

**Emergence lab/history as cinema-in-the-museum: The *Tah-Satah* exhibition,  
Jaipur, January-March 2017**

Reviewed by Kaushik Bhaumik

The *Tah-Satah* show curated by Ashish Rajdhyaaksha, held at the Jawharlal Kala Kendra (JKK), Jaipur, India, showcased the works of film-maker Mani Kaul, (1944-2011), a leading figure in the Indian New Wave cinema of the late 1960s-1970s,<sup>1</sup> and multimedia artist, Ranbir Kaleka.<sup>2</sup> Kaul (1944-2011) trained in direction at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) Pune, under the tutelage of the maverick Bengali film-maker, Ritwik Ghatak. In a career spanning four decades, Kaul made some of the most aesthetically challenging and critically acclaimed films in Indian film history. Kaleka (1953-) is a leading Indian contemporary artist trained as a painter at the College of Art, Punjab University, Chandigarh. Kaleka became known for his oil paintings of mythic scenes in the unconscious of the Indic everyday. From around the turn of the millennium, he started to produce multimedia artworks, projecting digital moving images onto surfaces containing monochrome painted figures in oil. The show in Jaipur presented video installations of Kaul's cinema and Kaleka's mixed media work consisting of moving images projected onto paintings,

---

<sup>1</sup>For Kaul's film philosophy, see Gurvinder Singh's 2013 English translation of *Abhed Akash* published as *Uncloven Space: Mani Kaul in Conversation with Udayan Vajpeyi*, Delhi: Quiver.

<sup>2</sup> For Kaleka, see the set of essays by international art and film historians and critics anthologised in Hemant Sareen Hemant Sareen (ed.) (2018, forthcoming), *Ranbir Kaleka: Moving Image Works*, Berlin: Kerber Verlag.

marking contemporary media's dialogue with the scalar pasts of cinema. In this article, I will tie the works of the two artists together with contemplations about Indian cinema located in the midst of larger histories of technology. The first ever museum show in India, locating cinema within electronic media histories, offers us majestic lessons in Indic<sup>3</sup> histories, media and much else.

I caught the *Tah-Satah* show on the last day of its scheduled run at the JKK. In some senses it completed a full circle of a number of personal associations I have had with the artists as well as the curator. For a number of years, I worked with Kaul at the Osian's Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema. Kaleka, I have come to know over the last few years while writing for a forthcoming anthology of essays on his video work (Sareen 2018). One afternoon at his residence, I made a chance remark that Kaleka's work reminded me of Kaul's films, which got Kaleka quipping that Mani had once looked at his painting *Storyteller* (1995) and said, 'that's me'. I had been very surprised at the definitive quality of Kaul's self-identification with Kaleka's work, as if Kaleka was painting a meta-scene that would contain Kaul's life and his films. Beyond this, what was once an intuitive hunch became an idea that substantially informed my viewing of the show, and that needed deeper consideration.

The other set of associations pertain to Rajadhyaksha, the curator of the show. On the surface of things, the show in Jaipur was a majestic amplification of the Kaul-Kaleka *pas-à-deux* Rajadhyaksha had orchestrated at the 4th Guangzhou Triennial in 2011.

---

<sup>3</sup>Indic classically refers to cultures of the Indo-European group of languages but is also used to denote the cultural matrix underlying all histories of long geo-presence in India. It is in the second sense that I use the term throughout the essay.

Some of Rajadhyaksha's projects since 2015 – a few that I was part of – leading up to *Tah-Satah* included his completing an anthology of New Wave film-maker Kumar Shahani's writings, while he was visiting faculty at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2015. In October 2015, Rajadhyaksha organised a conference on Indian New Wave cinema of the early 1970s, where *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1976) made by the Kaul-led *Yukt* film collective, was shown as the showpiece of the screening programme on multiple screens.

