

The Cipher and the Sieve

“Was he a person, a pseudonym, a fiction, or a persistent conspiracy?” So asked the Raqs Media Collective of KD Vyas, a character, or rather a mysterious correspondent, in their *The KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol.1* (2006).¹ We could ask the same question of Raqs. Let them answer — conspiratorially — for themselves:

What brings us to work everyday (and has kept us together for the past seventeen years [they wrote in 2008]) is a desire for questions and a dissatisfaction with answers, even if they are of our own devising. We seek refuge from certainty in all of what we do. This means that our work often expresses our deep and enduring scepticism with narratives built out of unexamined ideas about identity, property, progress, memory, and security. We cultivate a daily and diligent garden of doubt, from which we harvest many different kinds of fruits and flowers.

They add:

We see ourselves more as citizens of a federated republic of practices than as the subjects of nations and the objects of history. This means our commitments and fealty generally lean more towards the things that we make, see, read, listen to, and participate in — images, words, sounds, and situations — rather than to abstract and static concepts that are determined by factors and forces outside our control.²

To abstract a definition for the Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) or to locate their activity in the static result of artworks would be to fail in our conspiratorial task of passing along, even if only by means of a whispering campaign, the doubts that they themselves have sown. These doubts sometimes are obscured, though, doubly so: on the one hand, in the assurance of the very existence of artworks that they produce as a collective (work that this book documents); on the other hand, through a certain tone of writing, indeed, a tone of certainty that pervades whatever they write (texts which are absent here).

Raqs Media Collective’s activity is only partly its products: that is, its artworks. For a collective that developed from documentary film origins and whose name — Raqs — derives from the whirling of dervishes, the “products” are only the articulation of a process.³

Each is a moment in an overarching scheme — a scheme though that is transversal, not end oriented.⁴ And if these products seem to suggest themselves as the last moment, as if the finalization of a design, we are misled as to their importance. Rather, they are nodal points in a network, temporary on-off switches, whose potential branching set us off on new movements — but also to soundings of new depths.

To say that the Raqs Media Collective's production is only partly its products is not to suggest instead that it is composed of multiple activities: artworks on the one hand and social agencies such as Sarai on the other hand, not to mention curatorial endeavors and writing.⁵ In that sarais (*caravanserai*) are “stable institutions of hospitality for practices of nomadism,”⁶ traditional places for temporary relaxation of traders and travellers and the transmission of tales, we might locate Raqs practice in such hospitable storytelling. Inheritors as they are of a nation's “epics, stories, songs, and sagas,”⁷ such as the monumental *Mahabharata*, they have adapted ancient principles to modern techniques, or rather found them one and the same, indeed anticipated in advance, such as those of open text and recension. “Recensions are hospitable, they are ever willing to accommodate textual fellow travellers in their entourage.”⁸

Here is a concept that we can take to be foundational to Raqs' practice: recension. Recension is revision of a text, or a continuing series of revisions, that does not obscure the original. Raqs takes a very old case — the Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharata* — to ally the textual (but which was once oral) to the very new digital realm, finding the ancient to be as hypertextual as the contemporary: “The *Mahabharata* in that sense is an instance of a perennially new media work, because it is deeply hypertextual, every recension links to other recension, every story contains the threads of many other stories.”⁹ The artists have written that, “The idea of a ‘recension’ is a concept that we have found very useful in thinking about free and open source systems of cultural production. The idea of recensions as a category that makes it possible to think about the relationships of descent, affinity, and sharing between texts and narratives is something that emerges from the sciences of textual criticism, theological exegesis, and philology.”¹⁰ A recension links not only story to story but also storyteller to storyteller through time — to the storytellers that Raqs sometimes are, speaking from afar through the voices of the *Mahabharata*. (The *Mahabharata* often stands behind — or is it above? — Raqs' work. An open source, the *Mahabharata* is a bottomless resource for their work.)

“The KD Vyas Correspondence” is not a recension, but it talks of it and much more besides. We can take this “correspondence” as an allegory of Raqs' practice. In that “A Dossier Concerning the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol. 1,” to take this particular iteration of the purported correspondence, is a public deposition, a quasi-legal document, or the fiction of one, the artists here announce their ways of proceeding. Such *performative* fictions as these — a modal practice which includes their essays, lectures, and films — are means to link the artists' various “themes,” ways to practically elaborate their concerns in an open framework that can accommodate complexity without closure. It is a method that allows them to add to their stock of concerns over time and “cut-and-paste” between media.¹¹

(If I name this method “writing” in the broad sense, and find the “source” of its operations in actual written texts, which cannibalistically reappear as the spoken word of lectures and films, it is not to give priority or origin to what is published. In the absence of actual artworks here, these available texts offer an insight into the complexity and fluidity of Raqs’ process. “Writing” is the network of which individual artworks are the nodes.)

