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Time and Time Again

Three disparate fictional characters – Angelus Novus, Data Neolithic and Karma-Sakshi – engage in a dialogue on time and art, looking at the aesthetics that shape the context, the nuances that flit across an unreliable landscape and the energies that populate this world of time and its insoluble contradictions

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How can we talk about time? Do we mean to talk in proportions or in metonymical terms? Do we mean a dilation of space, of bodies, of dystopias, which lay themselves across the terrain of language or (often times) in inarticulacy? How do we talk about time that is incommensurate, dysfunctional, useless or out of fashion? Is time always disproportionate to everything else? Never before have more people and increasingly swelling networks depended on, embedded into, surveilled through, and have been regimented by time. This constabulary of time is measured in atoms (planetary or gravitational realities are unreliable), and synchronised through a complex web of technology. It seems overwhelming, but also inconsequential, to think about time. This time can crash, or at least it threatens to. Should an invitation to write on the topic of time be accepted or rejected? Time as a concept is impossible, because time inhabits all concepts. Time as material is impossible because time plagues and permeates every material. Time as motion is impossible because its motion is forever arrested in a dialectic. Time can only be cultivated in a contradiction, its fallow space sensed in measurement, the expanse of which is laid across a transdisciplinary approach; with a physicist and a philosopher, a technologist and a historian, a poet and a mathematician. It is the very view that time is aporia, that its insoluble contradiction keeps us wondering where to begin, what to say about time.

Angelus Novus, Data Neolithic and Karma-Sakshi wander through the multiplayer open-world landscape of time encountering movements, philosophies and artworks. Each of them takes different paths that intersect or run parallel to survey the lay of the land. The looping networks that try to apprehend multiplicities are open to non-linear explorations by the readers.

Karma-Sakshi is a speculative calculus on all non-human actors and all non-human witnesses. All actions unfold as a series of diachronic vectors and a matrix of synchronic ellipses in universal time. Are all actions witnessed by a central axis, if not by an uncountable matrix of witnesses?

Data Neolithic is a gnomon; projecting piece on a data-dial, looking to tell the time of contemporaneity. Data Neolithic inspects the generation of information to look for patterns of distraction and disturbance amidst the haze of noise to open temporary apertures of self-similarity in the art of time and of time in art.

'A Paul Klee drawing named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole that which has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it is caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress,' said Walter Benjamin in 1940 *On the Concept of History*. Hence, **Angelus Novus** is the twin of Trishankhu, neither in the past nor in the future but caught in the present and resigned to his simulacral rapture.

'The notion of time and its passage has always seeped into my work, sometimes bordering on an out-of-control situation, an outburst that is often a result of apathy or neglect. I attempt to look at the multiplicity of the idea of time and the gaps that therefore exist between two places. Exploring what transpires within these intervals, I wonder if our realties shift or distort within these gaps. Time has an inherent need to be accurate; I intervene with the intent of derailing time in its constant pursuit of that perfectness.' **Prajakta Potnis**

Angelus Novus: As I sit on this cloud and I look through the pile of the debris of the nth World War piled up in front of me, the immediate is incomprehensible. I am surrounded by a world where the distinction between the imaginary and reality is broken down and is bordering on the absurd. My eyes allow me to only make sense of distant events. Can time be quantified only through hindsight?

Since I can be omnipresent, I am also right now in my ophthalmologist's waiting room to have my hypermetropia corrected. Sitting next to me is a boy playing a game shooting down combatants of some unknown outfit, navigating through streets of some unknown decrepit war-ravaged city...

Your inherited criteria and values of judgement are continually losing currency under the impact of the constant upheavals in geopolitics and technology. What does the past or present mean to you now in the current historical and 'networked' existence? I thought.

A good exercise my ophthalmologist told me that arrests deterioration of sight is to practice focusing on something in direct proximity and in the next instant at what's far away. As I steadied myself on the cloud, I shifted my vision from his PSP to look again through the pile of wreckage in front of me continuously rising, calibrated not by latitudes and longitudes but by days, decades and centuries. I can't help thinking of the hubris of the Italian Futurists and their caveat against looking at the past... but is there an option? I adjust my rear view mirror but the future is un-seeable... all I can make out is the warning that says...

'Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear'

The future is gaining in on us and the present is but nonexistent, lost before even it is thought of. The present is comprehended only by its retrieval from the past and only by its critical re-appropriation can we project meaning into the future which will soon become

the present. Time is distributed unequally – the past is finite, the future infinite and the present just the edge of the two. So, is a work of art that is relevant only that which precariously balances itself on this edge?

Art is a reflection of the economic organisation of the times it is produced in and is at times responsible for maintaining continuity with the past in social and cultural areas. And sometimes providing ruptures and breaks to destroy or replace ideas or relations within them for the future.

Angelus Novus: As the dust settled from the waves of barbarism that had consumed Europe ...the nationalities of Europe got defined, feudalism was eliminated, the ecclesiastical authority curbed and monarchy was set up ... the Dark Ages in Europe had come to a close. The people sought a rupture with the present and continuity with their illustrious antiquity. They looked to their past – the achievements of great Greek and Roman civilisations. Italy could take the lead in the Renaissance because at that time the other nations were in a semi-barbarous state. Apart from possessing a favourable climate of political freedom, most importantly it had commercial prosperity. Renaissance is hailed as Europe's moment of transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world.

'And what is there to see in an old picture except the laborious contortions of an artist throwing himself against the barriers that thwart his desire to express his dream completely?... Admiring an old picture is the same as pouring our sensibility into a funerary urn instead of hurtling it far off, in violent spasms of action and creation. Do you, then, wish to waste all your best powers in this eternal and futile worship of the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, shrunken, beaten down? In truth I tell you that daily visits to museums, libraries and academies (cemeteries of empty exertion, Calvaries of crucified dreams, registries of aborted beginnings!) are, for artists, as damaging as the prolonged supervision by parents of certain young people drunk with their talent and their ambitious wills. When the future is barred to them, the admirable past may be a solace for the ills of the moribund, the sickly, the prisoner... But we want no part of it, the past, we the young and strong Futurists!' (excerpt from Futurist Manifesto, http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/manifesto.html).

'Cloud computing means storing and accessing data and programs over the Internet instead of your computer's hard drive. The cloud is just a metaphor for the Internet. It goes back to the days of

flowcharts and presentations that would represent the gigantic server-farm infrastructure of the Internet as nothing but a puffy, white cumulus cloud, accepting connections and doling out information as it floats' (http://in.pcmag.com/network-ing-communications-software/38970/feature/what-is-cloud-computing).

