

From: *Nalini Malani. The Rebellion of the Dead. Retrospective 1969-2018. Part II*, curated by M. Beccaria, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 18 September 2018 - 6 January 2019), Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2018, pp. 60-108.

Linea Recta, Linea Perplexa: Moving through Entangled Time with Nalini Malani

Mieke Bal

Nalini Malani makes art that moves and keeps moving, and this, not only from India to Europe, but, in the current retrospective, from Paris to Rivoli. In many other respects as well, her work is, fundamentally, *moving art*. Either the works move mechanically, like the shadow plays of which two works, *The Tables Have Turned* (2008) and *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2012), are included in this exhibition; a movement over-determined by the projections that, consisting of moving images themselves, move through the rotating cylinders. They may move in video, as in *Mother India*, a monumental five-screen video play. Or, the works move because they have been reverse painted on a transparent, shiny surface – glass, Lexan, Mylar. As a consequence, visitors cannot help but see themselves reflected in them, and thus become aware of their own bodily movements. In yet other works, ostensibly still, the paintings are composed of fragments of movement. These fragments move from panel to panel, in a cinematic division of frames, juxtaposed, so that at least the eye is compelled to move from one painting to the next, in the multi-panel paintings. Examples, here, are the thirty-panel painting *Cassandra* and the eleven panels of *Twice Upon a Time*. With a still different version of movement, some of the works are designed to be ephemeral, thus, moving through time. *City of Desires* is drawn in the fragile medium of charcoal, on walls from which they will eventually be erased, re-moved. Moreover, in all cases, a different kind of movement is superimposed on these technical ones: the emotional movement that the mode of painting and the allusions to real life situations solicit, as in “I am moved.” This movement can, furthermore, move us to political movement: a change of opinion, of priorities, and a more active attitude. All these movements join forces with the primary feature of art: that it is *live*.¹

I argue in this essay that this multiple and enduring movement is part of why and how Malani is a profoundly political artist, and this, thanks to her strongly artistic, indeed aesthetic art. She opposes the *representation* of the political situations – most directly, the proliferating violence – that she seeks to indict and resist. But how can art shape such resistance, if it isn't through showing its opponent? The dilemma of representation is the risk of repeating, and exposing to voyeurism, thus giving presence and force to the violence one abhors and wishes to eradicate. Malani's primary solution to this dilemma is that she takes on board and integrates, as an artist, the fact that the process of art in its live relationship to its audiences is an indispensable element of that resistance. To put it briefly and overly simply, artworks come to life when they are being seen. To be seen, they must be shown. Exhibiting art inflects the artworks, showing them in a specific light and combination, in a particular space. To place one artwork next to another makes a difference to both; the juxtaposition adds layers of meaning, based on the “sideways effect” of metonymy. This effect can be of mutual support, supplementation or continuation; but it can also be dialogue,

¹ I will explain the philosophical background of this conception of art as fundamentally moving in the section of this essay devoted to room 35.

contradiction, temporal or spatial discrepancy, and metaphorical reinforcement. In this view of exhibition, the curation is part of the work, and vice versa. In the case of political art as I see it, the role of curatorial work is crucial, for what can make art politically effective is not its theme, subject matter, or meaning, but that which happens in the relationship between the artworks together and the viewers who see, and are affected by them – the *art event*. Hence, the “exhibition-specific” analysis that follows, written on the basis of what I know of the concept of exhibition.²

In view of such variation on the concept of site-specificity, in my analysis of Part I of this retrospective, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the key concept was *circularity*, a formal characterisation of the exhibition and the artworks of which it consisted. Part of the motivation for this choice was the open book structure of the show, that freely allowed visitors to choose to go right, and follow the more or less chronological itinerary, or left, and start with the most recent works. Between that left-or-right dilemma was a “spine” in the middle, a video/shadow play (*Remembering Mad Meg*), which the viewer would inevitably traverse before reaching the rooms on either side. And before that spine, the entrance was already taken by a wall drawing, of which it was clear from the start that it was going to disappear, in an erasure performance executed by museum staff during the run of the exhibition. This drawing and its erasure stated that whatever else visitors decide to do, they are compelled to start in the present. The entire obsession with chronology, so dominant in historical disciplines such as art history, is thus already messed up, replaced by a sense of perplexity that leaves visitors to their own devices – perhaps confused, but also, and more significantly, empowered. They become the agents of their experience in and with this art. And with agency comes responsibility.

Here, in Castello di Rivoli, the space is altogether different, and compels a one-directional itinerary. One room succeeds another, in a total of five rooms of the third floor of the impressive building. This would normally imply a “*linea recta*,” a straight line, even if the line is not so straight and becomes a circle, so that one ends near the elevator where the visit began. But visitors have a choice, here, too: between turning either left or right upon arrival on the floor. And this is not all. The rooms may succeed one another, but within each, we can count on this artist, whose political point is the recurrence of violence and the impossibility to believe in a chronology that would cast it in the past, to confuse any idea of a straight line. Instead, the itinerary, no matter how hard one may try to keep it straight (as in a *linea recta*), can only be convoluted; in Latin, *linea perplexa*. That Latin word resonates nicely with English “perplexed,” as in “leaving us perplexed, puzzled, flabbergasted”; and entangled. For visitors find themselves in front of, or *with*, artworks that seem to refuse the chrono-logic of the artist’s career phases – youth, maturity, decline – and the value judgments attached to it. At the same time, it refuses forgetting, of the rationale that subtended earlier works, thus obliterating lifelong convictions. Hence, the *linea recta* of the exhibition space is complicated by a *linea perplexa*. Malani’s work rejects any sense of history as linear (*recta*), lest we be led to believe that over time the world has become a better place, because we’d have learned from the past.

In what follows I will consider, in each room, how the artworks keep (us) moving, and how that movement, on all levels, affects the way the art addresses its viewers in a political manner, while declining to impose meanings, let alone representations of, the political situations implied. The focus on movement serves three purposes:

² As in Part I, in order to avoid repeating earlier work, I will refer to such publications in notes. This entails what might seem self-indulgence, but is necessary to avoid accusations of “self-plagiarism,” the newest academic fad. For the view on exhibiting so briefly sketched here, see my 1996 book on the subject, especially the Introduction. The risk of representation as repetition is elaborated in the chapter “A Postcard from the Edge.”

- To do justice to an important aspect of much of Malani’s work, throughout her career;
- To get a grip on the ways in which her work is politically powerful;
- To explain, through the example of Malani’s art, how political art can only be operative if it does *not* represent the political issues; let alone, make propaganda-like declarations in favour of a particular view.

