

## Day 1: 30 November 2006

### Introduction

Shuddhabrata Sengupta, *Sarai-CSDS*;  
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### Introduction of EU-India Economic and Cross-Cultural Project

Kerstin Lindberg, *Delegation of the European Commission to India, Bhutan and Nepal*

### Panel 1: Information, Mobility and Exclusion: Borders, Passports and Identification Documents

Moderator: Shuddhabrata Sengupta  
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### Passport, Ticket and Rubber Stamp: The “problem of the pauper *Hajji*”, c. 1882-1926

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“... It is a disgrace to the fair name of the British government that that long after the Javanese and other pilgrims have left this country, British Indians may be seen mere disease-stricken skeletons, lying about in the streets of Jeddah, begging their bread and filling the town with their ordure and their microbes, and the Governor should have occasion to write to the consulate to ask it to remove its outcasts...”

Radhika Singha narrated the compelling history of the *miskeen*, the “pauper pilgrims” of colonial India, and their fluctuating relationship to the “pilgrim passport” that was a much-contested product of the Government of India’s complicated interventions in Hajj mobility. The presentation also analysed the way in which “modern documentary regimes were devised for populations understood to be poor and illiterate”.

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Ottoman Sultan began to tighten his hold over the Hijaz, even as Britain pressed for greater influence over the Red Sea, Singha explained. “The figure of the ‘*Hindi*’ in Ottoman domains, the pilgrim, sojourner or settler from the Indian subcontinent, began to transmute into the figure of the ‘Mohammedan British Indian subject’. But the embarrassing figure of the beggar-pilgrim also had to be accepted as part of this constituency.”

The French in Algeria, the Netherlands regime in

Java, and Russia in its Muslim provinces all adopted some form of compulsory passport or deposit system, as well as a compulsory return ticket, to regulate the masses of pilgrims. Yet till World War I, the Government of India “hung back” from these options; in 1882 it issued a pilgrim passport but “unconditionally”, i.e., without making it mandatory, or linking it to a fee, a deposit or a pre-paid return ticket.

Another aspect of pilgrim mobility that was a concern to various governments was that the stream of the faithful into the Hijaz also began to be characterised as a “particularly deadly conduit of cholera” which had to be prevented from infiltrating Europe. Indigent pilgrims, “enfeebled by deprivation, unable to provide for their return, their bodies, both in their manner of travelling and their way of dying”, were described as a “pathogenic danger” that had to be dealt with by the state.

Singha cited the explorer Richard Burton, who encountered four destitute Indians at Mecca in 1855; they were working as servants, hoping to complete their pilgrimage by begging their way to Medina:

Such, I believe, is too often the history of those wretches whom a fit of religious enthusiasm, likest to insanity, hurries away to the Holy Land. I strongly recommend the subject to... our Indian Government as one that calls loudly for their interference. No Eastern ruler parts, as we do, with his subjects; all object to lose productive power. To an ‘Empire of Opinion’, this emigration is fraught with evils. It sets forth a horde of malcontents that ripen into bigots; it teaches the foreign nations to despise our rule; and it unveils the present nakedness of once wealthy India.

The complaint that beggar pilgrims compromised imperial prestige was embedded in a colonial logic that simply treated poverty as a description, neglecting to assess the process of “pauperisation”, by which resources were stripped away from undoubtedly poor pilgrims, and stigma and incapacity attached to these figures, Singha asserted. The *miskeen* were characterised as “incapable of holding onto pieces of paper, unable to appreciate the need for passports or to distinguish between theirs and those of others, losing their return tickets or selling them and getting stranded”. Yet the way in which pilgrims, their brokers and *mutawwifs* (guides) shaped the journey “left its mark on the forms and procedures of colonial governmentality”. Till 1916, the pilgrim passport was symbolic rather than instrumental;

thereafter it began to be deployed as a means to attach the pilgrim to a pre-paid return ticket or deposit. "These two pieces of paper now constituted a composite artefact of colonial governmentality designed to ensure that poor pilgrims returned to India at their own expense."

The *miskeen* "devised" their Hajj by tapping into certain networks of Indian brokers and merchants involved in shipping, credit and commerce between Bombay and Jidda, and who competed with the landed elite in assisting pilgrims as an act of charity, Singha remarked. Merchants involved in grain and other exports to the Hijaz and the Persian Gulf diversified into pilgrim shipping, which intensified during the Hajj season. Speculators in Bombay sometimes pooled their capital to charter a ship for the season, or refurbished "old colliers or worn-out passenger vessels" to get them licensed for pilgrim traffic. "Ship-owners depended on petty brokers to sell passage for a commission. Their mode of operation was to promise cheap passage to encourage pilgrims to accumulate at Bombay, then delay embarkation and raise fares as the day of the Hajj grew closer... The Commissioner of Police in Bombay wrote of 'shoals of pilgrims' creating an uproar with regard to embarkation, and disturbances in the Muslim quarters of the city..."

This "disorder" was prevalent not only at the boarding point but also on board ship, at the quarantine station on the island of Qamaran, and around the Jidda consulate on the return journey. Pilgrim brokers in Bombay and Calcutta had links with the agents sent to India by Hijazi *mutawiffs*, and with the *maulvis* (clerics) in the districts. These connived with ship-owners to pack in more than the legally permitted number, or lower fares with some free fares. The price of the ticket varied with the date of the Hajj, location on deck and the means of the pilgrim. The disorder and intense crowding made eviction impossible, and allowed stowaways to escape detection.

The bulk of the traffic consisted of pilgrims travelling "in the lowest class", i.e., those who had no demarcated space on board ship.

According to Singha, "in the rush to the deck, the stronger and wealthier would lay their mats down over the better places while the rest overflowed onto the stairs and along the corridors or found a space on top of the latrines. Travelling in a group sheltered the old, weak and young, and gave women some form of huddled seclusion. A party might encircle itself with curtains on deck or erect a barricade with luggage; others simply had to cling to their perch." Baggage included sacks, tins

of *ghee*, stoves, and implements such as knife-grinding machines, used as a means of livelihood. Some pilgrims arranged with their *mutawiff* to save on freight charges and to evade customs duty. Others cooked and cleaned for food during the passage.

At Qamaran, when pilgrims were counted off the ship for a ten-day quarantine, their number was always found to be more than the total derived from ship-lists compiled at Bombay. Sometimes 25-45% of pilgrims pleaded an "inability" to pay the mandatory quarantine fees. "At Jidda, the indigent might beg a camel-ride to Mecca, hoping to cover the next lap to Medina on foot." In 1923, when the Sharif of Mecca prohibited pilgrims from walking to Medina, there were protests in India because undertaking the arduous trek was considered a meritorious act.

On the return journey, Singha remarked, there was less pressure. The better-off pilgrims would pay high rates to get away early; the poor would wait till fares were reduced. Cargo ships returning empty from the Red Sea and Yemen competed for this return traffic at low rates. Shipping agents would offer reduced or free passage home at the very end of the season, upholding the owner's reputation for piety. So the *miskeen* were quite ready to linger on in the Hijaz once their pilgrimage was over.

Singha then invoked the narrative of the "pauperisation" of the *miskeen*, who were cast in official pronouncements in India as "ignorant rustics, lured by wily guides, with no idea about what lay ahead and with no forethought about the means of return"; and under constant threat by touts, marauding Bedouin and extortionate Ottoman or Sharifian officials. The account usually concluded with a description of "famished and dying pilgrims stranded at Jidda, clamouring at the British consulate for a free passage home". The consulate claimed that it was under no international obligation to repatriate the destitute but would use its "good offices" to direct charity towards paying for the repatriation of the *miskeen*.

The Government of India itself spent very little in this regard, despite its lamentation about the suffering of the *miskeen*. But it enacted legislation to "improve the journey", which raised the cost of the fare and eliminated smaller craft. For instance, "to protect the ignorant and poor against rapacious touts", the Pilgrim Protection Act (Bombay Act II of 1883) stipulated that brokers had to get a licence from the Bombay Police Commissioner. However, it also limited the number of pilgrims per ship. The Native

Passenger Ships Act (Act X of 1887) declared that passenger ships to any Red Sea port had to be steam-propelled, and have on board a medical officer if there were over one hundred passengers. The only permitted ports for pilgrim traffic were Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta. Cargo ships began to be excluded, enabling pilgrim brokers and shipping agents to raise and manipulate the return fare.

"Therefore, pilgrims forced to wait for lower fares became destitute," Singha declared.

One consequence of the "beggar influx" was that it catalysed the production of state documents and statistics relating to the Hajj and the journey to the Hijaz. The percentage of pilgrims who could not pay the quarantine fees at Qamaran, or the 8 piastres for the *tezkira marur* (a permit for the journey to Mecca) at Jidda were recorded and cited as evidence of the pauper status of the *miskeen* at the outset of their journey. In 1911, when the Sultan insisted on a compulsory passport for pilgrims, he also authorised the Turkish consul to waive the visa fee for 10% of pilgrims, stamping the word '*miskeen*' on their passports if they produced a certificate of indigency. From 1925 onwards, ships maintained a list of "Government destitutes" – pilgrims repatriated at state expense – to discourage them from going on Hajj again.

The colonial administration, however, persistently refused to take direct measures to stem the "pauper" outflow.

"From the 1870s, British and Indian officials at the Jidda consulate had pressed the Government of India to introduce a compulsory passport, and to link it to a means test or pre-paid deposit to check the 'pauper influx'... To press their case, they extolled the other potential uses of a compulsory passport:

- > it would provide documentary proof of 'British nationality
- > it would function as a statistical instrument to monitor the overloading of pilgrim ships
- > it would serve as a mode of political surveillance

"In 1880, when the Ottoman authorities demanded that pilgrims have passports, the British consul wanted to make each pilgrim deposit Rs 40 for the return journey," Singha pointed out. "His reasoning was that the Turks would then insist on the destitute pilgrims, now recognised as accredited British subjects via their

passports, be taken off Turkish soil. In addition, compulsory passports would also permit foreign consuls, barred as non-Muslims from travelling to Mecca and Medina, to penetrate 'the barrier of fanaticism' and track the fate of their pilgrim contingents..."

The speaker described how Surgeon Abdur Razzack, the first Indian vice-consul appointed at Jidda to oversee the pilgrim traffic, also had concrete suggestions in this regard. For instance, if ship-owners issued a ticket only on the production of a passport and the passport number was added to the ticket, it would put the government in a position "to know with something like exactness how many of its Muhammadan subjects leave India every year, how many return and the number of those who do not, besides which Government will be able to keep a check on the movements of those who are suspected or disaffected".

In addition, if pilgrims had a passport, they could produce it if mistreated by local authorities, and thus seek assistance as British subjects.

The next consul, Moncrief, was less interested in benefiting the pilgrims, but astutely suggested that the Government of India issue passports "unconditionally", i.e., freely and without any fee or deposit, because of "the advantage to be gained by casting the entire odium of passport regulations on the Turks".

However, a year after the Ottoman order was issued, it was revoked – the authorities stopped inspecting passports, and pilgrims without one were not turned away. The logic was not so much about passports protecting their holders who would qualify as foreign subjects, but the fact that the Sultan's status as Caliph, protector of the faithful and patron of Mecca and Medina, made it difficult for him to turn pilgrims away once they had landed.

"In a strange parallax, therefore, the Ottoman government stopped checking Indian pilgrims for a passport but the Government of India went on issuing these; it encouraged pilgrims to take a passport but did not prevent them from leaving without it," Singha reiterated. "According to the official Pilgrim Manual, 'pilgrims are warned that it is desirable to supply themselves with a passport'; but they were informed that it was not compulsory to take one.

"The Government of India's pilgrim passport had dubious value because it was not compulsory. Pilgrims themselves had no incentive to take a passport; about one-tenth of the 'pauper Hajjis'

embarked without it. Many who had one did not register it with the British consulate on their arrival at Jidda, or retain it thereafter." Monitoring numbers was more reliably done via ship-lists, but here too there were discrepancies because of overloading of passenger ships; and many pilgrims preferring lower fares took cargo ships to the Persian Gulf and then the overland route to Mecca.

In addition, the "statistical grasp" over pilgrim traffic, via ship-lists and tickets, remained very loose for the return journey – there was a 33% discrepancy between the numbers of outgoing and returning pilgrims," Singha pointed out. The Government of India contended that they might have died of cholera not carried by them but contracted in the Hijaz; the Jidda consulate claimed that destitute pilgrims had a specially high mortality rate and thus should not be allowed to make the journey; Muslim associations claimed that many pilgrims settled permanently in the Hijaz, or returned home by the overland route or by uncertified ships.

The pilgrim passport was also not of much use with regard to the surveillance of individual "malcontents". The Muslim Protector of Pilgrims, working under Bombay's Commissioner of Police, was crucially dependent on brokers to distribute passports, get pilgrims vaccinated and line them up for medical inspection and embarkation. "Passports were issued in a great rush and without any concern to verify individual particulars," Singha stated. "The surveillance of individuals, as distinct from general intelligence-gathering, seems to have emerged as a concern only with the declaration of war with Turkey in November 1914, and more so with the Khilafat movement in India to defend the Sultan-Caliph's sovereignty over the holy places of Islam."

The speaker clarified that the pilgrim passport was a "collective document", one that included the holder, spouse, children, relatives and domestic servants; "this must have compromised its surveillance value". Women and children were not even entered by name on the passport, but only as a number in the group. Visa fees introduced by the Ottoman authorities in 1911 were charged only for the holder and not the group.

Nor was the pilgrim passport a very definitive document of British nationality – places of origin remained nebulous; pilgrims did not offer their passports at Jidda, nor did the officials there insist on the documents. The Ottoman governor and the Sharif of Mecca, on the other hand, wanted to "sharpen the line" of nationality in relation to "key

offices" in the Hijaz, and to prevent wealthy Indians from assuming "too conspicuous" a civic role...

"...Since the last year or two, however, the Grand Shereef has gradually excluded all registered British subjects by declining to re-appoint them unless they become Turkish subjects," according to Alban, the consul in Jidda.

At the other end of the scale, "stranded paupers" indifferent to the necessity of a passport continued to be a central issue in the Government of India's efforts to present itself as a "modernising regime", capable of sending out subjects bearing documents of identity and nationality, counted onto ships which were licenced for the pilgrim trade and monitored for contagious disease, Singha explained. However, in relation to Muslim populations within and around India, the "unconditional" passport was supposed to communicate "a different kind of symbolic message – not one about regulation, but about protection, assistance and religious liberty".

This freedom was claimed also by Muslims across the North-West Frontier; pilgrims from Afghanistan and Chinese and Russian Turkestan who, via Kashgar, Yarkhand and Ladakh, began to reach Bombay and Karachi in order to take a steamer to the Hijaz. In 1881, when the Government of India inaugurated its "unconditional" pilgrim passport, it also authorised Bombay's Commissioner of Police to issue informal passes to "alien" pilgrims, who had actually proved to be "quiet and orderly" in their passage through British territory.

This was an interesting contrast to the images of the "aggressive Kabuli, the *badmaash* (gangster) Pathan and the fanatic frontier *maulvi* (cleric)" that had come to populate the colonial imagination after the 1878-79 Afghan War, Singha commented. "In the instance of the pilgrim passport, the Foreign Department weighed the advantage of 'interchange of information and free intercourse' against the danger of admitting 'fanatics, spies and sedition-mongers', and decided it would be 'more in accordance with English habits and principles' to grant this facility to trans-frontier sojourners... The idea perhaps was to impress these groups with the contrast between their 'backward' politics and a government capable of providing the documentation, medical inspection and licenced vessels they needed to fulfill their religious obligations."

Sending travellers to the Hijaz with documents that established them as "British subjects, residents of India" put the state in a perplexing

dilemma, Singha asserted. "Within India, the government was very reluctant to recognise any obligation for poor relief except in dire famine. But it found itself under pressure to arrange for the repatriation of the *miskeen*." The Ottoman government was writing with increased frequency to the Foreign Office about how the Indian government was allowing the "scourge of mendicancy" to overflow into Ottoman Arabia. The Indian vice-consul (*Hajj Report*, 1911-12) advocated the need to check the arrival of Indians

...in such circumstances and under such conditions as are a disgrace to Islam as well as to the British community... It is a disgrace also to the fair name of the British government, that long after the Javanese and other pilgrims have left this country, British Indians may be seen mere disease-stricken skeletons, lying about in the streets of Jeddah, begging their bread and filling the town with their ordure and their microbes, and the Governor should have occasion to write to the consulate to ask it to remove their outcasts...

"One could collect a variety of such discourses and conclude that they add up to a familiar episteme in which colonial rule is confirmed as a civilising dispensation, struggling to coax bigoted and backward subjects into the modern era," Singha argued.

She explained that at the 1894 Paris International Sanitary Conference, Britain signed a convention agreeing to disinfection and medical inspection of pilgrims before embarkation, and more stringent standards for pilgrim ships. The Government of India protested that these shipping norms were formulated "too much from an European perspective", disregarding its own experience with "Asiatic passenger traffic", and ignoring its political compulsions. However, under pressure from the India Office it was obliged to draft a distinct Pilgrim Shipping Bill (rather than amending the general Indian Merchants Shipping Act), following the terms of the convention.

In place of the previous criteria of 9 superficial feet per pilgrim on board ship, the convention prescribed 21 feet, exceeding the norm for British troopships. The Indian Pilgrim Ship Act raised the criteria, but only to 16 feet. In calculating per capita space, children below 12 years were now supposed to be counted as adults; official logic stated that it was "the promiscuous way in which Indian families go on pilgrimage that causes much of the distress and mortality". Sanitary fees were now included in the cost of the ticket, which

meant that pilgrims would not be able to negotiate exemptions at Qamaran. There were protests that a "price barrier was being erected against the Hajj", and that medical examination might be used to disqualify the very infirm, not just people suffering from contagious diseases.