In part, the performative mode accounts for a tone of writing that is, at times, frankly admonitory. Admonitory in that the text speaks with that god-like voice from above and from all time that generally pervades Raqs’ writing.¹² (Sometimes this untimely voice, as is the case with “The KD Vyas Correspondence,” comes from the distance and divided time of a dead letter office.) But the text/tone is also confessional; whenever the artists write of KD Vyas, they are also writing of themselves: “The material we received seemed occasionally to yield tantalizing glimpses into his complex, eccentric ideas, which were always half formed and full blooded, and which forever ran in several directions all at once.” Ditto Raqs. Yet, saying so is hardly a critique. Running in all directions merely implies the networked nature of Raqs’ nodal artwork.¹³ Similarly, the phrase “half formed and full blooded” only conveys a sense of the “unresolved poetics” of their work, which variously maintains itself as an eccentric site for belated haunting. Recensions, too, are haunted.

Overlay underlies the concept of recension, if I might make this seemingly contradictory statement. Any superimposition may yield traces that were not previously visible. Superimposing the idea of a digital open-source network on the reality of a sprawling, unregulated, and sedimented city such Delhi tells us something novel of the latter, but the reverse is equally true and just as productive, perhaps more so. Each is a means to think the other and has been so in many of Raqs investigations, of which Sarai is one outcome. We need be careful, however, that any new mapping (any mapping is a schematic overlay) is not new strip mining. “How can those of us who work with information in a creative manner begin to get a handle on the enormously significant ethical questions that arise from working with information in today’s world?”, Raqs ask.¹⁴ They also say, rhetorically but to allegorical ends, of any current artistic practice, “The first question we want to ask is: how can this fiction of location, this imaginary map, the one that we are all currently engaged in drawing, not reproduce the boundaries that beset all mapmaking exercises? How can we as mapmakers avoid the predicament of an expression of mastery over the landscape we intend to survey?”¹⁵ Mapping or mining: there are always two sides to an act that make it either ethical or exploitive.

This makes all terrain contested, even that of a photograph, which we know is anything but transparent. “The surface of the photograph then has to be seen as a contested terrain. Appearing on it or disappearing from it is not a matter of visual whimsy, but an actual index of power and powerlessness.”¹⁶ Take eugenicist Francis Galton’s nineteenth-century physiognomic typologies, which figure in Raqs’ 2009 film installation *The Surface of Each Day is a Different Planet*, and which were nothing but series of transparent photographic overlays. Galton intended to chart, for example, the deviant “Jewish Type,” through the averaging of pictorial statistics, by mapping face on photographic face —

but in the end was met by the composite gaze of a Jewish angel.¹⁷ Arrested in a blur, appearing and disappearing at the same time, collectively these individuals exist as a palimpsest of personalities reduced to a cipher. By “cipher” I mean reduced to a code but also to a naught, in the sense that one uses the photograph to cipher deviancy but also to esteem a person of no importance.

A palimpsest is not a recension. But it is a corollary concept. Contrary to recension, any overlay of a palimpsest obscures what is beneath. For a palimpsest, the issue of legibility, therefore, is paramount. Legibility means visibility in Raqs’ world, but this is not always a good thing. Visibility means an arrest of identification and examination:

To be legible is to be readable. To be legible is to be an entry in a ledger — one with a name, place, origin, time, entry, exit, purpose, and perhaps a number.

To be legible is to be coded and contained. Often, when asked an uncomfortable question, or faced with an unsettling reality, the rattled respondent ducks and dives with a stammer, a mumble, a sweat, a scrawl, or a nervous tic. The respondent may not be lying, but neither may he be interested in offering a captive legible truth either to the interrogator or in response to his own circumstances.¹⁸

For Raqs, the difference between recension and palimpsest really is a valency that puts them to different use. With a recension, nothing is lost; it is a positive model for ongoing creative dialogue. With a palimpsest, what is seemingly lost or obscured may only be hidden in sight. The palimpsest, thus, has a bifurcated value: “An insistence on legibility produces its own shadow: the illegible. Between the bare-faced lie and the naked truth lies the zone of illegibility — the only domain where the act of interpretation retains a certain ontological and epistemic significance.”¹⁹ Here, illegibility has the virtue of self-defense.