In view of these goals it makes sense to take again as a key to the exhibition, the “exhibition-specific” way in which Malani the artist makes, selects, and arranges her works. In this view, the concept of “site-specific” from which this new one is derived is best considered according to the inflection proposed by Joanne Morra, as “site-responsive.” The responsiveness to the site parallels the responsiveness to the viewers whose presence brings the art to life and movement, and to the world of which the inevitable political nature of the work is the embodiment. The exhibition space is, in a sense, an image of the world, although not at all a “reflection” or “representation” of it. It is a haunted space – haunted by the figure, the words, the screams, of the woman who set linear history on its head: Cassandra, whose voice recurs throughout this exhibition.³

Movement through History: Erasure and the Contemporary

Just as a game, as far as I can foresee it at this moment of writing, I will follow the “linea recta” as the room numbers indicate it: from room 34 to 38. In room 34, this illusion of progress is immediately brought to a halt by a work that stretches from 1992 to 2018, in episodes with only precarious traces of it remaining. This work, titled *City of Desires*, is a large wall drawing in charcoal of the genre mentioned above. That drawing has subsequently been erased in an erasure performance by the artist or under her instructions, by museum staff or visitors. Starting in 1992, the artist has made versions of this in practically all her exhibitions until today. And to stretch the history of violence that Malani’s art indicts, her cinematic work *Dream Houses* is embedded in the large wall drawing, becoming part of it. This was her first stop-motion animation from 1969, made on 8 mm film, and is now technically reworked for this exhibition, so that *City of Desires* can also be seen as being from 1969–2018. That embedding is another way of updating the work to the now-time.

My first encounter with (a version of) an Erasure Performance happened a few years ago. In order to demonstrate the multiple involvements of movement in it, allow me to tell the story of that encounter. It was 2:50 p.m. on Sunday, December 21, 2014, the last day of the last chapter of a tripartite retrospective exhibition of Malani at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi. In the middle gallery, a uniformed guard stood next to an enormous charcoal wall drawing. He diligently supervised the public, ensuring that they would not come too close and smudge the drawing; charcoal smudges easily, and this would ruin the work. The drawing was a larger-than-life nude woman, her height combined with her low position compelling a kind of crotch-shot look that makes one uneasily complicit in the culture of exploitative, or even abusive, looking that is familiar from the consumption of pornography. The figure returns a fiery look, as if pre-empting our lack of modesty, confronting the visitor with her fury that, before she became a drawn figure, she directed at her treacherous husband Jason. The title, *Medea as Mutant*, explained enough, or so I thought. I approached to see what the white dots were that covered the image, as if to protect the figure

³ Morra developed this concept in an in-depth study of the way art has been curated in the Freud Museums, in Vienna and especially London. See Morra (2017). On Cassandra, more below. I do not have enough space to develop the way this particular building addresses the art displayed in it and *vice versa*, with its history of violence. See Doris Salcedo’s site-responsive installation *Abyss*, made for the Castello in 2005, discussed in Bal (2010, 230–36). Salcedo is another artist who devotes her life’s work to the struggle against violence.

somewhat from indiscrete gazes. Were they added or erased? The guard coughed, then smiled, warning me off in a friendly manner.⁴

But if this visit was the construction of a narrative, then it was a convoluted one; I seemed to have arrived at the climax of its plot: the crime, or the capture of the perpetrator. I left and returned. What happened? The guard was now busy rubbing the drawing! He had an ordinary eraser in his hand. Shocked, I inquired. No one answered; I got only smiles. The uniformed guard was now a performance artist, erasing the drawing under the supervising eyes of the artist. It dawned on me that this had to be an act of activism. Erasing what he had so carefully guarded must mean something beyond the act itself; a response of sorts. But what for, and how was that political act conceptualised? What's the story?

The story is of drawing and erasure; but also of Medea, and of Malani's work with Medea. Her *Medeaprojekt* goes back to the 1990s, and its historical framing was an event of terrifying violence in India: its first performance had to be postponed due to the demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. This drew the Medea myth, and its rewriting by East German writer Heiner Müller from 1981 on which Malani had based her project, forcefully into the then-present, making it both more urgent and more devastating. But whereas the retrospective as a genre of exhibition is by definition historical, Malani as a contemporary artist cannot enshrine her works in a long-gone past. The erasure of the drawing in New Delhi that Sunday afternoon in December 2014 had to have yet another motivation, more specific for this time, *with* our time: *con*-temporary.

I returned to where I began to see if I could make out that second relevance that binds the past to the present, and politics to art. A wall text read:

This is a tribute to the fresco artists of Nathdwara whose works are getting destroyed by our callousness. This manner of working is in identification with those artists. These works will be wiped off after 15 days just as theirs have been. It is hoped that the sadness is shared by others.

N. Malani

5/92

So, I could, and should have known. If art matters politically, neglecting it or letting it be destroyed is also a political act, negatively performed by inaction, leading to complicity. But I realised that the date 5/92 under the wall text did not refer to today. Yet the act of erasure happened now – in my presence. This made 1992 bond with 2014, and now with 2018. Nothing is *past* – the past is contemporary with the present. I was in the middle of the exhibition's narrative's plot, in the middle of the space, in the middle of time. This in-the-middle prepared me for my part in the politics of this art; it is the fact that art is *live* that implicates every visitor.

This short story of my experience prepares for the experience of that first room 34, where any illusion of a straight passage through time, as in a "proper" retrospective, leading *linea recta* from first to most recent work, is not only impossible, but would undermine the nature of the artwork. The visitor entering this space will not dream of trying, for that would only lead to frustration. Instead, another kind of dream is staged before us, by way of *Dream Houses*, an abstract yet evocative animation of cubes inspired by a utopian housing project by India's foremost architect, Charles Correa (1930–2015). This project was meant to inaugurate Modernism in India by

⁴ The artist later explained that the polka dots were erasures, and were meant to achieve "some agitation on the surface before entering the figure." She also connected the dots with aboriginal painting in Australia. This story of my first encounter with such a work is a spin-off from the Introduction to the 2016 book on Malani's shadow plays.

providing proper single-family houses for the working class. Malani, having just finished art school, made cardboard cubes and turned these into an abstract model, filmed through colour filters so as to become a stop-motion animation. For the first time this film is here embedded in the large, wall-covering charcoal drawing that combines readable faces with fierce, Medea-like eyes, with the kind of lines and digits reminiscent of the bureaucracy and other violent abstractions that rule our lives. Will the faces be wiped out before the digits, or is there a sparkle of hope in the opposite order, where the human faces briefly win their battle for survival and the digits are erased first?

