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Untimeliness, Inter-ship, Mutuality

Prelude

The qualifier "untimely" indicates a temporal problem. It can refer to a temporal disturbance of "natural" chronology, a discrepancy, ill-timing, something unfortunate, and, before all else, premature. In order to make us all think of the unfortunate untimely passing of our friend and stimulating, creative, inspiring colleague and teacher Dorota Filipczak, I decided to devote this article to that aspect of time that is most poignantly expressed in untimeliness, the loss of a beloved person before her time. But in order to bring a little comfort to that sad event, I make the word expand and extend to different reflections on time and its unwillingness to be "natural," straight, like an arrow that indicates progress, and instead, discuss a few instances of time's disobedience to that alleged regularity. Instead of time, I will present tempo: differences in speed, in pace that temporally "color" lives and the world in which we live. For, such different "tempi" make our experiences lively, and open up our potential to creative freedom. This would be, I conjecture, something that would make professor Filipczak giggle with amusement.

It is no coincidence that I first encountered her in an interview. The preposition "inter-" that is part of that noun, has always been my special interest. The preposition implies a focus on relationality. The interest she always pursued in (the work of) women artists was not limited to a thematic interest, which could easily be on the verge of the pursuit of identity as gender-essentialism. Instead, it was a mode of being, thinking, and doing her academic work. As a mode—and I mean that word quite literally—rather than a topic, her special interest in the art of which the artist is a woman, demonstrates in her work a non-essentialist feminist

perspective, which I can best indicate as *dialogic*. Her preferences for gender as a knot of social-cultural issues to consider spoke to (logic) the relationships (dia-) among people, with their own characteristics and interests, not at all bound to fixed properties that we too easily call "identities." From our first encounter on, I felt that this was a very special woman capable of contributing to the fabric of culture in original and constructive ways: generous and sharp, keen and calming; exciting and reassuring in her interactions with colleagues and students.

This goes beyond the theme of "woman" in a big way. Far from the more usual self-centered, frequently even narcissistic tendency to select artworks and texts in which the critic has recognized herself and is interested for that reason (either unconsciously or self-aware), professor Filipczak's mind was "outgoing," inquiring about otherness. Armed with an unlimited curiosity, she did not shy away from travelling even to foreign countries when she set her mind on seeing and studying a specific object of interest. Her personalizing approach to others compels me to speak about her on a first-name basis. For, someone like Dorota must be what I have called an intellectual friend, with friendship taken as seriously as the intellectual side of the relationship: an "inter-ship."[1]

I can only speak from my own experience: the encounters based on "inter-ship" that I had the immense pleasure and privilege to have with her. Once she had seen and reflected on my video work, *Madame B* (made with Michelle Williams Gamaker), which was first displayed in the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź in 2012–13, she requested an interview. This was the occasion of our first encounter, the result of which was published in the journal she created, *Text Matters* (volumes 4 and 5). Later, in 2016, she travelled to Kraków to see my video installation and film *Reasonable Doubt*, on René Descartes and Queen Kristina, where that work premiered. But even more impressively, she travelled to Oslo, in 2017, to see, reflect on, and interview me about the exhibition I had curated there in the Munch Museum, which included our own video installation *Madame B* and numerous works by Norway's greatest painter, Edvard Munch. The conversation we had there demonstrated her dialogic mode of thinking.[2]

This background of our "inter-ship" explains why, in this tribute to her, I don't write about literature but about visual art, of the digital kind.

[1] I proposed the neologism "inter-ship" in an article in which traces of the interview with Dorota are evident. See "Intership: Anachronism between Loyalty and the Case."

[2] See Filipczak "Mieke Bal: Writing with Images" and "Framing *Madame B*: Quotation and Indistinction in Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker's Video Installation." I am very grateful to Jarosław Suchan for inviting the installation in the great museum he directed with such great insight into modern art.