Angelus Novus: *May the Arrogant Not Prevail* is a to-scale reproduction of the Ishtar Gate built in c. 575 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar. Only, Michael Rakowitz has made it from recycled packing materials of Middle Western food products sold in the United States. He has also created to-scale duplications of the objects looted from the National Museum of Iraq in papier-mâché and covered them with Arabic newspapers and similar packaging materials titled *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*. In their heterochrony of accumulating more than one time – present-day commonplace materials making centuries' old objects and further circulating in museums and cultural institutions – they function as a heterotopia. The work refers to the looting of the Baghdad Museum after the American invasion of Iraq as well as to the artist's personal history. Although born and brought up in New York, his mother's family is from Iraq and in 1946 fled to the United States

*Michael Rakowitz, **The invisible enemy should not exist**, Galerie Barbara Wien, **Stela fragment**; relief carving shows two men wearing skirt and head band and four animals (lions) (IM23477) (Recovered, Missing, Stolen series), Middle Eastern packaging and newspapers, glue, 70 cm x 104 cm x 52 cm, 2016. Photograph by Nick Ash. Image Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin.*

Boolean

Karma-Sakshi: There are certain times in life when one is actively looking at everything, and then there are times when it's not even possible to look at anything at all. A Boolean switch between looking and not looking, on and off. You invented artificial light, to avert darkness, to illuminate the living room, the street, the city. The mass ornament. The illuminated globe. Perpetual light. More than a trillion *karma-sakshi* proxies. Perpetual light suspended the cycle of looking and not looking. In the condition of perpetual light, when is it even possible to not see anything? Meanwhile, light created its own estrangements. Light is also a torture device for you now. Minuscule versions of blinding lights!

Leap Second | Hesitation

Data Neolithic: A leap second is a note of time that we usually do not see, or hear, or need. It is one that is needed when a gap in the measure of time appears, one that threatens to crash all of time. On the day of a leap second event, The Network Time Protocol daemon receives notification from any one of the following – a configuration file,

an attached reference clock, or a remote server. Time requires that it must appear to be monotonically increasing, and this is why a leap second is inserted with the sequence 23:59:59, 23:59:60, 00:00:00. According to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk: Network_Time_Protocol> 'although the clock is actually halted during the event, any processes that query the system time cause it to increase by a tiny amount, preserving the order of events. If it should ever become necessary, a leap second would be deleted with the sequence 23:59:58, 00:00:00, skipping 23:59:59'.

Data Neolithic: The order of events must be preserved at all times, and a leap second betrays measurement by adding itself or deleting itself from the system of time. A leap second is the possibility of corruption of time, a contamination by a small measure of insertion that keeps the system from plunging into a mathematical catastrophe.

A leap second is also a gap, a hesitation. Often misinterpreted as weak will, hesitation is a momentary gap, a break in which the thinker allows himself to pause. It is the gap in between actions, the leap second between two thoughts, doubt and hesitation, which open 'time windows' of future events. Leap second is a knot in the weave of the fabric from the past into the present, and from the present into the future. This caesura, the time in between, is perhaps more important in memory-making events than the event itself. When we think about history, we think about events, temporality and the way an event occurred. In *On Tarrying* (Josph Vogl, On Tarrying, Seagull Books, 2011) Joseph Vogl speaks about moments between action, contemplation and withdrawal. The brief knot-moment, in between opinions that may go any which way, or not; one is not just undecided, but defers, multiplies and suspends the structures of decision-making. It is this time-knot, this leap second, before an event that becomes eventful.

Germination

Karma-Sakshi: Is it possible to freeze a universally unified time, if there is no central axis to this universe? If there are no limits to this universe, then any point can be its axis. The universe has infinite points of origin. Then, even my home or a sunflower seed can be the centre of the universe. In the infinitesimal universe, energy germinates in an effervescent moment. The moment of germination is contingent. The importance of time in your life arises from its contingent nature. Your life unfolds as a series of actions and events, and therein lies the gravity of witnessing actions and events, of witnessing life itself. My destiny as the witness will be the only trace that you ever lived.

Eternity | How to measure a second

Data Neolithic: Donald B. Sullivan, a physicist and chief of the Time and Frequency Division of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, explains, 'The second is the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom'. The objective is to keep timekeeping stable, in a manner that is invisible to the general population. Like timekeeping, eternity must be invisible too. Eternity is endless time, and that is a paradox. For how do we conceive of time that is endless? The unending time is a strange mathematical point, an absence of time itself that makes it endless. Eternity then is not a measure of time, but an acknowledgement of the

Edwaert Collier,
***Vanitas, Still Life
with Books and
Manuscripts and
a Skull**, Oil on
Canvas, 35 cm x
30 cm, 1663.*

impossibility of conceiving time. Eternity is impossible time. To try and prepare for eternity is to look into the abyss of time, and shout, and hope for an echo.

The landscape of time may be immeasurable, but the vicinity in time, its intimacy, its immediacy, its step is measurable. Seconds are the steps of time. We may not know where the steps lead to, but we do know how to walk the step, because we can measure the volume of each step. Could eternity be just an instance long enough in a measure of time we do not know yet? Socrates offered two possibilities: Either death means nothingness; a sleep-like state without dreaming, or, the soul leaves the deceased body to travel across a river to the underworld where it meets other souls. Socrates liked both ideas of eternity. The symbolism in 17th century Dutch Vanitas' still-life painting is a constant reminder that our being is fugacious. Skulls, rotten flowers, music instruments and hour glasses, often displayed in a clutter, are evidence of the certainty of death.

Post-humanists dream of biological immortality, of a genetically enhanced immune system, or infinite cellular regeneration that promises a never-ending life, in the hope that, in one of the possible futures, technology wins the war against ageing and disease. The most celebrated speculative future is one of virtual immortality, where memory, personality and intelligence are digitised, organised and downloaded to a robotic body or a collection of bodies. A longing for eternity is the hope to archive everything, and for everything to last forever. But if everything lasts forever, nothing is lost, and time

will come to a standstill. Is eternity then a time where a second does not come to pass?

Escape

Karma-Sakshi: Some of you might be thinking whether you are eternally exposed to the gaze of an omniscient witness? And a few others might think whether the universe is parading itself in front of your gaze. Am I measuring you from a perpendicular gaze? The zenith gaze? It's ambitious when you want to look at yourselves, like I look at you! Can you move out of your perceptual orbit? Can you escape into another dimension to look at yourselves from the zenith? Meanwhile, your survival skills have sky-rocketed. Your death-defying ambitions... assumptions, experiments, inferences, applications... And when you propel yourself into

*Rohini Devasher, **Terrasphere**, Video Still, 2015. Image Courtesy of the artist and Dr. Bahu Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum.*

the zenith you tend to think, is it a fleeting view? Or is it a timeless view? Is it an endless view? How can you bear with endlessness? How can you endure immortality? What happens if you never die? How will you get any rest from seeing everything all the time? Are you even programmed to endure such timelessness?

