contained in the seminal film *Calamari Union* where everyone in the cult is called Frank.¹⁴

E: The Stateless (the abandoned multitude): the ejected out type who fell by the wayside during various big boys' games of border combat, ethnic sovereignty, nation-state amalgamation, census recording, land regeneration, resource licensing, security drills, etc. The E entities, who are actually being generated from numerous locations through elaborate calculations and strategies, are ironically called "unaccounted for." Though the volume of the Es is multiplying each calendar year,¹⁵ they are expected to exist in miniscule forms—like the above mentioned *sediments*—and occupy minimal Earth-space.¹⁶

Will the char work out as a campsite for L-O-Es? Or will the culmination of these incidental entities in the spectral site eventually be perceived as a deadly threat to the order of the mainland, like in the case of the inmates of the convent in Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* (1997).

13 Such a concept was literally performed in *White* (1994, 91 min.), the second of the *Three Colours* trilogy by French-Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieślowski. A pseudo-humorous take on fixing and smuggling one's own body across territories and centers of capital accumulation and deflation.

14 *Calamari Union* by Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki, 1985, 84 min.

15 Statelessness in numbers: 2020, *An Overview and Analysis of Global Statistics*, report by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, August 2020, https://files.institutesi.org/ISI_statistics_analysis_2020.pdf. "Rohingyas Arrested After Fleeing Bhasan Char," report, *Dhaka Tribune*, August 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/07/11/18-rohingyas-arrested-after-fleeing-bhasan-char>.

16 For another rendering of "unaccounted for" see 185–189 in this volume, *Walking Away*, 2020, an installation by Abeer Gupta: A case study of the plight of the migrant workers in the Indian metropolises during the recent pandemic. The so-called medical safety drives have pushed certain peoples further out of the realm of the common and the public.

III. Conversion

for

belit sağ on *Leaking ... Archives ...*

Lawrence Liang on *Shadow Courts for Shadow Libraries: A Legal Trial of a Passion Crime*

Mi You on *Anywhere or Here: Art and Society Revisited*

Zoran Terzić on *Poetry & Bullshit: On the Unboundedness of the Situation*

He looked iconic—a lean and tall man with a long snow white beard maneuvering a couple of long shovels into large drums on a wood fire. Let us call him C.¹⁷ There was something timeless about his presence in those modest surroundings. It was a makeshift workshop next to a busy highway in the city of Bombay. On top of a few half size bamboos perched a thatched roof, secured by pieces of meter-long 35mm film strips. Sunlight filtered in through the straw walls making intricate patterns on the mud floor. The wobbly structure had a door made of rusted tin, and on that hung a fierce-looking iron lock. The only furniture in the room was a rickety bed, the legs of which were balanced on film reels. In one corner dusty and brittle film reels were stacked in the shape of a table top. His pristine handkerchief was spread upon it. The film reels were cracked and torn along the line of perforation making them hazardous as the dried-up celluloid strips could cut deep into the flesh. And we are not even talking about the deadly match between fire and film reels.

Perforation is a statement about some added or subtracted capacity (and not materiality) of an object—perforated papers (a facility) or perforated organs (a deterioration) or perforated city (still a rather exclusive term in urban studies for shrinking cities) and so on. But most probably no other object has been as hung on on perforation as celluloid-based film print is. Anyone, till even the 1990s, who had watched those jumbo film projectors, either at public fairs or in smoky film society facilities, throwing moving images and unfolding distant stories through a divine-looking ray of light from an elevated platform or a back room probably knows about the role of perforation in that. When perforation got damaged, the film strip broke away from the spool and lay like a coiled up snake

17 It is important to share this information with the reader that C is a real-time character and far from being metaphorical. See Madhusree Dutta, "Dhanda Ani Kaam: Material and Notations of Work," in *Project Cinema City*, eds. Madhusree Dutta, Kaushik Bhaumik, and Rohan Shivkumar (New York: Tulika Books; Columbia University Press, 2013), 223–226. C can also be seen in the documentary by Renu Savant, *Dark Room*, 10 min., Majlis Production, 2009, a film about the city being the dark room for processing the latent images.