True, Dorota was primarily a literary scholar. This made her vivid interest in my video work all the more striking. Her special interest in art made by women and the political consequences of that distinctive authorship are not bound to a specific medium, but emerged from her wide, open attitude to culture. My wish to relate to that openness has enticed me to select a work by each of three visual artists who are women, and who are based geographically on three different continents. All three are keen to critique the biases and exclusions that conservatism in art sites promotes—most prominently the repression of the shameful histories of slavery and the exploitation of women. This, as well as their investment in acknowledging diversity, they share with Dorota. The works I present here most centrally focus on time, temporality, and tempos. They play with time in their artistic and socio-cultural agency, frolic with it, but before all, they question its self-evident domination in chronology, regularity and the deceptive bias of progress (versus "developing"). If well engaged by spectators, or rather, active and engaged lookers, they probe what time does to people and their lives, and I must add that this suits the occasion for the present article, the sadness of Dorota's untimely passing.[3]

Slowing Down for the Mutuality of Looking: Ann Veronica Janssens's Clouds and Me

The time was a dog-day afternoon in 1998. The place was Lisbon, near the river Tagus. The door opened easily and closed quickly. Failing to read the small letters that identified the room, I found myself totally immersed in a piece that, in order to be experienced and understood, required precisely such thoughtless, total submersion. The space that surrounded me was blissful, bright, and totally opaque; in it, all sound was subdued.[4]

The word "space" may even be too worldly. The world, after all, was on the other side of the door. Where was I? In a strong, literal sense, I was nowhere. With my eyes wide open I saw nothing, despite the fact that the room was not dark in the least. The dense, impenetrable mist packed into the space whose limits I could not even guess was so bright it almost

[3] The conservatism, including a discriminatory conception of "otherness" inherent in a traditional concept of time is most sharply analyzed by Johannes Fabian in his seminal study 1983 *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*.

[4] This analysis is based on some revised fragments from my book on Janssens's work, *Endless Andness: The Politics of Abstraction According to Ann Veronica Janssens*. The analysis presented here comes from the beginning of that book.

seemed a kitsch fantasy of heaven. Imagine the kind of clouds angels sit on: those little fat putti with egg-shell skin. Such clouds would resemble those of Renaissance and Baroque painting, except that those latter clouds have shapes while this mist did not. Whatever shape it might have had was invisible to me. Since shapes can only be seen from the outside and I found myself inside the cloud, I felt I was enclosed in nothingness.

Fig. 1. Ann Veronica Janssens, *Horror Vacui*, 1999. Artificial mist and natural light, dimensions variable. Belgian pavilion, 48th Venice Biennale. Courtesy of the artist

After a while, ever so slowly it seemed—but time was arrested as much as sound—vague lines came through. The event of their becoming visible was just that: an occurrence in time. The change in the space consisted of a gradual, partial receding of the absolute opacity of the white that had surrounded me completely, clinging to my skin and challenging my sense of my own boundaries—something that could induce fear. When this receding took place, I became aware of my own dissolution. Thus, the after-effect of the event retrospectively turned the initial experience into an unsettling one. Next, another event occurred, one that was deeply narrative in that it had the retroversive capacity to change the state of what, before, I would have called "my mind."

Now, I could not call it that any longer. The anxiety that was created by contrast and after the fact was an anxiety "of the heart," to allude to Baroque philosopher Blaise Pascal. He famously wrote: "The heart has its

reasons which reason itself does not know" (158). This was what I discovered: the heart as the seat of a domain of reason that reason either does not know or actively ignores. The mind-body, or the body-mind, acts on its own, which is what happened when I felt that the earlier possibility of fear was a retroversion.

Retroversion is a narrative device that requires a narrative agent, a narrator, to manipulate the linearity of time. Readers are given access to a universe of events that run through time in different directions, crisscrossing where time thickens. We know such devices from novels—not from visual art, be it figurative, abstract or conceptual. Yet, as this instance shows, retroversion empowers not only readers, but also viewers. It gives access to unknown worlds. It opens up our lives to manifold possibilities that console us in our grief of being bound, hand and foot, by time's tyranny. I was without sight and blissfully coming into sight at the same time.

The accession to the visibility of the still-vague lines was also constituted by the emergence of the ceiling, plinths, and corners of the room through the seemingly limitless cloud. Lines and things became as one. It was an emergence barely identifiable as well as fragile, in permanent danger of annihilation. Only now could I begin to see that I was indeed in something as ordinary as a room. I could see its square form and its proportions. The earlier sensation, however, of no other space being present for me than the absolute, was still lingering on my retina and my skin. What was happening with and within me was an experience of duration as a crucially important element of visual perception.