Framing this, was Rajadhyaksha's monumental venture of archiving Indian film history through the website [www.indiancine.ma](http://www.indiancine.ma), an extension of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (1999) that Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen edited. The NewWave conference was held as an annotative exercise towards indian cine.ma. However, one would have to consider indian cine.ma as an aesthetic exercise beyond the practicalities of gathering film history, to track how the curatorship of *Tah-Satah* might be seen as an important moment emerging from this project. One of the key features of the website is a frame-by-frame breakdown of each film archived allowing the analysis of film between flows and fragments. Rajadhyaksha had already started working with the live film frame (as opposed to the film still) as the film historical research object in creating the images for his book *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (2009), which includes a long chapter on Kaul's *Uski Roti/His Daily Bread* (1969). A similar approach to fragmenting the body of the film as a means of intensifying critical focus via the film frame informed the design of the Shahani book. As we shall see, the film frame is central to the manner in which Rajadhyaksha conceptualises the Kaul installation pieces in the Jaipur show. In the Guangzhou show Kaul's films had been shown in their entirety.

Six years down the line, we are confronted with an amplification of the aesthetic experience of Kaul's films via fragmentation, dispersal, contrapuntal intensifications or convergent immersions in loops that mark a vital historical moment for the Indian 'cinematic'. While singular New Media moments such as indian cine.ma might not explain all that goes into *Tah-Satah* (for example, Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoires(s) du Cinema* (1988-98) probably forms a very important reference point too), it might do well to see the show as an assemblage running alongside other assemblages such as books, screenings and websites, informing the sensibilities of film researchers and archivists in the fast transforming media art scene in India.

### ***Tah-Satah: a very deep surface***

*Tah-Satah* brought together almost the entire body of Kaul's films, mixed together as media installations by Rajadhyaksha and his collaborators: film-maker Piyush Kashyap who conceptualised and edited the Kaul video installations and Madhu Apsara who designed the sound for these. The Kaul installations had been produced specifically for this show beginning with *Daata/The Giver* (2015), a five-channel video installation with single track mono sound commissioned by the National Films Development Corporation, which had financed Kaul's first feature film *Uski Roti/His Daily Bread* (1970). The five screens of *Daata* displayed five looped montages, consisting of various segments of *Uski Roti*. Capping the Kaul suite was *Iti/The End* (2015), a triptych of video projections viewable from both sides, consisting of sequences from Kaul's documentaries/docu-fictions *Satah se Uthata Admi/Arising From the Surface* (1980), *Dhrupad* (1983), *Mati Manas/Mind of Clay* (1985),

*Siddheshwari* (1990), *Arrival* (1980) and two digital videos made in Holland *Ik Ben Geen Ander/I Am No Other* (2002) and *A Monkey's Raincoat* (2005). Other Kaul installations were *Hawa Mein Gaanth/A Knot in the Air* (2015), an eight-channel sound installation mixing soundtracks from various Kaul films commissioned by JKK and designed by Vikram Joglekar, the music director for Mani Kaul's *Nazar/The Gaze* (1990) and *Ahamaq/Idiot* (1991); *The Idiot Room* (2015), where we see *Ahamaq* (Kaul's 1991 adaptation of Dostoevskij's *Idiot*), made in four parts for Doordarshan, India's national television broadcast service, on four monitors, and *The Idiot Garden* (2015) featuring a green wooden park bench underneath a tree with a blue Chinese vase lying smashed on the ground by its side. The scene references the bench in *Ahamaq/Idiot*, where key sequences are staged, culminating in the scene in which Myshkin smashes the vase in an epileptic fit during his marriage to Amba (Agalya), signalling beginnings of the disastrous denouement of the film.

The Kaleka works begin with *House of Opaque Water* (2015) made in collaboration with environmentalist, Pradeep Saha. A three-channel work, *House* is a poetic interplay of dissolving views of life in the Bangladesh Sunderbans where the sea keeps flooding out low-lying islands, and thus endlessly displacing humanity that nevertheless survives through extraordinary means. Interwoven with the Kaul installations were other Kaleka works including *Man with Cockerel* (2001-02) consisting of dissolving views of a man half-immersed in water, trying to tame a restless cockerel that flies away from time to time, and that the man chases out of frame; *Sweet Unease* (2011), a triptych single-channel projection onto canvases painted with scenes showing at either extreme two men (the same) seated at a table laden with a meal, who periodically get up, leave the frame and meet in a central