Endurance: Time: Death Wish

Angelus Novus: Much time has elapsed since I turned to look back at the past and my wings ache ... I am tempted to turn around and look at the future but am scared – I do not want to commit the folly that king Indradyumna committed of breaking the promise. He dared to steal a look before the celestial sculptor finished carving and he disappeared, leaving the wooden idols of Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath in an unfinished state. I would rather wait for the winds of progress to ebb before I risk a peek at the future... which I know will perhaps not be sooner than eternity. I strike line after line to mark the days on the cloud but the amorphous and iniquitous cloud erases all my attempts at tracking time. The futility of my act has made me give it up knowing that Time will not cease even if humanity is wiped off, only its unit of measurement will change.

Superdrop was created by Superflex, for the exhibition INSERT (2014) curated by the Raqs Media Collective. The *Superdrop* seemed like it was made for an exhibition *Kala* (Time) curated by Kapila Vatsayayana in the same space (Matighar, Delhi) in 1990. The concept of the artists was to '...insert something into "Kala" and then insert "Kala" into "Insert". To do so, we wanted to create a version of the tar pitch experiment. To imagine that we started the experiment at the time of the Kala exhibition and that we now are at the moment of the formation of the first drop'. Tar pitch is a viscoelastic polymer. This means that even though it seems to be solid at room temperature and can be shattered with a hard impact, it is actually fluid and will flow over time, but extremely slowly. The pitch drop experiment is a long-term experiment which measures the flow of a piece of pitch over many years. For the experiment, pitch is put in a glass funnel and allowed to slowly drip out (Superflex, 2014).

Typically, a drop is something one imagines as a transient formation between one body of liquid and the other. The *Superdrop* stretches this momentary occurrence to a period of 24 years as a consequence contemplating the indefinability of time – time and eternity as a relative quantity for different forms of existence.

Radical Painters and Sculptors Association

'Radical Group....(Notes) *When you come from a class that is closer to the working classes; feel rooted within a language and ethos that is regional and marginal; and when your ideas and dreams are not constrained by any of this, you are pushing a Sisyphean boulder up*

the hill. The Radical Group emerged in the mid 1980s out of a 'politics of friendship' among students from the Trivandrum College of Art (mid 1970s to mid 1980s) to counter the discursive hegemony of bourgeois, petit bourgeois philosophies in art, which they felt were reductive of 'other' voices. Centred around the charismatic figure of KP Krishnakumar, the short-lived 'moment' of the Radical Group, held exhibitions at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda (1986); the Town Hall in Calicut (1987) publishing a manifesto Questions and Dialogue *and a newsletter* Artists against a Reactionary Aesthetic Sensibility. *They wanted an alternate praxis, to bypass the stifling commodification of life and art; forge deeper links with the working classes and students in villages and towns. Such a dream was economically unsustainable within Capitalist society, and the group combusted out of its contradictions ending in the suicide of Krishnakumar in late 1989.'* **Anita Dube**

Angelus Novus: In *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, Camus raises the question that if one accepts that life is devoid of meaning then does one have to end it? Or then take the only other perceived option of taking a leap of faith, to transcend this absurd condition, to escape from it or to find meaning in the chaos of meaningless-ness of life? If one was to contemplate the meaning of life, then how does one look at a person who commits suicide because he/she feels there is no meaning to life

and a *jihadi*, for example, who is willing to end his/her life for the meaning he/she has found in life? Camus suggests that apart from suicide and hope, there is a third option – that of endurance. According to Camus, Sisyphus is the ultimate absurd hero. His enduring and unending act of pushing the boulder uphill only for it to roll back down is a perfect mirror to the absurd human condition. He has to endure it without committing suicide or hoping for success and accept that there is nothing more to life than this absurd struggle, only then can he find happiness in it (The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, Albert Camus, Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien, 1955).

Crash

Data Neolithic: Is there an art of disappearing? Jean Baudrillard suggested in his last book *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* (Jean Baudrillard, Seagull Books, 2009) which got published just before he passed away, that disappearing is not an accidental event, but a conscious withdrawal from the world. But not only individual humans are disappearing; it is actually reality in itself that is slowly disappearing. People foster a totalitarian attraction to unity, to lessen dualities, to abolish evil. Humans seem fascinated by the idea of a vanishing reality or that of reality

becoming a symbolic dimension that has broken away from the real. According to him, we are driven by an urge to dematerialise everything, through the processes of digitisation of the everyday, of memories and relationships. 'Behind every image,' he writes, 'something has disappeared'. Baudrillard concludes his writing with: 'Is it, in fact, the real we worship, or its disappearance?'

Data Neolithic: Exploring notions of the infinite, the immaterial and the transcendental, digital artist and musician Ryoji Ikeda orchestrates the infinitesimally small encoded particles of knowledge – data – into elaborate visual and sonic manifestations of mesmerising

beauty. Part of the larger *datamatics* project that explores how abstracted views of reality are used to decipher, encode and control the world, *data.tron* consists of three sets of data visualisations: computer crashes and errors, all the information relating to chromosome 11 DNA sequencing, and transcendental numbers, mathematical constants such as *e* or *pi* – vast, significant numbers without end.