The formulation of a special enactment also encouraged Muslim spokesmen to demand "a more pious journey", i.e., that only Muslims be appointed as doctors or cooks, and that only a female doctor be employed for the medical examination for women, out of respect for the custom of *purdah* (veiling/segregation).

Singha posited that public responses to the Bill indicated "a distinct figure" separating out from the "pilgrim mass" – that of the "solvent consumer" demanding value for money, separate embarkation and quarantine procedures, and arrangements to ensure that 'respectability' was not compromised.

Another significant development was Turner Morrison and Company, a British managing agency, taking over the Bombay Persia Steam Navigation Company in 1913 and offering to introduce compulsory return tickets if given a monopoly of the Hajj traffic. The Bombay government pressed the Government of India to accept Turner Morrison's offer, while Muslim ship-owners and brokers realised that "with or without official monopoly, compulsory pre-paid tickets would edge them out", and curtail rate wars that enabled large numbers of poor pilgrims to pay their way home. Sensing this opposition, the Government of India insisted on a wider consultation with Muslim public opinion; and the finding was that educated Muslims united with the *ulema* (religious fraternity) in protesting this move to price out the "pauper Hajji".

The logic of the Karachi Hajj Committee, for instance, was that the masses believed that the sufferings of the journey should be lightly borne, a belief cherished by all pious Muslims. The Muslim League indicted the proposal as one that allowed the government to divest itself of all responsibility. Other critics of the compulsory return ticket drew upon imperial rhetoric about the ideal of free trade and the religious liberty enjoyed by British subjects in contrast to those ruled by "continental despotisms". The Anjuman-e-Islam, Bombay, declared that the British government was sensitive to the "happiness of the Mahomedan pilgrims... It is the pride of the Indian Muslims alone that they are contented and happy under a Christian government." Muslim spokesmen also argued that the compulsory return ticket would

“disorient the frame of mind appropriate for the Hajj” – pilgrims would experience anxiety about making it back within a certain time, and if they felt inspired to stay on for the next Hajj or travel to other holy places, they would not be able to do so. Some Muslim activists rejected all state intervention as an encroachment on “religious liberty”, and challenged the characterisation of the Muslim community as helpless or indifferent, insisting that Muslim elites and shippers did assist pilgrims as an act of charity. Other spokesmen pointed out that if special trains were organised to pilgrim sites within India, and public revenues dedicated to their assistance, the government also had an obligation to help Hajjis through fare subsidies.

Singha asserted that these arguments heightened the prevalent official concern that poor pilgrims were coming to expect a free return from the Hijaz “as a matter of right”. However, acknowledging the intensity of the opposition to the compulsory pre-paid return ticket, the Government of India fell back on the indirect strategy of “raising the bar” for pilgrim ships. It also encouraged the formation of provincial Hajj committees, and offered to match donations to a repatriation fund.

The declaration of war with Turkey in November 1914, and the British navy’s subsequent blockade of Ottoman ports, did not prevent a few thousand pilgrims from leaving Bombay for the Hajj. In June 1916, the Sharif of Mecca, with British backing, declared his independence from Ottoman rule; and the Government of India “felt it was imperative now to show that change of regime had not affected access to the Hijaz”. The government hired Turner Morrison, and the firm got its steamships released from war use and instead put to carrying valuable foodstuffs to Jidda. Turner Morrison’s Mogul Line refused to issue single tickets except in special cases, so return tickets became practically compulsory during the war. The state-subsidised round-trip ticket was priced at Rs 125.

“The pilgrim passport began to assume a new importance as a record of individual particulars tying the individual pilgrim to his or her return ticket, and check illegal transfer, whether by theft or illegal sale,” Singha explained. “The passport was also supposed to facilitate the issue of an emergency pass if a ticket was lost, and to detect misuse of the originals. However, the pre-paid return ticket put pilgrims in the hands of shipping companies, who would delay arrival at Jidda, or give out-of-turn embarkation to new customers, often stranding those who had already paid.

In 1925, the Imperial Legislative Council accepted amendments to the Indian Merchant Shipping Act which compelled “pilgrims travelling in the lowest class” to produce a return ticket or make a deposit; those travelling in first or second class were exempted. S.D. Butler, the official introducing the bill, declared that by allowing “beggars” abroad, India was undermining national prestige. Some Muslim politicians supported the bill, saying it was directed only against the “professional mendicant” and not the “bona fide Hajji”. They also insisted that pilgrims be allowed to choose between a return ticket or a deposit, and that they could be permitted to embark on a single journey ticket if they gave an oath/declaration that they intended to stay for three or more years in the Hijaz.

“Through rules framed under this amendment to the shipping act, the pilgrim passport became virtually compulsory,” Singha pointed out. “But it was designated a ‘pass’, not a ‘passport’, perhaps to demarcate the limited arc of transnational mobility allowed to the poor:

Every intending pilgrim shall obtain... a pilgrim pass and present it for registration to the authorities appointed by the local governments at the port of embarkation.

No ticket shall be issued to a pilgrim who does not produce his pilgrim pass duly registered.

However, pilgrims performing the Hajj in a group could still enter on a collective pass.

Singha explained the “one crucial reason” why the pilgrim pass was still not integrated with the general British Indian passport. From 1912, and more so during the war, “the official position which crystallised was that the British Indian passport was a document meant only for Indians ‘of means and respectability’, whereas the condition linked to a pilgrim passport/pass was simply the sum of money which would ensure his/her return. At this time, the Government of India was also taking steps to improve the descriptive details on its general passport because of reports from Russian Central Asia about trafficking in this document. The applicant had to persuade officials that he/she was a ‘fit and proper person’ to receive a passport. Nationality status as ‘British subjects, natives of India’ did not automatically entitle someone to a passport...

“In other words, a passport was not a right but a privilege...”

The speaker noted that to discourage illegal transfer, the new passport rules of 1912 prescribed “a more elaborative descriptive roll”. Earlier, the general passport listed the holder’s name, father’s name, residence, profession and age. Now it also had to note “any real distinctive marks”, height, colour of eyes and hair, and the holder’s signature or thumbprint. Individual particulars on the pilgrim passport noted father’s name, residence, occupation, age, distinctive marks, and also “names and places of residence of nearest relations in India”. It had no demarcated space for the signature or thumbprint of the bearer.

Singha linked this to the Pilgrim Ship rules of 1897 and 1911 that required the shipping company to inscribe the holder’s name, father’s name and place of residence on the ticket, which was designated non-transferrable. The aim was to monitor against overloading, stowaways and the evasion of stamp duty; as well as to establish property right in case of loss, theft or death. “The introduction of pre-paid return tickets and deposit-stamped passports in the 1920s would reinforce this overlap of identity details between ticket and pilgrim passport.”

The question of standardising the pilgrim passport to the general passport was raised again during the war; in 1916, after the declaration of war on Turkey, the Government of India stripped the passport form of all reference to Turkish rules and regulations. In the same year, the general British Indian passport was redesigned to conform to wartime changes introduced to the British passport. “What emerged was the *book* form of the passport with its special paper, compulsory photograph, detailed descriptive roll and signature of the holder, a model which came to be referred to as the ‘international form’. In 1917 this document was made compulsory for entry and exit by sea, but pilgrims were exempted, and the question of standardising the pilgrim passport was postponed till after the war.”

In 1919, the Bombay government convened a committee to discuss changes in the pilgrim passport. It was decided not to introduce a compulsory photograph, taking into account that Muslims might object to carrying a representation of the human form on a religious journey. A photograph was now compulsory for the general passport, but women observing *pardah*, Hindu and Muslim, could give their thumbprint as a substitute. Eventually the committee decided against thumbprints as well, in case people complained that “Hajjis were being treated like convicts”. There was no discussion about the

value of signatures on pilgrim passports, “an indication of the degree to which this traffic was conceptualised as largely one of the poor and the illiterate”.

In 1926, the British consul at Jidda characterised the pilgrim passport as “antiquated and obsolete”, because of the “nervous refusal” of the Government of India to use a photograph or thumbprint as identification. He argued that the photograph would assist in detecting theft or illegal sale of pre-paid return tickets, and would also allow illiterate pilgrims to distinguish their own pass; he also wanted to permit only deposit-stamped passports, not pre-paid return tickets, as the latter were easier to manipulate and sell.

According to Singha, for Muslim representatives in the legislative councils and the vernacular press, “the most obsolete feature” of pilgrim traffic was the state’s insistence on [quarantine](#) measures that were not applied to passengers on liners going along the same routes to Europe. They also forcefully objected to the rough treatment given to pilgrims, associated with “ignorance and disorder”, on embarkation. “Officials did not only rely on documentary inspection – the pilgrim’s body also had to be marked as one made safe for travel.” The “pauper Hajjis” were lined up; medical officers went around, feeling the forehead and body for temperature; pilgrims that were passed had to have their breasts and the backs of their hands stamped with a rubber stamp – “like animals”, according to a member of the Viceroy’s legislative council who was deeply disturbed at the sight. The regional language press also complained about Hajjis being handled “like a flock of sheep and goats”.

This practice continued into the 1920s; in 1926, the Calcutta pilgrim department stated that it had substituted a stamp on the passage ticket for the stamp on the body, and that the new method was “satisfactory and expeditious”. The pilgrim department at Bombay, however, declared that an attempt to use a police cordon to separate pilgrims “passed” for embarkation had “proved totally impracticable”, and that the system of distribution of passes had also broken down. And at Jidda, the British consulate, “struggling to handle the increased documentary complexity created by the regime of conditional mobility”, turned to the ever-obliging *mutawwifs* to collect and redistribute deposit-stamped pilgrim passes and tickets, “despite complaints that they misused this mediation”.

Discourses about the *miskeen* now took on a

particular resonance, according to Singha. The obdurate figure of the “beggar pilgrim” seemed to undermine all the mandatory state procedures of identification, inspection and permission. The “pauper Hajji” was characterised as unable to deal with tickets and travel documents – an image invoked for different agendas. In 1911, the Secretary of State for India appealed to the Turkish government not to insist on a compulsory passport, since Indian pilgrims “would not be able to understand the need for them”. Educated Muslims opposing compulsory return tickets proclaimed that “illiterate Bokharis and Bengalis” would lose them. It was also argued that the special injunction/obligation of *ihrām*, to wear only two unstitched pieces of cloth while on pilgrimage, made it difficult to preserve return tickets.

“Pilgrims themselves were often quite willing to project themselves as ignorant and easily duped, as an explanation for their being stranded, why they had ‘lost’ their pre-paid tickets, or were detected with someone else’s deposit-stamped passport,” Singha concluded. Within the contending geographies of colonial dominions, British India was proclaimed by its rulers to be the “largest Mohammedan empire” in the world; and rivalry with the Sultan-Caliph and with other European powers “kept the poor pilgrim in the flow of traffic along the ‘naval high street of empire’ for a very long time. In the current of ‘high politics’, a very unlikely protagonist kept bobbing into sight – the disorderly, suffering and occasionally devious *miskeen*.”

### **Passports, Literacy, Phantasm: The States of Writing Nation**

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**Where is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is Indian? Who is Pakistani? Instead of taking these questions as self-evident, we are better advised to take all the aporias of national belonging and bounding nation states as a problem of statecraft and historiography.**

Vazira Zamindar examined the “contingent power” of the passport as a document “made to stand between a state and an individual” in the historically uncertain and formative conditions of the Partition of India in 1947. The subject of the presentation appears in her forthcoming book *The Long Partition: Making New Nations in Divided South Asia*, which places the events of Partition – the genocidal violence in large parts of north

India, as well as an “unprecedented displacement” of over 15 million people across the newly carved Indo-Pakistan borders, east and west – as one facet of what she argues was an extended period that included considerable bureaucratic intervention and aggression, to consciously produce “national difference” in the midst of this anarchy.

The speaker focused on a particular case study, of over 500 hundred illiterate coal miners in Bihar who had obtained Pakistani passports at the time these were introduced post-Partition, but without the appropriate visas, in order to continue working in the mines; residents of Bihar for generations, they had no intention of leaving their homes and their livelihood.

The coal mining labour force worked in the Damodar river valley which stretches across Bihar and Bengal; approximately 46% of India’s coal deposits are located here. Some of the mines have been in operation since 1815. The miners were from lower-caste peasant, artisan and tribal groups. Most undertook seasonal and short-distance migrations in relation to their work. Unlike factory labour, coal miners were largely local – they came from areas surrounding the mines, and from neighbouring districts. They retained strong ties to their originary villages, returning home for religious rituals, in the marriage season, and during harvests. From 1929, women were no longer allowed to work in the mines; they stayed in their villages with their families and worked the land; thus the link between the miners and their homes remained strong, within the larger dynamic of migration. A 1944 Labour Investigation Committee considered this population “close to the soil”, and not a “settled, full-time labour force”.

“In 1954, a trail of official correspondence began over this case, involving the provincial government of Bihar and several ministries at the centre, trying to decide how to deal with the coal miners. The passport had become a requirement for travel between India and Pakistan in 1952, and the coal miners were technically ‘citizens’ of the new nation – but their case disrupted the bureaucratic fictions of national inscription,” Zamindar explained. “Most studies of the region take 1947 as a threshold, after which ‘India’, ‘Pakistan’, and their severed histories become simply a given. But the narratives of genocide and displacement, refugee rehabilitation and resettlement, migration and the making of citizens/claims to citizenship, are all mutually constituting parts of a single history...”

“Where is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is Indian? Who is Pakistani?”

Zamindar suggested that instead of taking these questions as self-evident, we are better advised to take “all the aporias of national belonging and bounding nation states” as a problem of statecraft and historiography.

“When the Bihar government wrote to the Ministry of Home Affairs at the centre, asking what to do with these ‘illiterate’ coal miners who had been ‘advised’ to take out Pakistani passports, the provincial government had already marked this group as one category of a larger problem – namely, an array of Pakistani ‘nationals’ who had thrown away, concealed or not yet acquired Pakistani passports,” Zamindar reiterated. These “erstwhile holders of a Pakistani passport” stayed on with expired visas and without visas, as well as without passports altogether. The Bihar government was powerless, as it lacked any formal mechanism by way of which these non-“nationals” could be “removed” from the Indian “nation”.

How did these coal miners, identified as “close to the soil”, become Pakistani “nationals”? What constituted the mandated passport?

The speaker explained that the Partition Council, which oversaw the administrative division of British India prior to the transfer of power, actually went so far as to amend British Indian passport regulations so that there would be no restrictions on movement between “India” and “Pakistan”. Yet the Indian government introduced restrictions on movement across the western border, between India and West Pakistan, in order to stem the massive influx of Muslim refugees who were attempting to return to their homes in north India, following the cessation of Partition violence that had caused them to flee. These restrictions did not require passports, but “a rather complex technology of a permit system” designed to control refugee flow. The passport system was formally instituted in 1952 at the Pakistani government’s insistence, in order to regulate movement across the western and eastern borders between India and the divided entity of Pakistan, and to control the numbers of Muslim refugees from India.

“A key feature of the permit system had been that it did not mark individuals in terms of nationality, for it was a system that had been introduced prior to the formulation of citizenship laws by both states,” Zamindar clarified. “With the insistence on passports for travel within the region, a new order

of identification was established, with the intent to secure a relationship between individuals and states. From the Pakistani government’s point of view, Muslims moving from India to Pakistan would be forced to carry Indian passports, and thus be regarded as Indian ‘citizens’, thus limiting the claims to Pakistani nationality to Muslims of the region...”

By thus producing two clearly bounded states, the regulation was aimed at bringing closure to Partition’s momentous, repeated and traumatic displacements.

“However, if in front of a passport stood a single individual, and behind it a single issuing state that gave the passport its documentary authority and its national inscription, that relationship was both a contingent one and a feat of imagination,” Zamindar added. The Bihar government’s query about how to deal with illiterate ‘Pakistani nationals’ claiming India as home opens this relationship to scrutiny. “The coal miners who had been ‘advised’ to obtain Pakistani passports, and ‘Pakistani nationals’ who had thrown away their passports were part of a shared problem. The presence and absence of the document served to produce a spectre, a phantasm, between an individual and the state. There is a vast amount of archival material in the form of official files and correspondence, on the subject of ‘controlling the entry of Pakistani nationals’, and of ‘regularising the stay in India of Pakistani nationals’ – these writings are attempts to substantiate the phantasmic passport.”

These files passed from central ministry to central ministry – home affairs, law, labour, external affairs – “accumulating bureaucratic writing and differences of opinion”. According to the speaker, this led to the formation of three prevalent perspectives:

> *Legal*: this asserted that the coal miners, because of their Pakistani passports, were “aliens” without valid visas, and therefore liable to be deported.

> *National*: this asserted that because of “a policy of nationalisation of our industries”, it was preferred that non-nationals leave India, and Indian nationals be recruited in their place. But the logic grew more tortuous as officials drew upon a range of information that was converted into governmental forms of writing. Had the coal miners acquired their passports “by mistake”? Were they duped? Had they “voluntarily declared themselves” to be Pakistani nationals, and on this basis obtained Pakistani passports? Could

illiterate people be held accountable for written documents that they could not read or sign? Being illiterate, were they aware of the implications of their actions regarding the passport?

> *Humanitarian*: this emerged from the medley of such questions infiltrating – and producing – state discourse; it asserted that each case should be reviewed “individually on merit”. If the state government found that a “particular Pakistani national” has made India his home and “has no connection whatsoever with Pakistan”, and has taken a Pakistani passport “by mistake”, then he “may be allowed to stay in India even without a visa until the Citizenship Law is passed, when their claim for Indian citizenship will have to be considered”. However, in the case of other persons “who have some connections with Pakistan, they should be asked to leave India”.