frame to wrestle naked; Kaleka's four-channel *Crossings* (2005) with a figure painted on each screen, onto which a series of landscapes and scenes are projected, including moments when a projected figure shadows the edges of the painted image; *Forest* (2009) depicting a dystopic vision of guilt culminating in utopian rebirth, book burning and revival of learning in the midst of a forest where human beings and lions roam; and *He Was a Good Man* (2008) consisting of a video depicting an old man trying to thread a needle, while sceneries fade in and out around him, projected onto a painted surface.

A considerable part of the aesthetic frisson of the show came from the works of the two artists speaking to one another in counterpoint, between inside and outside of the exhibition spaces, from the corner of the eyes, across the surprise of encounters on turning a corner of the galleries, or simply from the various vantage points afforded by the staggered display space.

### **Cinema, history and the museum: knots in the air**

For curator Rajadhyaksha, the fundamental conceptual thread that joins the oeuvres of Kaul and Kaleka is their preoccupation with the cinematic as a medium through which to contemplate duration. Duration is a junction-space through which trajectories of the human *élan vital* pass; it is the moment that connects the layers of sense in life – from the chemical to the emotional to the inter-subjective to the historical to the cosmic – in an affective event. And indeed, the museum is a junction-space through which monumental civilisational drives pass, on their way into the future. In the journey from the dinosaur to modernity – and back in the museum – we

traverse the loop between the universal cosmic and the bodily cosmic, via a journey through a history of consciousness. The museological space gets even more explicitly oriented towards duration in a building designed to reconcile the Indic cosmic geomancy and modernist architecture, as the architect Charles Correa attempted to do with the plan for JKK, in order to catch the enigma of Indian industrial modernity rooted in Indic ‘folk’ craft.

What we get in the show are extremely complex mood pieces playing with various aspects of duration. I would like to draw attention to another characterisation of the show by the curator: slow time and the slow cinema of duration in which he places both Kaul and Kaleka. Here, the design textures of JKK become an ideal setting for the show. That is to say, a space like JKK with its mix of the modern and the artisanal is oriented more towards the entropic end of duration, a condition of heterogeneous things mixing, and, as I will elaborate later, the Indic tends towards entropy through the logic of political violence that renders everything ‘experimental’. In addition, political violence produces a more aniconic culture, invoking textures of death, mourning, fear and depression. Duration in this context veers more towards the side of dark matter and slow time than urbanity. Duration opens up chaos to its constitutive lines of desire for everything capable of material presence – past, present and future. Nowhere is this more spectacularly felt than in *Daata*, the *pièce de resistance* of the Kaul part of the show. What we see coming at us from all sides of the viewing space is the ‘realism’ of slow time of village life and the artistic sleight-of-hand of telling a story through block pieces of time depicting everyday action as constitutive planes of significance.

Kaleka's *Crossings* could be seen as some sort of *Uski Roti Redux* in its scenes of rustic rural bodies resting on the side of the highway, a Sardarji rattling along in some ramshackle vehicle, chaotic urban *bazaar* scenes, rural everyday scenes and rituals and modernised agrarian landscapes with *au courant* windmills that might be America in the dreams of the Punjabis. The singularity of the work, gives us the duration in which momentous stratigraphic layers of sense-life come together in drifts, but all passing through *a* point of perception. Kaleka dissolves and superimposes multiple scenes in oneiric felicity and beauty and separates them out onto gigantic screens to convey the multiplicity of desire, the separate screens conveying for the scale of the cinematic for the desires of 'small people', those relegated to the dustbin of history. Kaleka thus begins with poses reminiscent of Kaul's cinematic figures but can nuance the picture by allowing his superimpositions and modulations of the projected image to simultaneously show inner shifts in affect in still figures as well as when minds go walkabout in space. Kaul's cinema codes Indic histories in a public scale of history in the world while Kaleka frames those same histories in a more intimate affective dimension but that can nevertheless tantalizingly *touch* the cinematic.