on the floor. And outside, the screen narrative melted into the blinding light from the naked projector bulb before exposing the blankness of its sanitized white curtain. The show was destroyed. For many decades in the twentieth century this kind of spectacle of perforation rupture was an integral part of public life.¹⁸

Threading is a field-speak in filmmaking. The awe-inspiring chemicals, tools, infrastructures, and business of cinema were actually anchored to a delicate and feminine action called threading of the perforated celluloid. Anything going wrong in the threading of the celluloid means the images would garble up color and light or would be printed on top of each other or the audio of a railway station would pop up in the bathtub scene; in short, ghostly interventions would mess up the ware of serial images, synched audio, and flowing narratives printed on celluloid. The motion of the motion pictures depended on the threading.¹⁹

C was not concocting a magic potion for a Polanski-ish narrative. He was a celluloid waste dealer. He collected discarded film prints from warehouses of the movie distribution companies and wastages from the film labs. Initially it was a sort of El Dorado-ish adventure. The black-and-white film prints contained a small component of silver that determined the density of black and grey in the image. Hence, in countries that accumulated and also produced cinema, film prints had been dethreaded and burnt to ashes to sift pinchfuls of silver. Though it was a minor livelihood practice, it could annihilate a good part of b/w cinema. Later, when the b/w prints became rare and inaccessible, the enterprise shifted to melting colored film prints to be molded into bangles.

The journey of celluloid is marked by many stages of value alteration. After the process of chemical filming (coating the celluloid base with a certain chemical emulsion) and punctured perforation, it became raw stock or film roll. The transparent celluloid that was sold cheaply by weight in retailers' outlets turned into the precious film roll: sold by the length as well as controlled and standardized through a network of production licenses, customs and import-export regulations, bilateral treaties, etc. Until this point the value of the product had been determined by the "use value" (Marx) of it. It then went through an industrious process of getting the motion pictures printed on its body and then became a film reel. The product at this stage was owned by the people who produced the motion picture narrative—the movie producer. And got copyrighted as such. The value of it was not determined anymore by the material, but by the merit of the

18 There have been several avant-garde works based on the elasticity of perforated celluloid. Remarkable among them was Jack Smith, who used to improvise cinema performance by splicing parts of celluloid from different reels live during his shows in the 1960s in Manhattan.

19 It is fundamentally about motion control, controlled kinesis. The nineteenth century was dotted with the public desire for motion machines: bicycle, sewing machine, cinématographe, invented in that order.

embedded narrative. But the narrative would come alive for value realization only when placed within the public screening system. Hence, speculative bargaining entered the scene in the name of distribution negotiations. A Warner Bros. production versus a vernacular film. Thus it went on to acquire both "exchange value" (as per the labor and capital investments in addition to the material cost—Marx) as well as "sign value" (due to the scope of speculation on its market potentiality—Baudrillard). The product was now measured by the material at the rate of time: 1000 feet (305 m) means eleven minutes of projection time, a ten reeler means nearly two hours of extravaganza. The realization of its value now depended on the frequency and number of its public screenings. Due to repeated public use, unlike many other value-added objects, celluloid film reels fast reached the stage of redundancy.²⁰

During the first five decades of the twentieth century, cans of unexposed film rolls and film prints from Europe and America traveled to colonized countries in the most unusual ways—with the moving people (soldiers, POWs, fugitives, camp followers, missionaries, adventurous documentarists, enterprising fortune seekers) and with the moving goods (ammunitions and uniforms, rations for the force, consumer goods such as soaps and perfumes, printed material such as bibles and porn magazines). They reached the bazaars—the heady zones of inter-nations and trans-regions in the pre-during-post war years. War makes societies intensely responsive to commodities, both in scarcity and in plenitude. People and goods move at unprecedented speed during wars and create newer conventions of consumptions and transactions. Cinema's fantastic magnitude matched the expansive hedonism of the footloose bazaar multitude.²¹ It took to the magic of cinema as an accumulation of its own desires for unruly, unregulated, off-territorial, instant access, and transient pleasures. Stray celluloid rolls were bartered around in the oriental bazaars.

