Chapter 18

'We were nobody, we were nothing': art, communications and memories of underdevelopment

Sarat Maharaj & Gilane Tawadros

What are the ways in which contemporary art practices and communications shape up and interact in the development context today? This chapter takes off from a discussion about *Faultlines*, a show Gilane Tawadros curated for the Africa Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2003). With globalization, sectors of the 'developing world' are increasingly drawn into the orbit of 'advanced world' institutions –into the art-culture industry, the gallery-museum-biennale system and the communication-information economy. These entanglements are probed through a range of art works, films, performances and projects from across the world. Intensified interconnections brought on by globalization, migration, cultural mix and translation and new technologies mean re-mapping the classic North/South, developed/developing divide. It does remain the grim, principal fault. But new problems also crop up 'after development' in the advanced world –new 'zones of morbidity and backwardness'– putting into question notions of development as linear progress. Alongside, we have criticisms of the drift of development and modernity from inside the developing world itself. Contemporary art-communicative activities and strategies explore and embody the dilemmas thrown up under the circumstances –sometimes also intimating alternative models and other values.

Sarat Maharaj: In *Popular Music from Vittula*, Mikael Niemi gives us a deadpan rendering of 'everyday backwardness' at the Arctic rim of Sweden. It is a pocket of murky life left behind in the forward march of the model social democratic state and its success story. What he touches on strikes a chord across the develop-

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ing world: how to take the sound of 'backwardness', how to forge a lingo that both voices it and goes beyond the gag it imposes:

> We gradually caught on to the fact that where we lived wasn't really a part of Sweden. We'd just been sort of tagged on by accident. A northern appendage, a few barren bogs where a few people happened to live, but could only partly be Swedes. We were different, a bit inferior, a bit uneducated, a bit simple-minded. We didn't have any deer or hedgehogs or nightingales. We didn't have any celebrities. We didn't have any theme parks. No traffic lights, no mansions, no country squires. All we had was masses and masses of mosquitoes, Torndalen-Finnish swearwords, and Communists.
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> Ours was a childhood of deprivation. Not material deprivation –we had enough to get by on– but a lack of identity. We were nobody. Our parents were nobody. Our forefathers had made no mark on Swedish history. Our last names were unspellable, not to mention being unpronounceable for the few substitute teachers who found their way up north from the real Sweden. None of us dared write in to Children's Family Favourites because Swedish Radio would think we were Finns. Our home villages were too small to appear on maps. We could barely support ourselves, but had to depend on state handouts. We watched family farms die, and fields give way to undergrowth … our school exam results were the worst in the whole country. We had no table manners. We wore woolly hats indoors. We never picked mushrooms, avoided vegetables, never held crayfish parties. We were useless at conversation, reciting poems, wrapping presents, and giving speeches. We walked with our toes turned out. We spoke with a Finnish accent without being Finnish, and we spoke with a Swedish accent without being Swedish.
>
> We were nothing.

The 'indices of underdevelopment' Niemi chalks up have a quasi-sociological air, a parody of some sober, cumulative table of facts. He gauges 'developmental shortfall' through a stream of impressions, quirky, personal markers, subjective scraps of association –a far cry from hard-nosed statistics or 'scientific method'. The mode is introspective, in the shape of 'first person consciousness'. We are plunged into the lived experience of 'nonentity status', into the thick of 'zones of morbidity'. It adds up to a feel-think-know probe –an epistemic mode for unpacking elements of the world, mulling over its stickiness, sensations and intensities that gives us a concrete feel of how things tick 'from the inside'.

Why is this significant for communication in the developmental context? For Amartya Sen (1999) analytical approaches have tended to treat development in narrow, quantitative, 'GNP terms'. Against this, he has proposed we should see rates of material improvement and progress, rising living standards,

better conditions and resources as closely tied to the endeavour to engender and expand freedoms and rights. This is a key link if we are to grasp the drift of development 'from the inside', as self-understanding of the process on the part of those who are 'in the thick of it'. In today's interconnecting, globalizing world, the business of tackling unfreedoms and exclusions cannot be put off to some time 'after basic development has taken place'. The communications sphere becomes an essential medium through which individual participants and players identify, interpret and represent their social and cultural wants and needs. In doing this, they begin to shape development itself –orchestrating the process as opposed to having it simply thrust upon them. But what communicative structures and art activities can contribute to this shaping process –to opening up new self-reflexive mental, emotional, semantic dimensions– both for voicing 'backwardness' and for stepping out of it? I wonder, Gilane, whether we might look at this a little bit in the light of your research as curator of *Faultlines*?