The humanitarian discourse accepted that these “Pakistani nationals” were “really just Muslims who lived in India”, and that the passports were “spectral markers of nation”, Zamindar remarked. Thus, while the passport was a contingent mechanism, “a more substantive basis” for establishing identity/citizenship/nationality lay in whether these “nationals” had relatives who had left for Pakistan, or lived in regions that now were part of Pakistan.

However, “asking” such “nationals” to leave India was not a simple matter, and was countered with a different “humanitarian discourse” from the Pakistani government. A huge volume of correspondence concerning the affiliation of those (non)citizens possessing “phantasmic” identity documents proliferated between the two states over the next few years, beginning with the case of the coal miners and then pushing past this specificity to include “those presumed to be Pakistani nationals without Pakistani passports”.

For instance, responding to the suggested ‘removal’ of the coal miners who had been ‘advised’ to obtain Pakistani passports, on 7 September 1957 the Andhra Pradesh High Court sent a statement to the Pakistani High Commissioner, declaring that the passport was not an identification of citizenship but a mere travel document. The division bench had ruled that a passport was not the basis on which the fact of citizenship could be established, but that it only embodied a request to another government to allow the bearer free passage and give him every assistance and protection. “A passport issued by a government to a citizen does not make it a document of title or a piece of evidence

in a court of law to establish that fact. It is only a convenient link in the chain of international intercourse...”

Or, in another typical instance, the logic outlined in the Pakistani High Commissioner’s 1959 note to the Indian government:

I feel that a certain amount of confusion and misunderstanding in dealing with this problem has arisen on account of the lack of precision in the language used in conversation and letters, which has been somewhat loose on both sides hitherto. This was natural, as the approach to the problem was based on humanitarian grounds rather than of law or politics... The question, therefore, now is as to who is a Pakistani citizen.

There are approximately 3.5 crore of Muslims in India and they are Indian citizens under the law of this country. If any one of them or even any Hindu in India is labelled as a Pakistani and asked to produce documents by the Indian authorities, that would not mean we can accept him as such. A person has to be qualified within the meaning of the Pakistan Citizenship Act, before we can give him travel documents or permit him to cross the border.

I will continue to represent the cases of such Pakistani citizens about whose nationality there is no doubt, to you; but they should not be confused with the Muslim citizens of India or such others who cannot produce any evidence sufficient in the opinion of Indian authorities to prove their Indian citizenship.

A number of legislations followed to make Indian and Pakistani passports documents that would invest the bearer with citizenship; the bureaucracy was authorised, above the courts, to assess claims of citizenship and nationality by those “Muslims” and “Pakistani nationals” of doubtful credibility.

“If the passport has documentary power, it is a historically contingent one,” Zamindar concluded. “It is a particular form of governmental writing within a larger corpus of bureaucratic forms of national inscription. Its phantasmic essence is important in the context of both its power as well as its unsettled character, as it has been made to stand between individuals and states.”

Shahid Amin initiated the discussion following the presentations, asking Zamindar what policy applied in the case of the first Pakistani High Commissioner to India, who was born in Gorakhpur and retained his Indian passport for a long time. Amin also asked what laws the police applied in the case of abducted women on both sides of the new frontier. "When you go from India to retrieve Hindu women abducted into Pakistan, and want to bring them back into India as they are Hindu – and you work out a day of conception as a benchmark, if there are children – would these people also require a passport? This operation of retrieval carries on till 1955-56 and is a major national issue: the return of 'our' women to 'us' is the return of honour, and not a *mohtaj* (dependency)..."

Zamindar clarified that the passports were introduced in 1952, "so obviously, people were moving without them". It was not a requirement, and citizenship laws were formulated only in the 1950s. Prior to this, the permit system introduced in 1948 was an "ad hoc governmental form of restricting movement", and was only instituted on the western border – it was a sheaf of paper, with several pages; it didn't have a lifetime like a passport, but was tied to a particular journey. Before permits became mandatory, people were moving across regions "without knowing where they were going to settle, for all kinds of significant reasons..."

"For instance, people from the Muslim refugee camp in Delhi's Purana Quila, the most massive of the local camps, left for Pakistan but began returning in large numbers in 1948. This created a lot of governmental anxiety. Many reports were written about the influx."

According to Zamindar, at the time of Partition, government employees were given an option of choosing to work either for India or for Pakistan. "Those who stayed undecided were given the status of 'provisional optee'. Government records show that 37,000 people working on either side 'changed their minds' after 1947. A lot of debate followed, while policy was worked out for Muslim employees who opted to stay and work for the government of India." In Delhi through the 1940s and '50s, all the ministries followed a system of requiring each Muslim employee on the state rolls – from clerks to medical officers to sweepers – to report any visit to Pakistan, and relatives in Pakistan, and any visits by relatives from Pakistan.

"All these governmental forms of documentation emerge, and are filed in the state archives; they

are a substantial record of the indecision and uncertainty of the times," Zamindar asserted.

The speaker pointed out that for ordinary people, the question of whether they wanted to go to Pakistan or not, and whether it was their "intended home" or not, became the centre of a dispute; this was visible in all the court cases that emerged post-permit/post-1948.

Once the permit system came into place, people who overstayed their temporary permits – most Muslims returned "home" on these, then threw the paper away and stayed on to live in the *mohallas* (localities) where they had always lived – were taken to court. "That's when their intention – what they were thinking of when they opted to go to Pakistan – comes into play, and when recorded, becomes another form of debate and questioning."

Zamindar added that in the case of abducted women, passports were not an issue because the recovery process stopped in 1954. "There were no passports at that time. They began to be initiated in 1952, but were not instituted till 1954, and even later on the eastern border. There was a separate programme for the recovery of abducted women. Broadly speaking, Punjab was not the only place that experienced that scale of violence, and the abduction of women as a central part of that violence. However, Punjab was treated quite exceptionally in the interstate negotiations. A complete transfer of populations was agreed upon, but this was not worked out for other regions."

U. Kalpagam asked Singha to what extent she agreed that the "pauper Hajji characterisation" in Indian governmentality had "fed into" the kind of simmering majority/minority politics prevalent today. "A lot of people are angry that the government subsidises Hajj travel, for instance..."

Singha acknowledged that this "controversy" was in her mind during the research/writing of her paper. "I found that a considerable amount of work had been done on the 'medical management' of pilgrims, but their indigency was taken for granted." The bulk of pilgrims were undoubtedly poor, but pauperisation was "a process, institutional and discursive, for casting stigma and incapacity on a population that actually showed remarkable ingenuity and resolution and ability" to tap into a variety of commercial and charitable networks linking western India and the Hijaz.

"There was a difference between being poor and being pauperised," Singha reiterated. "We know

that by 1911-12, it was being discussed in terms of the government's duties towards its subjects, and this continues today. The argument is that if the state is drawing on public revenues to pay for sanitation at Hindu sacred sites such as Hardwar and at the Kumbh Mela, can it simply disown responsibility if the pilgrim is crossing borders?"

Issues of the "welfare" and "cultural entitlement" of the poor thus become communitarian. "At every point, whenever there is a new restriction and one mode of travel is being made difficult for the poor pilgrim, the government provides a subsidy," according to the speaker. Just as historically, when the colonial administration assisted Turner Morrison to a position of dominance through the pre-paid round-trip ticket becoming compulsory, the multiple needs of the 'pauper Hajji' became an increasingly contentious public issue, with pressure from the Muslim elite to not abandon the *miskeen*...

"Pilgrims were looked on a 'dirty', 'filthy' traffic by health officers in Bombay – and even today, airline employees tend to denigrate Hajj pilgrims in a like manner," Singha concluded.

## Panel 2: Monitoring Surveillance

Moderator: Tapio Mäkelä  
*Media Artist/Researcher, Helsinki*

### Exposure: Surveillance and the Political Economy of Interiority

Kirstie Ball  
*Senior Lecturer in Organisation Studies, Open University Business School, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes*

**Surveillance studies seem to assume decreased choice and consent – but is this true? Is 'exposure' always a technological inevitability, or is it more deeply rooted, within anxieties, vulnerabilities, desires and thrills?**

**Kirstie Ball** began her presentation with the assertion that surveillance changes states and status, "it bestows identities, alters power relations, and enmeshes dispersed arrays of individuals, organisations, governments and technologies". The range of states can be examined with the help of "a few crude binaries": marked/unmarked; identified/anonymous; authorised/unauthorised; included/excluded;

individuated /grouped...

"However, binaries are always problematic, and these are no exception," Ball added. "They assume that there is some sanctified private space, place or time which is outside of or beyond surveillance..."

According to the speaker, her native country of Britain practiced capturing, recording and analysing data about almost every facet of modern life; this meant that it was very difficult to find a place beyond surveillance. "Like many British citizens, I am aware that my data, particularly my body data, are a highly sought-after economic commodity, and are of inherent value to the capitalist military-industrial-entertainment complex. My experience of surveillance rarely includes the 'outside'; is hence relativised in terms of its intensity according to who I am, where I am, what I am doing."

Ball contrasted this with the experience of citizens in developing countries, where experiences of surveillance "might be dispersed within long periods of surveillance-free life". She suggested that the "anonymity and impersonality" of new urbanisms found in the developing world contrast sharply with the "mass customised and personalised brandscapes" of contemporary Britain.

The speaker introduced the concept of "exposure", by which the range of surveillance experiences in the developed and developing world could be understood. It is often tempting to speak of surveillance in terms of systems, technologies, organisations and governments. However, since the activities, thoughts and bodily content of individuals are the object of surveillance, it is also critical to recognise that individuals make investments in surveillance; and it is necessary to study how they construct their experiences, and how social structure is enacted by surveillance.

The speaker argued for a "non-reductive, qualitative approach" to the study of exposure, using the "bounded surveillance scenarios" of the call centre and the reality TV show to demonstrate that "the interiority of the surveilled is of the greatest value. The cores of these subjects are exposed, captured and consumed; and the subjects themselves invest in their exposure, highlighting the desires as well as the anxieties and vulnerabilities associated with surveillance."

Referencing her previous study of exposure in surveillance systems to theoretical work on the sociology of the body, Ball focused on the

interiority of the body and its relationship with the social world. She invoked the concept of “corporeal schema”, where the body’s adaptation of its responses/reactions to the social world is broken down “into a series of flows, which crystallise in a data body, or digital persona”, in surveillance systems; this is then used to reposition the corporeal body at the point of authentication.

The speaker drew upon feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz’s use of the Möbius strip as a metaphor for the body in society; the strip “connects the inner and outer surfaces of the body in a continuous oscillating loop”.

Ball clarified that when she referred to body interiority, she meant the embodied experience of the subject, “including affect, psychodynamic and visceral”; body interiority involved the “representation of bodily content and subjective experience as corporally expressed within surveillance systems”.

The speaker pointed out that Michel Foucault in his study *Discipline and Punish* claimed “our society is one... of surveillance, under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth”; he also talks, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews*, of “circuits of profit”.

“My argument is that with the rise of biometrics, surveillance-based work and consumer cultures, at certain points this gap between inner and outer becomes closed or frozen,” Ball asserted. “This is because in some settings the body interior is what is considered of value, authentic and worthy of capture. Hence the subject of surveillance can be understood in terms of his/her relative ‘exposure’.

“I believe there has been a shift from the monitoring and capture of appropriate performances, to the monitoring and capture of appropriate personhoods, i.e., of the vulnerable, flawed, emotional subject,” Ball declared.

“Surveillance studies seem to assume decreased choice and consent, but is this true...?”

“Is exposure always a technological inevitability, or is it more deeply rooted, within anxieties, vulnerabilities, desires and thrills?”

“We actually do not know.”

The speaker explained that she began to theorise the concept of exposure following her empirical research in call centres in the UK as well as in other countries. She observed that in the call centre setting, employees were required to make a significant emotional investment in their work,

“they are required to display social competency and are monitored in this regard...”

“While this is emotional labour, it has a wider significance in surveillance terms: emotions are coded and given a value; are subject to judgement; and have a reconstitutive effect on the employees,” Ball added. Agents are required to expose aspects of themselves and display their own vulnerabilities in order to achieve sales. At the other end, the recruitment films shown were designed to play upon the viewers’ sensibilities, through the image of managers in tears; and training processes that emphasised self-management and self-control on the telephone “above all else”. Of the twenty informal skills listed by agents, two-thirds included an “emotional management element”.

Similarly, the contestants in reality television shows continually expose their emotions to the viewing public – the more ‘real’ their experience, the higher the value of what is displayed.

“Contestants who appear to emote more deeply are heralded as brave, honest and strong...”

Capturing a sob, seeing tears flow down cheeks, looking into the eyes of the interviewee with tight camera shots emerge as critical features of the message,” according to Ball. New research on the genre finds that numerous reality TV shows focus on the personal shortcomings and vulnerability of the (normally working-class) contestants, whom the middle-class expert “reforms” or sorts out – “whether that be telling frumpy middle-aged women what to wear, advising parents how to deal with their troublesome kids, or telling a working-class family how to behave like typical aristocrats...”

“Each time the audience observes the hapless contestants coming to terms with disagreeable, problematic or dysfunctional aspects of their private worlds, and their unwitting effects on the people around them.”

Ball pointed out some “interesting commonalities” in these two apparently very different domains of personal/institutional surveillance. Emotional display is “absolutely vital” in both cases. In each case the exposure is voluntary. And in each case the subject is judged according to some external criteria, and their “emotionality” forms part of that judgement. Moreover, the experience may actually be unpleasant, and yet this does not necessarily hinder the subject from participating fully in this mode of exposure.

“The concept of exposure is central to understanding the dynamics of being under

surveillance,” Ball declared. “Even the photographic definitions and associations of ‘exposure’ resonate with surveillance practices because of the notions that exposure involves self-re/presentation in other media, and hence mediated subjectivities...

“Central to the definition of the word ‘exposure’ are ideas concerning vulnerability, making oneself publicly visible, the representation and capture of information, and an element of danger...

“Exposure has the potential to *thrill*.”

The speaker then examined aspects of theory that claim self-exposure “is becoming a contemporary cultural value”, i.e., the willed act of revealing the private self is considered “desirable” and “healthy”.

Surveillance theory is “fairly quiet” on this, Ball explained. Sociologist Michalis Lianos even goes so far as to say that individual experience and intersubjectivity “is of little consequence to institutions”; he argues that institutional surveillance *dispositifs* do not intend to produce any kind of cognitive or moral effects on subjects, and hence the volition of subjects is of no interest to the institution.

On the other hand, organisational theory is deeply engaged with the concept of self-exposure. Scholars H. Hasselbladh and J. Kallinikos state that institutional technologies are at the end of a process of “semantic closure”, i.e., they “embed” meanings and notions about organisational mechanisms, via codification processes that range from writing to algorithms pertaining to organisational activity.

“So a reality TV production assemblage *embeds* ideas about how subjects should be portrayed and captured, and how the audience should be won over; outsourced call centre assemblages which capture agent activity *embed* ideas about what agents can/cannot introduce into the production process. The more ‘authentic’ the agent is on the phone, the better the rapport they have with the customer, the higher the likelihood of a sale,” Ball reiterated. “Each requires subjects to enter into a situation where they, in whole or in part, are ‘exposed’. The consumption and production of these exposed subjectivities is central – and by default, what the subject believes about their relative exposure is central to the efficacy of institutional controls.”

This is significantly the case if, as argued by Lianos, the subject is “at relative liberty” – the subject’s reasons to become exposed are of particular interest, and as part of it all, “issues of desire, seduction, confession, anxiety, self-

improvement and judgement” arise.

Ball then brought up the issue of the general theory of the surveilled subject, and the complexities of incorporating this into the notion of exposure. She contended that imbued within modern practices of surveillance is a “political economy of interiority” – an assigning of economic value to the surveillance, capture and representation of the “unobservable”, i.e., “embodied” human experience.

The speaker cited the theorist John McGrath, who insists that “when a surveillance device is pointed at you, it is saying ‘Hey you!’ to your represented exterior, and is freeze-framing this oscillating relationship between interior and exterior”. More often than not, such framing occurs “when the interior is surfacing”, at a point where “exterior vulnerabilities reveal interior states”. McGrath also discusses contexts where exposure is actively sought rather than avoided; and how in some domains it becomes an object of fantasy and desire – voyeurism in gay subculture; the use of webcams; the portrayal of marginalised groups in mainstream culture. Exposure along these parameters is “addictive”, “empowering” and “sexually exciting”.

According to Ball, McGrath draws parallels between this and the viewer watching surveillance images. “The real interiority is replaced by representations of it using object presences in the watched space. The unwatched is about interiority; the watched is about exteriority. But it is this interiority, the authentic representations of experience, that the politico-economic surveillance assemblage wants to get at, because it sells, and it makes money...”

This imposes a new interpretation on the pain and frustration, represented by their tears and uncontrolled emotional outbursts, of contestants on *X Factor* (a British television musical talent show offering a prize of £1,000,000 in the form of a recording contract); it brings new meaning to the arbitrary recommendations of controversial nutritionist Gillian McKeith on the television show *You Are What You Eat*; and it creates new significance with regard to the “soothing and empathetic” voices of call centre employees as they are monitored and recorded “for training purposes”.

Moreover, “the nature of one’s exposure to surveillance depends on who you are, your social, cultural and sexual location, your inner anxieties, and your embodied self in relation to this assemblage...

“The closer to the interior, the more value it has.”

Invoking the “psychoanalytic sociology” of the surveilled subject, Ball suggested that the amount of exposure one is willing to undergo, and what one does when one is exposed to surveillance, depends on who one is and one’s location, how much knowledge one already possesses about surveillance, “whether one has a need to expose or display”, and whether one is paranoid.