The ochre walls are evocative of adobe, that millennia-old building tradition that appears to emerge from the earth, or to be embedded in it. The dark wooden ceiling enhances the cave-like atmosphere, which is yet another mode of stretching time and incrusting violence in it. And then, still more temporal layers are brought into this room. In one work the idea of convoluted temporality is staged literally. This is the shadow play *The Tables Have Turned*, one of the two of that Malanian medium or genre included in this exhibition. Consisting of turning, reverse painted cylinders, in this case, mounted on turntables among a clutter of cables and small lamps, these moving images that seem so different from film, invoke all those experiments with moving images from before cinema. These, in turn, respond to baroque techniques of vision, of which the camera obscura was the best known.

As a first hint to the multiple entwinements with older models of vision in Malani's shadow plays, we must realise that the shadows can be seen as the obverse of the camera obscura image. That image is reversed, upside down, and isolated. Malani's shadows are outward, not upside down, and both multiplied and moving. The shadow plays transform the other aspects of the camera obscura image as well. The world is not external but included, as objects of allusions. The spectator is not alone but exists and acts among others, in a temporary togetherness occasioned by the encounter with the images and their shadows, as well as the other people sharing this experience. This goes against the individualising effect, stating that the act of looking involves the body, as viewers stand, walk, or sit, an embodiment that is foregrounded in the shadows the bodies sometimes cast, and the auditive murmuring their bodily presence produces in addition to their visibility to other visitors.⁵

This work was made in 2008 for the 16th Biennale of Sydney, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. As in most of the shadow plays, sound is a key element. The title, the round shapes, and the sound constitute an allusion to the turntable, the now obsolete technical instrument also called phonograph, pickup, or record player. Turntables are tools for, literally, convoluting time: instruments for recycling recorded sound, they seem to be a powerful support for the recycled language we hear. The soundtrack of the shadow play brings Homer's eerie woman character Cassandra back to life through the mediation of Christa Wolf's novel. The here-and-now and the there-and-then are merged in the events of war that ravaged the world then as it does now: "Events that aroused the craving for more events, finally for war," says the voice towards the end of the looped sound track. The beginning of the sound track is also the beginning of Wolf's novel: "It was here. This is where she stood. These stone lions looked at her, now they no longer have heads." Victims of iconoclasm; yet even without heads, thanks to the technique of carving in that perennial substance that is stone, the lions materially connect that distant past with today, at that singular place "here." The connecting element, also congenial to the erasure of the wall drawing and the negligence against which it protests, is destruction. No wonder the lions have lost their heads – and mind the English expression: losing your head is going mad; and war is, and produces madness.

The Cassandra story runs through the entire exhibition. I propose to understand Malani's choice of Cassandra-Wolf's words in the soundtrack of *The Tables Have Turned* as a sonic *thought-image* that

⁵ On experiments with moving images before cinema, see Hecht (1993), and for theoretical considerations, including in relation to the camera obscura, Cray (1990). On Malani's deployment of these earlier techniques in order to create embodied experience, especially in a feminist perspective, see Doshi (2013).

comprehends a statement about the field of vision in its relation to time. To sum this up extremely briefly: vision is dialogic. This dialogic nature of vision is a simultaneous exercising of the viewer's subject and object status and what is being seen. Within this dialogue, temporally, Malani brings history in, not as something "out there" in the past but in its density and inextricable mixture of the different fields constituting "culture" – intricately folded, twisted, coiled, a tangle of movements, alluded to by the tangle of cables; in other words, *convoluted*, with the *linea perplexa* entangling the viewer. The enveloping effect of sound is part of that entanglement.⁶

And thus, the history of the media, in its apparent innocence, participates in political, scientific, and technological culture, where war, colonisation, economic exploitation, pollution, and the violence these all entail, collaborate. The artist thus brings history to bear on the present, the contemporaneity in which her work is so keenly invested. This presence of the past includes the problems of half fulfilled promises and dangerous deployments of technology. With its technique that allows playing and replaying, repeating recorded sound, the turntable is an apt metaphor for the turning of the tables, as in reversing a power balance – joining the question of the temporal order of the erasure. As a thought-image, it expresses continuity and discontinuity at the same time.

The past the turntables as technical inventions evoke is the time just after the mid-twentieth century; a past of which Malani, myself, and many of us were a part. Meanwhile, in the words adapted from Christa Wolf's novel, the "here" of placement contrasts with the past tense of "was," "stood," and "looked." The "now" indicates a present tense of absence. The recollection of the use of turntables does more than nostalgically invoke the years we were without power but also without complicity. It places us, visitors, inside the time frame between our own past and present. Whether it is the nineteenth-century time of the beginning of modernity, the time of our childhood, or the time of our teens, we bring a past into the present and thus, while entering history, we cannot disavow that somehow, some time, we were there-here. We were-are part of what Cassandra evokes, and what the paintings evoke while their supports, the cylinders, move before our eyes in their rotations.

One of the images binds this movement literally to the sensation of the audio. On one Mylar cylinder, or its shadows, we see three contiguous images: a big fish, with a blue back and a light green underside; a greyhound painted in light red, smaller and thinner than the fish; and behind or above the fish – depending on the moment as well as on our reading as perspectival – a large, round mass of what seems foliage with some snakes or worms in it; perhaps a bush or a section of a forest. This assumption is made plausible by the colours, mainly brown and green. But then, the colours of the fish and the greyhound are far from natural. Moreover, the disproportion of scale among the three elements detaches the bush from the other elements. Besides a fish would not be so near a bush.

Considered on a vastly different scale, and setting aside the meaning of the colours, the bush turns out to be something eerily small: a part of the inner ear. The flipping of scale turns the exterior element into an interior one, involving the body and that part of it that determines how we participate in the acoustic aspect of the world – and here, of the work. Flipping scale is one form of turning the tables. It also brings baroque thought-images, in particular reflections and ideas on images, into the orbit of modernity, showing the exclusivist narrow-mindedness of linear chronology but also of linear perspective; that other obsessive *linea recta*. The flipping from exterior to inner, from outside view to intimate, bodily experience reinforces the bond between baroque and modern thinking.⁷

⁶ For an elaboration of the concept of "thought-image," see my book on Malani's shadow plays (2016, 173–79). It also contains a much more extensive analysis of this shadow play (259–324).

⁷ On baroque philosophy of vision, see my book on the subject (1999). This inner ear also visualises the synaesthetic aspect of the exhibition, where rooms with sound tracks alternate with (supposedly) silent rooms.