With the end of use-value of the celluloid reel the sign value of the film ended, too.

20 Another factor that contributed to the decay of the film reels was weather. The film celluloid was never made conducive to the climate of the tropical countries. The heat and humidity affected the base emulsion and reduced the life span of the film reels. This, coupled with cinema's reputation of being a phenomenon of mass entertainment and thus being unworthy of preservation efforts, contributed to the idea of converting the film reels into ropes to tie bamboo poles.

21 Kaushik Bhaumik writes with great eloquence that "[b]azaar goods are like mercenary stormtroopers of armies seeking to conquer us from afar, minions of an unseen sorcerer or mad scientist sent in exotic disguise to charm and lure us away from our present lives to do his or her bidding. They could include exotic-aesthetic textures, a religious idea, the beauty of a woman, the charisma of a poet or actor. They work through those rebellious, greedy 'traitors' in the 'local' who are already feeling restless in the static doldrums of a settled society; through those who seek exotic enjoyments and speeds not purveyed in the village shop. Bazaars are encampments for such 'foreign' mercenaries operating between the global and the local." In "The Bazaar: Between Wild/Histories and City/Life," in *Project Cinema City*, eds. Madhusree Dutta, Kaushik Bhaumik and Rohan Shivkumar (New York: Tulika Press; Columbia University Press, 2013), 28.

Or, taking the last couple of decades into consideration, this could be formulated as: the use value of the celluloid print ended and the sign value of some motion picture narratives got converted into a body-less digital format. While we discuss the life span of celluloid as the material base of cinema, it might be relevant to note that before the invention of motion pictures, celluloid, the first edition of synthetic plastic, was used for making detachable collars and cuffs for women and men in white collar jobs in the USA. Celluloid-wearing, in the 1880s, was advertised as a new opportunity to end American middle classes' dependence on the laundry services that were ran by immigrant Chinese families.²²

Unlike the market, the bazaar does not horde goods to speculate on their value, but to cultivate and accommodate the excess. And the notion of excess here expands beyond commodities to norms, regulations, morality, as well as to contours of identity. It is a site of deviations, syncretism, and trans-practices. Nothing is definitively *off-post-non* in the horizontal expanse of the bazaar. Rather, there are *extras* that keep accumulating in the back rooms of the bazaar. Within this range of excess and extra come cans of obscure foreign films as well as discarded celluloid reels. The time span between the two phases was rather short—around two to three decades. Thus even after the embedded narratives became illegible due to the damage to the perforations, the celluloid reels stayed put in the bazaar and its back rooms. Incidentally, in the world of studio/company-based fiction films the small time actors who form the nameless crowd on screen are called *extras*.

Since transparent celluloid is a cheap material and can be colored very easily, why would anyone take so much trouble to convert film reels into celluloid bangles. The issue could be about plasticity, an impulse to challenge the static quality of things and simultaneously extend the conditions for molding and being molded.²³ A right to poiesis. A semi-playful yet deep engagement with the continuous courses of conversions and rematerializations. A denial of corporeal mortality that is governed by the laws of viability. The tactile participation in this denial, sort of a ritualistic performance, is the issue and not the commercial merit of the act. This is simultaneously part of the bazaar extravaganza and a cultish practice that even the most stringent nation-state cannot fully control.

This impulse of plasticity, almost absentmindedly, erases the expiry date regime. There is no death thus there is no memorizing, no archiving either.

22 See *A White Collar with a Message*, blog by Robert Friedel on the website of National Museum of American History, 8 October 2018, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/white-collar-message>.

23 Bhaskar Sarkar has been employing and expanding the attributes of plasticity in the context of screen narratives and its circulations. See Bhaskar Sarkar, "Plasticity and the Global," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 56, no. 2, article 11 (2015). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/framework/vol56/iss2/11>.