Gilane Tawadros: In addressing the keywords communication and development in a global context, we need to distinguish between communications for and on behalf of a globalized capital economy and other types. The former tends to be homogenous, emerging principally from the centres of financial and political power. Its forms are largely unilateral. Although they might be inflected with different accents –capital enterprises have been ingenious with inflecting communications so they can apparently speak to and 'fit in' with different spaces and places– they are nonetheless particular messages with predetermined outcomes within the context of the global economy. Some art practices, on the other hand, create possibilities for another kind of communication –a space, in my view, about dialogue and exchange rather than something one-way. Contemporary art is not always clear-cut or transparent, nor is it homogenous or unilateral. For example, in Moataz Nasr's installation *One Ear of Dough, One Ear of Clay* (2001), the video piece depicts ordinary Egyptians in the street, hunching their shoulders. The gesture is repeated over and over by individuals of various ages, genders and social class –a colloquial physical gesture, a shrug that suggests: "So what can I do about it? That's just the way it is". The work comments on political apathy questioning why people with a history of political engagement at every level of the social order, in direct and instrumental ways, are not as involved politically at this juncture.

In his installation *Tabla* (Venice, 2003), a huge video screen depicting a drummer playing on a traditional Egyptian drum, or tabla, dominates the space. We don't see his face or head, just the tabla clutched between his legs and his hands beating out a powerful, continuous rhythm. The noise ricochets through the exhibition scattered with tablas of varying sizes, like a geographical map of the Nile Delta.

The sound is deafening, relentless. You register the work acoustically before you read it visually, as the sound of difference. Arab music is very much about atonality and dissonance. But it's also a sound that takes over the space and

overwhelms the viewer. Furthermore, there is a disparity between the single tabla with a sound that is distinctive and powerful and the reverberations from others that are connected to the main screen and which create sounds in response. The piece works on a number of levels such as the question of political agency, of how individuals are implicated in the political situations in which they find themselves.

SM: Your example is arresting not least because Nasr's Tabla parallels a wider involvement of today's visual artists with 'high-decibel sound saturation'. How to make sense of this? One way is to press the distinction you imply between types and terrains of communication –to look at their archaeologies. From the 1960s, the spread communications and consumerist culture –TV, radio, cinema, advertising, fashion, sport, transport, popular culture, commodity design– saw an increased grooming and styling of the 'look' of the everyday right down to its micro-texture. This 'aestheticization' was summed up pointedly by the situationists as 'the production of the spectacle'. Later, the stakes were raised as reality came to be seen as processed by the artistry of digital simulation technologies. Had this rather stolen the thunder of artists if not upstaged the 'creativity' once associated with 'fine art'? What kind of art was possible that did not simply mirror 'the spectacle' or become ensnared by it? But let us also ask right away whether this was an issue at all for practitioners outside 'the developed world', outside mainstream, advanced consumerist art-culture circuits?

By 2000, electronic systems –satellite, cable, digital terrestrial TV and radio, dial-up Internet and broadband services, mobiles, SMS texting, cashpoints, video, nintendo games, iPods– set on course an intensified 'visualization' of everyday info-data flows. These signifying systems and image economies amount to 'retinal regimes' –a term that connotes, amongst other things, a sense of sheer overload and glut of images, signs, visual representations. Could sound scan the visual, supplement it, if not short-circuit it in the face of its 'retinal condition'? Sonic constructions, multiple frequencies, noise, sonic dirt vibes, inundations and interference become the stuff with which to probe, if not shatter, the 'spectacle', to dispel its ambient muzak. They serve as 'antidotes' that blank out info-spin-jabber in order to allude to other communicative wavelengths, alternative acoustic awareness. In *Popular Music from Vittula*, this sense of difference and of other possibilities is symbolized by the jarring, raw rockunrol awkwardly eked out by stubby-fingered, speechless Niila or by the farm worker turned music teacher who had lost his fingers in an accident and now strummed the guitar with a thick, penile thumb. The sound they manage to croak out are painful spasms of release, of coming to voice, of prising open a chink in the numb silence of 'backwardness'.

By the 1980s the term 'spectacle' takes on an almost entirely pejorative connotation. In the cross-tongued, global Babel of today's image-info-data

circulation, it seems better to speak of 'retinal regimes', a term with an oscillating positive-negative charge. It signals the pervasive syntax or 'visual esperanto' of the contemporary 'knowledge economy'. Although the latter is billed as cutting across the developed/developing barrier, outside advanced centres its infrastructures are still sparse with patchy access. This is roughly comparable to the lack in the developing world of modern gallery-museum systems and art education-communications structures of the sort that are the staples of the developed world's art-culture industry. Nevertheless, practitioners have invented diverse strategies in Internet-new media domains. Sites and networks devised by Raqs Media Collective (India), Open Circle (India), or Trinity (South Africa) are engaged in 'adisciplinary' manoeuvres –almost ad-lib assemblages of info-images and discourses, experimental inquiry tools interacting with social action, performance, learning sessions, investigative tours of urban spaces that have a feel of the random walkabout and happening. The 'transborder pants' with multiple-use pockets designed by Torolab (Tijuana, Mexico) can switch over for immigrant or American usage according to how citizenship status embodies and inspects the politics of belonging in the 'laboratory conditions' of the US/Mexico border. These projects are think-know-act contraptions that may not look like 'art' but count as art in their open-ended semantic fission. To pigeonhole them as 'developing world artwork' rather misses the point. As emerging art-communication ploys, they question the norm of the airtight modern gallery-museum system whether inside the developed world or out.