Choosing the inner ear for this tongue-in-cheek muddling of the history of visual philosophy and the senses, fits well with the sonic layering of this work. This temporal non-linearity is yet another way of taking the idea of turning the tables through turntables literally. It is also an emphasis on the inner, bodily nature of history. This is why the instruments from the artist's own adolescence resonate so strongly, both in their pastness, obsolete yet still alive, and in their intimacy, their subjectivity. This is a subtle account of sound: enveloping while also penetrating inside the body. While, through this depiction, the subjectivity of the inner ear insists on the synaesthetic aspect of art, its appeal to all our senses, it also binds the subject – artist and viewers – to the time evoked. Wandering along the cylinders, what comes across is not only a turbulent mass, visually and acoustically, but also the mode of existing in a mass. This includes an inevitable mixture of close-ups and long shots, when you see images wherever your eyes take you, hitting moments when the images are very close and, due to their position close to the ground, low. Eye to eye with details, brushstrokes, lines, dripping colours, body parts and animals, while all those other things also keep happening: this is term for term in opposition to the camera obscura's subject-effect. It is also an embodied experience of the constant flipping of scale that the images already show by themselves. There is not a single level, in this room, on which linearity remains possible. The utter convolutedness may leave us perplexed, and that is fortunate. For that state of puzzlement will have prepared us for a viewing attitude that makes us permeable to the multiple effects in this as well as the other rooms of the exhibition.

Topsy-Turvy Time

Once they have detached themselves, probably with some difficulty, from the turbulence of this first room, and its temporal entanglements, visitors may feel very differently, perhaps somewhat relieved, upon entering the next room where all images are (supposedly) still. The artist's arrangement of the rooms is not only convoluted in terms of time and movement, but also, with the clever alternation of sound and still rooms, make the effect of both stronger by contrast. Supposedly still only; for the titles of these works don't bode too well for the idea of silence. Cassandra, the doomsayer, or "misfortune teller," takes central stage, in the thirty-panel painting named after her. Her words might still ring in our (inner) ears. And in case they don't, the titles of the three tondi that accompany the large painting drive the point home: *Listen I* and *II*, compelling us to wonder what kind of listening is meant here. And *Angel III* might propose that we think about the "angle," perspective, or point of view – I call it "focalisation" – from which we care to listen. Especially since there is no geometrical angle in sight in this painting.⁸

Paint, hence colour, predominates. On the wall, yellow; and next to it orange veering towards red. But paradoxically, while the orange is already hinted at in some areas of the dominating yellow, the bits that could be yellow in the orange-red paintings are rather of a very pale variety, closer to off-white. Colours are crucial for painting, and here they are vibrant, bringing out and connecting the figurations that would otherwise remain detached from one another. At the same time, here and there they are almost transparent, when the artist has diluted her acrylic paint to make it seem as unequal and fragile as watercolour. The figures are not exactly integrated into the even background; they seem to be floating in front. While rigorously rejecting linear perspective, Malani creates a

⁸ The fortunate phrase "misfortune-teller" comes from Jean Frémon's introductory text in the catalogue (Galerie Lelong 2009). I use the term "focalisation" for "point of view," because it allows a subject term (focaliser) and a verb (to focalise); hence, an explicitation of responsibility. See Bal (2017, 132–53).

depth of sorts by layering, differentiating the thickness of the paint, and suggesting shallow shadows due to the reverse technique.⁹

Another paradox occurs when we realise that the single paintings are less unified than the multi-panel one. In *Angel III*, for example, the image of a boy figure supine at the bottom right, in front of a circle in darker red, is seemingly fighting a snake-like tube that could just as well be an intestine, or an earthworm. This boy would be a main figure if it was larger. As it is, above it, towards the left, a pale yellow circle outdoes the boy in size, and although it is small compared to the overall size of the tondo, it is quite crowded, while out-of-scale figures seem to float in front of it, with the man at the bottom apparently running past the circle. And if this was not enough visual turmoil, the circle is full of small digits. In *Listen II*, a bust of a female figure might be taken for the main character, especially since she seems to be intently listening. Further to the right is a smaller, full-bodied girl, a stock figure in Malani's universe. Below her, a figure seems to hold a gigantic crab on a leash. And all around body parts float, some kidney-shaped. And in *Listen I*, the worm – which recurs in all three tondi – is the most central element.

In the large painting, the worm keeps returning, in at least five different moments. The colours are also foregrounded by the support, the glossy surface of acrylic sheets on the back of which the works have been reverse painted, deepens the colours and reflects the viewers, so that one cannot stay detached. This is also a way in which these allegedly still images keep moving; for the visitors, who inevitably move, are in the picture. This movement in the reflection, combined with the temporally complex figure of Cassandra, invokes the theory of the image that best accounts for that inevitable movement, including in still images: the one developed by French philosopher Henri Bergson. Perception, in Bergson's view, is an act *of* the body and *for* the body.

While occurring in the present, perception is bound to memory; a perception image is necessarily infused with memory images. Malani's paintings are radical examples of this; they seem so full of different figures that they exemplify what such a multi-temporal image can look like. This presence of memory not only brings the past into the present, but also makes the image subjective. At the end of the book, Bergson writes:

In concrete perception memory intervenes, and the subjectivity of sensible qualities is due precisely to the fact that our consciousness, which begins by being only memory, prolongs a plurality of moments into each other, contracting them into a single intuition. (1991, 218–19)

The final part of this sentence explains why Bergson insisted on duration so strongly; and why, in Malani's version of it, the paintings look as cinematic as actual moving images. As Gilles Deleuze wrote in his book on Bergson: "Bergsonian duration is ... defined less by succession than by *coexistence*" (1988, 60; emphasis added). For Bergson, living in duration is a form of gathering: each moment is accompanied by the memory of preceding ones, appearing *pêle-mêle*. This raises the question: are these different women figures, or versions or moments of the one Cassandra? For Bergson, the difference doesn't matter. Perception involves both the materiality of objects and of the human body. Since the body is material, Bergson sees perception as a material practice. Malani follows him by placing emphatically material body parts all over her surfaces. But the decision is ours: if we see Cassandra in all these women figures, then there is a much more continuous

⁹ For an accessible theory of colour and its many meanings, see Van Leeuwen (2011). The "watercolour effect" of this, Malani's preferred mode of painting, can best be seen in the small blue figure on the third panel from the left, bottom row. For this, and more extensive, gorgeously reproduced photographs and an excellent commentary by Doris von Drathen, see Galerie Lelong (2009).

narrative than in the other option. This view is supported by the recurrence of such loosely constructed narratives and the resulting “filmic view” (Pijnappel) in Malani’s serial paintings, and also by the reiteration of the colour red, between the circular shapes in the multi-panel work and the three tondi, as well as by the recurrence of the earthworm, whose different positions make for a variety of events. In such a viewing, Cassandra ends up bald as if through chemotherapy, and exploded into pieces in the final circle.