IV. Ubiquitous

for

Bishnupriya Ghosh on *The Sanguineous Imaginary: The Afterlife of Blood*

Monika Gintersdorfer, Hauke Heumann, and Franck E. Yao alias Gadoukou la

Star on *Elevator Underwear: Performing Fashion*

Susanne Sachsse and Marc Siegel on *Who Wants to Fuck in a Box?*

Boli is polymorphous, multicolored too. But she is so lightfooted that no one can really make out when she changes color. Hence, for the custodians to notice the changes in Boli sometimes takes ages or even decades. But when they do find out that *this* Boli is actually not *that* Boli, and it is erroneously believed by many that *this* is the real Boli and the *other*, authorized Bolis are being ignored, they get furious, even turn violent sometimes. By the time they get around to rectify it by producing more grammar books, Boli changes again. Well, it is a precise game of speed. And what gives Boli a head start in the game is her ability to be with the crowd, coming out of one person's mouth and getting into another's head, slipping out of someone's memory only to jostle into someone else's amnesia, provoking someone to swear and goading another to gossip, sometimes sailing across with a song or lying latent in a story, shifting between serenity, flamboyance, and blasphemy.

Boli has a proper name: Spoken Word. But that is of no use as Boli does not have a passport; actually, Boli is paperless. She is not required to go to an immigration office, she simply slides. So Boli is Boli. Sometimes only a word, sometimes an idiom, sometimes just a full-throated sound, a scream or a nod, mysterious whispers, noise at the drinking holes, a system of obscuring wisdom and irony, occasionally a style of syntaxing, or the texture of the public life in a specific locale.²⁴ In the winter months when the crowds are hard to materialize she plays a different game. She unfastens the stories that she had knitted out of her word collection and leaves them in segments at the roadside in waste cardboard boxes. Some of the L-O-E people are often seen arranging those boxes in neat formations. Though the trash police in the societies of cleanliness would simply crush the story-boxes and throw into the trash. Some others open the boxes

24 One way of translating the word Boli into English could be dialect. But that would undermine Boli's personality, which is local but not landlocked. Boli is a vital member of the "repertoire of embodied culture." "The repertoire [...] enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically 'a treasury, an inventory;' also allows for individual agency, referring also to 'the finder, discoverer,' and meaning 'to find out.' The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same." Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

looking for certain items that would be useful for their homes. But that is a worthless exercise because each segment would soon turn into a whole and then begin sprouting more stories. Once Boli comes into a house there can be no way of stopping the weeding of stories. Boli's spread and multiplication imitate that of the body-cells.

Human or other living bodies are understood to be structured around cells. A stem cell is the primary unit of human bodies. It continuously multiplies itself into two kinds of cells: one kind that is identical to the mother cell and is thus capable of further multiplication—self-renewal cells—and the other that is responsible for specific bodily functions and does not multiply itself—differentiated or specialized cells. Thus a stem cell (and Boli) multiplies itself into identical figurations and also into different figurations, depending on the requirement as well as the pattern of growth of the body where they are housed. Cancer comes in, when it does, to disrupt this neat development blue print. Cancer cells are unruly; they may multiply exorbitantly or deficiently. They outlive their expiry dates and thus make the newer cells redundant or threatened. The demography of cells, at the time of cancer, simply upsets all logic of cell census. Henrietta Lacks received a modest grave stone in the year 2010, sixty years after her death from aggressive cervical cancer. But her cells have had a separate trajectory. A few months before her death a sample of cancerous cells were extracted from her body for scientific research; by the known standard the cells would die within a few days of being taken out of the host-body. But the adamant cancer cells of the Afro-American tobacco plantation worker are still alive and have been doubling every 20–24 hours since 1951. They are named HeLa Immortalized Cell Line. The same cells that had killed the woman—whose race, class, gender, and occupation had pushed her life and death to the margin of the margins—are now a crucial resource for medical science and its industries in their obsessive search for expanded mortality.²⁵

Though similarly unruly and unpredictable, Boli is not like HeLa. She has agency. She decides her line of spread by simultaneously growing roots and escaping away: sprouting in the houses of unsuspecting people and yet sliding away to the next site where the crowd is assimilating. While some may treat her as local and indigenous some others, in the same space and time, may consider her an interloper or even an invader. Deleuze and Guattari might have considered this facet of Boli (and also of HeLa cells, to an extent): rhizomatic.²⁶ Yet rhizomes

25 This case is significant as much for the medical marvel as for an example of using the bodies of the black and other oppressed races in the service of modernity and its sciences. For details of the case, see Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2010). Moreover, in the playscript *Family Tree* (premiered on 27 August 2021 at Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, London), playwright Mojisola Adebayo raises nuanced questions on cell and soil, and the situatedness of race, class and gender within that—based on the case of Henrietta Lacks.