GT: This goes back to whether by communication we mean a one-way conversation or a dialogue. Too often, both in the arena of development and the art world, the developed world is seen as having opportunities and goods to offer, and the developing world as the consumer who is potentially available in fantastic numbers. It's more complicated than this because the product, in terms of the artworks being made in the developing world, are packaged, taken back and presented to consumers in the developed world. Here, the artworks are framed in particular ways, which define and prescribe how they're read. This is often in the narrow terms, either as part of a national or ethnographic discourse, or as illustrations of preconceived ideas of what the 'developing other's' creative discourse is about.

But the critical point for me is that the work of contemporary artists within the African continent I did get to see –even if my range of evidence was somewhat limited– offered up many ideas, possibilities and points of engagement that I hadn't seen in the developed world. I came back to London, having travelled in Johannesburg and Cairo, for example, thinking, "Here I am in this capital of the developed world where all this infrastructure exists, where there are all these opportunities but the work I'm looking at appears so empty". It was decidedly lacking in the substance we are talk-

ing about. What is considered to be at the top of the hierarchy of communication worlds actually seemed empty of knowledge –however full it might be with information. They seemed more akin to global, commercial communications products. I found in Johannesburg and Cairo artists working without infrastructure, in extremely difficult circumstances, without wider cultural or, in some cases, moral support, working in quite isolated spaces. Yet I found work that challenged me, that was not in any way aping Western practice but opening up new forms of artistic practice in making and communication. There are artists in both cities dealing with specific, local questions: they are by no means turning their back on the rest of the world. Nor indeed are they ignorant of the realities of being part of a globalized economy. They are making work that focuses on particular issues but they undoubtedly have a relevance and resonance beyond these particular contexts. If anything, one's sense of being in a globalized economy (and the awareness from artists of its implications) is more heightened in Johannesburg and Cairo than in London or Helsinki.

SM: The global/local imbrications you touch on highlight why we should not pit the local as somehow 'primordial' against the global –the 'either/or' trap. At the end of Apartheid, the focus was either on coaxing the local gallery-museum system out of received racial designations, on encouraging development beyond these barriers or on plugging South Africa into global art-culture circulation through events such as the Biennale. Thinking in official circles gravitated towards the former. After the second Johannesburg Biennale (1997) the 'global option' was scrapped. Under the 'local' umbrella, *Serafina II* (1999) –a musical centred on HIV/AIDs awareness, backed by the Health Minister Nkosazane Zuma, but mired in controversy– was promoted. It was a 'follow up' to the original *Serafina* (1989) –a documentary look at Apartheid around the time of the1976 Soweto uprisings. Today this approach to creativity and development is perhaps sustained in Henning Mankell's story projects –mix of art-communication-education– where those affected by AIDS/HIV are encouraged to write about themselves, their families, their kith, kin and clan, their histories –an 'archive of the everyday' for the orphans left behind (Uganda Child Aid Project, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 28.09.04)

In the meantime, the 'global option' of the Biennale has begun to proliferate across the developing world taking the edge off what artists felt was a 'legitimation test' they had to pass in the heyday of singular Euro-events such as the Venice Biennale. It has steadily come to be seen less as an 'importation', potentially a global/local transaction site for devolving art activities to regional idioms –as with Sharjah, United Arab Emirates or Kwanju, South Korea– if also a mechanism for kick starting local urban regeneration and development.

GT: Clifford Charles's work relates to this inside/outside reach. He deals with how one creates abstract art in the post-apartheid moment, how one addresses the historical facts and experiences of apartheid in a new way that isn't circumscribed or prescribed by the local remit of the anti-apartheid struggle. This had created a requirement for a certain kind of practice that was politically contingent and contingent on the political. Now there is opportunity to link this to the wider theme of what Frantz Fanon called 'the fact of blackness' –possibilities for investigating this signifier in graphic terms of pure black ink on a white page. Charles' ink paintings explore what that might mean in pictorial, aesthetic terms, in the broader context of the history of art and also in the specific locale of post-apartheid South Africa.