In the obdurate resistance of what underlies or that falls or escapes through the meshes of evidence as residue, Raqs finds a whole other dialectic of legibility and illegibility, visibility and invisibility, appearance and disappearance. But how is resistance or residue made visible against overwhelming evidential fact? The photograph is evidence, evidence of a sort. But of what sort? What is evident in the photograph is not necessarily what the photograph is evidence of. The photograph can be used in evidence, brought forth in criminal trial or the marshalling of historical fact: of an individual, action or event. But a single photograph, such as Felice Beato’s 1858 photograph, *Scene at Sikanderbagh*, can be shown to be both the construction of assurance and the sowing of doubt. So this photograph figured in Raqs’ 2009 *The Surface of Each Day is a Different Planet* and their 2011 theatre production *Seen at Secunderabagh*. Of what does this photographic evidence, or lack of, convict?

Then we have the question of what constitutes evidence *in* the photograph? Galton sought the indices of insanity or deviancy within the photographic image itself, not in its referential association. Simply stated, the photograph is evidence of a “that has been.”

But can a photograph be evidence, too, of disappearance, not only of an object or individual that we know destiny has displaced, but evidence of disappearing itself, as an event? Contrary to a documentary film ethos according the reality of the image evidence of lived experience, Raqs have turned themselves into documentarians of the *disappearance* of lived experience.²⁰

Take the crowd. It might be thought itself as a photograph, and a photograph that captures it as an emblem itself of statistics. Any individual caught within it is a matter merely of ciphers and statistics.²¹ A missing person might float there and disappear in the sieve of the crowd.

Millions of people fade from history, and often the memory of their disappearance also fades with time. With the disappearance of ways of life, entire practices and the lived experiences and memories that constituted them vanish, or are forced to become something other than what they were accustomed to being. When they make the effort to embrace this transformation, typically what stands questioned is their credibility. They are never what they seem to be, or what they try to say they are. The annals of every nation are full of adjectives that accrue to displaced communities and individuals that begin to be seen as cheats, forgers, tricksters, frauds, thieves, liars, and impostors, as members of “criminal castes, tribes, and clans” or as deviant anomalies who habitually attempt to erode stable foundations with their “treacherous” ambiguities and their evasive refusal to be confined, enumerated, or identified.

These “missing persons” who disappear, or appear with great reluctance, with their names, provenances, identities, and histories deliberately or accidentally obscured in the narratives of “progress” and the histories of nation states, are to the processes of governance, what the figure of the “unknown soldier” is to the reality of war. The only difference is that there are no memorials to those who fade from view in the ordinary course of “progress.” The missing person is a blur against a wall, a throw-away scrap of newspaper with a fading, out-of-focus image of a face, a peeling poster announcing rewards for wanted or lost people in a police post or railway station waiting room, a decimal point in a statistic, an announcement that some people have been disowned or abandoned or evicted or deported or otherwise cast away, as residues of history. No flags flutter, no trumpets sound, nothing burns eternal in the memory of a blur.

The blur is not even an image that can lay a claim to original veracity, but a hand-me-down version of a reality that is so injured by attempts at effacement that only a copy can have the energy necessary to enable its contents to circulate. The patchwork of faded fakes, interrupted signals, and unrealized possibilities, which does not read well and which does not offer substantive and meaningfully rounded-off conclusions, is sometimes the only kind of manuscript available to us.²²

Let's not take this only as Raqs' lament for the disappeared and dispossessed. The individual may be subject to evidentiary criteria but the missing person slyly opposes any generalized surveillance that classifies or scrutinizing gaze that tries to hunt him or her down by means of an obligatory biometrics. A passive act of transforming oneself or disappearing within appearance counters any governing attempts at measurement. "The imperative of identification, and its counterpoint, the dream of disguise, are impulses we find central to the story of our times," Raqs tell us.²³ Hence, the "cheats, forgers, tricksters, frauds, thieves, liars, and impostors" that substitute for the missing person and for whom Raqs here act as spokesperson.²⁴ The missing person is the unnamed entity at the heart of the Raqs Media Collective's enterprise, the unstable figure around which the questions of legibility and illegibility, visibility and invisibility, evidence and identity revolve.

If the missing person is recessive and residual, the other emblematic figure in Raqs' world is the impostor, who is infiltrative and disruptive.