Not only were the boundaries of my body—my skin as protection and site of both vulnerability and access—less obvious than I had always assumed them to be. Not only was being inside the cloud incompatible with seeing its shape. Not only was vision a slowly granted and slowly developed privilege. In addition, the duration of perception was uneven in its rhythm, unstable in its linearity, dense and pervasive in its impact, and wavering in its location, siding alternately with the subject (me) and the object—the unstable sight that I was beginning to see. But then again, those notions—subject, object—and the distinction they proclaimed, had themselves lost their boundaries, their separate identities. They had become as vague and blurred as the mist I was immersed in.

All this time I could not walk. I was nailed to the floor, fearful even of shuffling forward, as the blind might feel when suddenly deprived of their aids. Walking, even when it is expected to be safe, is impossible without the help of perception. Pondering this, I heard a hissing sound. It seemed close by, but I could not gauge its distance from me. I could not see its source, nor interpret its meaning. Perhaps it was a part of the

installation. However, it might as well have been accidental; a noise made by the air-conditioning system of the building, perhaps. Who was to say where the work began and ended, where its seams stitched it to its environment, how it was framed? The sound was not loud, but in the total silence of the fog-cushioned space it constituted an unsettling interruption. Like the emergence of the lines, the hissing constructed the preceding silence at the very moment it broke that silence. Yet, it was only potentially frightening for a moment. As the mist was brightened up by its rigorous whiteness, so the sound's contrast to silence was its only affective burden. Just like the lines coming into visibility, it allowed nothing to distract from the purity of its retroversive effect.

How long had I been standing there? Duration was *there*; it was a presence, an embodied sensible "thing." It became sensual, slowly accumulating metaphors, associations, and personal memories of space, smell, and matter. Duration was made so intense, so bodily, that it was impossible to measure it with a clock. In a futile attempt to document this sensation of being in time, I tried to take a picture of the moment when the slowdown waged a victorious battle against the inexorability of time. Duration became an ally in my desperate resistance to the gliding slope of life at whose bottom "the end" is written. My camera refused: its automatic calculation of time versus distance and light could not deal with the situation, just as it cannot capture dreams.

One minute, ten minutes? I had now become used to the hissing sound that came on at intervals that may have been either regular or arbitrary. It ceased to interrupt my being-there. The mist had not disappeared, not even lessened; it had become more transparent, and in that respect at least it ceased to hinder. I could walk now; slowly, carefully, alert, one small step at a time. I could see the edges of a few steps and guess the rest of the stairs. The room became a part of a building. I could outline the end of the room and guess a hallway. I could make out the sound as coming from at least three different directions.

At this point in my narrative, a bifurcation is mapped out before me. In one direction, I continue the narrative discourse and introduce the next episode. From the mist emerges a creature barely identifiable; I do not know whether it is male or female, victim or threat. But there seems to be an air of murder about this figure. Here we go down the path of fiction, where I engage the mist room as a setting for a mystery plot. This mist becomes the marsh into which the villain flees at dawn; in which the child gets lost and might drown or suffer more unspeakable things; in which the heroine perseveres to find the lost victim of abduction. The unlimited worlds of fiction open up when time and visibility lose their self-evidence. I imagine myself sitting in this room of mist watching other visitors come

in, seeing their deceleration, interpreting their bewilderment, and writing stories that take their starting points in *their* body-minds.

The other direction, more appropriate for the occasion of an art experience, opens up the field of the philosophy of perception, of art practice and its role in the contemporary world. This path leads to a world that is just as unlimited, subject not to rigid structure but to the proliferation of human imagination. It is my good fortune that I was ready to "have seen" this space as a stage, a theater, a work of art, an experiment in the bond between perception and sensation which makes all aesthetic standards falter and dissolve. I experienced perception's irreducible bond with duration—the unity of perception and sensation that undermines the distinction between subject and object, which the visual arts have always considered to be the basis of their specificity, or "nature." This installation articulates a thought that has become thinkable only now—a thought that transforms what was there before. The world as we knew it, art as we knew it, the limits and concepts and distinctions by which we lived: they are all transformed through the brief sensation of losing clarity by being slowed down by an excessively decelerated tempo.