In a way, it all begins with *House of Opaque Water*, which gives us a sense of life beginning from the cosmic flood; a mythic originary moment for the historical-ideational dimension of the show. The duration in this work is cosmic where life and thought are borne towards survival in human *techne*. The slow time of culture in the cosmic flood is foundational to whatever follows: be it industry or cinema. *House* 'illustrates' the cosmic mythic that informs all of Kaleka's video work.



What happens after this is a layering of history through artisanal action; the talismanic temporality of *He Was a Good Man*, which is the transcendental sluggish time of human labour and history, built from the chaos running through the most banal of fabrications. What tantalises us in Kaleka's video work, especially in the 'simple' one-trick video projection-onto-painted image works such as *Good Man*, is the feeling of witnessing the 'fact' of the birth of perception itself, which the digital glitch-masquerading-as-cinematic-flicker aesthetic of Kaleka's mixed media works accentuates. The brain as screen flickers to life; the play between stillness and movement accentuates Kaleka's still life-style paintings. The simpler the scene witnessed (a single act), the greater the tension between video and painting, the more profound is the sense of viewing the brain come alive, the earth being born out of primordial chaos. No wonder *Good Man* is placed next to the Kaul sound installation *Hawa Mein Gaanth/Knot in the Air*. The flickering presence of the man trying to thread a knot through a needle is as airy and ephemeral as the sound objects that Kaul seeks to conjure up as 'knots in the air'.

At the other end of the spectrum, I place *The Idiot Room* and *Sweet Unease*, united in a modernist durational regime, marked by 'smoother' abstractions in the virtual than the more earthy materiality of artisanal labour or village and small town scenarios. Kaul devised *Ahamaq/The Idiot Room* for television, making use of the medium's plastic capaciousness and its ability to expand to fit more bodies, actions, camera angles and sounds into cinema. Such a mode of film-making suited the frenetic diegetic content of the film that Kaul shoots almost 'literally'. Characters are caught up in a sweet unease, bodies overwrought with sensation and indecision act with violent unpredictability just as the protagonists do in Kaleka's video. Indeed, Kaleka's

work spans a historical space of class mobilities in the lower middle classes of India, running across Kaul's *Satah se Uthata Admi* (featured in *Iti*) and *Ahamaq*. Here we reach the end of a certain arc of *Tah-Satah* that uses various registers of duration to narrate a civilisational tale from the cosmic flood of *House of Opaque Water* to Mafia violence in *Ahamaq*.

*Iti* sums up Kaul's cinema as consisting of an archive of gnostic signs consisting of tools, artisanal craft objects, food items, modes of transportation, human figures wrapped in hand-woven clothes. Industry becomes a figure of history changing primitive landscape into civilization and returning it to wilderness through historic/natural violence. The diegetic content as well as the textures of life depicted invoke a world where matter takes aesthetic form like a knot in the wind, dissolves back into landscape, continuing to produce aesthetic form via human beings working off landscapes and finally dissolving into entropy. In a self-reflexive mode, Kaul and Kaleka consciously make images whose textures announce that they too are of this entropic world. Poets, artisans, classical singers of Hindustani music and Kaul himself occupy the return of space unto itself, where cosmos and cinema overlap passing through history, with the film-maker making a film. Things begin in entropy, the owl of Minerva flying at dusk (and what better metaphor for entropy than a knot in the air?) and emerge into figuration momentarily only to dissolve into a new configuration of entropy. Tradition must by definition occupy both these points at once – its glorious apogee as well as its decaying even as it is performed. It must repeat something like Hindustani classical music at the apex of 'civilizational greatness', but always in a sort of becoming ruin as every moment in history inevitably is, a contradiction that needs to be resolved towards what we call

innovation. Entropy is the dusk in which the storytelling of the Storyteller begins, creating a universe out of an entropic mix with imagination and forging the props for narration, provisionally. And this is where cinema begins to flicker and come alight to life, miming the knots in the winds of history, adding something new to the world by means of repetition. It is the medium of the most diverse cacophony of human spirits, the space of democracy and the multitude, actualised in history in repetition, in *élan vital* moving towards survival or pleasure *jouissance*.