Decay: Time

Angelus Novus: The Metronome ticks like a time bomb, keeping time to the symphony of the jets that carry tourists and stock brokers and CEOs of multinationals, drones that cross sovereign boundaries, war cries of the rabid, rhetoric of the political leaders, the sounds of groundwater being sucked, urban construction, a cold drink advertisement that I can skin after five seconds, cries of the oppressed, sounds of the pollutants seeping into the soil, shutting doors, water from mega projects drowning villages, whirring of the casino roulette, shouts of the indigenous people, mining drills cutting through sacred rocks, election speeches, an altercation on reality television, screams of the abused, rise and fall of the stock market, calls for self-definition, car bombs, *clunck* of a plastic bottle carelessly disposed, cars, hoot of the luxury liner, opening windows, stamp of the border control, din in a mall, sound of
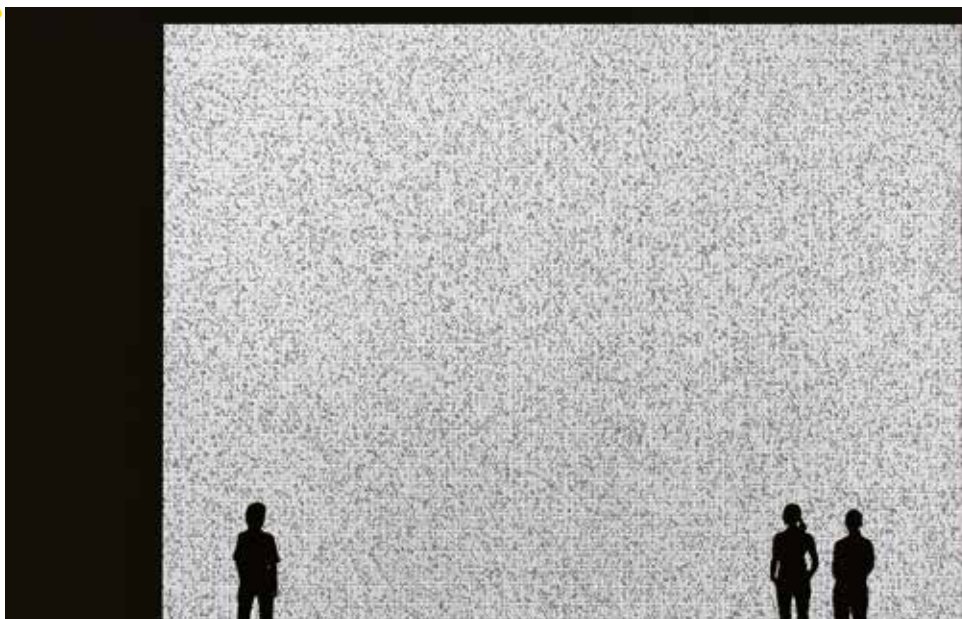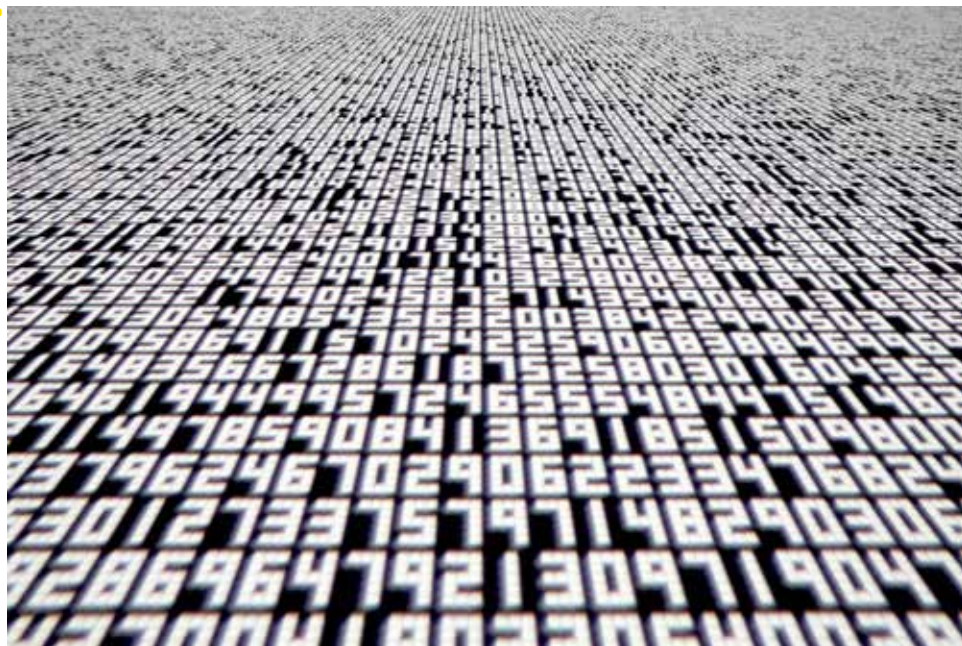
juices secreted in the stomach. Chatter of guns on the PSP. New Year's celebrations.

In her work *Loca Cola* (1999–ongoing) Sharmila Samant talks of erasures of local cultures and traditions with the multinational companies taking over local businesses as well as tastes.

*Ryoji Ikeda, **data.tron**, Audiovisual Installation, DLP Projector, Computer, Speaker, Dimensoins Variable, 2007 © Ryoji Ikeda, Photograph by Ryuichi Maruo, Image Courtesy of Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM]*

*Superflex, **Superdrop**, 2014, Tar with metal frame, Installation View, **INSERT 2014**. Photograph by Umang Bhattacharya, Image Courtesy of Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation*

She has collected 53 bottles of the ubiquitous global giant Coca Cola from various countries, which all surprisingly come in different shapes and sizes. Earlier the advertisements used to basically cater only to the upwardly mobile middle class and sold products through the portrayal of a very elite, Western lifestyle. Now, however, after liberalisation, the contenders have multiplied and people from any and every strata have become potential consumers. People who would have opted for a local sherbet or other indigenous drinks from a street vendor are now consuming soft drinks. Sharmila's Coke bottles are filled with local/homemade drinks from the respective countries prepared as per the recipes collected by her along with the bottles. Over time, during their display, the homemade drinks which are supposed to be consumed fresh and hence are without preservatives ferment and ooze out of the bottles.

Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca Machine* is a 12-metre-long installation that looks like it belongs more to a science lab than an art space. The machine is a complex arrangement of tubes and glass jars that is fed twice a day. His aim was to create a complex machine that is in a way pointless as a critique of the obsessions of the inevitable decay signalled by the hyper consumer society we live in ... the machine too consumes only to produce faeces similar in composition to the human excreta. In his essay, Subversive, Gerardo Mosquera says, 'He uses methods typical of global capitalism to produce his art... All of Delvoye's work and his persona as an artist seem modulated by the postmodern ambiguities of simulacrum and irony, and in cases like *Cloaca*, it goes beyond to reach a concealed subversion' (Subversive Beauty Gerardo Mosquera, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016, https://wimdelvoye.be/about/publications/).

Giovanni Anselmo's *Sculpture that eats* is a bunch of lettuce leaves crushed between a smaller stone block and a standing stone block. The stones are tied together with a copper wire. As time passes, the leaves rot, loosening the wire and the sculpture falls apart. Arte Povera was a movement in Italy that had as its starting point an exhibition in 1967 by Germano Celant by the same name. What Celant was trying to propose was that it was unreal to aspire for the finish and high production values of Europe and America due to the crumbly economic conditions prevalent in Italy. The minimalist works spoke about the paucity of means and used it as a cultural tactic against the dominant culture. The artists chose materials that were poor and impermanent. According to Celant, it was a guerrilla war against the problem of capital (Neo-avant-garde, David Hopkins, Rodopi, Amsterdam-New York, NY 2006).