26 “Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees of their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is

can also be stalled. They cannot rise above the ground where the soil is too rigid and paranoid. Boli is not allowed in certain territories where oral hygiene is considered a nationalist trait. But even those people, rarely though, let Boli get in when they forget their names or cannot remember who they are. Such things happen when the people concerned have been deeply scared or sad for a long time.²⁷ Such people on certain occasions get so beside themselves that they befriend Boli and let some strange sentences come out of their mouths. The sentences suggest ideas that they never thought they were capable of thinking or would utter one day.

Other people who are not so beside themselves call such an occurrence a case of *seizure*, or, depending on the milieu, sometimes term it as a *caesura*. *Caesura* is a poetic pause, part of the meter structure, capable of housing palimpsests. *Seizure* is an agitated disruption, sharp in appearance and polemical. Both are short lived and opposed to flow. The flow can sustain itself only because the mounting pressure is punctured at regular intervals through *caesura* or *seizure*. Thus, caesura/seizure alias pause/disruption occurs when the growth of Boli, quite similar to the cancer cells, gets out of control. The *seizure* people—who often try to influence others by using Boli—are marked as blasphemous and sometimes as seditious. And the *caesura* people—who compose palimpsests around Boli—are tolerated, sometimes even honored, before being memorialized in a frozen posture.

Continuously skating through such terrains and milieus may tire even the light-footed Boli. Ben Okri, the British-Nigerian poet and novelist, has made a few architectural proposals where Boli can unload some of the elements that she keeps accumulating from each milieu that she passes through. In the backroom of Okri's project the following notes were found:

The Boli who loafs around with the crowd in the ports, bazaars, stadiums, camps, fairs, public baths, and unguarded borders is the agile one. (CBs and C are part of this Boli culture.)

The Boli that hides segments of stories at the roadside and multiplies herself in people's dwellings is the insidious, subversive one. (LOEs enjoy this culture, and so do a section of the UDGs.)

The Boli who multiplies like HeLa cell line and trespasses into the land of oral hygiene is a radical. (The char has the potential to become a favored site for this one.)

reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. [...] It is composed not of units but of dimension, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows.” Introduction: Rhizome, in *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 21–22.

27 Salman Rushdie, an admirer of Boli, begins his novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as follows: “... a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name.” Later, during the mission of rescuing the sea of stories and thus making the city buzzing again, the protagonist gets to know of a certain Khattam Shud (The End), the Prince of Silence and Foe of Speech, who hates stories. Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Penguin, 1991).

Ben Okri's proposal:

Her father's books were not read in a normal way. Some of them were read with the hands. Some were read by placing them at the centre of the forehead. One of the books could only be read with eyes closed. Another one could only be read in dreams while the reader was asleep, with the book under the pillow.

There was a special book of her father's which could only be read by the dead. It was placed in their coffins, over the heart.

There was one book that was only read by drinking. Water was poured on its waterproof pages and the water was drunk. The words filled out in the blood and heart and brains, till the reader became the words.

There was another special book that was read in the wind. The book was left dangling, the wind blew its pages, and the reader, with the light on their face, read the words which the wind dispersed.²⁸

28 *The Freedom Artist*, a novel with a foreword that simply says "Read Slowly," is an allegorical story-storehouse that weaves together three distinct strands of power-politics, wisdom-myth, and imagination-flight with innumerable brief propositions disguised as stories. A writer who writes invisible books, a girl who treasures a word-angel on her forehead, another girl who goes missing for committing blasphemy by asking "who the prisoner is" slowly descend on the time of *post-truth-contemporary* that lay in deep somber. Ben Okri, *The Freedom Artist* (London: Head of Zeus, 2019), 228.