SM: You lead us onto an exceptional communications event in the tricky exit from Apartheid –the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-1998). The cross-examining it staged saw 'perpetrators, beneficiaries and victims' tussling to find a common wavelength. The 'due process' of trial became episodes of theatre, performance and spectacle as the 'silenced' sought to voice unspeakables of the Apartheid years (Krog, 2000; TRC Tapes). At times, it looked like 'communications' itself was in the dock. The relevance of the event straddles the developing/developed fence: it applies to the search for truth and reconciliation in the aftermath of the Central African genocide no less than to the Balkans, to the Chile persecutions, the Northern Ireland sectarian deadlock and to diverse 'zones of Artic unspeakables' across the globe.

But reservations have also been expressed –not least during the course of the Tribunal through the merciless satirical revue Truth Omissions (Pieter-Dirk Uys, 1996) or through the more intimate musings of poetry, in a lyric such as "Maybe you don't have to know why" (Adam Schwartzman, *Book of Stones*, 2004). For Albie Sachs, one of the Commission's originators, its limitations lay in its inability to square the four truth-telling modes he was to identify: forensic, legal, dialogic, phenomenological. Could a juridical framework take on board the self-reflexive intensities of the last two? The Commission's legalistic drive –keen to wrap up matters in the interests of the overall political settlement– functioned with a readymade lingo that some used simply to 'perform' their way through the ritual of 'asking forgiveness and receiving it'.

The Commission's proceedings were riddled with a tension between the timescale of juridical 'due processes' and the durations of truth-telling, the stretched-out temporal cycles of art processes. The latter come into their own as legal procedures reach an impasse or dead end because of lack of hard facts or reliable witness. They carry on the scrutiny by other means –through the immersive, fictive mode– as we see in Walid Ra'ad's project

Missing Lebanese Wars (Atlas Group, 2002, Documenta, Kassel). He ponders how to do justice to the devastated Lebanon when there are the barest scraps to go by, scant sources, no data bank at hand. What methodology is up to it? To map individual lives caught up in the strife, he has to grapple with both the absence of an archive and the likelihood that if one did exist all it might have authorized is an 'official' version. How to voice unutterable, 'missing' and 'disappeared' historical experience? The question parallels dilemmas around representing the Holocaust that Lyotard sees as the impossibility of meeting Robert Faurisson's kind of demand for 'facts'. The 'first hand evidence' Holocaust-deniers tauntingly ask for can only be verified by witnesses who are unavailable precisely because they had been wiped out (Lyotard, 1983).

Beyond such dead-end absolutism of the fact, we have Ra'ad's startling fact-fiction constructs. He launches off from the handy myth of stumbling over a hoard of 226 notebooks belonging to Dr. Fadl Fakhami and a treasure trove of videotapes. The ruse helps him to plumb unthinkable bits of the narrative. He cites, with mock-scholarly referencing, two 'found' videos, Tape 17 and Tape 31. They refer to real life events, to named British and American hostages. To this he adds a make-believe Arab hostage, Souheil Bachar. The situation is staged as a glimpse into captivity, its edgy atmospherics and paranoia. In this fantasy-fact scenario, Bachar grapples with the Lebanon's unimaginables: how to know the other, how to communicate beyond barriers of tribe, religion, nation?

In *A Passage to India* (1924), EM Foster had flagged up this yearning with the catchphrase 'Only connect' –the desire for oneness with the other, 'empathy' as the means to scaling the walls separating colonizer/colonized, self/other. Whether it could be literally fleshed out through body contact is a thought that fleetingly crosses Souheil Bachar's mind as he imagines, in a torrid interior monologue, fumbling around with and fondling his fellow hostages:

> pressed myself against his ass…punched me in the groin. Why they wanted me to fuck them then to fuck me …

Could the momentary desire to break the taboo of male same-sex contact, to cuddle his cell mates, amount to that authentic embrace in which self/other antagonisms melt away? The thought is banished in a mix of revulsion, loathing, fear of rejection. Do we also sense a glimmer of an ethics of difference here?

In another stab at the 'Missing Wars', Ra'ad zooms in on a bundle of 'found papers' that testify to a professor's passion for horse racing. Each horse represents one or another methodological stance: positivist, empiricist, historical materialist amongst others. All have had their day in the Lebanese battlefields. Is there a winner or are they all deadbeat? Can any

deliver a way of filling in the 'Missing Wars' sagas? His sift through the 'liq-uidity of solid facts' puts existing approaches into question. Is it at all likely he could have broached any of this through means other than the concrete, cross-hatched thinking of art processes?