Lacerate Time

Data Neolithic: In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1969), Michel Foucault writes about the archive not as a physical space, and differs from the conventional definition of an archive. His description of the archive is both the 'system of utterability' and the 'law of what can be said'. The archive does not reproduce but actually produces meaning and it is an instrument of power and authority. As a centre of production of meaning, Foucault's theory on the archive claims that the storage, organisation and redistribution of information are never passive or innocent; they always inform political and historical discourse. If Foucault removed the archive from its physical space and theoretical framework, Jacques Derrida describes 'archive fever' or *mal d'archive* in French (which also means 'in need of archives') in a rather poetical manner: 'It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it archives itself' (Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996 p. 91). According to Derrida, we not only need archives, we burn for them. An archive is a place that shelters memory. Archives are memory factories, and memory

Sharmila Samant, **Loca Cola**, 1999-ongoing, glass Coca Cola bottles, local drinks prepared and bottled by the artist. Image Courtesy of the artist.

Wim Delvoye, **Cloaca Original**, Mixed Media, 1157 cm x 78 cm x 270 cm, Installation View, Cloaca, 16.09 – 31.12.2000, MUHKA, Antwerpen (Belgium), 2000. © Wim Delvoye. Image Courtesy of the artist.

holds meaning. For both Foucault and Derrida, the archive can't be seen as a passive repository. In fact, according to their theory, it shapes and controls the way history is read, which in turn shapes our political reality.

Archives, however, do not tell us the truth about our histories or ourselves; they rather construct idealised images of our supposed collective history. What matters in the end is the carrier material, which dictates the amount of data that can be stored for *x* amount of time, from stone and papyrus to digital memory chips. Or narrated histories, from one individual to another like in storytelling. This all becomes evident in the work of Christian Boltanski, whose archives are memorials, without showing memory actively. His ever-expanding heartbeat library, *Les Archives du Coeur (The Heart Archive)*, a permanent installation at Teshima Island in Japan, is divided into three rooms: an installation, a recording room and a listening room. Almost like an ethnographer, Boltanski collected heartbeats from people all over the world as well as those of visitors. It is an ever-growing database of records of our human existence, drawing questions on death, memory, disappearance and loss.

Data Nostalgia

Data Neolithic: Facebook sends us daily reminders about our past posts, carefully marking and cataloguing previously uploaded photographs and reminding us of them. The algorithm feeds into our yearning for inventing micro nostalgia – anniversaries, birthdays and even the first day at college or first camera (irony at its sharpest). It does all the background work of memory – selecting images (it is careful to select ones with faces, the algorithm 'hand-picks' those faces you chat with and tag often). The photograph is framed with a non-specific sense of 'elation', and urges you to make visible your memory again. It wants you to put the visual codes of your life back into circulation. It does not matter if you do not feed it with new photographs or new memories; old memories are just fine as long as they are put back into the system. The algorithm of nostalgia is a profitable one, but also a necessary one. Nostalgia keeps the system running; as long as our data can be used as 'soft' reminders of our spectacular social lives that accumulate value with the more 'likes' they attract; the system gets better and better at defining nostalgia for us. For the algorithm to know how to produce nostalgia, it needs to be able to 'remember the data'. Facebook is then a system of assembling and manufacturing memories. A calculated selection of a daily nostalgia fix. In fact, it goes a step further. Artist Amalia Ulman created an online persona on Instagram by feeding the system exactly what it had learnt to recognise. The more the artist performed according to prescribed behaviours – uploading images of herself as a 'cute girl', 'sugar baby', 'life goddess' – the more 'likes' and 'shares' her content received. Relying on a character and a narrative that had been seen before allowed 'people to map the content with ease'. Data Nostalgia could be seen in its purest form

here. After all, data nostalgia is hardly concerned with 'real life' (whatever that might be), but with the sequence of data uploaded online which falls into a recognisable pattern generated by a large aggregate of social data consumption. It is even better if the nostalgia is produced by re-presenting images from the past that were never real. Here, nostalgia serves as a reminder of a life that was never lived, but one that is better consumed, and therefore more valuable.

Karma-Sakshi: I'm the witness of all human and non-human actions. It's the unique vantage point that a star enjoys to witness all the actions on your land. A flat land. The sky rotates around your flat land. Likewise, I also rotate around you to witness all your actions. I'm neither the big brother in television nor the architectonics of surveillance. I'm living out a heavenly destiny. I just see everything. What does it mean to see everything? It's about being present everywhere at the same time.

'The 50 cm resolution is useful because it bypasses risks of privacy infringement when recording people in public spaces, much in the same way that Google Street View blurs the face of people or car license plates. But the regulation also has a security rationale: it is not only important details of strategic sites that get camouflaged in the 50 cm/pixel resolution but the consequences of violence and violations as well. The resolution of satellite images has a direct bearing on drone attacks. Although, at a resolution of 50 cm, the general features of individual buildings can be identified, a hole in a roof – the signature of a drone strike – would appear as nothing more than a slight colour variation, a single darker pixel, perhaps, within a pixel composition.' Eyal Weizman, Violence at the Threshold of Detectability, Journal #64, April 2015.
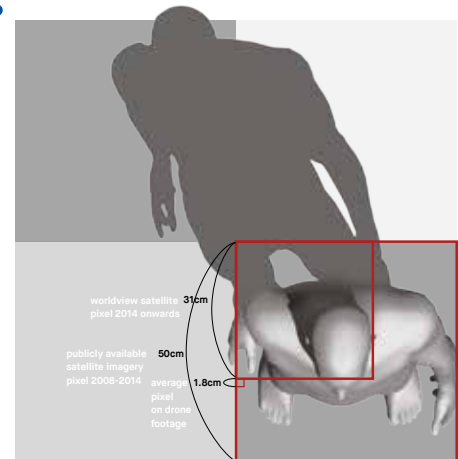
*Forensic Architecture, **50 cm/pixel satellite imagery**, A large hole in the roof of a shop in a market in Miranshah, Pakistan is left after a strike on March 30, 2012. A satellite image depicts the same roof less than a day after the strike. We know this hole is in one of the pixels but cannot tell exactly which—likely one of the darker ones, 2013. Image Courtesy of Eyal Weizman and Forensic Architecture.*