“There is strong affective element to surveillance subjectivity – embodied visceral phenomena which occur intersubjectively within and between the corporeal self, on the frontier between the conscious/unconscious mind and *between* minds, and encompassing sociality, corporeality and thought...

Ball pointed to the recent work of scholars Wendy Holloway and Tony Jefferson on the recognition of personal investment as a factor in the analysis of exposure, and of the way in which an individual acts and reacts in relation to local rights, duties, obligations and conventions. Such a methodology reveals information about subjectivities and local moral orders, and how institutional normativities fit into those orders.

“Instead, I have argued that the nature of exposure itself demands a multidimensional approach to subjectivity,” the speaker concluded. “This is also particularly relevant given developments in body surveillance technologies on the one hand, and on the other, calls for iterative and post-Cartesian conceptions of mind, body and society...

“Most important is the notion that exposure involves personal vulnerability, and therefore invokes psychoanalytic or psychodynamic concepts concerning vulnerability, anxiety, desirability, notoriety and self-reform. Rather than reducing one to the other, discursive and socio-structural arguments which interpellate institutional discourses and social structures can be juxtaposed upon psychoanalytic arguments to explore personal and emotional investment in local moral orders under the gaze of surveillance.”

#### Rapporteur’s Note

The Möbius strip or Möbius band is a surface with only one side and only one boundary component. It has the mathematical property of being non-orientable. It is also a ruled surface. It was discovered independently by the German mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius and Johann Benedict Listing in 1858.

A model can easily be created by taking a paper strip and giving it a half-twist, and then merging the ends of the strip together to form a single strip. In Euclidean space there are in fact two types of Möbius strips, depending on the direction of the half-twist: clockwise and counterclockwise.

The Möbius strip is therefore ‘chiral’ (in geometry, a figure is said to have chirality if it is not identical to its mirror image, or more particularly if it cannot be mapped to its mirror image by rotations and translations alone).

A line drawn starting from the seam down the middle will meet back at the seam, but at the ‘other side’. If continued, the line will meet the starting point and will be double the length of the original strip of paper. This single contiguous curve demonstrates that the strip has only one boundary.

If the Möbius strip is cut along the above line, instead of getting two separate strips, it become one long strip with two full twists in it, which is not a Möbius strip. This happens because the original strip has only one edge that is twice as long as the original strip of paper. Cutting creates a second independent edge, half of which was on each side of the knife or scissors. Cutting this new, longer strip down the middle creates two strips wound around each other.

Alternatively, cutting along a Möbius strip about a third of the way in from the edge creates two strips. Other interesting combinations can be obtained by making Möbius strips with two or more half-twists in them instead of one. For example, a strip with three half-twists, when divided lengthwise, becomes a strip tied in a trefoil knot. Cutting a Möbius strip, giving it extra twists and reconnecting the ends produces unexpected figures called paradiromic rings.

The international symbol for recycling is a Möbius loop.

## Machetes, Electrodes and Databases

Sam De Silva  
*Independent Media Maker/Facilitator,  
Colombo/Melbourne*

**The modes of surveillance may be ‘low-tech’, but the panopticon is still always at work; and if one cannot bluff or bully one’s way through, the only option is to pay a bribe...**

Sam de Silva presented some observations on surveillance in Sri Lanka, “through a low-tech frame”. He remarked that a television talk show he had seen on the subject of war had stayed with him, through one of the interviewees saying that the notion of smart bombs and precision attacks was an “illusion”, a lie. Most modern wars were ugly and messy, with victims being hacked to death with machetes; unimaginable torture; ball bearings ripping through flesh and bone.

“We know of Iraq, today the most public of all the wars. It’s very low-tech,” de Silva stated. This was also the mode in Sri Lanka, which maintained a high level of surveillance. “Men from each of the four security forces – army, navy, air force and police – are placed on duty at checkpoints all over the capital Colombo, and throughout the country.

Their job is to monitor, search and record the public as it moves, as we move, as I move, from location to location. Police keep check of who lives where, and want to be kept informed of details of new tenants. They take into custody anyone they think is even slightly suspicious. In most cases, these 'suspects' are from the Tamil minority..."

The speaker briefly summed up recent Sri Lankan history. "The modern civil conflict involves the majority Sinhalese and the largest minority – the ethnic Tamils. The Sinhalese live mostly in the south, while the Tamils consider the north and east to be the traditional Tamil homeland. During the British administration, Tamils were placed in positions of government power in keeping with to the colonial divide-and-rule policy. After Sri Lanka became independent, the race factor was used by politicians to further their own power. Discrimination against minorities intensified. In the early 1970s, young Tamils became militant, and that militancy became an armed struggle by these Tamil Tigers for a separate, independent state, a Tamil *Eelam*."

"Of course, the history of these communities is much more complicated than that," de Silva clarified. "But the core problem remains the same – suffocating, discriminatory state policies against the minorities. The current culture of surveillance is fundamentally to check Tamil militancy. The Tigers continue to maintain that the Tamil people are treated as second-class citizens."

The speaker explained that Sri Lankans are required to carry their national identity card at all times. "These cards foreground ethnicity, distinguishing a Tamil from a Sinhala. But the card is secondary: ethnicity can be determined from appearance and speech. Tamils are harassed at checkpoints, and rarely does one hear a Sinhala speaking out in their defence. The majority population seems to have accepted the view that there is a high probability the next suicide bomber will be a Tamil, and therefore it is completely valid to treat Tamils with suspicion and disrespect, even if their papers are in order."

De Silva described how on any given day, he would walk or drive by over a hundred armed soldiers at various checkpoints along the major and minor roads of Colombo. Each vehicle and individual entering the city was liable to be checked. This does not have to be a source of tension, unless one is a Tamil. "I am Sinhala, and have an Australian identity card, not a national identity card. I carry a photocopy of my passport along with an international driver's licence. When I am pulled over, there is always a slight

confusion. What numbers should be recorded in the police or army log? Sometimes the passport, sometimes the licence... The data is not computerised; everything is manually noted in books with ruled columns. The number that corresponds to who 'I' am is written down – but there is no column for 'country' or any other essential fact. The data is a fragment – and the system can be tricked..."

"The panopticon is always at work, and if one cannot bluff or bully one's way through, the only option is to pay a bribe. The system can be manipulated..."

Society condones and tolerates all this, de Silva pointed out. In fact, it augments the surveillance mechanisms by informally functioning as a "distributed neighbourhood force". And in general, "everyone is afraid – not just of an attack by the Tamil Tigers but of being considered a Tiger supporter or sympathiser."

The speaker claimed that the boundary between informant and curious individual is extremely blurred. "Sri Lanka is an inquisitive society. I grew up in Australia, where privacy and individuality is encouraged. But in my country of origin, everyone wants to know what everyone else is doing..."

"The auto drivers hanging out near my workplace are familiar with my entire history. The workers on my street know I am visiting Delhi. The man who runs the photocopy shop down the road remembers my grandfather. People around me notice what I do, when I come and go, who I am with, and whether my car tyre needs more air..."

"In Sri Lanka, this surveillance is a part of life, part of daily culture. There is no real concept of privacy. But there are ways to guard information. I cannot walk into a police station and try to find out something about someone. However, I know that I can find someone who knows someone at the police station who can find me this information. And the fact that the information is written in a log, on paper, and is not stored in a high-tech database, makes it more accessible; a password is not required."

De Silva described how information, on the other hand, is also arbitrarily treated.

"A friend told me he saw a policeman sitting in a jeep, eating. Next to him on the passenger seat was a stack of documents. Needing something to wipe his greasy fingers with, he took a couple of sheets off the top of the stack, cleaned off his hands, crumpled up the papers and threw them out of the window..."

"Information in police stations is noted down manually in statement books; fast cross-referencing is impossible. But I have heard that if the police don't believe what you tell them, the first tactic they use to extract the 'truth' is to strip you naked and hang you upside down by the toes..."

"The innocent need not worry, and people will tell the police exactly what they want to hear..."

The speaker then clarified that advanced technologies were beginning to manifest within this ethos of 'low-tech' surveillance. Reportedly, all checkpoint data is entered into a military database. The government has initiated an 'e-population' documentation project to register and maintain records of all Sri Lankans; 'ethnicity' will be a specific field in this database. All Tamils in a particular region will be identified and located via name and address.

The "cultural jump" that needs to be made between a manual, paper-based system to an electronic version is a significant factor, de Silva concluded. "Perhaps there is space for intervention. There is no obvious culture of dissent or critique of the insertion or use of force in civilian life. Sri Lankans are not shy of technology — they know its benefits.

"And broader society as a rule will not really care about what we perceive to be the negative uses of technologies within the parameters of intensified surveillance."

## Security Culture and the Economy of Fear

Konrad Becker  
*Organiser/Artist/Activist, t0 Institute of Culture Technologies, Vienna*

**We should not believe the hype that new technology is democratising the world. In actuality, it is a new business model: the ecology of angst. <ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A NUCLEAR DISASTER? TO LEARN HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF, CLICK HERE!>**

Konrad Becker used audiovisual materials to analyse the "interrelations and business models between security and culture", positing that from the end of the Cold War onwards, culture has made "a dramatic return" to the international stage, displacing military coercion as a political tool. "But the fact is that culture was highly instrumental in this way even before the end of the Cold War; and culture today is not only about security, it is about information mindsets..."

Becker asserted that international relations and military studies increasingly document the culture of security, "the mindset that responds to threats and vulnerabilities, and the idea of strengthening the nation". Today it cannot be easily claimed that security is just for military purposes — it is also quite important for "the project of cultural self-realisation... The energy that is not invested in pure survival or the struggle for survival can be invested in what people call 'culture'..."

"Obviously, artists have a special role in this," Becker added. "They are forced to adapt to a world of insecurity and threat." There is an inherent conflict between security culture and what is called "freedom of expression" in the arts, and security has extended beyond the classic bipolar ideology. "For instance, if you look at urban guerrilla manuals, you will see that no laxity in security measures or regulations is permitted. Equally, you can see this in the training provided in torture schools of the Americas and the Western hemisphere."

In contemporary Europe, the "creative industries" are now servicing the culture of security, according to Becker. "The intent is to bring in artists from the cold, provide them with 'security' — and the deal then is that 'culture' goes to the machines of capital. This commercially-driven output of the creative industries is instrumental to the development of security culture; even the US Department of Homeland Security has a Cultural Bureau..."

The speaker explained that the initial understanding of the function of "security" was formalised in Middle Europe in 1375, through the first declaration for protection of highways, and related treaties aimed at securing the roads for merchants and pilgrims.

"Today we have a completely new dimension. It is an age of permanent crisis, a dromological movement that is fixated on security and speed, and is about who can protect themselves best and fastest..."

"Classical ideology holds that liberal freedoms are bought with blood, and that these values can only be upheld through lethal force. But what drives our societies now is not capital but the security complex itself. It is a cycle where capital invests in weapons and tools for more security, which then needs more weapons and tools for more security... On the network, the strong become stronger, the fast become faster."

We should not believe the "hype" that new technology is democratising the world, Becker

declared. “In contrast, actually it is a new business model – the ecology of angst. Individuals increasingly see that they have very few resources to actually address the risks they are supposedly facing...

“<ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A NUCLEAR DISASTER? TO LEARN HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF, CLICK HERE!>”

Feelings of security and safety are grounded in multiple unconscious causes in various composite experiences, the speaker explained. The fear of death is a composite of different ontological anxieties, and we are very sensitive to it as a phenomenon. “We can see that our levels of fear are not necessarily correlated to any specific scale or form or intensity of a *real* danger... What we have is a narrative of doom and survival.”

Becker examined the links between risk avoidance and social control. “A politics of uncertainty drives the survivalist mentality – which is only visible to a certain extent. In a world of fear and catastrophe, the best possible scenario that we can imagine is survival, because we don’t have a choice – trust the experts! And any experiment or alternatives we try to create on our own would immediately seem dangerous.”

This paradigm stretches across the whole political spectrum, from left to right, Becker stated. Safety is “a good thing”; dissent becomes a security concern in itself; “passivity becomes the ultimate goal in this story”. At the same time, risk has become big business and is one of the fastest growing economic sectors globally – not just in terms of technology ranging from surveillance cameras to stealth fighter aircraft, but the larger conceptual narrative of risk analysis, risk management and risk communication. We have new ways of confinement and tracking – “prisons that don’t need walls”, i.e., virtual control via GPS (Global Positioning Systems); and new forms of privatised security, where “maximum paranoia will result in “maximum profit...”

“Some research in the field of contemporary criminalistics claims that we are entering a new ‘control culture’ which will guarantee an individual virtual iron cage for each and every one of us...”

“It is about privatising conflict, managing difference and dissent on a business level. We see a change from what used to be a public police force to private security organisations; public prisons to private corrections management as profit centres; state armies are being replaced by mercenary forces...” Becker asserted.

The speaker pointed out that privatisation also has an effect on the concept and practice of security, in the sense that “new forms of war and peace are emerging”. If one scrutinised the websites of companies involved in the production and marketing of new security practices, one would find that they also advertise/offer “humanitarian operations”, public relations, diplomatic interventions, and propaganda.

“If you want to invade a small country, or take over an airport somewhere, you would always hire these same people,” Becker remarked.

He described surveillance as the “prime method of control” today, arguing that it is not about “privacy”, unlike the old model; it is about social sorting and exclusion, “automated discriminatory mechanisms for risk profiling”; the social categorising that resulted from these identification practices were used for creating and reinforcing economic, social and political divisions.

“The old model characterised Western society as disciplinarian. We have gone beyond this ‘evil eye’ of surveillance and the trope of the centralised coordinated panopticon, and learnt that surveillance is a loose, rhizomatic set of processes – which nonetheless can be perfectly co-opted for conventional security purposes,” Becker clarified.

“To paraphrase Guy Debord: the controlling centre per se has become ‘occult’. It is never to be visible, never to be occupied by a real, known leader or a clear autonomous ideology. Instead, we get rule by characteristic denomination, rule by game laws... Hegemony and information dominance are trying to embrace culture and art for one reason – to extend mastery to the symbolic level, even through the application of brute force. Such mastery is very important for security operations of all kinds.”

According to Becker, game rules subliminally as well as overtly define personal and social values; “they tell us what is worth pursuing and what we should avoid; they tell us how we should behave, what the game is about; they are maps and codes of behaviour”.

The speaker also invoked a larger, continuous cartographic project: “the geo-mapping of the infosphere that imposes itself upon the geosphere”. What culture then does is to legitimise security enforcement and thereby reduce possible resistance. This is a post- Cold War phenomenon, but was also part of the Cold War – “most European avant garde culture was set up via these protocols, and European

contemporary art magazines and major exhibitions were funded by these programmes.

“Today, the security industry is attempting to influence a global mix of emotions and cultures to integrate into a new world order.”

What we see expressed today as ‘culture’ is related to a general militarisation of the intellect, Becker explained, drawing upon the essay “Panic War and Semiokapital” by the political philosopher/activist Franco Berardi, who holds that we are seeing a culturalisation of security that is related to what are called operations “other” than war. These include “cultural peacekeeping” and the “tactical/strategic use of symbolic manipulation”. They involve the “age-old methodology of engineering fear and longing”, physical and psychological needs related to personal desires. The result is the virtual media of the security-military entertainment complex, “a merger of Hollywood and warcraft” – the two are not differentiated any longer.

“Young children can buy the software in a shop,” Becker stated. “These media products are actually being used in military training, and the US army enables free downloads for recruitment purposes. But it is the same technology. War is simulated; and research into this field shows that the military and entertainment industries are merging into a condition of post-human warfare of the future. Fantasy and reality are blurred, the borders between the factual and the virtual are no longer discernible...”

“The Institute for Creative Technologies, a joint operation of the Pentagon and major Hollywood companies, learn ‘cultural interactions’ through this software. It is not just about shooting – it has a detailed history. Some people call it the ‘military Nintendo complex’. The very first games all came from there...”

“You can hardly tell what comes from the toy store and what from the military.”

The military-industrial complex is now migrating into cyberspace,” Becker declared. Consequently, we see “omni-directional warfare, unlimited series of battle”; war becomes a political, economic and cultural factor.

“There is a tradition of art dealing with the theme of war, thousands of years old,” Becker continued. “Debord refers to artistic practices being ‘an immaterial civil war’ – a Cold War, in a sense. And the new frontier of that conflict is space – the omni-directional conquest of outer space and the simultaneous colonisation of inner space that has been intensified through technological

‘development’ – the searches for truth serums, hallucinogenic experiments, etc...”

“Thus, the Star Wars programme is today also applied to the most internal security issue of imagination and desire itself.”

The speaker then defined terrorism as a “multipolar, omni-directional rhizomatic network of fear”; there is inadequate information about these low-intensity decentralised conflicts. Terrorism is “violence committed by someone we don’t like”, and statistics about it are “meaningless”.

“The anthropologist Michael Taussig commented that colonisers lived in such terror and fear of the worlds they conquered that they could only survive there by in turn inspiring terror and fear on a massive scale,” Becker added. “It applies to the US definition of terrorism – ‘the calculated use of violence to inculcate fear’ – not only in the victim but also in everybody else... It is about the *making* of fear: not spontaneously produced, but very mathematically worked out in terms of impact. It is a psychological discipline based on the manipulation of fear – and like art, terrorism uses unconventional, asymmetric actions and methods of operation.”

The speaker invoked the “symbolic terrorism” that had manifested over the last few decades via “the manipulation of words” and “people who use these words”; he also pointed to the “synthetic terrorism” generated via media representations of the issue. However, at the same time advanced artistic and cultural practice has, perhaps redemptively, managed to counter these through a paradoxical “affinity” with what is known as the “analytic thinking” of terrorist, counter-terrorist and special operations units...