The impostor is an exemplar for a kind of performative agency that renders a person capable of expressing more than one kind of truth of the self to the scrutiny of power. The figure of the impostor offers a method of survival that meets the growing intensification of scrutiny with a strategy based on the multiplication of guises and the amplification of guile. At the same time, the term impostor is also an accusation; one that power can fling at anyone it chooses to place under scrutiny. It is this double-edged state, of being a way out as well as a trap, that lends it the capacity to be a heuristic device uniquely suited for a nuanced understanding of a time in which criteria such as authenticity, veracity, and appropriateness take on intense, almost paranoid dimensions in the conduct and governance of life's most basic functions.²⁵

The missing person and the impostor are complementary, not oppositional, figures, when they are not sometimes one and the same. They are not fixed symbols, though, but emblems of fluid strategies within deteriorating situations.

With respect to residue: it may be said it is that which never finds its way into the manifest narrative of how something (an object, a person, a state, or a state of being) is produced, or comes into existence. It is the accumulation of all that is left behind, when value is extracted. Large perforations begin to appear in chronicles, calendars and maps, and even the minute agendas of individual lives, as stretches of time, tracts of land, ways of being and doing, and entire clusters of experience are denied substance.²⁶

To disappearing residue, Raqs offers the methodological concept of "seepage." Seepage is another, now fluid, form of overlay that is infiltrative:

By seepage we mean the action of many currents of fluid material leaching onto a stable structure, entering and spreading through it by way of pores, until it

becomes a part of the structure, both in terms of its surface, and at the same time as it continues to act on its core, to gradually disaggregate its solidity. To crumble it over time with moisture.

In a wider sense, seepage can be conceived as those acts that ooze through the pores of the outer surfaces of structures into available pores within the structure, and result in a weakening of the structure itself. Initially the process is invisible, and then it slowly starts causing mold and settles into a disfiguration — and this produces an anxiety about the strength and durability of the structure.

By itself seepage is not an alternative form; it even needs the structure to become what it is — but it creates new conditions in which structures become fragile and are rendered difficult to sustain. It enables the play of an alternative imagination, and so we begin seeing faces and patterns on the wall that change as the seepage ebbs and flows.²⁷

Seepage is an infiltrative act that adheres to a dominant structure while surreptitiously undermining it to produce its own counter-residue.²⁸ Whatever play of “alternative imagination” is figured within this dissolution, we are not left only lamenting a loss but have residual hope.

Falling through the sieve or off the map, where do we go from here? Let’s leave the last word to the Raqs Media Collective:

What happens to the people in the places that fall off the map? Where do they go? They are forced, of course, to go in search of the map that has abandoned them. But when they leave everything behind and venture into a new life they do not do so entirely alone. They go with the networked histories of other voyages and transgressions, and are able at any point to deploy the insistent, ubiquitous insider knowledge of today’s networked world.²⁹