Time entails movement. Given Bergson’s insistence on the inseparability of time and space, every image, still or moving, is in movement *by definition*. It is material, not because of the support we associate with images, but because the bodily action of mobilising the image is material. Therefore, the reflections of the moving visitors are relevant for the theory of the image involved. Why is that important? This question brings us to the political force of movement. In 1907, the philosopher coined the term “creative evolution” (1983) to describe this type of movement. It occurs when understanding and action are imbricated. Without such an understanding, we would be powerless to effect change, and art would be politically powerless. Bringing Cassandra’s voice and image to life is a creative way of hinting at countering this. This fourth Bergsonian movement, the *readiness to act*, lies at the heart of the political potential of the image, moving or still, figurative or abstract. In view of this potentially political effectivity, the sense of movement intertwines with the convoluted temporality that produces a vision we tend to accept in poetry more easily than in visual art. Poet and essayist Octavio Paz (1914–1998) termed it a “vertiginous traversal vision” that

... reveals the universe not as a linear sequence of events but as the confluence of spaces and times into a single pool of tranquillity. (qtd by Von Drathen in Galerie Lelong, 2009, 23)

Apart from that tranquillity, so far from Malani’s art, this seems an adequate characterisation of her multiplicity, both in figurations, in the panels, and in her choice figure of Cassandra.

All through the Cassandra works, and in particular in this work in room 35 – the only work actually named after the Greek heroine/victim – the temporal turbulence goes hand in hand with an “immense transversal ‘geography’” as Von Drathen calls it (23). Time, space, and body: they come together in the world traveller, the figure of a woman solidly decked out and painted more thickly than most figures in the polyptych, as if prepared for long, endless meanderings, pointing out to us viewers how futile it would be to search for (linear) directions. The painting is multiple-panelled for a reason, or rather, for many reasons: it compels a gaze that takes in details, small and large, from panel to panel while also producing a longing for an overview. In its panelling, it recalls and honours the Indian pictorial tradition of Pat, where a comic-strip-like division in small squares was indebted to the economic modesty of the painters’ situation. Both the compulsion for detail and the desire for an overview are fed by the way the painting is structured. In the circles, like Petri dishes, minuscule organisms grow, but the woman who seems to be the most prominent figure (Cassandra), turns away from the woman, also Cassandra or not, who, on the left, seems to be imploring her, her arms wide open. She herself has her arms together, as if her hands were bound, and her bald head suggests imprisonment or deadly disease. Instead of engaging that potential interlocutor she may be looking at, or into, that floating brownish oval, as if in a mirror – seeing herself in horror. Cassandra is not only a prophetess. In Christa Wolf’s novel, seeing is also, for her, a desire and a pleasure; hence, a trap.¹⁰

With the bright yellow surface setting the colouristic tone, it easily escapes attention that the figures are mostly set in blue – of different hues, intensities, and tones. Blue as the sky, water, and the air coming out of the mouth of the chorus-like figure on the bottom left. Blue of smoke, due to

¹⁰ This is a trap, since it keeps her seeing, and doomed as she is to not be listened to – this will be her torture. See Wolf (1988).

pollution; that ominous nuclear blast perhaps evoked in the rays of light blue coming out of the hands of the figure on the lower right, from which a couple (Adam and Eve?) seem to be fleeing. Blue as the wings of Byzantine angels, as the veil of the virgin Mary. Blue as in shy, in ill-humoured, or as intuition. Blue as the arteries shining through a skin depleted of its substance. Blue constitutes an entire world. From this room with so much to ponder, so much time to spend with these paintings, these cannot help but evoke, in their harmonious busyness and differences in scale, yet possible narrative continuity, the slogan “unity in diversity” that has turned out to be the greatest lie, not only in India but in the entire world. With this colourful and sombre impression still on our retina or brain, we move on to the next room, where movement and sound are almost overwhelming.¹¹

Painful Pictures

In that room, also painted in black, five very large video screens form a semicircle, inside which the visitor finds herself caught. *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* from 2005 is a video play. The artist’s voice surrounds us, sometimes calm, sometimes echoed, sometimes screaming. Due to the video format, the soundtrack and the images where the discrepancies of scale are even more powerful because constantly changing, this work with its monumentally large screens enclosing the viewer is the most *immersive* work of this exhibition. The *linea recta* is impossible to even keep obliquely in sight; the shape of the installation prohibitively discourages a direct movement towards the exit. The title of the work was inspired by a seminal essay, “Language and the Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain” (1998) by the reputed anthropologist Veena Das, from which the opening and closing quotations were also taken.¹²

The best introduction to the political theme of this work is the opening quote from Das:

How is it that the imaging of the project of nationalism in India came to include the appropriation of bodies of women as objects on which the desire for nationalism could be brutally inscribed and a memory for the future made?

It matters that the quote is a question: “how” and “imaging” together raise the question of the work itself: how to *image* the simultaneity of the joyful beginning of the postcolonial independent state of India with the systematic abuse, rape, and abduction of women? Then, while found footage, black and white images of ceremonial flags and festive fireworks, celebrating the birth of the nation, start to roll, the artist’s voice is screaming in anguish: “What do you take me for! A something machine?” and we know what is going on. A bit later, the voice screams, “Get off me!” Meanwhile, a male voice, quietly and calmly says things such as, “the national honour is at stake,” and “our women must be returned.” We don’t need much more to get a sense of the horrid discrepancy yet bond, between celebration, honour, nationalism, and rape, pain, bodily and mental torture.

National emblems – Gandhi working at a spinning wheel – and cheerful outward appearances – a girl in bright yellow, in a lovely close-up, a cow on the left: they all become threatening, not in themselves but due to the timing, the sequences. When the girl’s *bindi* on her forehead turns into a Coca-Cola logo, in the cow’s belly a diseased red ball grows, and Gandhi lies dead, we realise that the promise of an equal society has been broken. The work is made up of alternating voices, one expressing anguish and pain, the other not reassuring but ignoring, erasing, and focusing on honour,

¹¹ On blue, see Julia Kristeva’s treatise on blue in Bellini, which for her is bound to motherhood (1980). The many uses and meanings of blue have been mapped historically by medievalist Michel Pastoureau (2001).

¹² The title of this section was adapted from an essay by Van Alphen on the work of a painter whose work is also deeply political in the struggle against violence, in the sense discussed here (2008). Veena Das counts among the most important anthropologists on India. Like Malani, she alerts us to the everydayness of violence. See Das (2006).

glory, and whatnot, irrelevant when you are being raped and held captive. Since the installation is set up as “immersive,” the question arises into what one is being immersed. This is not, not at all, the kind of passive, overwhelming immersion that holds viewers in thrall; instead, it is inflected as, on the contrary, *activating*.