*Christian Boltanski, **Les Archives du Coeur (The Heart Archives)**, Teshima Island, Japan 2008, Photograph by Kuge Yasuhide, Image Courtesy of the artist and Benesse Art Site Naoshima*

*Giovanni Anselmom, **Senza titolo**, stone, lettuce, copper wire, 1968, Photograph by Giorgio Mussa. Image Courtesy of Archivio Anselmo and Marian Goodman Gallery*

*Amalia Ulman, **Excellences & Perfections**. Image Courtesy of the artist.*

Impermanence: Memory: Time

Angelus Novus: 'Mr. Novus', my name is called out as the ophthalmologist is ready for me. Adjusting a pair of lenses in front of my eyes he asks me to read the letters on the light box ...   L .H. O. O. Q. The ophthalmologist is satisfied, I see him smiling through his moustache and goatee, and I am, for some reason, reminded of Mona Lisa. People believe there is something tormentingly melancholic about her fleeting smile. Some believe she was painted by Leonardo to talk about the impermanence of life. My ophthalmologist, who was part of the counter culture movement in the early 1970s, seems to have caught my thoughts telepathically. He adds, 'In Buddhist thought, it is necessary to realise that everything is of the nature of suffering and that all is impermanent. One is mostly oblivious to the three characteristics of existence which are suffering, impermanence and non-self. This leads to the strengthening of ignorance concerning the true nature of sentient existence.' And I said... It leads to desire, and the billboards and the magazines and the television channels urge us to buy three to get one free. Ludites will be quick to say that consumer culture today threatens to erase one's sense of memory along with all signs of the past... but documenting, archiving is the easiest thing in the digital era. Memories can be summoned up at a flick of the finger on the screen of the mobile and albums meticulously archived on social media.

Relics of the Buddha are, one might think, evidence of being in denial of transience of our being and thereby at conflict with the teachings of the Buddha. They can, on the contrary, be taken as an ultimate mark of acceptance of impermanence – that of the Buddha's corporeal being itself. *Blood Wedding* by Anita Dube is a melancholic celebration of death, like the Sufi understanding of death as the union of the soul with the divine beloved. Made at a time of deep personal loss and turmoil, the human bones painstakingly embalmed with blood-red velvet and beads are aesthetised to such an extent so as to take away the solemnity of the human mortal remains. As Boris Groys says in *On Art Activism*, about aestheticisation of tools, 'artistic aestheticisation means the defunctionalisation of this tool, the violent annulation of its practical applicability and efficiency' (http://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/ Boris Groys On Art Activism). Anita, too, negates death and takes away the efficacy of nostalgia and memory to cause pain.

By dematerialising the art object and contesting the permanence of the art, the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s sought to escape modernism and commodification. Occurring simultaneously across North and South America and Europe, the neo-avant-garde was a reaction to the perceived constraints of Modernism, such as originality, style, expression and craft, and of the market forces. The Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-Vietnam war protests, the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Counter Culture, better known as the Hippie Movement, laid a rich ground for its nurture. The Fluxus group led by George Maciunas created performance art pieces, called *Aktions* or *Happenings or Event Scores* that were ephemeral in nature. On Kawara's postcards (the *I Got Up* series); telegrams (the *I Am Still Alive* series), his date paintings (the *Today* series); calendars (*One Hundred Years* and *One Million Years*) engage the personal and historical consciousness of place and time.

Data Neolithic: The concept of simultaneity expressed through Krishna dancing with many Gopis at the same time is a common subject in Indian art and popular images. The two clocks, placed next to each other, in Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1987–1990, represents the artist and his partner who suffered from a severe illness. The clocks were set at the same time, but bear the possibility of one stopping before the other. In this case, the batteries must be replaced and the clocks re-syn-chronised. Felix Gonzalez-Torres said, 'Time is something that scares me... or used to. The piece I made with two clocks was the scariest thing I have ever done. I wanted to face it; I wanted those two clocks right in front of me, ticking' (Torres in an interview with Robert Nickas: 'Felix Gonzalez-Torres: All the Time in the World,' Flash Art 24, no. 161 (Nov./Dec. '91). P. 86–89).

Duration

Data Neolithic: Henri-Louis Bergson, a French philosopher, proposed that processes of immediate experience and intuition may be more significant than abstract rationalism and science for understanding reality. He noticed that duration is the essence of time. If to measure a second is to capture the essence of time, Bergson's insistence on the instant perhaps inaugurates the philosophy of duration. Bergson turns to art to contemplate the idea of duration in his writing titled *An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. He states, 'I shall perceive (the ringing sound and the vanishing sound) one in the other, each permeating the other and organising themselves like the note of a tune, so as to form what we shall call a continuous or qualitative multiplicity with no resemblance to number. I shall thus get the image of pure duration.' To elaborate his philosophy further, he also takes an example of a pendulum to build another analogy of duration. According to him, melody works on the same principles of duration as a pendulum. As we feel drowsed into slumber listening to the sound of the pendulum, it is difficult to spot the very single sound of the pendulum which puts us to sleep. It is during the period of the swinging pendulum, when the swinging itself becomes unremarkable, or when the previous and forthcoming sounds enter an unexceptional continuity in perception and cannot be distinguished from one another, when duration becomes apparent. It is 'during' this time of perception that the pendulum arranges itself like a melody, like the notes of a tune. Bergson points out that the single sound of a tune does not captivate us, but rather the perception we possess to delight in the unity of sounds produced by the single ones in us. This experience of melody is the experience of duration, according to Bergson. Melody teaches us what duration is. To take delight in duration, or to be pained and tortured by it, is a singular ability our perception possesses. We are able to experience duration of not just the present but of the past and of the future as well. By extension, imagination could be the duration of the future, while memory might be the duration of the past. It is in these acts of speculative narratives – imagining and recollecting – that we make possible alternative experiences of duration in addition to the one of the present. Duration then makes us inhabit time with an indestructible unity. And each one of these unities can be punctured by an instant, an instant that opens another duration.