“The overlap of authoritarian security cultures and the economy of fear, characterised by instability and personal insecurity, is shaping contemporary society into psychological states of regression and dependence,” Becker concluded. “We are all fairly helpless...”

Tapio Mäkelä initiated the discussion following the presentations, inquiring about the kinds of readings that inform our perception of surveillance; whether concepts of surveillance are sufficient to cover everyday embodied presence in the city, and the informal acts of following life in our vicinities. Was there a need to expand on the vocabulary?

Wendy Chun remarked, with regard to Kirstie Ball's argument, that there were many studies, such as the work of political scientist Jodi Deane, of "exhibitionism" as "an act of exposure"; and cultural theorist Victor Burgin's assertion that what we are witnessing now is not just exhibitionism but something fundamentally different that does not follow the definitions of exhibitionism. Chun then asked about the relationship between "performance" and "interiority", and to what extent Ball's work was influenced by feminist theorist Judith Butler's work "that actively links the two", and by media theorist Tom Keenan's work on exposure, which defines it as something "which is fundamental to subjectivity to begin with".

Chun also raised the issue of exposure vis-à-vis the "phantasmatic", making reference to Vazira Zamindar's presentation, and the desire for a certain kind of legibility. "The question of the emotive seems to be intimately linked to the idea that the body speaks the subject's truth." What relationship did Ball see or not see between them? Chun's question to Sam De Silva was with regard to the visible sign as a mode of authenticity: to what extent was the question of exposure relevant in Sri Lanka, and was it granted platforms such as reality television and radio shows?

Chun asked Konrad Becker to analyse the culture of fear that was the central focus of his argument, in terms of the desire for exposure.

Taking up the issue of the relationship between exposure and exhibitionism, Ball replied that, putting it "very crudely", she saw exhibitionism as "a specific social practice", while exposure was "a general social condition". Exhibitionism is a particular way of playing with power relations, and of presenting oneself within particular subcultures and practices. Exposure is a generic concept that includes power relations.

"So, if you were to do a kind of ontology of exposure, exhibitionism would be one element," Ball remarked. She acknowledged that she would have to work more on Butler's theories of performativity, so for the moment could not comment on them. Regarding the "phantasmatic", Ball asserted that she found the definition of the word to be problematic. "There is a lot of work on the body as a source of truth, and work on lie detector testing and the histories of that..."

"The central question is of making the body speak 'the truth' – but whose truth, and what version of the truth...?"

"In that sense I would say that the body itself is a 'phantasmatic' site – rightly so, and it should remain so."

De Silva explained that there was no reality TV in Sri Lanka, but there was *Sri Lankan Idol*, just as there is *Indian Idol*, a reality show based on US television's *American Idol*, an extended and immensely popular competitive amateur singing/performance contest. "I don't know if there is the desire for 'exposure', as such, in Sri Lankan society, but there is definitely the desire to cooperate with the state and its regulations. The paranoia that Konrad described definitely exists in Sri Lanka..."

"To some extent it is a cultural response to state surveillance practices, but it is also caused by certain traumas undergone during insurrections and crackdowns and actions of the state in the context of civil war."

According to Becker, the culture of fear and exposure are related on various levels. "A lot of people prefer to be paranoid rather than feel lonely... If I take a camera onto the street, obviously kids will start waving into it..."

"And a lot of people would rather be watched by a stupid policeman, or even a machine, than just be drifting in the cosmic rubble of a little planet somewhere..."

"So I think people may actually appreciate being the object of surveillance; everybody has the wish to have someone watching over them."

"But it goes further: the whole experience of aesthetics and culture is deeply interrelated to the appreciation and experience of biological fear. There is a fine line between the feeling of disorientation and losing control being experienced as a positive value, or experienced very negatively. People riding a roller coaster usually shriek throughout their experience of 'fun', but this experience is usually quite unpleasant. You are losing control, you are at the mercy of violent momentum; yet somehow you find yourself feeling secure vis-à-vis the context – just because you have a ticket, you are safely strapped in, the ride is for a finite time, and the system is supposedly reliable..."

Becker declared that the "aesthetic games" being played in contemporary art are usually on the level of "a certain dalliance with ennui", and of slight changes in perspective, of play with certain somatic parameters that provoke reactions. "You go to a disco, and there are certain light effects

that don't allow you to see clearly. That's a little dangerous, in biological terms. But leaning in a corner or against a bar, having a drink in a controlled environment, you *know* you are safe; and you know that you are enjoying the activity for just that reason."

Ravi Sundaram commented that the field of surveillance described by Ball lacked a theory of the subject, and that once the theory of the subject goes into a crisis within the parameters of social theory, "you have the moment of affect, embodiment, the Deleuzian moment". Were the earlier discussions on the crisis of the subject marked by debates on difference?

"The public discourse for us in India – even as we look at Europe and the crisis of European identity – is an explosion of discourse on difference, even while the research is in a different tenor," Sundaram declared. "The same applies to Konrad's argument. Can we revisit these particular discussions? Take the way bodies get socially inscribed in, for instance, the debates on *hijab*... What forms of visibility do we produce? Do we revisit those as they are? Or do we revisit them as particular assemblages? You referred to 'contained environments': is there a way we can think about medium-specificity and functioning outside bounded environments? When we talk about cell phone photographs being transmitted, those become part of public controversies as much as the video camera does..."

Sundaram then brought up Becker's "ironic" allusion to the link between technologised entertainment and military apparatus, suggesting that the argument could address the contemporary scenario in Europe in more depth, taking in the particularities of debates on migration, identification and censorship, as well as a "global sweep". Could more classic forms of difference production be read into the contemporary debate?

Aarti Sethi stated that she was compelled by Ball's assertion that surveillance studies currently does not have a theory of the subject. "When we think about surveillance, we need to consider exactly how the relationship between interior and exterior plays out. Clearly, when we deploy the word 'interiority', we are deploying it in a very specific way; and what is *deemed* to be interior and its relationship with an exterior are also historically located within specific sociocultural and economic practices, such as reality television and call centre work, which contribute to the economy of the production of an interior..."

With regard to Becker's claim that today state armies are being replaced by private militias, Sethi pointed out that there are moments when private militias come together to form the state army, even while "the career of the nation state itself" enabled the emergence of standing militaries. "If we look at that moment vis-à-vis the contemporary, there are obviously ways in which state forms themselves are *not* transmuting – it is necessary to look at the histories of this. It is not a linear progression and teleology, but is a process of ruptures."

Ball clarified that in her opinion, surveillance studies today has a "partly Foucauldian, very limited view of the subject"; and that in the terms of social theory, the viewing of body interiority in isolated terms is problematic, since society/sociality is experienced in an embodied way. "You can't boil it down to one thing; nor resort to a binary-based definition. So I began to think about psychoanalytic phenomena, visceral phenomena, affect-emotional phenomena... I found very helpful insights in the work of Irma van der Ploeg, a Dutch author/philosopher. She argues that there has been a shift in body ontology, so what is considered 'interior' is actually about dominant body ontologies, which vary between contexts.

"Some of the basic groundwork for my research involves looking at the organisation of body ontologies in relation to the workplace, border control, etc. Within the workplace you have a dominant body ontology of containment, based on a principle of 'masculinising' – the firming of soft/curvy bodies and the restriction of leaky bodies, as it were; the imperative is that nothing individual should transgress the boundary of the body while it is at work.

"Policing is based on an informatised body ontology, which treats the body as a source of data and 'truth'. Van der Ploeg compares these two models and says that in actual fact privacy is much more critical within an informatised body ontology, for in this schema I am walking around, touching things, leaving my DNA as 'evidence' of innocence or guilt... so there is a lot that can be deduced about who I am, where I come from, what I'm doing, etc., with this rather than with a contained body ontology..."

"One can apply these models critically, but I don't think one can apply them in isolation."

Responding to Sethi, Becker asserted that he did not have a linear worldview, and that he did not consider himself competent to map a teleology –

"I can just hope that the unexpected will happen..."

The speaker reiterated that in his presentation he was not referring to local militias, but to the merger of the military complex with the entertainment complex and the privatisation of the security services – i.e., "the global integration of corporations, that was not possible earlier".

"This merger, where public relations companies and weapons manufacturers and financial service initiatives are all becoming one, is fascinating to analyse," Becker declared.

"They have a scope of activities that dominates and operates in a way that is mostly invisible. They create stories and mythologies and feed these to the global media, which we are supposed to believe, and that supposedly justifies contemporary politics and war."

According to Becker, this "secret presence" is just an abstraction for most people – we don't realise the implications of its power or the scope of its interventions in our lives, because we are not interested. "Moreover, the chief actors can function much better if they are not visible – that is part of the game..."

"In the heyday of globalised business practice, the assumption was made that the state would wither away. But the state is necessary to uphold the status quo, with lethal force if necessary, and businesses rely on state forces for the realisation of their contracts," Becker concluded. "We have to actually understand the change in fundamental definitions – what is a war, what is not a war, who is a prisoner, who is not a prisoner..."

"The concepts are becoming very fluid. We urgently need to rework our entire conceptual apparatus as we think about these things."

### Panel 3: The Artist as Information Practitioner

Moderator: Rana Dasgupta  
*Writer, Delhi*

#### Archival Malpractice and Counter-Strategies

Charles Merewether  
*Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University, Canberra*

**"...The guard had a blank look on his face, the look of an illiterate, unthinking man. He put the palms of his hands together and kneeled**

**on the floor in front of me, begging me to spare his life. I looked at him for a long minute, and then I let him go."**

Charles Merewether began his presentation on the Khmer Rouge archive of genocide with a statement by Walter Benjamin: "The dialectical image is one that appears in a flash. It is thus, in the image that flashes up in the Now of cognisability, that the has-been can be grasped."

The speaker's commentary was accompanied by a series of haunting images. Between 1975-79, about 7000 photographs were taken of Cambodians who died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge at the Tuol Sleng camp in Phnom Penh. These photographs represent less than half of the 14,200 prisoners who were detained and killed in the camp.

"How should we view these photographs that form an archive of genocide?" Merewether asked. "What are we to do when we cursorily see such photographs on a bookstore stand or museum wall, one of many sharing a space in time according to the commonality of their medium or the genre of portraiture? What is the basis on which one can compare? What disappears from sight in the equivalence brought to bear by this apparently simple act of classification and building a collection?"

"Is there not something disruptive to this act, in our viewing of subjects forcibly photographed, who already knew while taking their pose that their fate was most probably sealed; or that photography had been harnessed as an instrument of fear, and that the archives were constructed as evidence of the exercise of power on the part of a genocidal state apparatus?"

"What claims can be made *for* these photographs, and *by* them?"

Merewether's analysis drew upon the theories of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who writes of how art freezes time, and that it is about the *meanwhile*, "duration in the interval, in that sphere which a *being* is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilised". However, it is precisely within the space of this duration or interval in which the body is frozen in time, transformed into an object, that enables its appropriation, that confirms the primacy of the viewing subject.

According to Merewether, Levinas suggests that "resemblance (is) not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image. Reality would not be only what it is, what

is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image.” Levinas doubts that representation can do anything more than mitigate *against* a recognition of another; he claims: “...On the depths of the concreteness of the time that is that of my responsibility for the other, there is a diachrony of a past that cannot be gathered into re-presentation.”

Merewether asserted that the act of archival preservation exposes us to a violent division: “...the traumatic experience of the event embeds itself in the act of representation. It occurs without knowledge.” In this sense, it is carried forward as unclaimed experience, “suffering a perpetual belatedness”. These images are lost to time, and “have no destiny” until acknowledged and reclaimed. The viewer becomes the “belated witness” to something that has been unrecognised, repressed, unassimilated.

“It is the very exteriority of the gaze that we can no longer control that disturbs the present, forcing recognition of something else.”

Viewing these images reveals a fracture that has enabled the constitution of the present, Merewether stated. “It belongs to the future anterior, *that which will have been*.” This condition is neither present nor past; it punctures time. What we experience is a face-to-face exposure to something incomplete, heterogeneous, anterior, as if waiting in the shadow of an event to come. This marks a “temporal incommensurability – between eventhood and the meaning/significance of an event – that becomes legible in the aftermath of its passing...”

“Photography is both inside the structure of the event – i.e., it exists by virtue of being within the temporal moment of its subject – and excessive, insofar as it outlasts, and is therefore outside, the temporal space of the event itself; it is a *remainder*.”

Merewether remarked that this equivocal duration is what haunts the image and in turn the archive; belonging to a different order of legibility, it disrupts the mnemonic order. “Walter Benjamin associated this issue of time with mechanical reproduction and the shock or trauma of modernity. Through the modernity of mechanical reproduction, i.e., through the repetition of images, this interval of time that exposes belatedness, will attain meaning as an *index* of a traumatic event.”

Regarding the “claims” or “demands” that these photographs make on the viewer, Merewether argued that the images show us “the remaining

imprint” of the subject who has been killed – those of the perpetrator and photographer who are present but not imaged, and ourselves, the viewer, “always arriving too late, bracketed within the frame of the photographer, and thereby destined to repeat the original scene of violence”. We are placed before the subject, and in place of the photographer “whose act presages the death of the subject”, we become the camera eye and accomplice in the death of the subject; and we are “forced to live with the victory of the persecutors”.

Merewether explained that the Khmer Rouge left behind records, logbooks, photographs, confessions and written ‘autobiographies’; and a ‘Daily Execution log’ that listed the name, age, occupation and birthplace of each ‘enemy’ executed. This material is an account of the killing of prisoners as well as hundreds of thousands of Cambodian civilians. Each week the prison authorities would send the information to regime commander Pol Pot, specifying their progress in eradicating ‘the enemy’. Prisoners were blindfolded, interrogated, tortured and forced to write ‘autobiographies’ detailing their work and family background. The document was cross-checked with other records and used against them when the regime so desired, through supposed discrepancies between one memory and another, i.e., differently inscribed testimonies. These disjunctions were then systematically used as evidence of guilt.

After interrogation, the blindfold was removed and the prisoners photographed. As recalled by Vann Nath, a survivor:

... They untied my blindfold. In front of me was a chair with a camera set across it. “Go sit on that chair,” a guard said, pointing at me. The others handcuffed to me sat on the floor by my side as I was photographed. The guard took a picture in front of my face, and the back of my head. Another guard measured my head, and then they made an ID card. Then they photographed the other people attached to me, and put our blindfolds back on.

This sadistic dramaturgy produces extreme dissociation, as the blindfold separates persecuted from persecutor. When the ‘blind’ person is then suddenly exposed to the unerring gaze of the camera, he/she experiences a “blank fear”, since the blindfold had enclosed him/her in a darkness associated with death.

“The camera functions to unburden the gaze from the body, to differentiate it from what it sees. No

one sees anything,” Merewether continued. The images carry “wear and tear” that embodies the violent condition of their production and signify their perishability. Time has corroded the images, and they are not seen as part of the national heritage. The images have become increasingly illegible, a condition “that is a mark of history and its destitution”. This condition “rehearses the fate of its subject”. And yet, according to Merewether, “like noise, these scratches exist... acting as interference, disrupting the homogeneity of the photographic transfer that seeks to eradicate the discontinuum of time...”

The speaker cited the French film critic Christian Metz, who defines photographs in terms of the “arrested image”, implying that the camera takes its subject captive. Metz writes of the “cut inside the referent” that intervenes in a “real” in which it can only work to “de-realise”, or make unreal. The image, while appearing to preserve its object by removing it from the real, in fact seals its fate, its destruction; it reduces the image to a fragment, a “part object”, for a “long immobile journey of no return”.

In this sense, Merewether declared, photography is always “exorbitant”, a remainder that is always in excess of an original event or thing to which it owes its own life; “yet what is given is by virtue of what has been taken away”. The archive is marked by its own self-enabling condition of livelihood: “a form of supplement that outlives and therefore supplants its originating referent”. The mediation achieved by photography that immobilises, “this act of mortification and the disjunction of the camera from the body signifies a movement between erasure and inscription... *an abyssal space* within the order of representation, between an archival act and the event of genocide. The archival act of inscription sets the stage for the genocide to come.”

The speaker invoked Michel Foucault’s claim that the lives of ordinary people gain “infamy” through their entry into the public domain of the archive towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the state began to monitor/regulate both the “inward and outward” lives of its citizens, so that “everything thus said is registered in writing, accumulates and constitutes dossiers and archives”. As a state document, the information thus archived became the “authorised” source of knowledge and legitimate evidence of the existence, identity and status of the individual.

Prior to this, evidence of ordinary lives was, as Foucault puts it, “destined to pass away without a trace”; this had enabled the construction of what

Nietzsche called “monumental history”, recording only “great” events and lives around which the state had built itself.

“In a perverse twist to Nietzsche’s notion, the Khmer Rouge had built a ‘monumental history’ from the bodies of its citizens,” Merewether explained. Following the taxonomic traditions of phrenology and physiognomy in criminology, photography was deployed to record biometric information as to the shape and size of each prisoner’s head,” Merewether asserted.

“The body is designated within the classificatory regimes of the archive’s informational order, and is thus rendered legible. While each photograph has details of gender, age, profession and birthplace, no prisoner’s name is given. The individual identity has been reduced to statistical matter. The body becomes a *number*. Under these conditions, photography enters the archive and takes its place within the orderly procession of data: the seamless transfer of the world as a document to be carried forward. Not only the coming into being of the trace, but its legibility as a sign within the visible order of things.”

Thus the Khmer Rouge archive, documenting the eradication of the regime’s ‘guilty’ ‘criminal’ ‘enemy’, was not just an instrument of administrative culture, “but an archival malpractice more feverish”, “infernal”, an “obscene practice of classification” compelled by the “delirium of the persecutors”. The intent was not to systematically inscribe in order to remember, but in order to legitimate the murderous act of collective erasure upon which the records were constructed.

