

Handwritten text in a non-Latin script, possibly Indic, covering the walls of a gallery. The text is arranged in several horizontal lines across the wall, with some characters appearing to be stylized or calligraphic. The script is dense and fills most of the wall space.



AROOP

A Series of Arts, Poetry and Ideas

Volume - 2 | Number 1 | July - December 2017

Some things that *only* art can do **A Lexicon of Affective Knowledge**

Editor

Ashok Vajpeyi

Asst. Editor

Manish Pushkale

Guest Editor

Nancy Adajania

AROOP: A Bi-annual Series of Arts, Poetry and Ideas
Volume - 2 | Number 1 | July - December 2017

© The Raza Foundation, New Delhi, and the contributors
No material from this Series can be reproduced without permission of the Raza Foundation and the contributors concerned.

Editor
Ashok Vajpeyi

Guest Editor
Nancy Adajania

Editorial Office:
The Raza Foundation
C-4/139, Lower Ground Floor,
Safdarjung Development Area,
New Delhi - 110016, India
E mail: razafoundation.delhi@gmail.com
abstract.rf@gmail.com
manishpushkale@gmail.com

Subscription Rates:
Single Issue: Rs. 500
4 issues subscription- Individual: Rs. 1,500 Institutions: Rs. 2000

Published by:
The Raza Foundation



Printing: Archana - www.archanapress.com

Inside front cover: Mithu Sen, 'No star, No land, No word, No commitment',
Artificial Human Hair, 2004-2014 (Art Omi, New York, 2004; KNMA, New Delhi,
2010 and Kunstmuseum Bochum, Germany, 2014).

Inside back cover: Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani, 'Spelling Dystopia' colour print,
Diasec, 70 x 115 cm, 2009. Copyright Fischer & el Sani and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Contents

Guest Editor's Note Nancy Adajania 7
अद्वितीय <i>advitiya</i> Sonal Jain (DMC) 13
afterpresence Reena Saini Kallat 17
<i>akal</i> Rajkumar 21
অবাক <i>awe-baak</i> Sampurna Chattarji 25
a committed decay Naveen Kishore 29
an act of mind Samit Das 31
<i>Ba'tin</i> Jahangir Asgar Jani 35
ಬಯಲು <i>bayalu</i> Babu Eshwar Prasad 37
boredom Gerardo Mosquera 41
cave Neha Choksi 43
chalorosia Jerry Pinto 47
colloidal Sridala Swami 49
corpothetics Christopher Pinney 53
'Die Geträumten' Shanay Jhaveri 55
deamy Margit Rosen 59
death Bharti Kher 61
dissolution seeing or previously known object Sumakshi Singh 63
eclectic Gulammohammed Sheikh 65
eco-genic Ravi Agarwal 69
empathy Natasa Petresin-Bachelez 73
escape as affective labour Paul O'Neill 75
exile Arshia Sattar 79
exhibitability and cult value Lucy Steeds 81
fear Anju Dodiya 83

film | Shelagh Keeley | 85
freeze a moment | Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani | 89
future | Hemali Bhuta | 91
gets under the skin | Varunika Saraf | 93
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (excerpt) | 97
hashiya | Ranjeeta Kumari | 99
'I' am an artist | Nicola Durvasula | 101
infinite spectral capillarity | Jin-me Yoon | 103
insight | Rasha Salti | 105
intuiting | Irit Rogoff | 109
inversality | Sharmistha Ray | 111
jugaad/jugaar | Iftikhar Dadi | 115
khali | Dayanita Singh | 117
khayal | Vidya Shah | 119
khushi | Shantibai | 121
khwabistan | Nancy Adajania | 124
Kokerenge | Navjot Altaf | 129
 | Mithu Sen | 133
 | Shilpa Gupta | 137
matter | Vivan Sundaram | 141
metakinesis | Alexander Keefe | 145
metaphora | Ruth Padel | 149
mondialité | Hans Ulrich Obrist | 151
moti-bhrama | Mriganka Madhukaillya (DMC) | 155
mrirtughonta | Naeem Mohaiemen | 157
museum, musex, mutext, mutant | Miguel A. López | 159
nostalgia | Amitava Kumar | 161
novel | Chandradas Choudhury | 163
ornament | Kaiwan Mehta | 165
para-museum | Nora Sternfeld | 169
Poi | Archana Hande | 171
reclaiming matter | Vibha Galhotra | 175
remembrance | Prabhakar Pachpute | 179
shafa | Gargi Raina | 183
strange-ing | Rohini Devasher | 187
structural ambivalence | Sudhir Patwardhan | 191
synsoria | Sheba Chhachhi | 195
Gwendolyn Brooks, 'We Real Cool' | 199
tailender | Sahej Rahal | 200
taqiyya | Ranjit Hoskote | 205
the flower | Shanta Gokhale | 207
'the mind never burns enough' | Sonia Mehra Chawla | 208
under-controlled circumstances | Pallavi Paul | 213
unselfconscious cosmopolitanism | Smita and Mustansir Dalvi | 215
Mahasweta Devi in conversation with Naveen Kishore (excerpt) | 219
Vayillakunnillappan | Gigi Scaria | 221
Contributor Biographies | 223

Guest Editor's Note

Some things that *only* art can do A Lexicon of Affective Knowledge

Nancy Adajania

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), for whom art and activism were not antithetical.