In Kaleka's practice, the artisanal is signalled primarily by the oil painted blob – a style he invented to align his work with the Indic artisanal and *bazaar* pop kitsch. Kaleka uses the 'archaic' medium of paint to slow down the speeds of cinematic modernities with mixed media textures that are indexical of the Indic artisanal-industrial that we perceive in the sensory calculus of life around us. Kaul too, as Rajadhyaksha has pointed out, references the dulled oil textures of Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings for an artisanal feel to the bodies in *Uski Roti*, which might make us imagine Kaul's cinema too as being projections of landscapes and scenes on iconic painted human figuration (Rajadhyaksha 2009). The artisanal textures of oil paint on the canvas thus become the point from which a cinema of the people emerges in the work of both the artists. They immerse themselves in the artisanal lives of Indic people producing oneiric moving images of individuals expressing insurgent desires via play with matter. However, this is not to say that such a scenario is celebrated. Instead, oil paint is used to produce duration to give us an artist's ego reportage of sorts about the contradictory lines of desires of the complex Indic everyday, its multifarious historical stratigraphies. Kaul and Kaleka are neither commentators nor participants in such histories, but are instead trance walkers through noisy people's

histories, whose art in the final instance is defined by ethical thought about historical violence, for example, such violence's drive to beat down human flesh to earthly dust evident in the manner in which the textures of the weather-beaten faces and apparels of refugees merge with those of the dusty barren landscape they occupy in Kaleka's *Crossings*.

It is a very deep surface (the *Tah-Satah* of the show title) indeed that we encounter here. The void of existence always has a form, at least *a* fold of artifice, the aniconic texture of artisanal earth that is the visual texture informing the works of Kaul and Kaleka. Absolutely smooth spaces are perverse fantasies since every apparently smooth surface on closer inspection always reveals a kink. What *Tah-Satah* boggles our mind with are the historical trajectories of cinema imaging matter, from earth/paint to contemporary media play. This journey in turn becomes a self-reflexive contemplation of Indian cinema's own place in the history of the Indic people, its conditions of production and viewing, right up to its entanglement in the genealogies of the JKK complex that I alluded to earlier. We come out of the show in a Robert Smithson kind of delirium, the one he had on his tour of what he called 'The Monuments of Passaic', where in a flash he grasps the passage of glass/reflection/image/cinema through millions of years of earth's history from the Big Bang to our times, while contemplating modernist constructions, pipes, bridges or even a sandbox that came out of primordial earth (Smithson 1996). Kaul's *Dhrupad* ends with the modernist camera doing a vertiginous knot in the air across the concrete build-up of Bombay, in line with the rise and fall of a Hindustani classical note. This is precisely a cinematic actuation of what Smithson was trying to tell us in his essay about that journey

If *Tah-Satah* is framed by the tension between stillness and movement, it is because both Kaul and Kaleka are interested in querying Indic histories, where labour still works on the edge of primordial chaos, where *all* life functions *within* the slight psychotic movement of the moment of the birth of consciousness, when the latter is pure affective excess without symbolic inscriptions that makes pure affect bearable. All culture or artifice remains trapped within this momentary appearance of form that disappears as soon as it appears under the pressure of relentless competitive violence. The still and the moving are hardly discernible as separate from one another, movement dies almost as soon as it is born in political violence. And yet this savagely primitive life can be foundational of history; immersed in labour from which all else is built upwards. Anything that seeks to grow does not rise beyond a point but begins to flatten out and then crumble to earth and, I suggest, the works also show up this flattening as a certain condition of democracy, where the ‘general’ violent conditions of labour determine the ‘system’, the local acting fractally ‘upwards’ to encompass the system, rather than historical backwardness. And still this moment of appearance encompasses a thousand individuals acts of historical violence in the Indic giving it a durational aspect in depth and sharpness. Duration not only allows for the complex layers of habit and memory and technologies to converge but also the multiple readings of the ‘ethics’ underlying the historical, for instance, the stubborn persistence of the ‘local’ in the Indic global ascunning ‘from below’. Cinematic duration is also the time of compassion allowing all life to become singular out of chaos, even if for a fleeting moment, something that could be read as the workings of democracy or shared civilisational guilt. In Indic histories the interfaces of the modernist and the artisanal are both numerous and complex marked by diverse civilisational textures

and gradations. And where better to think through such textures than a space like JKK, itself another ‘knot in the air’ in the histories Kaul and Kaleka pass through?