In 1979, the Vietnamese-installed government transformed the Tuol Sleng prison into the Museum of Genocide. Open to the public, it displayed the torture instruments, documents relating to the forced confessions, the personal items of prisoners – and along the walls, their photographs. The latter are now being used as a means of identifying those who had ‘disappeared’. Visitors to the museum initially wrote the names of prisoners they recognised on the photographs.

“The regime’s taxonomic processes of classification, of which these archival images have been a part, are thus re-signified,” Merewether declared. “But what kind of legacy is this archive, and how do we deal with it? To what extent do the methods used to record history and the means of organisation inform the way in which history may be viewed, and the kind of truth it holds, especially an archive produced by the perpetrators, documents gathered by their spies,

photographs taken by their employees, confessions extorted under conditions of torture?

“What use can be made of such archives in the aftermath of a violent regime or civil conflict? Do they provide a means of actualising histories of which we have been dispossessed? To what extent can archives help people to overcome actual experiences that have passed into history?”

“And is there some obligation to the past, a responsibility toward the dead to keep whatever records exist of their lives, and are symbols of the unspeakable – that persist to disturb those who wish to forget as well as those whose histories have been erased?”

The speaker reiterated that to preserve the archive is to acknowledge the right to memory, but we have equally the right to ask what kind of memory, and whose memory. He cited camp survivor Vann Nath:

If I were to meet Pol Pot or Leng Sary today, I wouldn't have anything to say to them. In fact, I did meet a former guard once, around 1981, when I was working at the museum. He was in a crowd of people outside the gate coming to visit Tuol Sleng. I recognised him immediately. When he saw me, he tried to cover his face with his scarf. But I grabbed him by the hand and pulled him into the cellblock. “If you were me and you caught me like this, maybe you would kill me,” I told him. “But I want to show that not all people are evil like you. If you don't want to believe me, I'll take you out of here right now and tell all the people outside that you were a guard here. You will be killed immediately.” The guard had a blank look on his face, the look of an illiterate, unthinking man. He put the palms of his hands together and knelt on the floor in front of me, begging me to spare his life. I looked at him for a long minute, and then I let him go.

It is the consequence of the events that matter, not the cause or the agents, according to Merewether. “What counts for Vann Nath is a form of revenge that is to do with recognition – the long minute of recollection – the politicisation of memory.” The potent and powerfully ambivalent “long minute”, an instance of the “abysmal” space between erasure and inscription, is not the survivor remembering one of the perpetrators, but of forcing the perpetrator's contact with his own interiority, his repressed remembrance of complicity in the sadism of the regime. Or, as theorised by Levinas: “The face signifies in the

fact of summoning, of summoning me – in all its nudity or its destitution, in everything that is precarious in questioning, in all the hazards of mortality – the unresolved... alternative between Being and Nothingness, a questioning which, *ipso facto*, summons me...”

Merewether clarified that the regime's leaders had their own way of dealing with the fact of atrocity. Prime Minister Hun Sen: “If a wound does not hurt, you should not poke it with a stick and make it bleed”; and “We should dig a hole and bury the past and look ahead to the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a clean slate.” Nuon Chea, responsible for brutal forced evacuations of Cambodian cities: “Please leave this [the regime's responsibility for the massive numbers of deaths] to history. This is an old story. Please leave it to the past.”

“These leaders are faced with the trauma of modernity, an archival malpractice of their own making, an infernal archival machine that exceeds itself and its place of origin,” the speaker reiterated. “Enforced cultural amnesia follows as the necessary stage for rewriting the past. Should we assume that collective amnesia is the only path to recovery in places of intense conflict?” In the words of Vann Nath:

At first it was very hard for me to return to Tuol Sleng. Sometimes I would forget it was a museum, and I felt like I was still an inmate... From time to time some Cambodian politicians think about closing the museum. But in my opinion it should stay open. More than 10,000 people were killed in that prison. If Tuol Sleng is abandoned or converted to another use, it will mean that the people who died there were sacrificed, that their lives were useless. I want to keep that memory alive so that the new generation of Cambodians can understand what happened during that time.

“What is the place of memory in the archive or museum?” Merewether asked. “Can the existence of such spaces bring consolation to those who suffered?”

“To most Cambodians, the museum is not a place where they can mourn their dead – in Cambodian culture, remembrance and mourning are sacred private acts, not shared in public...”

“And there is no place in Cambodia where the genocide did *not* occur.”

The speaker invoked Giorgio Agamben's re-definition, in the context of the philosopher's writings on the Nazi death camps and those who

bore witness there, of Foucault's conception of the archive as an abstract relation between "the sayable and the unsayable". For Agamben, this does not account for "a possibility and an impossibility of speech, i.e., the "always present caesura within its possibility". He recasts the terms towards the speaking subject, grounding the shift in the radical negation that characterises sites of genocide.

Merewether also invoked the scholar Gayatri Spivak's critique of the logic of Western archival practice. Alleging that India itself has been created as a proper name and fiction that inscribes its colonial history, she addresses how this practice constructs the colonial object of historical knowledge, whose task was to produce a whole collection of "effects of the real". At stake is the authority of different kinds of knowledge and double valence that such an archive/such readings provide. On the one hand, preservation of and access to archives is evidence of modes in which events and people have been erased from history and from consciousness; yet on the other, such evidence itself "is neither sufficient with regard to nor has a stable identity in relation to what has passed".

"As used to interrogate the visual field, photography and practices of representation enable us to explore not only what constitutes the terms of their entry, or becoming an archival subject," Merewether concluded. "But equally, in order to recognise this subject that exceeds the archive, we need also to think outside of archival logic. This allows us to recognise not only the violence inherent to what can and cannot be consigned to the archive, but that violence is itself constitutive of the formation of the archive."

#### Author's Note

Earlier readings of these photographs have been presented in public, notably the symposium 'Ghost in the Shell', held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (October 1999); the 'Packrats and Bureaucrats' conference held at the University of California, Santa Barbara (February 2001); and a seminar in the Department of Sociology and Religion, University of California, Santa Barbara (April 2001). I am indebted to the discussions and suggestions made by the participants at those events, as well as to Tom Keenan's wonderful book *Fables of Responsibility* (Stanford University Press, 1997), and to the published work of Ben Kieman and the Cambodian Genocide Program at Yale University.

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### Information versus Dissemination: Artistic and Activist Strategies of Information Practice

Ewen Chardronnet  
*Artist/Critic/Information Activist, Tours*

**How does one test – in 'real' conditions – pharmaceuticals, GMOs, RFID tags, nanotechnologies, without the dissemination of fatal hazards among a disinformed or uninformed public? How is such research to be conducted without controlling the dissemination of information via media, which could trigger panic?**

Ewen Chardronnet focused on the ideas, concepts and politics embedded in the word 'dissemination'. He began with the definition of the word in English, which differs somewhat from its meaning in 17<sup>th</sup>-century French (*dissémination*), from which the English meaning seemed to derive. "Standard English dictionaries tell us that 'dissemination' comes from the Latin *disseminatio*, or from the verb *disseminare*, to sow (cognates being semen, semin-, seed; from the Indo-European root *se*). But going by the Académie Française dictionary, the word does not really apply to information; it is used for things that are spread around without being obviously controlled – rural habitats, army troops, nuclear weapons, seeds, germs, viruses, cancer cells... English dictionaries apply the word in two senses: 1) to scatter widely, as in sowing seed; 2) to spread abroad, promulgate, disseminate information."

The speaker clarified that his paper would explore the usage of the word in both languages, as well

as media disseminations, the consequences and contradictions of anti-industrial radicalism, and artistic/tactical interventions in specific politicised cases involving manipulation of information.

“As generally implied by its definition in English dictionaries, disseminating information is an intentional process of information transmission from a source to one or many individuals,” Chardonnet asserted. “Dissemination involves telling. The message doesn’t change, and there is limited, if any, accommodation of feedback. Thus, mass-media messages are mostly an enactment of dissemination.” But if the terms of inquiry are shifted to philosophy and semantics, “we immediately find Jacques Derrida and his 1969 book *Dissemination*, in which he deconstructs both criticism’s pretensions to explaining the ‘truth’ about literature, and philosophy’s pretensions to being the ‘literature’ of truth... For Derrida, the word ‘dissemination’ implies a link between the wasteful dispersal of semantic meaning, and semen. Dissemination is a scattering of semen, seeds, but also semes, semantic features. We are playing on the fortuitous resemblance of ‘seme’ and ‘semen’. In actual fact, there is no connection between them. And yet, by this floating, purely exterior collusion, accident produces a kind of semantic mirage. Dissemination refers then to a fertile dispersal of meanings, but also to the dissipation, or the loss, of meaning...

“Derrida’s central contention in the book is that language is haunted by dispersal, absence, loss, the risk of unmeaning – a risk which is starkly embodied in all writing.”

Chardonnet declared that no appeal to context or convention can possibly arrest the “disseminating free play” of language. “Dissemination is an attack on the notion that texts can be owned, controlled, limited or appropriated in the name of some legitimate authoritative source. But rather than enabling a negative prohibition of all access to a kind of truth/unity of meaning, dissemination affirms the already divided generation of meaning.” In this sense, Derrida prefigures the discussions around the hypertextual dissemination of meaning on the internet, as well as the Creative Commons and anti-copyright issues. A more recent initiative by US university departments is the Credibility Commons that analyses internet data. But one has to ask, ‘credible’ for whom, and under what conditions, in this probing of the kind of digital collectivism that drives Wikipedia, or Web 2.0. Or the idea behind James Surowiecki’s book *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business*,

*Economies, Societies and Nations* (2004), about the aggregation of information in groups, resulting in decisions that, he argues, are often better than could have been made by any single member of the group; or the drive behind academic- and experts-based research engines. “What we learn from Derrida is that despite the gap between the message and its interpretation, society continues to place a high economic value on expert-centred transmission; and it is this very profitable phenomenon that is contributing more than ever to the growth of virtuality in global media politics,” Chardonnet asserted.

Using video footage to illustrate examples of radical political strategy, the speaker described interventions by the artist/activist collective The Yes Men, who use an audacious and ingenious deployment of information dissemination techniques.

For instance, as a critique of “corporate social responsibility”, at the International Payments Conference on 28 April 2005, “Dow representative Erastus Hamm” unveiled ‘Acceptable Risk’, a Dow industry standard for determining how many deaths are acceptable when achieving large profits. The audience of bankers enthusiastically applauded the lecture, which described several industrial crimes (including IBM’s sale of technology to the Nazis for use in identifying Jews, and the ‘Acceptable Risk Calculator’) as “golden skeletons” – i.e., skeletons in the closet, but lucrative and therefore acceptable. Several of the bankers then signed up for licences for the ‘Acceptable Risk Calculator’, and even posed for photos with Acceptable Risk mascot “Gilda”, a golden skeleton.

Chardonnet then gave an account of the activities of the English firm Strategic Communication Laboratories. According to the company’s website (<http://www.scl.cc/home.php>), it has pioneered a new methodology to enable governments and countries to manage their relationships with their key audience groups through more powerful communication. The methodology is based on 16 years of academic research and development conducted at 42 universities around the globe. It uses scientific techniques from a variety of social sciences to make “communications with groups” far more effective (and measurable).

“The company’s work is based on something that even its spokesman admits ‘you won’t find on the web’ – the Behavioural Dynamics Institute,” Chardonnet explained. According to SCL’s website, this is “a virtual lab led by Professor Phil

Taylor of Leeds University, for persuasion, influence, psychological operations and public diplomacy. Since its inception in 1989, it has been working with universities around the world to refine and develop its communication techniques. It has pioneered a number of methodologies that have been tried and tested in the real world... BDI continues to develop the most powerful communication methodologies, saving lives and reducing conflict worldwide." SCL offers various solutions based on this methodology to help countries in specific governmental areas such as defence, foreign affairs, internal security, health, finance and tourism.

"In a world where the perception is the reality, all countries need to have the capability to manage their own perceptual alignment – otherwise someone else will," the company declares.

Strategic communication differs from orthodox commercial communication (such as advertising, public relations, etc.) in that it concentrates on the behavioural outcome of the communication and not just concepts such as brand awareness.

The Institute has pioneered a number of methodologies, which have been tried and tested in the real world. According to the company, "Even during research testing, the programmes that were being developed by the Institute saved thousands of lives, demonstrating that increased research and development into this area is delivering powerful results. BDI continues to develop the most powerful communication methodologies, saving lives and reducing conflict worldwide."

Today, the Institute is "the only academic think-tank in the world whose understanding of the psychology of persuasion has been successfully applied on a global scale. SCL Ltd. is the only licensee in the world for BDI's work, making the company the only channel through which the academics' methodologies can be applied to practical, real-life situations...

"Even though much greater effort and resources must be applied at the front end (as compared to commercial advertising), the resultant outcomes are far more effective and predictable. Consequently, the SCL solutions are used primarily where the communication outcomes are critical," the company states.

SCL functions through what it calls "OpCentres", command facilities for strategic communications. In this "always-ready environment", researchers can identify target audiences using highly advanced statistical models; strategists can

orchestrate campaigns using the most effective scientific methods, and media producers have access to innovative production techniques. "These units of expertise combine to create one of the most dynamic and influential 'weapons' in the world...

"An OpCentre puts influence, control and power back into the hands of the government and military, giving them greater power to influence the enemy in time of conflict and enhanced access to their citizens during a crisis. For instance, an OpCentre can be designed to override all national radio and TV broadcasts, allowing the government and military to communicate with the public as the need arises.

"The OpCentre is a formidable tool for Homeland Security, Conflict Reduction, International Public Diplomacy and un-mediated Government communications."

OpCentres can "launch a powerful psyop campaign against an engaged enemy; engender support within the national community for proposed military action; re-engineer foreign perceptions so to avert conflict altogether; develop national resilience and behavioural compliance for homeland security issues; produce powerful public diplomacy campaigns for political, economic and military issues; maintain an 'always ready' public communication command centre for critical incidents; and develop more effective public information campaigns for social and health issues."

An OpCentre can be made up of many different "custom modules". Any of the following may be incorporated into an OpCentre: Media Capture and Analysis; Concept Development; Secure Communications; Target Audience Archive Filtering; Cultural Alignment Unit; Recruitment and Training; Command Interface; Scenario Planning Team; Archive and Recall Systems; Evaluation and MOE Unit; Media Management Unit; Strategic Planning Campaign; Word-of-Mouth Unit; Risk Analysis Unit; TV Transmission; Communication Planning Unit, Print Production; Message Development; Distribution and Logistics; Channel Management; Forward Command/Tactical; Environment Development; and finally, Administration/Management.

Chardonnet described how SCL "went mainstream" at the 2005 Defence Systems and Equipment international exhibition in London. The main attraction was an OpCentre presenting a range of simulations, from natural disasters and chemical catastrophes to *coups d'état*. The intent

is to “disinform” the public, on behalf of the state; and to deliberately support the dissemination of false information, through the projection of dubious assumptions about acceptable risk. The possible scenario presented by SCL at the exhibition was a pandemic of smallpox. “The government faces a dilemma. It needs people to stay home, but if the news breaks, mass panic might ensue as people flee the city, carrying the virus with them. SCL steps in to help orchestrate a sophisticated campaign of mass deception. Rather than alert the public to the smallpox threat, the company sets up a high-tech OpCentre to convince the public that an accident at a chemical plant threatens London. As the fictitious toxic cloud approaches the city, TV stations are provided graphic visuals charting the path of the invisible toxins. Londoners stay indoors, glued to the television, convinced that even a short walk into the streets could be fatal...

“While citizens worry over fictitious toxins, the government works to contain the smallpox outbreak,” Chardonnet explained. The final result, according to SCL’s calculations, is that only thousands perish, rather than the ten million originally projected. At the end of the smallpox scenario, dramatic music fades out to a taped message urging the public to ‘embrace’ strategic communications, which are ‘the most powerful weapons in the world’. “According to Mark Broughton, SCL’s public affairs director, ‘If your definition of propaganda is framing communications to do something that’s going to save lives, that’s fine... but propaganda is not a word I would use for that,’” Chardonnet commented. “The smallpox scenario in fact reminds me of the Tchernobyl catastrophe, during which French psyops forcefully disseminated the idea through mass media that the barrier of the Alps had fortunately prevented the radioactive cloud from reaching France.”

Transposing the concept of “dissemination” onto different terrain, Chardonnet then pointed out that when a farmer shares his agricultural expertise with other farmers, “he engages in a dual dissemination practice”. Ten years ago, the Farmers Confederation in France under the leadership of José Bové began to oppose genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the country, through a strategy of destroying fields; and ensuring that their activity was covered by the mass media. In the context of his activism, Bové was imprisoned for periods of time, and became a media star; he inhabited an ambiguous position, even competing as a candidate for the next presidential election.” According to the speaker, the person who worked in the shadow of Bové

and never achieved his status was René Riesel, formerly a member of the Situationist International in the late 1960s, and who has lived as a peasant in the south of France. In the 1990s he co-founded the French Farmers’ Confederation with Bové. He too was jailed several times for his part in the destruction of GMO fields. Critical of Bové’s media postures and political manoeuvrings, Riesel left the organisation.

“Like Bové, Riesel was for Luddite direct action,” Chardonnet remarked. Just as the Luddites took their sledgehammers to machinery that was harmful to the “commonality” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and like the Unabomber (Thomas Kazinski) who sent postal bombs to industries he felt were responsible for deforestation in the US, Riesel was against what he called “the continuing artificialisation of life, at work now for a century”. In this process, “science and the economy, each supporting the other, have invaded the entire social spectrum. Industrial society prevents other types of knowledge and social relations from finding expression, creating a technological system that has become autonomous, to the detriment of life and liberty... This domination leads as much to the ruin of nature as it does to the alienation of human beings.” For Riesel, after the ‘becoming-world’ of the factory, we are now facing the ‘becoming-world’ of the laboratory...