GT: The capacity for some kinds of art to create such spaces for reflection, for 'indirect' communication is vital –though 'indirect' might not be the correct word. Perhaps I should say art is not so much 'roundabout or circuitous' as not completely transparent, not immediately legible, simply because the problems themselves, the issues and questions are not fully known, and the answers are also not known. What one needs is precisely that opportunity to reflect, to take time to pose questions without necessarily answering them. As you say, the judicial process, the agenda of political, social and economic requirements for communication completely militate against that kind of space and time. From this viewpoint, in the exigencies of executing change and of transforming society, art can often be seen as little more than an indulgence. When there are pressing issues facing the developing world, why should one spend time, energy and resources on something that appears unimportant, which is not necessary in the way food, educa-tion, sanitation and water are self-evidently critical in people's lives? The implication is that this 'indulgence' should only be afforded to society at a more advanced stage in its development. It assumes a strictly linear progres-sion to social and cultural development and, secondly, a hierarchical organ-ization of priorities. However, the question remains: can social, political and economic transformation be delivered without knowing what kind of changes one wants to achieve and to what end, without addressing the full lexicon of human needs beyond the physical and material?

SM: With globalization in full spate, we cannot shy away from re-conceptualiz-ing issues of development and modernity from a 21st century perspective –of re-mapping them, as you mention, in more non-linear fashion. This means adopting something like a 'recursive model' where we get constant feedback on how development 'upstream' affects matters 'further down'. Such a model springs up from present-day factors –from the sheer volatility of interconnections in today's world system. Its drift is different from earlier 'vertical' top/down approaches such as Walter Rodney's classic *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) that is centred on unpacking lopsided, exploitative colonial legacies.

   This should by no means imply that the North/South divide is no longer the principal fault line: it persists with its grave disparities and inequalities. Development has yet to kick off in swathes of the South where some economies have been thrown of joint by IMF/World Bank 'structural adjust-ments' while others have been buffeted by WTO rulings. But their actual

desperation is also paralleled by an incipient dynamic, another global pic-
ture, where as some zones 'catch up', others 'fall behind' sometimes in the
heart of the developed world itself. We have 'upcoming' quality of life
alongside 'stagnating, laggard' ones or non-starters. Niemi graphs this as
'backwardness' at the Nordic tip of the globe turning the classic
North/South binary upside down: it's the 'relative' South that is flourishing.
Not dissimilarly, Tony Cragg's sculpture *Britain as seen from the North*
(1981) –a map of the UK made up of consumerist detritus– had shown the
fattening effect of the burgeoning Thatcherite boom on the English home
counties to the detriment of the North.

The effect of such symbolic inversions is to thicken the plot of the devel-
opment story. They show how globalization jumbles together
developed/developing zones engendering topsy-turvy, though increasingly
enmeshed and interdependent relations between different parts of the
North/South. It is now less easy to think of 'development problems' as if
they were happening 'elsewhere': we are implicated, 'in it' wherever we
are. Perhaps this is also why we are left somewhat uneasy by the 'cost-ben-
efit' treatment of development as a malady 'out there' to be tackled briskly
by setting up a shopping list of development priorities (Lomberg, 2004;
Copenhagen Consensus)[1].

Sen captures the 'thickening of the development plot' in empirical
terms by citing certain surprising anomalies: for example, male longevity
rates in South India and parts of Bangladesh turn out to be higher than
those for African Americans at the core of the developed world, in
Washington and Manhattan. We may be inclined to brush these figures
aside as isolated glitches rather than symptoms of systemic disorder. But a
pattern begins to build up once we correlate such discrepancies with other
trends in the developed world: increasing obesity levels as shown up in
'Body Mass Index' distribution research (WHO & International Obesity Task
Force, 2004) and its potential impact on reversing what were rising longevi-
ty figures; ageing outstripping birth and fertility rates; pervasive mental dis-
tress and depression or new forms of morbidity; substance dependency,
often triggered by new, taxing work-play-performance expectations; job
loss in advanced sectors through outsourcing; environment damage. An
array of sticky problems seems to crop up 'after development has taken
place'. We face a double-scenario: on the one hand, dire circumstances of
want in the developing world: on the other, in the developed world, a rising
sense of 'post-development blues'. For in the wake of advanced develop-
ment we now see new forms of 'malaise and backwardness'. In this uneasy
space of 'development and its discontents' –the 'indices of over-develop-
ment' have yet to be fully collated– art and communications seem to

1 <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/>.

become more indispensable for the struggle to interpret and shape ideals and objectives not only for 'development' but also for life 'after it'.

GT: What you say about the globalizing, later phases of the developed world are not so much described as a 'crisis'. They are raised as a question about what we mean by 'development' and its ends when developed societies are beginning to face new, huge problems of the mental health of their population, increasing rates of obesity and so on. You suggest these might be indications that something is not quite right in the developed world or in any event with a flatline, progessivist mapping of development. This seems to parallel the question one can also pose about whether art in the developed world is actually adequate to the task of creating spaces other than the commercial. Can it generate spaces and other dimensions, as you say, of the temporal, the reflexive and critical, the non-utilitarian? In other words, spaces beyond those of the culture-consumption industry. Why are these so diminished? It seems to me it's not only in the domain of the developing world where the question of the relationship of artistic practice and social needs has to be looked at and interrogated but also in the developed world.