Coalescence

Karma-Sakshi: You thought that parallel rays are coalescent and omniscient in synchronic time? How does the radial diffusion of rays appear to you as parallel? Any speculation about time through your experience cannot be anything more than a bundle of perceptual errors. Your experience of time is a perceptual error. The error of radial light appearing to you as parallel light. The error of spiralling time appearing to you as a vector. I'm the origin of all vectors, where all the vectors live out their destinies as witnesses.
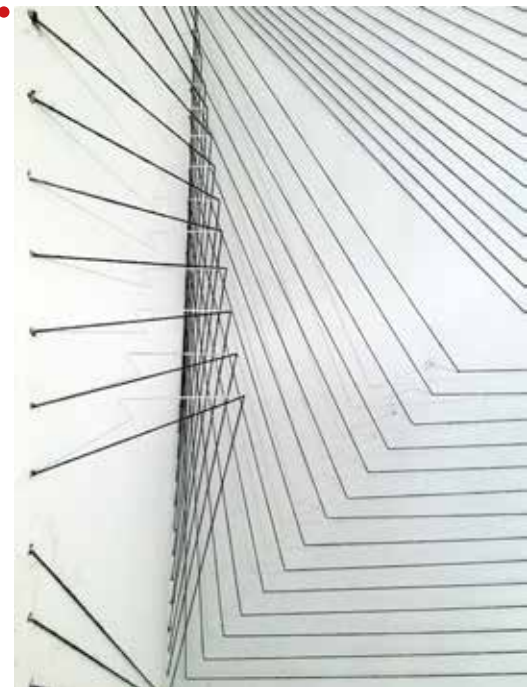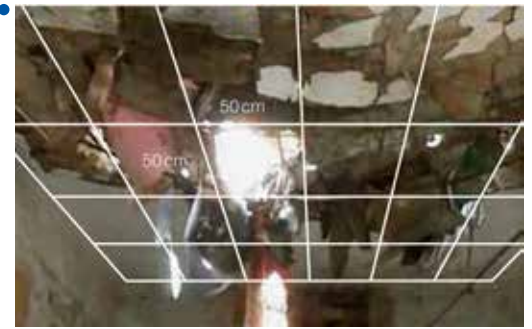
*Parul Gupta, **Spatial Drawing**, Wool, Spokes & Glue Bond, 2016. Making Space, part of Artist Process program at Exhibit 320's alternative space IAfter320. Image Courtesy of the artist and Exhibit 320.*

*Forensic Architecture, **50 cm/pixel satellite imagery**, A large hole in the roof of a shop in a market in Miranshah, Pakistan is left after a strike on March 30, 2012. A satellite image depicts the same roof less than a day after the strike. We know this hole is in one of the pixels but cannot tell exactly which—likely one of the darker ones, 2013. Image Courtesy of Eyal Weizman and Forensic Architecture.*

*Anita Dube, **Silence (Blood Wedding)**, Human bones covered in red velvet with beading and lace, Dimensions variable, 1997. Image Courtesy of the artist.*

*Tushar Joag, **Karma Sakshi Looking at 'Today' by On Kawara on the day he died,** Mix media, 2016. Image Courtesy of the artist.*

Sandbox : Time

Angelus Novus: My vision is blocked by an enormous cloud shaped like a mushroom; somewhere in the middle of its very long shadow that reaches the present, I see an apparition playing chess with a model in the nude, one end of his shadow reaches the here and now while at the other end is another explosion that rocked the castle called modernism. As I pull out my (post-colonial) glasses and focus, I see that this landscape of time we are standing in is a humungous sandbox. As more lights have come on around the periphery of the sandbox, we all cast shadows like a Moravian star and each slender point is intersected by another shadow of another slender multi-ple-pointed star. At each intersection is our very own sand castle called modernism.

'A sandbox is a style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on the gamer, allowing the gamer to roam and change a virtual world at will. In contrast to a progression-style game, a sandbox game emphasises roaming and allows a gamer to select tasks. Instead of featuring segmented areas or numbered levels, a sandbox game usually occurs in a "world" to which the gamer has full access from start

to finish. A sandbox game is also known as an open-world or free-roaming game. Gamers play sandbox games according to their preference. These games include structured elements – such as mini-games, tasks, submissions and storylines – that may be ignored by gamers. In fact, the sandbox game's non-linear nature creates storyline challenges for game designers. For this reason, tasks and side missions usually follow a progression, where tasks are unlocked upon successful task completion. Sandbox game types vary. Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) generally include a mixture of sandbox and progression gaming and heavily depend on emergent interactive user game play for retaining non-progression-focused gamers' (https://www.techopedia.com/definition/3952/sandbox-gaming).

Angelus Novus: Explosion in a shingle factory. Motion which is a combination of space and time was explored by Duchamp in *Nude Descending the Staircase* and caused a major flutter in the Armory show of 1913. It was met with fierce dismissal and was termed by a New York newspaper as 'explosion in a shingle factory'. *The Fountain of R. Mutt* had exploded in the face of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. The devices of the (historical) avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s of collage, assemblage, ready-mades, mono-chrome painting and constructed sculpture posed a challenge to the bourgeois notion of 'autonomous art' and 'the expressive artist' changing the course of art.

As Geeta Kapur points out in her book *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (Tulika, 2000), modernism is a moment in the art of America and Europe that spawned an avant-garde which opposed the academic agenda of the arts reinforced by the state. This was not the case in India as the avant-garde and the modernist movement in India worked towards the cause of nationalism. If we have to stake a claim to modernism, she states that the Eurocentric definition and terms of reference of modernism have to be changed to accommodate alternative modernisms. The way the terms nationalism, tradition and modernism and the dynamics between them play out in the cultural development is specific to each location especially in post-colonial societies. With the passage of time, as these societies change and grow, these relations too are subject to change.

Possible Futures

Data Neolithic: If we think about the future it is already in the past. We imagine or perhaps dream a different future in times of social or technological change, often to envision an alternative order to a repressed system. But what if the change is part of the dream? The Afro-American Jazz legend Sun Ra and his Arkestra produced astral jazz, African-American sci-fi and psychedelic hip-hop to suggest that a future for black Americans could be intergalactic. Another account of a possible future is Sultana's Dream, a story written by the female writer Rokeya Sakhawat

Hossain in British India imagining a feminist utopia where men are banished, living in isolation, and women reign supreme. This early work of feminist science fiction imagines a world not only not dominated by men but also mentions inventions like solar heating. (*Sultana's Dream* was originally published in The Indian Ladies' Magazine, Madras, 1905, in English.) In times of despair and censorship, Science Fiction or simply Future Fiction becomes a mode of expression to imagine life on the outside, a possible future with beliefs in the tenacity of humanity. Sci-Fi bears a subversive potential for the alternative, the revolution, the better idea. How do societies that are bereft of an active interest in producing Sci-Fi tell of other possible futures? How do these societies articulate a desire or a foreboding about other possible futures?

Data Neolithic: A time capsule, a box containing *A Letter to Amália Jyran, Who Will Be Fifty Four in 2061 CE,* a work by the Raqs Media Collective for the Nordic Biennial of 2011 will be opened in 50 years' time. Until then, it will remain buried on the grounds of the Alby Estate in the city of Moss, in the Øsdold county of Norway. 'A time capsule is nothing if not an attempt at creating a demonstration of the relationship between the future and the present, and between the present that will soon be past, and the future that will become present one day.'