The world in which we live is “furiously experimental”, Chardonnet remarked. With the acceleration of market competition and the so-called “natural limits of the planet”, new experimental technologies have now to be tested in “real conditions”. Riesel rejects the “non-global movement”, the “citizen ecologists”, the “deep ecologists”, the “open source community”, and “Burning Man”-type of teknivals and raves” (large free parties that take place worldwide, mostly in summer, as part of a grassroots cultural movement that has a subculture of particular kinds of music, and recreational drugs; teknivals are often illegal under various national and regional laws). Riesel is sceptical of the digital arts, and says, “It’s a world where everybody can be an artist or creative, a world full of Situationist ideas that *became crazy*.” One of Riesel’s “Luddite followers” is Peter Lamborn Wilson, also known as Hakim Bey, the author of *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (1985); for Wilson, “sustainable development” means “very expensive houses for vaguely ecologically conscious idiots”.

According to Chardonnet, both Riesel and Wilson thus advocate “a new secular Luddism”. Wilson states, “There are those of us who are usually called spiritualist anarchists. I’m willing to accept

that label if I can have other labels as well. It's a well-known fact that there's no secular Luddite community anywhere. The only Luddite communities are Anabaptists, Amish, Mennonite and Seventh-Day Adventists, all those kinds of Germano-Anabaptist groups that originate in Pennsylvania. I guess it's religious fanaticism. Well, we need some equivalent of that."

Chardonnet then traced "Luddite" farming to the Amish, their approach originating in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Anabaptist movement in Germany. The Anabaptists were dissenters from Luther's initial following, who objected to his supporting the state against peasant revolts, under pressure from the aristocracy. As they were consequently persecuted, the Anabaptists adopted a millenarist approach, a "spiritual anarchism", a "radicalisation" of Lutheran reforms that was founded on apocalyptic assumptions and predicted the imminent end of the world/return of Jesus. Many early Anabaptists were condemned as heretics and executed by both Catholic and Protestant regimes. Survivors fled to Alsace, the mountains of Switzerland and southern Germany. In 1536, the scattered Anabaptists were united under a young Catholic priest from Holland, named Menno Simons; the group became known as Mennonites. This was when the tradition of farming and its associated lifestyle took deep root. In 1693, a Swiss bishop named Jacob Amman broke from the Mennonite church because he thought it was becoming too moderate; he settled a patriarchal society in the mining village of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, near Strasbourg. His followers were called the Amish. When the community was expelled from France by Louis XIV in 1713, some members settled in America; by the 1720s, the group in Pennsylvania was a flourishing agricultural community.

"The Anabaptists, the Amish, the Situationists, the New Luddites, etc., are instances of groups separated in time but linked by a shift of radicalism, from a common insurrectionary consciousness to a call for a technophobic apocalyptic communitarianism. Is this a valid position?" Chardonnet asked. "These communities have never influenced global politics. And what is left of their ideal, when it has to confront the force of GMO dissemination?"

Chardonnet's next example of a "dual dissemination practice" was of Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), a collective of five tactical media practitioners of various specialisations, including computer graphics and web design, film/video, photography, text art, book art and performance. Formed in 1987, CAE's focus has

been on the exploration of the intersections between art, critical theory, technology and political activism.

"We know that from the Cold War onwards, 'for the respect and balance of democracy', the military in various countries have had to convert certain technologies for civilian use, like GPS that was sanctioned for civilian use in the nineties," Chardonnet stated. "The state remains obsessed with the politics of controlling the use of these technologies, as they have immense potential for dual use, and the huge arsenal of regulations, even for laptops and softwares, are regularly bypassed and transgressed. Since 9/11 and under the Patriot Act, the US government has focused on implementing measures of control in the lives of civilians. Steve Kurtz of CAE experienced this at first hand..."

The speaker showed video footage of Kurtz's arrest by the FBI. Known primarily for his work in bio-art, Kurtz's practice (he is a professor of art at a US state university) is often openly critical, and his treatment by authorities is seen as a form of censorship by the Bush administration. The arrest itself had a surreal dimension. Kurtz first aroused state suspicion in May 2004 when he called 911 to report the death of his wife Hope from heart failure. He regularly worked with biological specimens as a part of his creative process, using them in his art installations. Observing these, local police notified the FBI, who detained Kurtz without specifying charges, under anti-terrorist laws, and sealed off the block around his house. Dozens of agents in hazardous-material suits sifted through his work and impounded many of his possessions, as well as the body of his dead wife. The following day his detention was deemed illegal, but he was still charged with federal criminal mail fraud and wire fraud, and faced the prospect of 20 years in jail. Legal specialists claim that this is a precedent-setting case with far-reaching implications for artists, scientists, researchers and others, as it involves the violation of the constitutional right to free speech and expression.

"There is a lot more to say in the debate; I have just tried to underline the contradiction we face today. On the one hand, we have the dissemination of all kinds of new technologies, hidden behind the dubious laws of 'acceptable risks', and on the other hand, the extension of all kinds of mechanisms of control because of the technologies' potential for dual-usage," Chardonnet concluded. "Geo-location equipment, RFIDs, implants, an invasive, ubiquitous and omnipresent computing grid, etc., are

symptomatic of this need for control. But the questions remain. How does one test – in ‘real’ conditions – pharmaceuticals, GMOs, RFID tags, nanotechnologies, without the dissemination of fatal hazards among a disinformed or uninformed public? How is such research to be conducted without controlling the dissemination of information via media, that could trigger panic? How does one use these technologies in large markets without losing control of the means of dissemination? How does one control the so-called ‘antagonist’ agents of dissemination that are as diverse as society itself...?

“PsyOps *needs* to be worried. The internet, open borders, telephony, radio waves, bodies, the air – everything facilitates dissemination. With the hackers, the migrants, the artists, the journalists, the scientists, the farmers, and civil society in general contributing to the energy of dispersal, this war around information can only be won in the imaginary of a totalitarian state.”

#### Rapporteur’s Note

The Yes Men ([www.theyesmen.org](http://www.theyesmen.org)) are a group of culture-jamming activists who practice what they call “identity correction”. They pretend to be powerful people and spokespersons for prominent organisations, accepting invitations received on their websites to appear at symposiums and TV shows. They use their newfound “authority” to satirically express the idea that corporations and governmental organisations often act in dehumanising ways toward the public. They are helped in their interventions by people across the globe.

The two leading members of the Yes Men are known by a number of aliases, most recently, and in film, Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno. Their real names are Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, respectively. Servin is an author of experimental fiction, and was known for being the man who inserted images of men kissing in the computer game *SimCopter*. Vamos is an assistant professor of media arts at an institute in New York.

One of the Yes Men’s first interventions was the satirical website [www.gwbush.com](http://www.gwbush.com), established for the 2000 presidential election to draw attention to alleged hypocrisies on Bush’s actual website. When asked about the site in a press conference in May 1999, Bush responded that the website had gone too far in criticising him, and that “there ought to be limits to freedom”. In 2004, the Yes Men went on tour posing as the group “Yes, Bush Can!” encouraging supporters to sign a “Patriot Pledge” agreeing to keep nuclear waste in their backyard and send their children off to war. They appeared at the 2004 Republican National Convention and drove across the country, first in an RV with a George W. Bush body wrap, and then in a painted van.

The Yes Men appeared on in August 2006 at a “Housing Summit” in New Orleans, taking the stage along with New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. In front of an audience mostly composed of real estate developers, one of the Yes Men gave a speech in which he claimed to be Rene Oswin, a fictitious “assistant

under-secretary” at the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In his speech he claimed that HUD would reopen public housing facilities that had been closed since Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005. He said that HUD had changed its mind and, contrary to its earlier declaration, would *not* demolish the housing projects in order to replace them with mixed-income development. The fictitious Oswin also announced that the big oil companies would chip in some of their record profits to rebuild the damaged levees to the height needed to prevent the city from being drowned by future hurricanes. HUD has called this prank, which brought attention to the lack of affordable housing, a “cruel hoax”. A HUD spokesperson denied that anyone named “Rene Oswin” worked for the department.

The Yes Men’s most famous prank is placing a “corrected” WTO website at [gatt.org](http://gatt.org). The fake site began to receive real emails from confused visitors, including invitations to address various elite groups on behalf of the WTO, which they obligingly took up. Showing up in newly purchased suits, the Yes Men gave speeches encouraging corporations to buy votes directly from citizens. They argued that the US Civil War was a waste of money because Third World countries now willingly supply equivalent slaves. And they claimed that people should listen to the WTO, not the facts.

Their boldest intervention to date was initiated on 3 December 2004, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, when Andy Bichlbaum appeared on BBC World as “Jude Finisterra”, a Dow Chemical spokesman. (Dow is the owner of Union Carbide, the company responsible for the chemical disaster that killed thousands in Bhopal and left over 120,000 requiring lifelong care.) On their fake Dow Chemical website, the Yes Men first said as clearly and emphatically as possible that Dow Chemical Company had no intention whatsoever of repairing the damage. The real company received considerable backlash and both the real Dow and the false Dow denied the statements, but Dow took no real action.

The Yes Men decided to pressure Dow further, so “Finisterra” went on the news to claim that Dow planned to liquidate Union Carbide and use the resulting \$12 billion to pay for medical care, clean up the site, and fund research into the hazards of other Dow products. After two hours of wide coverage, Dow issued a press release denying the statement, ensuring even greater coverage of the false news of a cleanup.

The activists’ experiences were documented in the film *The Yes Men* (2003), distributed by United Artists, as well as the book *The Yes Men: The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization* (The Disinformation Company, 2004). Reviewers have complimented the group for being “the most vital force in guerrilla performance”; “technosituationists with an agenda”; “impostures on behalf of a righteous innocence that alone keeps the world from melting down”; “funny like mimes, deep like mirrors, authentic like (humiliated) reality”; “ascended masters of media hoaxing”; “deft viscerators, exposing the matrix of corporate power and government venality for all to see”; “artists whose antics truly threaten the consensual hallucination”, etc.

## Across Borders and beyond Definitions: Creating Concepts and Syndicating Content

Florian Schneider  
Artist/Activist, *kein.org*, Munich

**By creating new concepts, we might be able to negotiate what is nowadays called the 'state of exception' that becomes the rule.**

Florian Schneider gave an account of the ongoing digital project *Dictionary of War* (<http://dictionaryofwar.org>), "a collaborative platform for creating one hundred concepts on the issue of war, to be invented, arranged and presented by scientists, artists, theorists and activists at four two-day events in Frankfurt, Munich, Graz and Berlin". The aim is to generate "key concepts" that either play a significant role in current discussions of war, or have so far been neglected, or have yet to be created.

Narrating his experience of the project and future perspectives, the speaker said he found it difficult to describe something that is "unfinished"; three-fourths of the first phase had been realised. The work refers to a relatively big group of 10-15 people located in various cities in Germany, but it also refers to a larger environment or network, Schneider clarified.

The original idea behind the *Dictionary of War* traces back to an event a year earlier in the border town of Terifa, at the southern tip of Spain, almost touching Africa across the Straits of Gibraltar. "We organised an event called *Borderline Academy* – approximately 200 artists and activists and theorists met in an open space in an old fortress in Terifa. We shared many common beliefs, convictions and attitudes towards the various topics we were working on, but we realised there was a surprising lack of specific understandings," Schneider remarked. "There are particular keywords that always come up in our conversations, which are being conceived in very different ways. We came up with a spontaneous idea of a 'dictionary session' – one that might reveal a certain potential for the creation of further and certainly very productive understandings and/or misunderstandings..."

"We asked everyone to pick a term and try to create a definition or explanation of the term – for instance, 'precarification'; 'Chinification'... One year later the project had a clear general outline, i.e., we organised four initial sessions on the topic of 'war'. There are many and obvious reasons for choosing this topic; the most important possibly being that it lent itself admirably to the creation of concepts."

Schneider stated that in the project's schema, "concept" was not to be read in terms of plan/planning, but as a frame "through which one can imagine and formulate something..."

"By creating concepts, we might be able to negotiate what is nowadays called the 'state of exception' that becomes the rule."

The first four sessions of the *Dictionary of War* invited practitioners from different fields to produce something "heterogeneous, pluralistic, collective and collaborative", rather than producing "exceptions and exemptions".

"A characteristic of progressive leftist politics in Europe and the West in general is that there used to be a constant plea for exceptions and exemptions. But I feel intuitively that there has been a tremendous shift," Schneider added. "*Dictionary of War* does not assume that there will be a reaching back to a 'universalised' body of knowledge. The project's underlying principle is a refusing of both – on the one hand, the unifying and simplifying notion, and on the other hand, any kind of particularity or exception..."

The project is marked by "a certain double irony", according to Schneider. First, it is not a dictionary. "We stated quite clearly that we are not interested in defining or ordering anything, or clarifying the essence or content of a term or concept. We are not addicted to the issue of war, nor do we have a certain fascination for the military..."

Second, "our conviction is rather that in the past three or four years, we have been facing great difficulties regarding how to criticise the immanent/global war that is taking place. It is in fact impossible to criticise it – and this is not only due to the fact that there is no 'outside' to this war any longer."

Regarding the motives behind this choice of topic, Schneider argued that the project is conceptualised as "polemical" in various respects. "We are trying to look for confrontation with a reality in which our relations are increasingly concealed, the more we talk about war and peace. It is a strange and paradoxical situation. But it is also about determining the extent to which war and the concept of war – as Foucault puts it, 'society must be defended' – can work as an analyser of power relations that are constituting the current changes..."

"These changes have produced a new vocabulary – the 'new' war, the 'global' war, the 'immanent' war, the 'postmodern' war – all sorts of labels that indicate that the juridical model of sovereignty would seem to have had its day."

The speaker claimed that war as an armed confrontation between nation states “seems to be a thing of the past”, but it still refers to a conflict between different interest groups, “defined by the degree of their intensity and extension”. As in the past, war seeks to regulate rather than destroy existing power relations.

“It is precisely this constitutive function of war that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri unfolded in the really brilliant first chapter of *Multitudes*, the sequel to *Empire*,” Schneider commented. War is explained as a constitutive form of a new order “that no longer knows an inside or an outside; that no longer destroys but also produces life”. In this new world order, there is no difference between war and non-war; “war is perpetual and everywhere”. We don’t seem to have the terminology or categories or abilities to deal practically, politically, with this new situation; we are approaching it on a “very abstract, theoretical” level, as far as understanding the current debate, post-9/11...

“Political activism remains in a terribly naïve, outdated state,” according to Schneider. Reform and change was not a matter of “upgrading” this activism – rather, it was a question of “reinventing, re-evaluating and recreating key concepts” in the case of war.

War seems to be subject to a “de- and re-regulation process” that challenges old certainties and replaces them with new, or at least unexpected, premises. *Dictionary of War* is driven by the ideal/desire to oppose war and simultaneously call for a kind of “desertion” from a war of words, the propaganda/“info-war” – in which “facts on the ground” are artificially created through powerful modes of communication. The project is also committed to making the creation and revaluation of concepts a transparent and “more or less open” mechanism that enables intervention. The aim is also to develop models that redefine the creation of concepts not on an interdisciplinary basis but on the basis of the “undisciplined”, “non-cooperative”, collaborative process...

Schneider explained that the project drew inspiration from *What Is Philosophy?* (1994), by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; the book’s first chapter is an extensive elaboration on the “very essence of philosophy” as “the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts”. The philosopher’s only business is concepts, and the concept only belongs to philosophy.

*Dictionary of War* also drew directly upon the theorists’ notion of “conceptual personae”,

particular entities who are not necessarily identical with the author/philosopher/artist, “but rather testify to a third person who could be beneath or beside the creator”. A famous example is of Nietzsche and his figure of Zarathustra, who articulates the thinker’s key ideas. As held by Deleuze and Guattari, “we do not do something by saying it, but we produce movement by thinking it, through the intermediary of the conceptual persona”.

“Concepts do not fall from heaven – they pre-exist, and are permanently in the process of being created/recreated/re-evaluated. *Dictionary of War*’s slogan, ‘at least when we create concepts we are doing something’, is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari,” the speaker declared. “It refers to the fact that concepts need to be invented and produced; concepts also refer to problems, without which they would be meaningless. A concept that is not trying to solve a problem is empty, futile...”

“*Dictionary of War* is not about definitions, nor about narrating anecdotes about or from war. It is not about holding this or that opinion about something, such as ‘Bush is a mass murderer’ or ‘We must stop the war in Iraq’. It is not about exchanging opinions. It is not about producing entertainment...”

“It is very much about developing the tools with which one could attain new ideas or develop new practices.”

Regarding the project’s technical format, Schneider clarified that “for now” it was to be a website. “Building it is not about text, deadlines, editing, publishing – in its essence, *Dictionary of War* is about performativity.” Concepts are presented in sessions in alphabetical order in 30-minute time slots – “a completely egalitarian approach”. All contributors have the same time frame, and they are free to choose their title, theme, genre and media; “they can dance, read, show a film or video, lecture... One presenter used only 7 minutes of the time slot, and for the other 23 minutes observed silence...” The performer is free to change the theme, media and action right up to the last minute, so the project’s coordinators are sometimes kept in suspense. The presentation takes place in uninterrupted sessions of 7-8 hours.

“One cannot call this ‘entertainment’ – it is actually quite hard work,” Schneider asserted. “Events are not a ‘service’ we provide in order to get audience response – instead, we are inviting people to collaborate on a certain site of production. The

'event' is first and foremost a democratic opportunity to *produce* something."