Immersion, here, means that viewers are inside what they see, and thanks to the rhythm of different image scales, they are being moved to respond. The voices as well as the moving images surround us, which makes us part of the scene, but certainly not passive. This activating effect bridges the two historical moments of women-genocide: the aftermath of Partition, in 1947, and the systematic violation of women in that other enduring aftermath – since there is not really an after – of 2002. The bridge connects the two high violence moments; the difference between the two banks of the river of blood, Malani’s hope against hope, is that women no longer silently accept their fate. Painful as these evoked – but not graphically represented – pictures of ruinous violence are, the artist’s screams turn a disempowering passive engulfment into a hopeful activism-to-come. That is the potential political movement this work is able to perform. Just consider the many meanings, and the transnational multivalence, of the English phrase “Holy cow!”

Archival Visions

As earlier, visitors may feel a bit relieved again when, after this painful experience, they enter the next room, also painted black. The eleven-panel painting *Twice Upon a Time*, with its title both witty and ominous, quite full and busy, seems a haven of tranquillity, if only because there is only one work in this room 37. Upon entering, one can be overwhelmed by colour, figures, and reflections, including one’s own. The black on the walls turns the colours into a harmonious composition. This creates the restfulness needed to process the many figures on the relatively large paintings, and realise the movement in these still images. There is no cinematic movement, no sound. Or so it seems. The images, not technically moving, tumble over each other, sometimes overlapping, or embedded in one another, overstepping the boundaries between frames. The special technique of reverse painting, also applied in the shadow plays and the paintings in room 35, adds to the vibrancy of the paintings, because they are painted on the back of a shiny sheet. This technique is Malani’s special way of appropriating and modifying traditions – her retrospectivity.

Malani’s interest in revitalising modernism is, once more, two-sided. On the one hand, it is a way of laying a claim to India as a modern country, thus implicitly opposing exoticising and denigrating views of the country and its cultures. On the other hand, it is one of her modes of being creatively active between the un-ideal present and the mythical, then colonial past, remaining acutely retrospective so that cultural amnesia doesn’t have a chance to set in. Therefore, she places her work not so much in-between, but in-the-middle of times as well as styles, media, and discourses. Thus, she stipulates that there can be no “post-” modernism without being in the middle of modernism. Specifically, the technique of reverse painting dates back to early Indian modernism. This technique also has issues of content to contend with, and very important ones for this artist.

Chinese painters who used small glass plates to depict erotic scenes imported the technique with its content into India. Later the technique was diverted for the representation of sacred imagery. Malani diverts it back, not to revert to semi-pornographic depiction but to present the allegedly sacred stories from mythology in a profane light, for profane interests, and for the expression of everyday suffering – a suffering generated by the mistaken belief that sacredness justifies violence. Taken especially in conjunction with the video/shadow play in the next room, also done in reverse painting, the shiny glass-like surface of the paintings makes them bristle with life, and allows the layering of multiple images, including the reflections of the visitors who are inevitably mirrored; hence, visually involved and politically implicated, gathering images to revitalise their own past in

the present act of looking. This is *embodied* perception, emulating the immersive installation we have just exited.

Busy and agitated, the painting remains entirely readable, image for image, without ever yielding to either a single coherent narrative or an incoherent mess. A great variety of images are both autonomous and connected, by means of colour effects and linking motives. For example, depending on the mini stories the visitor remembered, read, and now inhabits, some meandering shapes look either like lugubrious intestines or cheerful garlands, large snakes or tiny earthworms. Both the figures and the viewers are in the middle of things. The paintings also show the combination of traditional, rural, and modern figures and situations. Abstract-looking masses of blue and orange, organs or umbilical cords, float throughout the work. Figures are arbitrarily tiny and large in a play with scale that has its own political message, and everything seems connected. One striking member of the cast of this exuberant play is a man in modern business suit, spreading his hands as if to claim property rights over that entire world. What did they mean, with *post-colonial*?

On the middle panel a tondo-like circle encapsulates a dynamic, naked figure holding a huge insect – a kind of caterpillar – above his head, while airplanes fly by and bombs explode. The figure with the insect may appear as mythological and Indian; the airplanes and bombs are, then, just as Indian, although as easily evoking worldwide violence and the horror it produces. The figure stands in the round space among times, among worlds, among dimensions. A quotation from Malcolm Lowry's 1947 novel *Under the Volcano* binds this work to the thought that the world can explode any time, like a volcano. And it connects the painting to the shadow plays, but also to the subaltern figures we see in all the works, with the words: "I have no house, only a shadow." No house: subaltern; shadow: doubling, spectral, unsubstantial.¹³

Even though the work is full of Indian references, a search for Indian sources would be utterly reductive, and skirting an attempt to exoticise the work. Malani's art is never mono-cultural. This is nowhere so clear as in the combination of a Western and an Indian myth, each of which presents a story of abuse and erasure of women. Included in the work are the mythical stories of (Greek) Medea and of (Indian) Sita, a figure from the Hindu mythological epic *Ramayana* whose adventures have connections to Medea's. Like Medea, Sita was abandoned and repudiated by her husband, and although she didn't kill her sons in revenge, she left them to their father who had twice (upon a time) betrayed her by yielding to ideology in the form of peer pressure. Thus, Sita abandoned them by returning to her own mother, being swallowed up by the earth.¹⁴

Foregrounding Malani's political and feminist commitments, the figure of Sita, in spite of the mutual love between the couple, embodies the utterly unjust reliance of a cowardly husband on popular masculinist moralism voiced in gossip. Accused of "inevitable adultery" after having been sequestered by a demon, she is subjected to a trial by fire, but when the people spread renewed rumours about her chastity, Rama abandons her in a forest, pregnant with twins, for a second trial – *twice* upon a time. The title denotes an aesthetic of the fairy-tale, that quintessential narrative genre, but the distortion ("twice") refers to the incorrigible pressure of ideology that narratives tend to convey. This fairy tale has no happy ending, nor an indeterminate future (happily ever after). It remains in the middle of times as well as cultures: that ideology is age-old, never gone away.

¹³ The word "spectral" is meant to evoke the many theoretical analyses of that notion in the wake of Derrida (1994) that are highly relevant, but that I have no space to develop here. In the context of Malani's work, especially fitting is the keenly developed reversal, by Peeren (2014), of the association of spectral and powerless, in relation to subalternity.

¹⁴ The many references to Greek mythology are not only part of Malani's refusal of regionalism. Concretely, there was a strong bond between India and Greece, visible in the Gupta school of Indo-Hellenic sculpture, flourishing roughly from the 4th century BC to the 7th century AD. On this early contact, and the philosophical implications, see McEvelley (2002).