### **Cinema, history and the museum: lines of flight**

*Tah-Satah* is the moment when Indian film history coincides with the entry of cinema into the museum. Thomas Elsaesser (2016) sees the museum as the destiny of the cinematic as well as the viewing context for cinema in the time of new media and digital technologies. Indeed, as Erika Balsom (2013) suggests, isolating the cinematic in the sensory void of the museum forces us to encounter its power more singularly than in the public arena of the cinema hall. *Tah-Satah* reflects this perspective all the more given Rajadhyaksha’s pre-occupation elsewhere with the death of celluloid cinema as also the death of a certain mass populist democracy in India (Rajadhyaksha 2009). The power of Indian film is being preserved through the archival project of indian cine.ma, while the film frame inserts itself into Rajadhyaksha’s texts as illustrative material and finally it survives in the breaking up of the body of film as installation artwork, taking advantage of Kaul’s emphasis on duration that almost demands such a deframing-reframing. Here, one is reminded of Laura Mulvey’s (2005) thoughts about a heightened rearticulation of cinema’s power through platforms that allow us to dissect the filmic body in great detail, making the experience of cinema’s ‘death 24 frames per second’, but one where the full force of cinema’s life can be felt most powerfully.

Mani Kaul’s films are converted into digital media objects, an assemblage of *son-image* installations extrapolated from cinema and aligned with cutting-edge multi-

media convergence in Kaleka's work that brings together paint, animation, film and the digital. Classical cinema, already deconstructed in Kaul, flies towards its disaggregated future in Kaleka's work that in turn reaches out to the scalar ambitions of celluloid cinema. Cinema and contemporary media become tools through which history can be opened up to its constitutive lines of desire, that is, the totality of desires of everything that a moment of history encompasses. Fissile sense material that requires machines to record and show, converts the museum into a lab, where histories emerge in the empty duration of its interiors. Lines of flight everywhere: people in history, matter between earth and industry and machines, between cinema and post-cinema. The cockerel of history needs many machines to record, remix and broadcast its multifarious flights. The relentless concoction of loops in the exhibition allows us to pleasure-trip on historical emergences in the life-cinema assemblage. The play with sightlines defining the set-up of the exhibition creates a heady sense of affective and associative connections between screens; a dreamy scenario of film loops forming and transforming on screens.

However, *Tah-Satah* is not so much about clashes between regimes of digital technology and the cinematic, the obsolescent and the new, but a relay of the cinematic itself, thinking its way through a logic on the scale of the people in the cascades of its technological histories. For Rajadhyaskha, Indian celluloid cinema of the kind Kaul made, had a scale that could articulate a people's mythic history in India's crowded and diverse democracy. Kaleka has always insisted on the celluloid cinematic scales of his multimedia work. Scale is a shadowy totality that can be projected in any size as long as the original proportions of the inner composition of an image can be held in place, that is, as long as they can be fractalised. While the

'outing' of paint as material in Kaleka's cinematic practice might make us wonder whether such in-your-face physicality is required for cinema to continue to articulate the people, we can also continue dreaming cinema as it was. Confronted with the broken Chinese vase of *The Idiot Garden*, we may interpret it as cinema broken by fascistic populism (as Godard does), however, as the light is switched on at dusk in the garden, the shiny magical quality of the blue paint on the vase allows us to imagine the vase will jump back to completeness by simply running the film of cinematic history backwards. The show does make us speculate about cinematic machines of democracy never invented or put to public use, such as a portable 35 mm camera that might have allowed us to record continuously, erasing the difference between the fictive and the documentary at the people's scale of cinema. In making us imagine this machine, *Tah-Satah* hints at a new medium that might make it happen.