Stagnating Time, Scale and Grass: Doris Salcedo and the Forgotten Dead Creeping into Life

"Each unit is approximately the length and width of a standard coffin," Doris Salcedo wrote in the artist statement for her work *Plegaria Muda*.[5] The word "coffin" stuck in my throat. When I was asked to write about Salcedo's work for the catalogue, I had just had my own experience with coffins. For a feature film on madness that I was involved in making, I travelled to Seili Island, Finland, to a former psychiatric hospital, a pinkish building amidst green meadows. On Seili, a former leprosy colony had been converted into a "madhouse"—something that, as Michel Foucault has told us, had been done in many cases. The disappearance of leprosy marked the invention of the madhouse, or psychiatric hospital. On Seili, patients were admitted on one condition: they had to bring their own coffin. This chilling fact turned our filming on that location into a historically layered moment that I qualify as "political."[6]

[5] See Mieke Bal "Waiting for the Political Moment."

[6] See Foucault. Also, see www.crazymothermovie.com for more information about *Mère Folle*, the film I co-authored with Michelle Williams Gamaker.

Fig. 2. Doris Salcedo, *Plegaria Muda*, 2009. Wood, cement, soil grass. Courtesy of the artist

Salcedo not only uses the dimensions ("approximately") of coffins but also the material: wooden tables; and the color, or discoloration, of the grey that we recognize from her work *Unland* (1995–98), which was also made of treated and aged tabletops. Working with and for the victims of political violence has been Salcedo's artistic program and life project from the beginning of her career. Death caused by human hands; victims de-humanized when their bodies could not be retrieved, buried, mourned, because the violence was denied. Mass graves hidden in green pastures, where the hiding is like a second killing, parallel with but opposed to the traditional second burial. In *Plegaria Muda*, those killing grounds themselves become visible—barely, piercing through their attempts to stay hidden—for the first time. Green, growing grass, life: it is almost shocking to see those tiny bits surface from between the gray, dead slabs.

Like the coffins of the history of Seili that sentenced, without trial, the allegedly mad to life imprisonment, never to be seen again, the coffin-size sculptures do not explicitly reference any violence at all. They do not tell stories; they just "are," touching the visitor with hair-raising horror while remaining mute, immobile, silent as the grave. This is art, after all—not committed journalism, not politics, not propaganda. Yet there is a reality behind them, or inside them: the reality of mass murder. That is the reality of the history of the present, in the aftermath of which we live and enjoy great works of art. This reality is invoked in a manner that is both absolutely inevitable and yet indirect. The numerous units, working together to constitute a mass—as in "mass graves"—cannot avoid working *together* to convey or touch us with the horror that inspired them. But nowhere can any representation of violence be seen. Even the grass of the killing fields is modest, small, growing shyly from between two layers of wood that evoke but do not represent the coffin. It is as subtly present as the coffins on Seili, hidden in the past. From within that present in which Salcedo shows her work, the small bits of grass that pierce through the layers of attempts to keep life under a lid, green goes very well with gray; but the beauty of a color scheme matters here only ironically. Instead, it is the struggle of those small green elements that touches me, with the contradictory combination of two meanings. They conceal the place of violence, the invisible grave, by overgrowing it. This makes the grass guilty by omission, complicit with the cruelty that not only killed but also concealed the killing, thus preventing mourning. Yet, they also indicate the perseverance of life, thumbing their noses at those who think killing can erase life.[7]

Such sculptures subtly hint at the human figure that they refrain from representing. They deploy the human figure allusively. They cloud the human figure in concealment, as silent nuclei. These terms, which I borrow from an essay on the Latin-American Baroque in literature, are, in Salcedo's case, to be taken in two ways. They refer both to the strategies deployed in the art and to the violence of concealment and silencing that art addresses.[8]

"Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably," Walter Benjamin wrote (255). In this sentence, the key word "recognized" does not clarify the ambiguous preposition "of" in "image of the past." Does "of" indicate provenance or subject matter? In other words, is Benjamin talking about images that come from the past or images that represent the past? The

[7] Here I am revisiting some fragments of my book on Doris Salcedo's work. See Mieke Bal *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art*.