Hence, the need to embed these stories into an archive from which we, as viewers, must select and re-compose our own narratives. This activating formal procedure leads to the Bergsonian political force mentioned earlier. For this we get to see loose body parts, a man who appears to be ready to begin a boxing fight, crawling insects, meadows, water, and circles, in which all these elements, in different compositions, also appear. The circle inevitably evokes the world. Here and there, letters are imprinted, such as the quoted text from Lowry, or singular digits. Babies, old people bent over, skeletal animals, adolescent girls – and then that business man, twice over. The young girls can “be,” or evoke, Alice; the business man, the colonial subject. The point is to see multiplicity, including ominous things; not to decipher the images. The transitions from panel to panel turn the busyness of the visual view into a cinematic one.

This painting, then, consists of eleven panels and forms both a whole and a non-unified range of images, with discrepant scales, mostly bright colours such as blue, and orange, on a light green background, and so many images that seem out of order in spite of the Medea-Sita allusions. The multi-panel painting offers a “filmic view,” as Pijnappel wrote in an essay that demonstrates the presence of the cinematic in so much of Malani’s work from the beginning (2016). While I fully agree with this view, I would still advocate to add a consideration of that other aesthetic, that of the archival, if only because of the emphasis on multi-temporality. The multitude of stories mixes Greek mythology, contemporary horror, allusions to Renaissance prints, Kalighat painting, early twentieth-century narratives, and age-old Hindu myths.

While the paintings are brimming with narrativity, on entering the gallery one immediately senses a resistance to narrative coherence. Moreover, this mode of considering the painting avoids any attempt to unify it. Instead of gelling into a single image-storyline, the ineradicable multiplicity turns it into an archive of images. According to Van Alphen, the archive, despite its long history, including as a tool for colonialism, has been revitalised as an artistic mode under the impact of the digitalisation of more recent times. He contends that the cultural role of the archival mode is increasing while that of narrative is declining. His analyses make the case for a great variety of relevant aspects of the archival mode. He discusses such issues as storage, listing, classification, depletion, reanimation, and other aspects of the archival mode that contemporary art both deploys and critiques. An archive is primarily a place, although full of mazes; it is easy to get lost in an archive. A narrative is primarily based on time; it takes the form of a timeline, however convoluted it may be.

Malani, with her consistent resistance to binary opposition, presents narrativity and the archival as exuberantly co-present and interacting. Narrativity is already visible in an allusive storyline that runs from left to right. It is also making its presence felt in the recurrence of figures from panel to panel. A man carrying a big globe returns at the end. A seer from Greek mythology, Tiresias, fits well with Malani’s emphasis on the futurity of the present, as *per* Cassandra.

Instead of contrasting narrative and archive, the eleven panels of the one work in room 37 constitute an archive *of* narratives – all incomplete, allusive, evoked by synecdoche. Rather than being an archive, the work “does,” it *performs* the archival mode. In various ways, the archival mode is activated, literally, to galvanise the viewer. Each painting can be seen as a department of an archive; a shelf, drawer, shoebox, or section. Each contains many figures, all appealing to our desire for narrative, none satisfying it entirely. This, along with the moving reflections of the visitors, causes, as Malani said about of the Medea wall drawing, agitation on the surface. The point of this “archival aesthetic” is to show the multi-temporality or what I like to call *heterochrony*, yet another version of the *linea perplexa*, and in the bargain, also propose to the viewer the task of bringing her own order in the chaotic storage of images. The archival aesthetic, then, is in-becoming; it is not yet

there, which is as it should be. Without the work of the viewer, there is no art event; a finished, perfectly ordered archive would be dead.¹⁵

Seeing the figures and their allusions to, or synecdoches of stories while seeing oneself reflected, posits narrative in the mythical third-person discourse crossing, or crossed out by, first-second person exchange, both at the same time. Andreas Huyssen considers the point of this mixture in terms of an archival aesthetic with a clear political thrust:

. . . weaving a tapestry of images from the combined *archives* of the past and the present. . . Her focus on violence perpetrated in the present on women, children, and the poor mobilizes mythic characters to tell contemporary stories, while citing mass cultural images that reveal their mythic investments. In such pointed montages, the work cuts through the silence that has veiled these horrors and accepted violence as part of everyday life. (2012, 52; emphasis added)

This mixture not only confronts the viewer with plurality but also immerses her in her own tininess – even if the paintings are human-size, and the figures smaller than life-size.

Bloody Hell

The final room tells us once more, and with more activating insistence than ever, that this exhibition cannot make the world appear more cheerful than it is, but also that we cannot sit and wait it out either. The room is filled with an artistic statement to that effect. Cassandra's voice returns in full force. About one minute into the soundtrack we hear these words: "This is Cassandra speaking." The video/shadow play *In Search of Vanished Blood*, with its poetic title, speaks of utmost horror. For its first showing in Kassel, visitors entered the space through a sloped passage; it is not so strange that some referred to this as a descent into hell – a hell that is bloody. "In the heart of darkness," replies or continues a distorted voice, pluralised by means of asynchronicity. The pluralisation of the voice is meaningful not only because of its eerie mechanical sound but also because it speaks a plural identity in the linguistic first-person singular. The visitors' participation in the art is thereby once more firmly driven home.¹⁶

We, visitors, can fill in; "the heart of darkness," updated with the preposition "in" that makes us part of it, for example, we can supplement with Conrad's Kurtz's words "the horror! the horror" and we know where we are: *in* today's world, with its old and new dictatorships, the latter passing for democratic. The world with its different pasts that keep haunting the present while being erased by the authorities. No wonder these dictators fear art, so that it keeps being censored; for it is able, by means of the literary and visual imagination, to provide visions, including knowledge that other forms of knowledge production have difficulty achieving. Its idiom: thought-images. Both the erasure and the hope that Cassandra's voice can at least be heard, so that the future, too, can be seen, or imagined, are wrenched into the present, in this art that keeps the negative and the positive together: the blood has vanished, but the search goes on. With the five rotating cylinders and the six

¹⁵ For the notion of "archival aesthetic," see Ernst van Alphen's 2014 book on the subject. This book is devoted to contemporary artists who deploy such an aesthetic as an alternative to narrative. His earlier book (2005) gives insight in the "thought-image," a concept mentioned above; even if he does not use that term. The term "heterochrony" calls attention to the great diversity in experiences of time, in relation to economy, history, employment, and other factors that determine lifestyle. An awareness of heterochrony is especially relevant for "migratory culture." For both these concepts, see Bal (2011).

¹⁶ The artist book published for the occasion, *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2012), contains a film, *Cassandra's Gift* (2012), by Payal Kapadia. Among many critical essays on Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel, see Edward Said, "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*" (1993, 22–31); and remarks in Mbembe (2001), to get a sense of the novel in context.

video projections, the soundtrack becomes a sonic shadow play, as the voice is accompanied by its own shadow.