SM: With globalization, the developing world implicitly poses tough long-term questions to its advanced counterpart on all the fronts we are looking at: how to develop modern gallery-museum infrastructures without getting bogged down in the self-sealing art-culture industry; how to extend 'communications' without becoming simply passive consumers of pre-packed communications commodities: how to 'do development' without ending up with 'development blues' –in a 'culture of over-development'. The empirical issue of how to deliver actual development seems to open up to queries of a normative kind.

　　The developed/developing 'entanglements' that show up with globalization amount to a ceaseless process of translation across their lines. With high-speed communications, migrations, dispersals and movements of people, translation becomes an everyday affair –a process of churning out difference, divergence, teeming diversity. This flies in the face of globalization's overall standardizing drive that breaks down 'the difference of the other' so as to render the 'foreign and alien' culturally digestible. This kind of filtering –a logic of assimilation, of making the 'other' into the 'same'– can also tip over into forms of xenophobia as we may observe from trends across the North European social democracies once known for their 'tolerance'. With today's translation-migratory drifts, the contemporary appears as a criss-crossing of heterogeneous, ever-mutating identities, multiple tongues, disjunctive ways of knowing and living. This suggests we have to move beyond Jurgen Habermas's sphere of 'communicative action' where everyday transaction seems to be ultimately between relatively similar cul-

tural subjects and social actors. Though he supplements this by pointing to the 'inclusion of the other', his underlying conceptual scheme is made up of discursive agents with comparatively fixed identities tuned into the same cultural wavelength. They interact on a readymade ground from which they set about shaping a shared living space through ideals they thrash out between themselves in steady 'dialogic' exchange. The ground is one of transparent, rational deliberation: interlocuters think and speak within much the same cognitive parameters. But is today's translation-migration-globalizing scene on as even a keel as this? It is rather more riddled with untranslatable elements, riven with the sense of epistemic non-fit and unsquarable cultural difference, more cacophonic Babel than dialogic swap. It is shot through with a feeling of the 'radical other in our midst' who is neither 'visible nor audible' except perhaps in whittled-down, pre-given terms. The symptomatic figures of this space are its 'deterritorialized' cases –those classified 'sans papiers, non-citizens, clandestini, illegals, deportees, infiltrators'. But it is the black-hole of non-communicating communication represented by the 'suicide bomber' that seems definitive. How to piece together a 'commons' out of this Babelian space, an ever-changing ground where self/other can forge a 'lingo to parley' and to live in and through difference and multiplicity?

Under these conditions, communications genres such as documentary, reportage, bulletins, news round-ups interact and fuse with those of art to spawn new visual-discursive forms. An example is Multiplicity's installation project *Journey Through a Solid Sea* (Stefano Boerri et al, 2002, Documenta, Kassel). It tracks the tragic events of 26.12.96 when a shipload of over 300 'illegals' went down off the Sicily coast –right under the eye, as it were, of the pan-opticon satellite-retinal apparatuses scanning the region. Rumours of the disaster circulating the Mediterranean had been denied all round. Were the developing world families deceivers when they insisted their relatives had drowned? The real calamity came to light when the ID card of one of the 'clandestini' –Anagopalan Ganesu– was fished out of the sea in the pocket of his denims. *La Reppublica*'s dogged reporting, the power of investigative journalism and the media's drive to get to the bottom of things also had the effect of turning events into a somewhat black and white tale. Representations of the various players tended towards 'hyper-indentification' –cold-hearted locals, unscrupulous traffickers, inept police, indifferent authorities were matched by stereotypes of 'illegals, refugees, dodgers'. The installation counters the effect by putting into play a spread of contradictory accounts and individual reactions. Immersed in this clamour of versions and clashing modes of truth-telling, we get a feel 'from the inside' of the anguish and dilemmas, rights and wrongs thrown up by the tragedy.

GT: Salem Mekuria and Zarina Bhimji translate historical events not in a literal but in an experiential sense. Their work hones in on a particular historical episode but then pulls away and extrapolates the implications of that situation for a wider humanity and understanding. In her triptych film installation *Ruptures: A Many-Sided Story* (2003), Mekuria explores the turbulent events that have erupted periodically in the lives of Ethiopian people in recent decades. She offers up neither a linear history nor a seamless narrative but rather a series of fragments which rotate around and interweave with one another reflecting her understanding of time as a circular rather than progressive and chronological, translations of 'how things happened'. Sabah Naim's work addresses the mistranslation of lived experience implicating the global media and communications industry in the consistent misrepresentation of the Arab world. Her photographs of ordinary Egyptians going about their business are drawn upon, painted, scratched and decorated. They are paired with three-dimensional sculptures moulded from newspapers and magazines which are methodically rolled up and squeezed into a sculptural frame, forcing them into a grid in a sense to account for themselves. The work is a critique of the widening gap between two seemingly incommensurate worlds: on the one hand, that of global communications; on the other, the everyday world of Egyptians and their daily effort to survive. In this instance, the artwork operates somewhere in that gap. The artist becomes translator or mediator of critical awareness between these two worlds.