[8] See Sarduy.

irresolvable ambiguity defines Salcedo's relationship to representation. It is through this ambiguity that the sculptures can do their political work.[9]

Benjamin insists on the need for images of the past to be in the present—to be "the case," to use Ludwig Wittgenstein's definition of "the world" in the opening sentence of the *Tractatus*. Salcedo's works are entirely visual: they use no words other than their titles, and the only sound they emit is that of an emphatic silence. Yet, the art's very visuality—its forms, colors, and matter—also carries out conceptual work, all the while making its viewers do the same. And with *Plegaria Muda*, we cannot avoid seeing the conceptual work in the dimensions as well. While never representing a human figure, Salcedo does not allow us to forget that figure, if only by the dimensions. Nor can we forget the trace of life, the grass tells us.[10]

But none of Salcedo's works is didactically political. Instead, they offer viewers tools to move beyond fixed concepts into the uncertain realm of mobile concepts, and challenges its viewers to endorse that mobility. I therefore would like to group these works under the heading of "practical philosophy" rather than that of "visual philosophy" because they reflect on how we can *deal with* the suffering of singular people caused by political violence. That "dealing with"—occurring only after the suspension of a sentimentalizing compassion—posits the intersection between the singular and the general, the punctual and the enduring as the site of the political. It also harbors the ambiguity of the preposition "of."

Unsettling Speed: Nalini Malani's Foreshortening of Time Shooting from her Head

The third artist who deploys tempi as a political weapon takes the opposite direction. Instead of slowing down or even stagnating, time, in her recent work, is upsettingly fast. As I write this, the artist is installing an exhibition in the National Gallery in London, where she was invited on a two-year fellowship, requested to respond to the museum's permanent collection. This entails the challenging undertaking to establish, or rather, to *figure*, an *inter*-relationship between historical still images such as paintings, and Malani's contemporary moving works. For this exhibition she is working in her newly invented medium: animations made by tracing her fingers over an iPad screen. The animating, activating force of these works gives the genre-medi-

[9] See Benjamin.

[10] See Wittgenstein.

um name "animations" a second meaning. Inter-historical, intermedial and intercultural: no one is more apt to establish such multi-tentacled inter-ships than Malani. Bridging differences without erasing them, the central mode she deploys is narrative. But then, how does she bring in stories so that they relate, steering clear of individualism and particularity?

Fig. 3. Detail from Caravaggio's *The Supper at Emmaus* overlayered by Malani's animation. Courtesy of the artist

This project clearly performs what I have called "pre-posterous history": an inter-temporal relationship in which the past and the present are in conversation, in mutuality, instead of a conventional chrono-logic with one-directional linearity. Merging old master paintings and the contemporary in each animation is a perfect example of this. Since the work is still in the making as I write this essay, I cannot imagine a more radically contemporary work. That contemporaneity matters, especially in art that so insistently experiments with temporality, and in a project where history meets today in an intensive form of dialogic relationality. Malani is constantly connecting, linking, integrating; her work is essentially performing *inter-ship*. The request to respond to the gallery's paintings matches Malani's ongoing experimental, creative spirit.[11]

[11] This section borrows some ideas from "Inter-ships with Nalini Malani: The Foreshortening of Time," my catalogue essay in *Nalini Malani: My Reality is Different* (2022). The image presented here is from page 90.

This artist does not simply make "works"; instead, she experiments not only with content and artistic form, but also with media and the space in which her works appear. Thereby, she invents new media or media combinations. She gives the currently much-discussed topic of intermediality an entirely new, mobile and changing meaning. She does not "adapt" one medium to another, as in cinematic versions of famous novels. Her intermediality is much more far-reaching than that. The result tends to be an interaction that moves both ways rather than a finished product. From the outset, she always gave her works a twist that enabled a transformation of the medium. Malani continued to experiment with transforming media to create new forms and narrative possibilities. Another example is the way that her multi-panel paintings play with the cinematic. The fragmentation of the invoked story over many (sometimes sixteen or thirty-two) panels, figures in a different mode or medium what in the cinematic is the temporal succession of frames. This unification-in-fragmentation is crucial both in her paintings and in film.[12]