In Asim Waqif's site-specific installation, of a *Puzzle for a Future Archaeologist,* containing of personal and found objects

(including the front of an old autorickshaw, a door, a window, the artist's father's Rajdoot motorcycle, metal parts and wood) placed in a hole in the ground and sprayed with polyurethane foam, the artist raises questions about our contemporary times from the viewpoint of a future archaeologist.

Somnambulism

Karma-Sakshi: You come to see me drown into the unknown depths of the ocean. You derive pleasure in seeing me drown. That enjoyment is universal, purposive, necessary and pure. Your sleep patterns are anchored to vertical time. As I drown, you swim towards me thinking that I'm a sinking golden crown. You are curious about the radial patterns that travel through deep sea currents. You have been swimming towards me every night for the past 530 million years. Yet, we have never spoken. I always wanted to take you for a swim through the unknown coral reef mountains. Imagine, we swim into a wild strawberry garden. But we have not spoken for the past 530 million years. Maybe, it's too early to take you out for a swim.

*Asim Waqif, **Puzzle for a Future Archaeologist**, Detail, 2015 - 2016, Photograph by Chandan Ahuja. Image Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Nature Morte.*

*Raqs Media Collecive, **Time Capsule**, Aluminium box with contents, 2011, Momentum Biennale 2011 in Norway. Image Courtesy the artists and Frith Street Gallery, London*

*Marcel Duchamp, **Fountain 1917** (replica 1964), Porcelain, unconfirmed: 360 mm x 480 mm x 610 mm, Tate. Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1999, © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2016. Image Courtesy of Tate, UK.*

*Parul Gupta, **Spatial Drawing**, Wool, Spokes & Glue Bond, 2016. Making Space, part of Artist Process program at Exhibit 320's alternative space 1After320. Image Courtesy of the artist and Exhibit 320.*
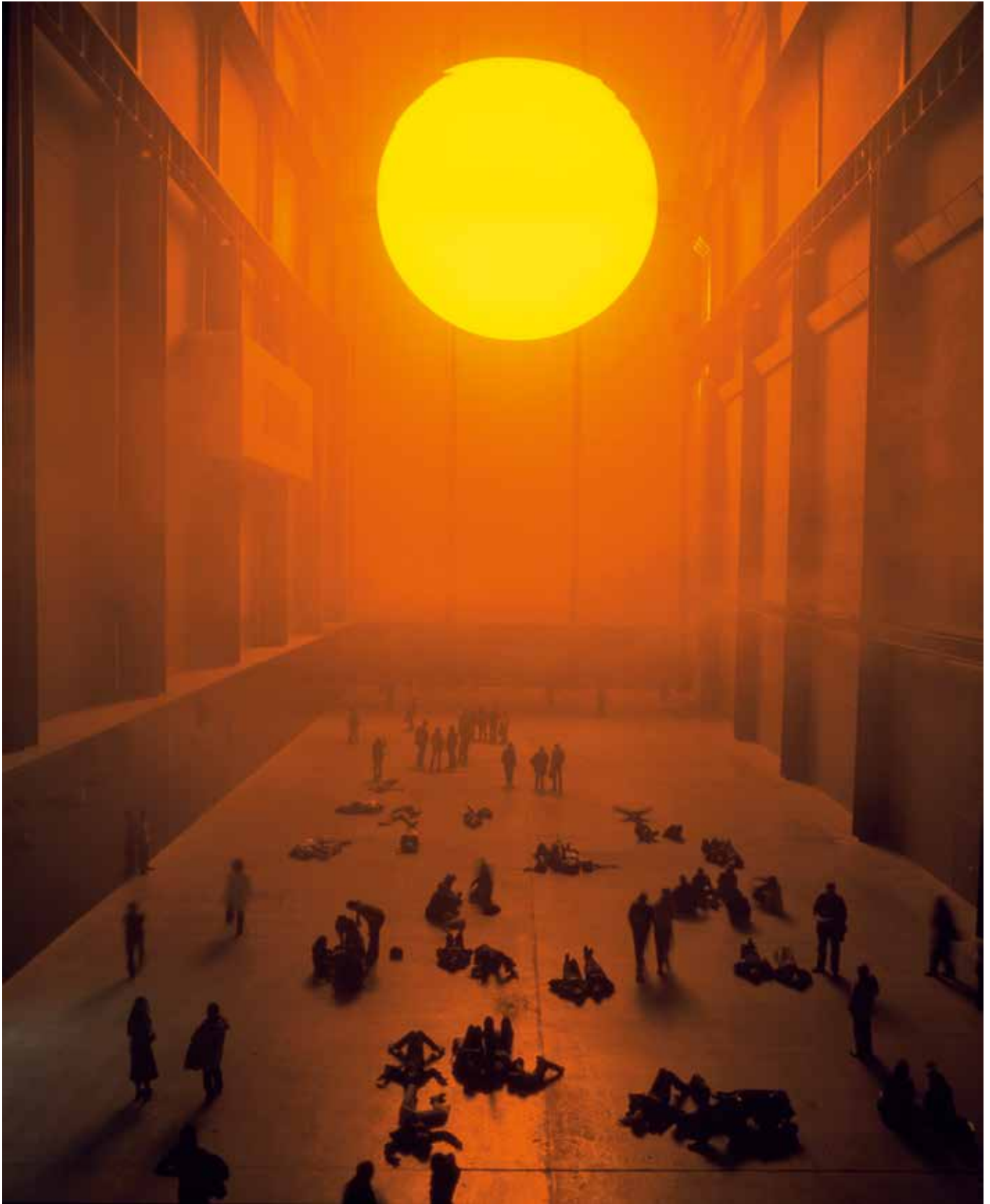
*Olafur Eliasson, **The weather project**, Monofrequency lights, projection foil, haze machines, mirror foil, aluminium, scaffolding, 26.7 m x 22.3 m x 155.44 m, Tate Modern, London, 2003, Photograph by Andrew Dunkley & Marcus Leith. © Olafur Eliasson. Image Courtesy of the artist, neugerriemschneider, Berlin; and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.*

Data Neolithic is an avatar created for this article by Grover l Ahldag. Working together, Amitesh Grover and Arnika Ahldag make contextual art and performance-based projects in New Delhi, India. Karma-Sakshi is John Xaviers, a Delhi based artist-curator-academic. Angelus Novus is Tushar Joag, artist and Associate Professor, Shiv Nadar University, Delhi.