SM: I should like to end by glancing back from today's vantage point at two representations of modernity and the development saga. The first is an early work, *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1968). It had spelled out some crucial propositions on the subject. How have these fared? The film had floated the idea that instead of the distinction 'developed/underdeveloped' we would be better off speaking more forthrightly about 'capitalism/socialism'. Though this reverberates with Cold War polemics, it takes on another hue for our time as a reminder to keep open the possibility of alternative approaches to development, other solutions and models at odds with those installed by an apparently all-sweeping corporate globalization. Not least, we can now read the film's proposition against Mrs Thatcher's monetarist policies –accompanied by her monotonous chant 'There is No Alternative' (TINA)– that had reduced the North English mining communities and villages to 'zones of underdevelopment'. Her TINA attitude was forged during protracted strife between workers and bosses in the 1970s when the ailing economy led to Britain being dubbed 'the first developed nation to have slid back into a developing one'. A current curatorial event, Olivier Resseler's *There Must be an Alternative* (Forum Stadpark,

Vienna, 2004[2]) recalls her one-track views in a riposte to versions of similar blinkeredness today. It is the affirmation of 'other possibilities', of a 'plurality of models of advancement' that is the drift of Jeremy Deller's re-enactment –through a battery of techniques and stagings– of the crippling blow Mrs. Thatcher inflicted on the South Yorkshire miners in Orgreave on 18.06.84 (*Battle of Orgreave*, video, 2001).

Memories of Underdevelopment was an unexpected melange of documentary, real footage clips, censors cuts, Hollywood-style excerpts. Though it seems to bear the stamp of 1960s assemblage, it prefigured the sorts of converging of factual-fictional genres we see today –techniques that have enhanced attempts to give more multi-dimensional coverage and analysis of development. The film put into critical spotlight the lead figure Sergio's deep-freeze inaction, his inability to throw in his lot with the 'struggle of the proletariat', his disdain at glimpses of what he saw as their crude manners and taste, their 'lack of culture', 'rottenness' and 'backwardness'. But Elena, the working class woman, sizes him up fairly quickly: "You are neither reactionary nor revolutionary: you are nothing". It is as if Niemi's musings at the Arctic edge of the world forty years later echo her words. Much of Sergio's lassitude, his sense of inertia is attributed to wallowing in 'bourgeois subjectivism and introspection'. Today, however, elements of such 'first person consciousness' appear in more favourable light: 'the view from within' is also about elaborating mental and emotional capacities for scrutinizing values, for taking decisions for oneself –ways of thinking and feeling indispensable to 'development as freedom through self-critical awareness'.

My second example is *The Long March: A Walking Visual Display* (Lu Jie et al, 1998 onwards)[3]. The project explicitly takes a prolonged look back on China's development saga from today's viewpoint to check how things have turned out. It goes down the 'memory lane of underdevelopment' by retracing the route taken by Mao's Red Army, the Long March (1934-1936). The arduous trek had been in the name of stepping out of the oppressive past towards a 'socialism adapted to local conditions', what was later to evolve into a series of five-year plans for modernization spurred on by the slogan 'the great leap forward'. A participant of the original march, Deng Xiaoping, further recast it as a symbol of the 'socialist market economy with Chinese features' in which he saw 'development as the hardcore principle' (The Long March Foundation, NY, 2003: 4). The string of Western intellectuals who 'visited' China –amongst them Parisian post-structuralist stars such as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze– added to mythologizing the Long March by teasing out its 'lessons' for the

2 <http://forum.mur.at>.
3 <www.longmarchfoundation.org>.

developed world. Liu Jie's retracing is therefore not only about touching base with actual spots on the original route but also about its various 'ideological appropriations and re-routings'. At any particular site en route, project participants join in with the locals' daily activities or their special crafts as, during one sojourn, with the paperwork skills of villagers (*The Great Survey of Paper-Cutting in Yanchuan County*, Beijing, 2004). The encounter becomes a collective knowledge production and performance, with the potential for sifting through history, personal lives, vagaries of political regimes, issues of human rights, armed struggle, censorship. This is sometimes further relayed through installations, shows and debates through the Internet, mobiles, videos. Everyone becomes a participant-observer analysing both their immediate situation and the heroic march that symbolized an approach to modernization and development which had now lost its appeal. These 'consultation exercises' can sometimes faintly echo the 'correction sessions' of the original bands of Maoist cadres and activists working the countryside with fervour to raise political awareness. The project also resembles a tableau –not unlike Stations of the Cross– where each stopover is occasion for soul-searching, for delving into the current state of material and spiritual affairs. As the certitudes of older models of development crumble, we begin to see them in the light of China's present swing towards free enterprise in step with corporate globalization –something shot through with its own uncertainties. In enacting the original trek, The Long March probes it both as an epic vision of development and as an event of violence, intolerance and repression. It is about taking stock of what had happened in the name of enlightenment and development against the consumerist frenzy of 'post-communist development' in China today.