She calls another medium she has invented "erasure performances." In these, at the end of exhibitions she wipes out wall paintings that she has made as part of an exhibition, to figure her solidarity with artists whose murals have been neglected. And so she goes on; her boundless creativity extends to exploring what a medium is, can be, and especially, what it can *do* in and with time's pace. And here, let's remember that the term "medium" is synonymous with the preposition "inter-." Until a few years ago, her most famous and complex media invention consisted of "video/shadow plays," begun in the 1990s and reaching worldwide renown in 2012 with *In Search of Vanished Blood*, commissioned by Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev for dOCUMENTA (13). Here, in the London project, she makes paintings and drawn animations interact, also bringing in sound and addressing the space. This carries the old master paintings into the present, back to life, and renovates their relevance. It also intimates a critique of the Western tradition, in which the exploitation of workers (slavery) and of women (nudity) was standard. Thanks to her intervention, the paintings are no longer still—not as flat surfaces, and neither as taking-for-granted those subjections of people. This shakes up the museum as an institution where conservation is primary—a necessary task, but also one that resonates with "conservatism."[13]

[12] On theories of intermediality, see Lars Elleström *Beyond Media Borders: Intermedial Relations among Multimodal Media* volumes 1 and 2 (2021) and his 2019 *Transmedial Narration: Narratives and Stories in Different Media*. A handbook on intermediality Elleström began to edit was finished by his colleagues, who took over after his untimely death in 2021, and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2023 (see Bruhn, López-Varela and de Paiva Vieira).

[13] On the cinematic aspect of her multi-panel paintings, see Colah and Pijnappel. She has exhibited "animation chambers" on various occasions, including the exhibition at the

Consistently experimenting with ways to substantiate and diversify McLuhan's 1964 dictum "the medium is the message," the London exhibition proposes yet another inter-medium: incorporating cut-outs from old master paintings in ways that, in each instance, vary the dimensions and colours of the original works. After an in-depth study of the collection, the artist has selected paintings for a series of nine animations. In her dialogue with the historical paintings, the way Malani has cut out details of these, draws attention to the synecdochic issue of the relationship between the part and the now-new whole, in their embedding as detail or fragment.[14]

Interacting with art can be consoling or socially helpful in other ways. One way is to make viewers think; to animate their minds, while allowing them to inter-relate with the works. In view of the topic of time, in my reflections on Malani's work with time I have considered the possibility of foreshortening time. Foreshortening is a millennia-old painterly technique of transforming a flat image into an illusion of three-dimensional space. This accords well with Caravaggio (1571–1610), that quintessentially baroque painter who gained a reputation for not being good with space because he did not care for linear perspective. Instead, he deployed "color perspective": playing with light so that bright colors come forwards and dark ones recede. This transformation of spatiality is recognizable in Malani's animations, where the black background makes the brightly colored moving figures stand out starkly, giving them an almost 3D effect. Her creations burst into life out of a tomb-like blackness. This is profoundly different from linear perspective in which the one-eyed viewer's gaze falls into the abyss of the vanishing point. In some sections of the animations, a (Renaissance) painting made in linear perspective is thus made to quiver through the color perspective, as we can see in the image from Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* from 1601—that most characteristic instance of foreshortening.

This is what makes Malani's baroque figuring contemporary in its inter-ship with the historical Baroque and what came before it, as well as with other elements or aspects of art, people, space and the world. Her

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Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona for the Miró prize awarded to her in 2019 and at the Whitechapel Gallery, London (2020–21). In 2023 she was awarded the Kyoto Prize, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize. I use the verb "to figure" to invoke Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the figural as an overcoming of the word-image separation, best explained by D. N. Rodowick in 2001 *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy After the New Media*. I have published a book on Malani's "video/shadow plays" in 2016, *In Medias Res: Inside Nalini Malani's Shadow Plays*. In its introductory chapter I also discuss the erasure performances.

[14] For further information on McLuhan's theory on the methods of communication as the focus of study, see McLuhan *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. On the issue of detail/fragment, see Naomi Schor *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (1987) and her 1980 "Le détail chez Freud."

narrative figurations adopt fragments or scraps of baroque aesthetic and thought in a multiple practice of quotation, which takes from the outside in and ramifies from the inside out. They are arguably fictional, yet are neither parallel to nor, consequently, independent from the actual world. In fact, they militate against such autonomy, precisely by quoting the contrasting way in which baroque art militated for an enfolded, entrapped relationship with the real world. This is how the still architecture of the galleries is adopted in the animation. This inter-ship that activates Malani's integrated figurations neither entails something that is simply relativism, nor does it allow universalism or absolutism to assert itself. The term, rather, is "entanglement." This entanglement moves along, whether we are looking at cut-outs from the historical paintings, at later manifestations of a baroque style or at ourselves in the tones that the Baroque has set for us so that we can have baroque (re-)visions. But in each case, the outcome—us, our view—is different, for it is differently entangled. Inter-ship is another word for this. The art gives us a hand in that delicate, wavering uncertainty. Just consider the foreshortened hand of Christ in the Caravaggio. It is no coincidence that the three artists whose work I am presenting here, all refuse the static, stable temporality of classical painting.[15]