In view of ongoing censorship and art resisting it by imaging it, it is no coincidence, then, that a striking image of this work is a form of overwriting the face. Disturbingly, a woman's mouth is entirely covered, hence, censored, or gagged. What, at first sight, could be a horrific image of a scorpion, the woman in danger of being bitten and poisoned, is in fact the shadow of an image painted on one of the turning cylinders. The result of the chance that this precise drawing casts its shadow onto the mouth of this woman, right now appearing in the projected video. Only for a fleeting moment is this image visible. But it stops us in our tracks.

In Search of Vanished Blood is replete with reminiscences of past violence, as it is replete with recalls of past art that in its own way addressed that violence. The most obvious of these are allusions to Goya's prints *Los desastros de la guerra*. Goya's prints are not a nationalistic protest but a humane one. This makes his work available for quotation in Malani's work. As the last of the old masters as well as the first modern artist in Western Europe, he helps the contemporary artist position herself more specifically in relation to the traditions of modernity and modernism, on the one hand, and her own time and place, on the other. In Goya's series, the titles of the prints all put a heavily ironic spin on the images of horror performed by people on people – no matter who attacks, destroys, or devours whom. For Malani, it is especially the history of violence that she alludes to, as she does in her quotations of historic prints from medical books by Dürer. She also deploys the early modern Kalighat style, recurring in her work since the mid-eighties. The point is not the precise intertextual reference but the inter-discursive connection. Hence, if we take the comparison both ways, we can also see in Goya's style an expression of solidarity with the handiwork of craftsmen, who would rather be making prints than serve as cannon fodder.

The allusions to Goya's visual discourse as practice in this series of prints are as fleeting as they are strong. Their timing activates the visitor. The next image is there before we know it. Like the quotations and the multiplied voice, the images turn; they pass by, casting their shadows. Thanks to the relentless turning, violence emerges, on many different levels at once. Each body part that flies by on the cylinders or the videos seems cut off in acts of aggression. Innocent butterflies are so out of scale that they seem the product of nuclear disaster. Let me describe a small fragment. On one cylinder, we see a man with an Afghan head-dress, mouth open, holding a gigantic bird, perhaps caressing it with clumsy oversized hands. A cat sleeping beside him seems indifferent to the bird. On the bottom, we see some sea creatures, out of place in what could otherwise be considered a scene. A smaller young woman or girl shines through the transparency. At certain moments of the turn, she seems to be inside the man's body. A dog standing on hind legs walks beside her like a circus animal. Is this animal walking on a cloud, or a brain?

This is painting combined with drawing. Mute colours make the painting on the cylinder look like watercolours rather than oil painting, with a predominant Burnt Sienna and Phthalocyanine Blue only interrupted by the blue feathers of the bird, and a touch of scarlet on the dog. On the bottom of the cylinder small creatures move, animals of indistinct identity: birds, salamanders, butterflies. The blue is repeated in the image on the next cylinder, of which we can only see a narrow portion. There, two women, only outlined, are sitting. Under their feet, however, is an isolated spine, made of bones. This spine is blue, the same blue we just encountered on the bird's feathers. Painting and drawing meet in the details, especially the eyes. The man's eye is strikingly expressive. He seems astounded or horrified by the bird, perhaps by its size, or the tactile substance of its feathers. On the bird's tail the feathers look prickly; perhaps the man feels the pain of thorns. The girl's eyes face us directly, from the other side of the transparent cylinder. And the woman on the left of the two women on the next cylinder looks resigned, dejected, with her large eyes. Paint, hence colour, matters in all these works. Such as red – absent.

Blood: vanished, forgotten; yet present not in scarlet splatters but in the innumerable narratives of violence the work holds up, then retracts. Signs of blood, the paintings, the Mylar, the drawings, the sounds all press forward the materiality of the work, which nevertheless remains elusive. The signs are able to muster the meaning of blood, precisely because they *are* not it but tie themselves to it. And then, the poem from which the title is a quotation slowly passes over the bandaged face of a woman – gagged, her mouth wrapped with semitransparent gauze. This is where the image asserts its own poetic nature, with a face that is both completely obliterated and yet “live” in the present. Overwritten by the poem, yet dimly visible, the image speaks in its dual medium to state the aliveness of the woman and the way the poem covers her face, as one face of violence.

Time is inscribed in the work’s stamina in insisting, reiterating, and yet constantly transforming the materiality of the symbolic blood. This prolongs the duration of the experience of the art. Time is also made specific in the temporal itinerary from present to past and back. And time is at work in reading, looking, experiencing, and imagining. These are the four movements triggered, each with a temporality of its own. Time is brought in through quotation, recognising the past; and through imagining the future, by Cassandra-the-artist. The poetics of quotation implies an acknowledgement of the collective nature of art – the works, the experience, and what the imagination does with these. It is a form of collaboration. This is an important aspect of this artist’s practice.

Quotation is also an acknowledgment of art’s need for materiality. The quoted precedents are primary material, building blocks that help the new work stand on its own. Quotation does not contradict a measure of artistic autonomy. Malani’s creation of the particular genre of the video/shadow play as her unique medium relies on, and honours, earlier technologies and aesthetics as much as actual motives. She merges intertextuality – the quotation of traceable precedents such as extant texts and images – with interdiscursivity – borrowing earlier, other discourses, including technologies and the traditions of their deployment. Conversely, autonomy is not isolationism, arrogance, or cultural autism. It is self-governing on the basis of collaboration, moral responsibility, and most importantly, a relatively free subject position. Free, that is, in acknowledgment of its interconnection with others.

In addition to, or rather, overshadowing or absorbing time and quotation, the primary issue in this work is the search for materiality, for which blood is both a metaphor and the real thing. It is both *comparant* and compared, thus undermining the divide that rules theories of metaphor. And paint is blood’s sister. This final work embodies the need for real, material traces in order to believe, acknowledge, and feel historic violence. The work of the shadows that define the poetics of *In Search of Vanished Blood* is geared to designing such traces, even in a minimal(ist) materiality. In its own uniqueness, along with its exhibition-specific retro-spectivity, this work thus stipulates a first conditional feature of the entire body of art this exhibition sets out before us, in the hope that we will go back down and out, politically and artistically transformed.

The above essay analyses the exhibition at Castello di Rivoli according to its initial project. While the book was being finalised, in June 2018 the curatorial process developed further, including an additional major work by the artist, *Listening to the Shades* (2008), installed in room 37, and the installation of *Twice Upon a Time* (2014) in room 35.

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