## **Coda**

As the sun sets on JKK I saw *Iti*, the end of the story, while the falling darkness enveloped the view from the gallery window looking out onto *The Idiot Garden*. It was as if *Iti/The End*, was revealing itself as the constitutive secret of the museum, framing cinema as a code that had not yet lost its vigour. At that moment the exhibition complex looked like the spaceships displaying LED screen advertising in Ridley Scott's sci-fi film *Blade Runner* (1982). One realises that inserting cinema, electronic movement into the museum moves it away from the Noah's Ark model in a certain history of labour, towards a spaceship containing the code of human life in the virtual, from which some vital aspect of human life will be regenerated in the future. We could at that moment imagine the exhibition complex as a spaceship tracing slow



knots in cosmic time and the show itself as a complex brain-like thing controlling the craft's trajectories through the cosmos. Chris Marker said as much about the museum in *La Jetée* (1962), precisely through a subtle play on stillness and movement in the cinematic, conceiving the museum as a science fictive time-travel machine archiving various episodes of the civilisational as life's flight into the virtual away from death. But if the film about the relationship between cinema's moving image and the photographic still is told through the museum in which the film is set, it is because, for Marker, the photographic in cinema passes through the museum by cinema's diverting its foundational logic of history in the fetish towards the photograph's 'smooth' surfing of space. Cinema moves us because it evokes history threatened to be turned to *stillness* by its own violence, but somehow managing to breathe, to *move*. Cinema was invented to imbue this breath in modernist freedom despite its historical burdens. The democratic breath is what cinema has recorded endlessly from its earliest times, from locomotives' puffing smoke, to factories breathing out people, to hosepipes breathing out water or kids' laughter in the Lumières' *L'Arroseur Arrosé* (1895).

Cinema in the void of the museum, in the singularity of display, in frames separated out of the flow of films, in film slowed down or speeded up, allows us to notice this special power of the cinematic: it has the power to invent people's breath in times that threaten us with stillness. The public scale of the museum and the people's scale of cinema come together in *Tah-Satah*. This hyper-mediated breath of freedom is caught in its stratigraphic layers from the primordial earthy miasma to the supermodernist technological complex, by artists aligned with craftsmen, inventing democratic life against death. Hopefully, humanity has not lost its survival instinct to the extent that it

will fail to invent the right cinematic machines needed for it to go on breathing, reconciling the freedom of democracy with its own smothering forces. Hopefully, it will again reconstitute the Chinese vase by becoming the potter *Prajapati*<sup>4</sup> of democracy, and breathing felicitously into the clay/flesh of humanity to create many more free expressions of life.

## REFERENCES

- Balsom, Erika (2013), *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Elsaesser, Thomas (2016), *Film History as Media Archaeology*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Mulvey, Laura (2005), *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, London: Reaktion Books.
- Rajadhyaksha, Ashish (2009), *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency*, Delhi: Tulika Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (ed.) (2015), *Kumar Shahani: The Shock of Desire and Other Essays*, Delhi: Tulika Books.
- Rajadhyaksha, Ashish and Paul Willemen (eds.) (1999), *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>4</sup>*Prajapati* could mean Brahma, the Divine Creator, but is also the honorific by which Indic potters address one another indicating cosmic creation as claywork.

Sareen, Hemant (ed.) (2018, forthcoming), *Ranbir Kaleka: Moving Image Works*, Berlin: Kerber Verlag.

Smithson, Robert (1996), “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 68-74.

#### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Kaushik Bhaumik is Associate Professor in Cinema Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He has been Deputy Director of the Osian’s Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema. He is co-editor of *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* and *Project Cinema City* and editor of the *Marg* centennial issue on the 100 years of Indian cinema. He has written extensively on various aspects of Indian film history in international journals and anthologies. He has also written about contemporary Indian art and, in 2012, participated in a collaborative art show, *The Rise of the BROW Nationals*, at Chemould, Mumbai. Currently he is co-editing a volume on non-multiplex film exhibition in India and researching the cultures of global modernity in Bombay, 1950-1980.