When considered as an alternative to perspective, foreshortening, while also involved in the production of a three-dimensional illusion, is the opposite of linear perspective in three ways. First, it extends space forwards, not backwards; second, it involves the body, which perspective had so efficiently reduced to a single eye; third, it flaunts distortion. Foreshortening is the systemic opposite of linear perspective. Forward, bodily and distorted, it is akin to the color perspective that Malani and Caravaggio share. Through both, by means of distortion, space becomes more real, or at least more tangible. Shortened in length and extended in width, limbs become longer, not on the picture plane, but towards us, perpendicular to it. Far from catering to the one-eyed, disembodied viewer, however, foreshortening creates the illusion that the object extends into the viewer's space. The object thus leaps off the canvas and pierces the imaginary wall that separates the represented space and everything that occurs there from the space where the viewer stands (or sits). As a result, foreshortening critiques the viewer's illusionary disembodiment. It is a perfect tool for an activating artist who deploys storytelling to shake us out of our passivity and complacency. Malani's engagement with foreshortening is one of the ways she enacts her commitment to binding; her political force.[16]

[15] For an extensive study of baroque thinking and narrating today, see my book *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*.

[16] The breakthrough study of perspective's illusionism is Hubert Damisch's famous skeptical view of it; see *L'origine de la perspective*, 1987 (English: *The Origin of Perspective*).

The paradox of foreshortening, with its multiple realms of relevance, such as space and time, makes it possible to assess Malani's (politically) binding force, and reveals an affiliation between her work and that of Janssens and Salcedo. Although allegedly serving the illusion of realistic representation, giving body to the flat surfaces that constitute the figures in a scene, its political effect is very different. While linear perspective moves backwards, producing a space the viewer can possess, colonize, but not risk entering, foreshortening moves forwards, bringing the figures to life but, in the same move, challenging the viewer's imaginary safety and isolation from the presented (fictional) world. Animation as activation responds to this goal and multiplies its effects. As a result, foreshortening breaks the realistic illusion at the same time as it supports it. Or rather, foreshortening changes that illusion and its modalities of viewing—from a distanced and disembodied mode of looking to an engaged and embodied one. With foreshortening, the mode of the artwork shifts away from representation, with all its illusions, into a realm that binds the image to the viewer, visually and affectively. This compels the viewer to think. What happens in the ambiguous realm where I know I am overstepping a boundary, yet feel required and delighted to risk doing so, is perhaps more crucial to what art can accomplish. This is how Malani, Janssens and Salcedo, all three, inter-medially transform visual narrative, and the way we see it, from contemplation to interaction.

But then, Malani especially turns foreshortening into a temporal device. Temporally, she gives her animations a foreshortened duration. And that creates a *lasting actuality*. This is what Malani produces with the pace of her animations. And that temporality is politically animating: actuality is *now*, but if we don't act upon it, it endures. Time is foreshortened to the extent that it is distorted so as to reverse the black hole of linearity. In Malani's inter-ship move to make spatial foreshortening temporal, time is both asymmetrical and heterogeneous. The heterogeneity of time is conveyed in moments when its foreshortening makes the viewer feel something that connects to—but *is* not—the past. This is the primary affective effect of the animations' speed. It is this artist's unique mode of narrative action, making the medium of animation politically effective. Malani's take on temporality indicates an overfilled imagination and memory, as well as a constant warning: urgency! Her head and heart are full of voices, and those voices end up in the animations to bring some order to chaos, while also, conversely, being affected by the chaotic state of the world.