“What can contemporary art do?” is a question that many artists, critics and curators have asked since the early 1990s, and with increasing urgency during the last few years. During this period, the world has witnessed a tumultuous transformation involving the withering away of the Cold War era’s certitudes: the fall of Communism, the seemingly triumphal rise of neo-liberalism and its collapse during the economic meltdown of 2008, the emergence of global Jihadism, and the imminent threat of ecological doom.

These historical pressures have had their impact on how art is produced, presented and received globally. Often, while we instrumentalise and enslave art in the service of various social or political agendas, we do not stop to contemplate and ask: “What could art still mean to us?” **We fail to understand that there are many things that art can do, but there are some things that *only* art can do.**

Just as Clement Greenberg reduced painting to its medium, many of us today tend to flatten art out and reduce it to a commentary on its context, its circumstances, its moment. As such, art is often not allowed to realise its expressive potential. While the various turns in contemporary art – whether institutional critique, the linguistic turn, relational art, or the educational turn (to name just a few) – have significantly expanded the scope of art practice by making us aware of the politics of institutionality and of the potential of discursivity, collaboration and the significance of dialogical art, they have also tended to reduce art to these domains of inquiry. Is it perhaps time now to *re-turn to art*?

Let me clarify that this is not a bow in the direction of a naïve aestheticism or an argument for pure formalism. Is it possible for us to build a new lexicon of affective knowledge? One that can articulate the non-discursive, pre-cognitive realms of human experience; that can address the ongoing

interplay of abstraction and materiality which defines our actions as participants at various levels of cultural production? Can we craft a new language to speak about the political, taking a cue from Homi K. Bhabha's observation that "the structures of affect [have been] radically devalued in the language of political effectivity"?¹ And is it possible for the lexicon of affective knowledge to leave behind a philosophical and aesthetic surplus that eludes easy comprehension, no matter which domain, discipline or practice it emerges from?

*

From the very beginning of this editorial exercise, I had intuitively felt that a set of essays – speaking from Olympus – would not do justice to the concept of affective knowledge. It had to be a different format, one that would lend itself to the fragmentary and the elusive, the excessive and the minimal; one that may, on a first encounter, sound antithetical to the very subject under discussion. How does one offer a precise explanation for what it feels like to inhabit the margins (*'hashiya'*, contributed by Ranjeeta Kumari to the lexicon of affective knowledge, smells of sweat and gravel)? How does a Noh performer coax a 'flower' to bloom unbidden (Shanta Gokhale reveals the magic that lies beyond the exactitude of *techné*)?

The lexicon of affective knowledge is a discourse that speaks in many tongues, that jams in many accents, and that lisps and stutters. But it also moves you to silence (*khali* or the blank beat by Dayanita Singh). It is 'colloidal' (Sridala Swami), idiosyncratic ('deamy' by Margit Rosen and 'chalarosia' by Jerry Pinto); it can't have enough of paradox but it also does not wish to throw away the reliable grid on a whim ('structured ambivalence' by Sudhir Patwardhan).

Significantly, these keywords are neither generic nor trend-conscious. I invited 67 contributors from the diverse fields of visual arts, literature, music, dance and architecture to choose words, memes, lodestones that lie at the beating heart of their own practices. The singer Vidya Shah emphasises the urgency of inscribing the affective language of abstraction in North Indian classical music in the larger social and political context; Alexander Keefe, in his entry 'metakinesis or kinesthetic empathy', a term popularised by John Martin, the American critic of modern dance, critiques Martin's valorisation of the primordial sensory prehistory of dance which confined non-white dancers to a non-modern position – even as white dancers emboldened by the powers of 'metakinesis' happily used this primordium to enrich their own vocabulary.

Unbeknownst to each other, the keywords offered by the contributors collide and collude. A spontaneous symposium formulates itself in the pages of this lexicon. Hans Ulrich Obrist's contribution '*mondialité*' (or 'globality'), which is devoted to Glissant's archipelagic thought, affirmative of diversity and creolisation, could be read alongside Archana Hande's playful and ironic neologism 'Poi' ('People of India *aka* Pure Original Indians'), which questions notions of purity and authenticity that legitimise monocultural constructs intolerant of difference. From an art-historical context, Gulammohammed Sheikh recalls the significance of 'impurity' or 'eclecticism' as an artistic choice that he shared with fellow artist Bhupen Khakhar in the late 1960s and early 1970s, at a time when post-colonial studies had not yet popularised the notion of hybridity. If Jahangir Jani invokes the *Ba'tin*, the hidden aspect of the Divine in Islamic religious thought, which inspires Sufism and can be interpreted in other contexts to attest to the diversity of affective experience, Ranjit Hoskote points towards *taqiyya*, the adoption of camouflage or dissimulation in Shi'a Islamic practice, as a survival strategy and an enabling condition for artists in difficult times.