NOTES

- 1 “Every witness is also an actor. All actors are also witnesses. All witnesses are redactors. Reading the *KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol.1*,” a talk delivered 24 September 2008 in Damascus for the Reloading Images workshop. “The KD Vyas Correspondence” exists as this lecture, an “essay” (“A Dossier Concerning the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol. 1”) and a video installation (*The KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol. 1*, 2006). “A Dossier Concerning the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol. 1” was published in *The KD Vyas Correspondence: Vol. 1*, ed. Monique Behr (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver – Archive für Aktuelle Kunst, 2006).
- 2 “Heartbeats. 20 Artists: First Person,” in *International Gallerie 24* (July 2009).
- 3 “Raqs is a word in Arabic, Turkish, Persian and our own Urdu that denotes a whirling, a dancing, a practice and cultivation of ecstatic contemplation founded on kinesia. So our name, our artistic signature, comes from the whirling — the Raqs — of whirling dervishes . . .” “Learning from the Horizon: Practicing Art. Imagining Politics,” a talk delivered by Shuddhabrata Sengupta for the *Second Former West Research Congress*, Istanbul, 5 November 2010. Raqs is also an acronym for “rarely asked questions.”
- 4 “The epics, stories, songs, and sagas that represent in some ways the collective heritage of humanity have survived only because their custodians took care not to lock them into a system of ‘end usage,’ but instead embellished them, which added to their health and vitality, before passing them on to others.” “Pacific Parables” (2006), in Raqs Media Collective, *Seepage* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), 12.
- 5 In 2000 Raqs co-founded the Sarai Programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi. <http://www.sarai.net>
- 6 “Learning from the Horizon.”
- 7 “Pacific Parables,” 12. Cf. “We grew up hearing many kinds of stories. Stories of wise animals and stupid gods, arrogant kings and generous subjects, magical machines and speaking trees.” “New Maps and Old Territories: A Dialogue between Yagnavalkya and Gargi in Cyberia,” in *Seepage*, 159.
- 8 “Reading the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol.1.”
- 9 Ibid. “Each story demands the telling of another story, and the telling of that other story demands the re-telling of another story, and so on. Hypertext is an ancient device. New Media is very old media.” “A Dossier Concerning the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol. 1.” Needless to say, the stories of the *Mahabharata* take many trans-cultural forms and are not limited to their actual telling in the epic: from ancient sculptures to puppet shows to contemporary films, not to mention Raqs’ work itself. See “Digressions from the Memory of a Minor Encounter” (2006), *Seepage*, 46–55, which recounts Raqs twentieth-century encounter of a circa 967 CE Cambodian temple frieze of a minor story from the *Mahabharata* in a nineteenth-century Paris museum, where they “felt the sharp edge of estrangement in something that also felt downright familiar” (46), for an apt discussion on contemporaneity: “An increased intensity of communication creates a new kind of experiential contagion. It leads to all kind of illegitimate liaisons between things that were meant to be unfamiliar. The first thing that dissolves under the pressure of this promiscuous density of contact across space is the assumption that different degrees of ‘now’ can be better obtained in different places; that Delhi, or Dar-es-Salaam are somehow less ‘now’ than Detroit. The ‘now’ of different places leach into each other with increasing force” (47).
- 10 “Reading the KD Vyas Correspondence, Vol.1.” Raqs’ usage of “recension” is not the same as “the process of reconstructing the most reliable readings from variant versions of a text.” Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 185. In “The Concise Lexicon: of/for the Digital Commons,” Raqs define “recension” as: “A re-telling, a word taken to signify the simultaneous existence of different versions of a narrative within oral, and from now onwards, digital cultures. Thus one can speak of a ‘southern’ or a ‘northern’ recension of a myth, or of a ‘female’ or ‘male’ recension of a story, or the possibility (to begin with) of Delhi/Frankfurt/Tehran ‘recensions’ of a digital work. The concept of recension is contraindicative of the notion of hierarchy. A recension cannot be an improvement, nor can it connote a diminishing of value. A recension is that version which does not act as a replacement for any other configuration of its constitutive materials. The existence of multiple recensions is a guarantor of an idea or a work’s ubiquity. This ensures that the constellation of narrative, signs, and images that a work embodies is present, and waiting for iteration at more than one site at any given time. Recensions are portable and are carried within orbiting kernels within a space. Recensions, taken together, constitute ensembles that may form an interconnected web of ideas, images, and signs.” *Sarai Reader 03* (Delhi: The Sarai Programme, 2003), 363. OPUS (Open Platform for Unlimited Signification) was a public platform Raqs created for such activity. It was launched as an online adjunct to their installation *Co-ordinates 28°28’N / 77°15’E :: 2001/2002 at documenta 11* in 2002.