This urgency concerns the need to heed; to see the world and listen to the voices that would otherwise threaten to remain buried in routine. The title of exhibitions such as *Can You Hear Me?* at the Whitechapel Gallery and *You Don't Hear Me!* at the Miró Foundation in Barcelona (both 2020),

responded to a real event of the utmost horror: the week-long gang rape, then murder by assault with a rock, of an eight-year-old girl by eight adults in India. How to address this deeply disturbing narrative in an art of lines, movement and speed? If we read the quote by George Orwell in one of the animations, "Either we all live in a decent world or nobody does," the political thrust of their speed is driven home, along with the intercultural pervasiveness of violence and cruelty. This affects the viewer, in ways that also animate the old master paintings in their inter-ship between art and the political. As I mentioned, Malani draws figures directly on her iPad with her index finger, a process she describes as follows:

> There is sensitivity with the fingertip, which is erotic, raw, and there is something very direct about this process of drawing, rubbing, scratching and erasing, to do with the messing around in one's mind. I feel like a woman with thoughts and fantasies shooting from my head. (Butler, Costa and Pijnappel 57)

"Shooting from my head" connects this autobiographical comment to the turbulence she projects in the head of the right-hand man in the *Supper*. The phrase connotes both the violence she is concerned with (the ambiguity of "shooting" as both killing and filming), and the speed of her animations (they move like lightning). The colors of the fast-moving lines underline that effect. The current project adds to this, as the still, old master works from the museums are integrated into the fast-moving contemporary images, fragmented, overwritten and brought into the orbit of the brightly colored lines. And this bringing to actuality also entails the historical violence to which they were connected. Urgency is added to the need to look and listen. And given the dialogue between Malani's animations and the paintings, this intimates the need to look as a relevant, necessary act in the world of our time. This is how her acts of foreshortening time achieve their activating relevance.

Malani's description of "thoughts and fantasies shooting from my head" denotes the kind of subjectivity implied in these works. Her own visions shoot out to reach into the visions of others: what happens in the world, and what the old masters made of what happened then, merge in the lasting actuality. For this artist, movement is crucial, but the combination of her own flashes of emotion, her history and that of others, precludes any attempt to bring the choreography of the animations in sync. A form of political agency resides in the inter-ship between activism (for better looking and seeing) and activation (for better thinking). Time, whether unbearably slow, as in Janssens's mist rooms, unpredictably capricious, as in Salcedo's coffin-like tables, or hyper fast, is the primary tool to activate the act of seeing as a strategy of resistance. The fast pace of Malani's anima-

tions makes time itself sensuously strong; the experience of it, activating. The foreshortening of time and the effect it has on the visitors is a detail—one that guides us to see what the whole, the work as a whole, must be: the flashing images to the inter-ship between past and present, I and you, painting and drawing, each animation and its neighbor, and the different cultures that interact in this intensely activating exhibition.

Epilogue

The three artists whose works I have proposed here as artistic-intellectual friends to mourn Dorota Filipczak's untimely passing all deploy different tempi as a tool to activate their visual interlocutors—to shake up their complacencies, their certainties, in order to re-think, through feeling the sensations, how the tempo/pace of life and death activate their thoughts. The mutuality of looking à la Janssens *works*, in all three cases. And this activating agency is due to the refusal of time—to invoke the title of an animation work by South African artist William Kentridge. Mentioning this globally recognized artist is also a short recuperative allusion to the absence of African art in most overview writings on art. Salcedo's insistence of incipient life in the slow growing of stalks of grass within her coffin-sized table sculptures can also be considered a shadow of such refusal. And Malani's near-aggressive speed in those images shooting from her head contains another refusal: to let the cruelty of those rapists-murderers go by, as if it was "normal."

The three very different paces, or tempi, these works create as if by magic resonate with Dorota's active engagement, most clearly visible in her founding gesture of creating the journal *Text Matters*. Yes, text matters. In view of the present collection of essays: writing *about* art and literature—bringing up issues that would otherwise remain in the dark, vague, or "normal"—is the statement that the creation of a journal makes. For such a journal, with the intelligence of its contents, harbors the three aspects of time, or tempi, that my title foregrounds: the untimeliness of the loss of such an inspiring colleague must be deeply regretted and entice the readers of the journal to take up the inspiration; the inter-ship Dorota stimulated through her educational, dialogic attitude and her other active involvements; and the mutuality that remains possible between artworks, literary texts (that matter), and the study of such cultural artefacts in which the student or scholar responds to these. Time, tempo and (un) timeliness are fundamental aspects of such processes.

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