Rajkumar and Shantibai, artists from Bastar, have contributed '*akal*' ('intelligence') and '*khushi*' ('joy'). Systemic constraints often prevent artists who are not metropolitan and academy-trained from expressing their intellect or feeling individual artistic pleasure. If there are some things that *only* art can do, these terms vividly exemplify the liberation that an inner-directed artistic practice has brought Rajkumar and Shantibai in a hierarchical, grossly unequal society. You could read their entries along with Sheba Chhachhi's neologism, 'synsoria': Chhachhi privileges Yogachara philosophy, which regards the mind as one of the senses, and asserts the necessity of perceiving sensory knowledge in proximity with issues of social justice.

Nora Sternfeld proposes a 'para-museum' that can expand the social and cultural capacities of the museum beyond its institutional mandates; Irit Rogoff's 'intuiting' nudges us to make the epistemic leap rather than holding on to the complacencies of inherited knowledge.

And I trust, dear reader, that you will be intrigued by Paul O'Neill's philosophical fiction with a Houdini-esque keyword, 'escape as affective labour', and Mithu Sen's words woven out of hair, hanging on the exhibition wall like a medieval nun's penance shirt. Will you see them as the gift of lexicographic freedom – words that do not follow the pecking order of preordained rules of grammar? And that tantalising black rectangle contributed by Shilpa Gupta: what could it be? Something censored or erased or an indecipherable caesura? Go ahead and zigzag your way through this lexicographic maze:

awe-baak____deamy____cholorosia
 afterpresence____corpothetics
 an act of mind____*akal*____synsoria
*Ba'tin*____*taqiyya*
 dissolution seeing or previously known object__film__a committed decay
 eco-genic____empathy
 exhibitability and cult value
 fear____death____*mrittughonta*
 freeze a moment____‘Die Geträumten’
 intuiting____insight____*jugaad/jugaar*
 ‘I’ am an artist__cave__boredom__gets under the skin
 inversality____infinite spectral capillarity
*khayal*____metakinesis____*Kokerenge*
*khushi*____*khwabistan*____*bayalu*
*mondialité*____eclectic__Poi__nostalgia__remembrance
 museum, musex, mutext, mutant____para-museum
 matter____*moti-bhrama*____tailender____novel
 reclaiming matter____‘the mind never burns enough’
*shafa*____Vayillakunnilappan: a child with no mouth
 unselfconscious cosmopolitanism____ornament
 under-controlled circumstances____*metaphora*____strange-ing
 escape as affective labour
 future
 _____exile

This lexicon is lush with images that speak close to the keywords; or, at other times, spring from the authors’ archives in an aleatory trance. Vivan Sundaram (‘matter’) and Sahej Rahal (‘tailender’) have produced a gorgeous dystopic *frisson* by shaping words out of minerals and light. And I could not resist rupturing the flow of the lexicon with inserts from the works of three of my favorite women authors – Gwendolyn Brooks, Claudia Rankine and Mahasweta Devi. All three women have fought social stereotypes by adopting a variety of literary formats and cadences: the resonance of the ballad form which looks forward to rap (Brooks), the expansive

Whitmanesque American lyric radicalised ever further (Rankine), the morphing of fieldwork and activism into literary expression (Devi).

Finally I would like to express my deep gratitude to Ashok Vajpeyi, managing and life trustee of the Raza Foundation, who gave me complete editorial freedom to conceive and shape this issue of *Aroop*. As a former civil servant, he has seen governments of all shades rise and fall around him; he has been centrestage, been banished into exile, has returned to the centre, but he has never stopped believing in the disruptive and generative power of art. I do hope that Indian culture will one day acknowledge the debt that it owes him.

A big thank-you also to the artist Manish Pushkale, trustee of the Raza Foundation; Sanjiv Choube, member-secretary of the Raza Foundation; and Bharti Sikka at Archana Press (Delhi), for their steadfast support in the production of this issue.

*

PS: While the lexicon of affective knowledge was born out of my diurnal wrestling with the question of the political in art, it is also inspired by Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘felt knowledge’ and by that astute interpreter of signs, Roland Barthes, whose late work, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (1978), demonstrates, paradoxically, that some signs and conditions can be delinquent and do not reward systematic commentary. Under the entry, ‘errance/errantry’, Barthes wrote: “[E]rrantry does not align—it produces iridescence: what results is the nuance. Thus I move on, to the end of the tapestry, from one nuance to the next (the nuance is the last state of a colour which can be named; the nuance is the Intractable).”²

1. Homi Bhabha quoted in Gary A Olson and Lynn Worsham, ‘Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha’s Critical Literacy’ in *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1998, p. 386.
 2. Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978; rpt. 2010), p. 103.