The two examples above underline why we should heed critiques mounted from within the developing world, by those in the 'thick of the development process' and who face the brunt of it. The landmark film *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1950) had captivated audiences across the developing world –from the Soviet Union through the Arab countries to West Africa– because it had stirringly dramatized classic development issues: the loosening of centuries-old relationships and identities based on tribe and clan, the turbulent exit from traditional society, the painful induction into modern living and values, contradictions of the colonial legacy, bonded labour, 'backwardness'. Mother India tracks the long hard road to independence and improving conditions –as if alluding to both Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1941) and Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India* (1921) that had indicted British colonial authorities for the lack of medical care for 'native women' in her depiction of India as an unremitting 'zone of backwardness'. The film's opening shot is of the lead character, Radha, 'inaugurating' an irrigation dam. From this triumphant moment onwards, the rest of the film is a flashback to 'memories of underdevelopment' –to her strug-

gles against hunger, natural disasters, feudal landlords, debt. The irony is that what the film portrayed as the glorious symbol of development and modernity –the construction of the dam– has today become an ambivalent image of progress. As if speaking back to the North India classic, a film from South India *Thaneer, Thaneer* (Water, Water) (Ramachandran, 2002) confronts its 1950s optimism with a litany of complaints about development 'gone awry', core problems that persist 60 years on. This time, a village stricken by drought has its self-help scheme to channel in water frustrated by redtape, obstructive bureaucracy and corrupt politicians. The new element is the untrusting eye the film casts on the 'rhetorics of development' even asking whether the honest journalist's decision to throw in his job as reporter for a corrupt news editor to become a 'doctoral candidate researching rural development' can contribute to any change at all.

This self-reflexive, knowing stance welling up from within the development process itself is summed up in Zakes Mda's quizzical look at the certitudes of modernity and advancement 'after Apartheid'. His novel *Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) charts the career of a band of diehard nationalists, 'respectable', small town white 'volk' and their black women servants caught up in a sex scandal of the 1970s. They had been charged for contravening the infamous Immorality Act that forbade cross-colour sex. With such god-fearing pillars of the establishment involved, the government was forced to drop the case hurriedly to save face. At the end of Apartheid, the men soon enough learn to mouth the Truth and Reconciliation catchphrases of 'change and forgiveness'. They even join the ANC realizing the benefits of being on the 'winning side'. Here Mda almost prefigures the actual merger of the New National Party with the ANC sealed this year (01.09.04). The talk is of futures, capital ventures, how to plug into global exchange opportunities. One of the Black women victims, Niki, had found a kind of solace spending her days tending bees in hives she set up at the town's edge. She would often simply hand over honey she collected to passers-by who took her fancy. An old diehard, who had been one of the sex abuse ring, now 'reformed' mayor of Excelsior heading the town's new ANC administration, tries to talk her into setting up a honey business. Would it not be smarter actually to sell jars of the sticky stuff than to dish it out free? She holds back quietly from his entrepreneurial zeal –not to mention the 'aspirational' PR of the development agency that had set up shop in the town. She continues to hand over honey to whomever she pleases. Her actions evoke fleetingly the sense of a 'wild economy untouched by development' where perhaps the only rule is spontaneous giving without expectation of return. Something of a non-exploitative, ancestral mode of living and sharing is intimated –'memories of a prehistoric state of underdevelopment'. An image both of sheer 'backwardness' and of critical utopian thinking –it questions the consumerist frenzy and capitalist accumulation, greed and graft in the scramble for development after Apartheid.
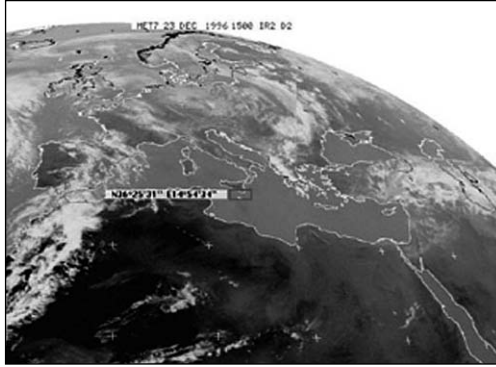
1. 'Multiplicity's' installation project Journey Through a Solid Sea
(Stefano Boerri et al, 2002, Documenta, Kassel).

2. The Long March: A Walking Visual Display
(Lu Jie et al, 1998 onwards)