- 11 The same can be said of the video installation *The KD Vyas Correspondence*: “The installation invites its viewer to reflect on this insistence by entering a matrix of eighteen video loops and nine layered soundscapes that function as a select set of indices to our continuing investigations on the theme of ‘declining time,’ on the protocols of the production and transmission of narratives, on the vexed questions of the verification and authenticity of being, and on some methods for remaining sane in the early years of the twenty-first century.” “Reading the KD Vyas Correspondence Vol.1.”
- 12 In part, the “Dossier Concerning . . .” is a fictional device used to deliver KD Vyas’s “Selected Admonitions,” such as: “Disguise the contents of your dreams but reveal the structure of your thoughts and be open with the materials of your research.”
- 13 One might initially think that a work like *Revoltage* (2010), whose electrical illumination alternates between the words “revolt” and “voltage,” is merely binary in its opposition but its streams of electrical cords implicate that decision in a host of connections. See the entry “Node” in “A Concise Lexicon”
- 14 “Pacific Parables,” 11.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 16 “In the Theatre of Memory: The Work of Contemporary Art in the Photographic Archive,” *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 52 (January 2012), 86.
- 17 “But the ‘ghost’ image of a composite of madmen from Bedlam has strangely gentle eyes. Galton’s wager, that if you were to stick the faces of eighty-six inmates of the Bedlam asylum on top of each other you would end up looking into the eyes of madness, has gone oddly awry. Criminal composites produce a saintly icon. A quest for the precise index of what Galton thinks is ugliness in a row of sullen East London Jewish schoolboys yields amazing grace.” *Ibid.* 85. Raqs long-standing interest and investigation of biometrics finds a coincidence in the fact that in 1858 William Herschel sent Galton the hand print of a man called Raj Konai, a villager from lower Bengal. This hand print appears in Raqs work *The Untold Intimacy of Digits* (2011).
- 18 “Stammer, Mumble, Sweat, Scrawl, and Tic,” (2008) in *Seepage*, 31.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 In their 30 April, 2009, lecture for the Prefix Urban Field Speaker series, “Photographs and Phantoms,” Raqs quote Ackbar Abbas: “Disappearance, too, is a matter of presence rather than absence, of superimposition rather than erasure. Hence an elective affinity between the photograph and disappearance.” See Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 106.
- 21 “Because the crowd erases distinctions and gains numbers because a crowd is nothing if it is not an accumulation.” Scenario to *The Surface of Each Day is a Different Planet*. In part, this work is a complex meditation on the relation of individual and crowd, and crowds and photographs.
- 22 “Dreams and Disguises, as Usual,” (2004) in *Seepage*, 81.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 24 The impostor and missing person are Benjaminian types much like those allegorical figures Raqs employ to “speak to the predicament of the contemporary practitioner”: “In a networked world, there are many acts of seepage. . . . They destabilize the structure, without making any claims. So the encroacher redefines the city, even as she needs the city to survive. The trespasser alters the border by crossing it, rendering it meaningless and yet making it present everywhere—even in the heart of the capital city—so that every citizen becomes a suspect alien and the compact of citizenship that sustains the state is quietly eroded. The pirate renders impossible the difference between the authorized and the unauthorized copy, spreading information and culture, and devaluing intellectual property at the same time. Seepage complicates the norm by inducing invisible structural changes that accumulate over time.” “X Notes on Practice: Stubborn Structures and Insistent Seepage in a Networked World” (2002), in *Seepage*, 107, 112.
- 25 “Dreams and Disguises, as Usual,” 76. The quotation continues: “As concepts, the ‘impostor,’ like the ‘waiting room,’ can signify both thresholds meant for quick, sportive, and easy crossing, portals into unpredictable futures, that come laden with the thrill that only unintended consequences can bring, and, for some, a bleak and eternal purgatory tinged with its own peculiar anxiety, distrust, and fear.” Raqs’ notion of the waiting room is also a situation that applied until very recently to non-Western artists. “The figure of a person biding time in a waiting room helps us to imagine the predicament of people living in societies often considered to be inhabiting an antechamber to modernity. In such spaces, one waits to be called upon to step onto the stage of history. Most of the world lives in spaces that could

be designated as 'waiting rooms,' biding its time. These 'waiting rooms' exist in transmetropolitan cities, and in the small enclaves that subsist in the shadow of the edifices of legality. There are waiting rooms in New York just as there are waiting rooms in New Delhi, and there are trapdoors and hidden passages connecting a waiting room in one space with a waiting room in another." Ibid., 75–76. The impostor in the waiting room figures in the video *They Called it the XXth Century* (2005).

- 26 "Photographs and Phantoms." Cf. "The first thing to consider is the fact that most of these acts of transgression are inscribed into the very heart of established structures by people located at the extreme margins. The marginality of some of these figures is a function of their status as the 'residue' of the global capitalist juggernaut. By 'residue,' we mean those elements of the world that are engulfed by the processes of Capital, turned into 'waste' or 'leftovers,' left behind, even thrown away." "X Notes on Practice," 111.
- 27 "X Notes on Practice," 112. Cf. Raqs' comment on their work *Erosion by Whispers* (2005): "Things can come undone because of a whispered rumour. Cities may be built in steel and concrete but they are eroded by whisper. *Erosion by Whispers* reflects on the way in which rumours render cities ephemeral."
- 28 If we qualify Raqs's work as a semiotics of recension (with its three aspects of the textual [recension and palimpsest], the diagrammatic or schematic [mapping], and the indexical (the superimpositions of photography)), we have to remember this concept of seepage that makes it all active and effective.
- 29 "X Notes on Practice," 112.