The presentation is documented by three video cameras from three different angles; the intention is to make the material available on the internet, replicable beyond the actual event; the digital platform thus becomes a kind of "studio". The video recordings are published online via peer-to-peer networks. "We set these up in 2003 as part of the project *DASH* – it was first beta-tested during the independent media lab at the G-8 summit in Geneva that year," Schneider explained. "It is a multimedia suite entirely based on open source technology. The video/audio coding and format, as well as the dissemination/syndication via BitTorrent protocol, and the the download and upload clients, are also open source.

"The actual content is to be syndicated and disseminated via a range of other websites. The idea behind *Dictionary of War* is that people can pick up interesting concepts, texts, recordings, visual materials, photographs, etc., and use this in a completely different context for their own purposes. The number of websites syndicating this feed from our website is quite amazing. We invite everyone to do this, and we are happy to give technical support. Particularly interesting is how many US universities have made use of our work in their curricula...

"We are planning a book of the first four sessions, but we will not reproduce the material as it is, since some modes – dance, for instance – cannot be included. The publication will instead reproduce things that are excluded during the actual performances in *Dictionary of War*, i.e., the debates and discussions that follow the presentations. There is a tremendous desire to reflect on the content of the project; the book is conceptualised as a kind of meta-narrative...

"We also try to syndicate the event as such, so after the fourth event, scheduled in Berlin, we will work on smaller 'local' editions. We are concretely planning a session in Novi Sad (Serbia) in June 2007, and in Beirut – and as a kind of 'final scenario' we plan to do one in the US."

Schneider reiterated that the concepts in *Dictionary of War* are not intended to be deployed as means of control, or in order to regulate meaning, but to activate developments and processes and other events. "In this sense, as it is about dissemination, operating in a manner opposite to the propaganda/info-war, the project may well find itself becoming some kind of 'war machine' itself..."

### Rapporteur's Note

For Deleuze and Guattari, a "concept" is a multiplicity, not in itself a single thing but an assemblage of components, each of which must retain coherence with the others for the concept to remain itself. These components are singularities – "'a' possible world, 'a' face, 'some' words" – and yet become indiscernible when a part of a concept. Each concept also has a relationship to other concepts by way of the similar problems that they address, and by having similar component elements; but there is no given way of relating, nor any necessary relation.

The concept is not to be confused with the proposition, as in logic; i.e., it is ungrammatical. It does not have a reference, as a proposition does. Rather, it is intensive, and expresses the virtual existence of an event in thought.

A concept has no relationship to truth, which is an external determination, or to presupposition, that places thought at the service of the dogmatic image of thought.

"The concept is a form or a force," according to Deleuze and Guattari. Concepts *act* – i.e., they are affective rather than signifiatory/expressive of the contents of ideas.

Conceptual personae are figures of thought that give concepts their specific force, their *raison d'être*. They are not to be confused with psychosocial types, nor with the thinkers themselves. They are *created*, like all concepts. While they are often only implicit in philosophy, they are crucial for understanding the significance of concepts; they are internal, non-philosophical preconditions for the practice of creating concepts.

For thought to exist, for concepts to be formed and then given body through conceptual personae, they must operate on the "plane of immanence", a founding concept in Deleuzian ontology. Immanence, meaning "existing or remaining within", generally offers a relative opposition to transcendence, a divine or empirical beyond. For Deleuze, the plane of immanence is an unqualified immersion or embeddedness, which denies transcendence as a real distinction, Cartesian or otherwise. It is an infinite field without substantial or consistent division; a formless, univocal, self-organising process which always qualitatively differentiates from itself. Thus it eliminates problems of pre-eminent forms, transcendental subjects, agency and real structures...

On the plane of immanence there are only complex networks of forces: "relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness" between relatively unformed elements, molecules and particles of all kinds; there are only "haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages". It is a plane of "consistency or composition" as opposed to a plane of "organisation or development".

Deleuze states, "It is only when immanence is no longer immanent to anything other than itself that we can speak of a plane of immanence." The plane of immanence constitutes the "absolute ground of philosophy... the foundation on which it creates its concepts".

Therefore the plane of immanence must be considered pre-philosophical: it appears as both what *must be* thought and what *cannot be* thought...

Rana Dasgupta initiated the discussion following the presentations, remarking that in the context of the material explored by the panel, we could define information as “the discourse of the machine”. It is systems that produce information, not individuals; what we think or feel is not ‘information’ till it has been linked into a homogenising system.

“Charles posed for us a grotesque dilemma regarding information – that we have only the lens of the perpetrator to memorialise a tragedy, and therefore we are faced with the problem of whether to totally reject the information we are given – or to somehow subvert it from its original intention, in an attempt to remember and learn from tragedy,” Dasgupta pointed out. “Ewen and Florian presented aspects of the essential state we are all in – the situation in which catastrophe is the permanent condition, and the information we receive about it always places us in the predicament of how to interact with it...”

“Is there a fundamental politics to modern information? Do we have to live with fantasies of alternatives – like the Amish in earlier times, like Hakim Bey with his ‘Temporary Autonomous Zone’ in the contemporary? Are these the only kinds of options we can have, to information that the machine produces? Or is there a totally different form of information we can produce for ourselves, in the mode Florian suggests? There is a kind of melancholy, a wistfulness, about a massive information zone that is not available to us, in the totalitarian kind of ecology of information...”

Chardonnet remarked that he and his collaborators had planned to meet soon to do a “self-critique” of their work as alternative information providers. “We need to examine our practice, our motivations, our relationship to machines and technology... why we spend 10 hours a day on projects of intense mapping... The question is, are we already working on our own obsolescence?”

According to Schneider, *Dictionary of War* was not about information, it did not “provide” information about any subject. “Regrettably, we have lots of information but are lacking concepts and the ability to conceptualise, that would enable us to make full use of this information.”

Dasgupta asked whether this perspective was a development within Schneider’s earlier projects such as *No Borders* and *No One Is Illegal*, which focused on making information available. Schneider clarified that those projects were not political campaigns to provide information about

the plight of immigrants. “They were specific interventions in a certain situation; they drew connections and links. They were not about convincing people to be less racist.”

“In that case, why bother to document at all?” Chardonnet asked. Schneider replied that he was not interested in archives, and that his real interest was in syndication and publication. “Not because I think making things public provides accessibility. There is a key difference between *accessibility*, i.e., making thing easily available, convenient, etc; and *access*, i.e., to be able to work with certain data and process them so that action and a certain activity is the result...”

Shuddhabrata Sengupta commented that all three presentations brought up the “counter-effects” of information. Merewether had invoked the “long interval” when the photograph is taken, and the “long interval” when the photograph is reviewed by the person returning to the genocide museum. “The order in which the Khmer Rouge archive was created could be replicated in the museum, but it would still be a different order. The indexical, arithmetical order which the photographs followed, whether by chronology, age, etc., would still be based on the same principle but would have a different *effect*...”

Sengupta said he “disagreed” with Schneider in that he did not accept the latter’s claim to be disinterested in information. “On the contrary, I think he is very interested – not in information as adding to what we know, but that an accumulation of the knowable in a sense produces effects that have to do with the destabilisation of what can be known. Instead of using the machine metaphor – i.e., the question of whether information is produced by the machine – we could ask also whether one could consider these works more in terms of infection and contagion; more in terms of how one item of information leaks onto another and produces effects that are completely unprecedented – or intended – as with *Dictionary of War*...”

“Perhaps, when we are talking about the aesthetics of information, the disordering, disrupting effect of information might be as important to study as the ordering.”

Kirstie Ball stated that Merewether’s “very moving” presentation reminded her of the time she had attended a talk by the Director-General of Records of the Office of National Security in the former East Germany. “Their archives were opened to the public after reunification. One of the things they had to do was decide who exactly

gets access to which records, and how to protect the victims' privacy – and the privacy of the people associated with the regime, who wanted to lose their dodgy past as informers for the Stasi, which a lot of people were... Investigative journalists, researchers, all wanted access to the records. But the management prioritised the victims and their relatives, gave them 100% access, in order that they could reconcile what happened to them with the information about them in the archives. But in other cases the management regulated access, especially by media, so that those whose names were in the informer files were not outed by the media...

"Amazingly, those records are still used today for employment screening," Ball added.

Jeebesh Bagchi commented that Merewether's presentation brought two conversations to his mind. One was with a historian who spends a lot of time in the archive; Bagchi asked her what excites her about this mode of research. "She said the colonial archives lead her into a world of total indecision; there were thousands of files about follies of decision-making and the inability to take a side glance; a kind of huge mess of trying to act in the world. It looked like a total inability to rule. But when she took this disorder back to historiography, she had to be more 'decisionist', as it were. She said it was impossible for her to produce an adequate sense of the archive in her work because it always slipped..."

The second conversation was with an activist who worked on the conflict in Kashmir. "He was concerned about the mass of information – he said, 'Everything about Kashmir is known, there is nothing not known. The chaos and indecision is omnipresent; all you need is a frame to link all of it.' Somewhere we inhabit this dual form, this oscillation between indecision and regulation. The inability to fix, to name, often results in a very poetic image, whether it is in the colonial times or the contemporary."

Wendy Chun invoked the work of cultural theorist Richard Dienst, who claims "images are that which remain to be seen". Identifying one of Merewether's themes as being that of the "crisis of indexicality", she pointed out that what linked the images as indices is the production of "testimony" by the victims. "The question is, what if the photographs *aren't* indexical? The Chinese figures on global warming are being reworked, because in order to appear more efficient they faked the numbers. What happens to the photographs if we look at them within that logic? What if we assume they *misinform* us, that they were faked in order to prove a certain efficiency?"

Chun clarified that she was referring to the logic in general, and not just the Khmer Rouge archive of genocide. "One way to respond to the photographs is to say, 'Meaning is what will have been'. But there is a difference between that kind of meaning and the kind generated by indexicality, here..."

Merewether reiterated that in his presentation he had been trying to maintain "a space of possibility" for the reading of the images of genocide victims, and by implication, a space for reading the archive, but from a position that would be "exterior" to the archive. "Hence I referred to Agamben's statement about the possibility and impossibility of speech, and his critique of Foucault and Foucault's notion of the statement. It seems to me that Agamben, by framing and structuring this idea, is already beginning to establish a dialectic in relation to information and/or the archive. Therefore it does have certain effects..."

"I then try to make a distinction between the testimonial and the kind of privileging given to the testimonial, and say that one needs to look at this material in terms of the 'long interval' – the kinds of effects it has on *us*. We have to keep in mind that the photographs have been made for *us*..."

"That's where the work needs to be done, and that's what I'm trying to move through, retaining the possibility of keeping the archive open."

Merewether cited Timothy Ash's "wonderful" book *The File: A Personal History* (1997), which describes the author's experience of going back to his Stasi record; "he actually discovers what amounts to an extraordinary fiction about his life. For me, that's been a sort of inspirational text, with its idea of the effects of the real, and what bearing it may have on 'what remains to be seen' – to be seen by *us*."

An interjector asked Merewether whether he felt there was as much value in the single image as in the accumulated series of photographs in the Khmer Rouge archive, as the individual frames vividly captured "fear and anger and opposition". There was a need to record the "variety of emotions" that were projected by victims – not only to document their *manner* of confronting death, but also to confirm this as a *mode* of resistance projected "for posterity".

"Yes and no, with regard to the value of the single image," Merewether argued. "I would worry about the imputation of what it is that the faces are expressing, the reading of their interiority..." He quoted Kansas senator Senator Bob Carey, who

has written about the images in the Khmer Rouge museum of genocide. “Why do these pictures of terrified, disoriented and defiant Cambodians cause me to feel responsible?” Carey asked. ‘In part because I fought and killed people who look much like them, in Vietnam...’

“For me, that’s an extraordinary statement in itself,” Merewether remarked. “Carey adds, ‘In part because I received a Congressional medal, etc... In part because I buried most of my Vietnam memories; and in doing so I closed my ears to cries of guilt and turned my back on rumours of terrible happenings after America came home from Indo-China in defeat.’

“What really happens is that the writer *fails* to remember the individual faces: those of the Cambodian prisoners and the Vietnamese are suddenly merged into one,” Merewether declared. “Memory is notorious for its unreliability, but the fact that these different sets of victims should thus coalesce in Carey’s mind is shocking...”

“On the other hand, there’s definitely a kind of recognition of responsibility on his part – and such acknowledgement seems to me to also be critical; it too needs to be archived...”

## Film Screening

### **Temporary Loss of Consciousness** Video Documentary (2005)

Monica Bhasin  
*Independent Filmmaker, Delhi*

Kashmiri/Punjabi/Bengali/Urdu, with English subtitles

Colour, 35 min.

(for details, see [Art/Media Works](#) section of this report)

### **Keynote: Histories of Identification**

Introduction: Shuddhabrata Sengupta  
*Sarai-CSDS*

#### **Why Did Fingerprinting Emerge in Colonial India? Governmentality, Surveillance and the Fear of the ‘Native’**

Chandak Sengupta  
*Professor, Department of History, Birbeck College, University of London*

**The British viewed the Indian body not simply as an inferior, coloured entity, but as an organism that differed from the Western body in significant ways; it was a peculiarly complex effect of environment, habits, beliefs and knowledges. To this, one could add ‘character’ and ‘psychology’ – while fingerprinting was a corporeal technology, its rationale and justification were not based in notions of physical/racial difference, but on differences in character and behaviour.**

In his keynote address supported by slides, [Chandak Sengupta](#) narrated the origin and history of the colonial practice of the systematic identification of individuals by fingerprints, which began in British India. “Handprints and finger impressions had long been used by people across the world as signatures, but such practices were not based on any clear knowledge of the distinctiveness of the ridge patterns of fingerprints, their key characteristic. As far back as 1684, the British physician and pioneering botanist Nehemiah Grew had pointed out in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* that human fingertips were covered by ‘innumerable little ridges, of equal bigness and distance, and everywhere running parallel with one another’. By 1823, the Czech physician and pioneering physiologist Jan Evangelista Purkyně had even classified fingerprints into nine different types. But these scientific observations had not led to a *system* of identification...”

The random information provided by somatic ridges and whorls took taxonomic shape only in the colonial regime of 19<sup>th</sup>-century India, when fingerprinting emerged as a cheap and definitive method of identifying the colonial subject. Sengupta cited the scholar Simon Cole’s hypothesis that fingerprinting proved so useful in colonial locations because it provided a relatively simple way of exercising surveillance over a racially ‘other’ population. It has also been suggested by the scholar Ronald Thomas that fingerprinting was “invented” by colonial administrators because it was the ideal mode of “biological monitoring and control” – the point was to “mark individuals biologically and to impose a suspect identity upon them”.

Sengupta pointed out that racism, however, was only one plot-element in a more complicated story. “In 1858, William Herschel, then a junior civil servant in Bengal, asked a ‘native’ contractor to sign a contract with his palm-print. Herschel later recalled that he had no idea at that time of the uniqueness of the ridge patterns – his intention was to intimidate the contractor.” This

being successfully achieved, Herschel soon used native fingertips for the same purpose; he also began to collect and store the prints of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. He never encountered a duplicate print, and confirmed that in prints taken repeatedly from the same person across time, the individual ridge patterns persisted unaltered...

According to the speaker, the colonial context encouraged Herschel to convert his “hobby” into an administrative tool. British complaints about Indians were legion, but one recurrent theme concerned the “duplicity” of the native character. Virtually each colonial official declared that Indians were notoriously untruthful and thought nothing of committing perjury, denying having signed a contract, or impersonating somebody when there was a chance of making a profit. “Even observers who were not India-haters by the standards of the era marveled at the innate mendacity of the natives.” Of this vast and unreliable population, Bengalis had the worst image of all; experienced British observers always emphasised that the natives of Bengal were “exceptional” amongst Indians in their duplicitousness. Sir George Otto Trevelyan, for instance, observed that it was not too much to assert “that the mass of Bengalees have no notion of truth and falsehood...”

The colonial order increasingly felt there was an acute need for “a means to hold natives to their word”, Sengupta declared. Herschel experienced this with some intensity when he was posted to Nadia district as a magistrate, in the midst of the indigo revolts of the 1860s. The cultivation of indigo was done on contract; an easy way of compelling a peasant to grow the crop was to forge a contract. On the other hand, a peasant could easily deny his obligation to grow the crop by repudiating a genuine contract, declaring it to be a forgery. As magistrate, Herschel observed that the documents submitted in his court “were frequently worth no more than the paper on which they were written”. In his testimony to the commission inquiring into the indigo revolts, Herschel urged the adoption of fingerprint signatures on contracts because this made it “all but impossible to deny or to forge”.

No response was forthcoming from the commission or the government of Bengal, but Herschel began to ask for fingerprint signatures from those registering deeds, collecting pensions or serving jail sentences, during his tenure as magistrate and collector of Hooghly district. Official disinterest prevailed, however, and the practice was discontinued when Herschel retired.

The significance of his work was first appreciated by the famous British scientist Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin and the father of the idea of eugenics, Sengupta explained. “In the 1890s, Galton became interested in identifying individuals by their bodily features. The editor of the journal *Nature* introduced him to the retired Herschel, who was delighted to share his vast collection of prints. Galton declared that there seemed to be no persistence anywhere in the bodily structure, “except in these minute and too much disregarded papillary ridges”; he was also convinced of the usefulness of the practice in Britain as well as colonial India, and advised that fingerprint matching “might well be part of the training of many minor civil servants, postmasters, Public Trustee officials, War Office and Admiralty pension officers”, etc.

However, Galton’s suggestions were not taken up by any agency of the British government except the Home Office, “which was and is concerned, among other things, with crime and policing”, Sengupta added. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, politicians, policemen and administrators have been concerned with identifying ‘habitual’ criminals, repeat offenders who constituted a distinct class and served harsher sentences than first-time transgressors. To achieve this, the police needed a system whereby a *specific* prisoner could be identified as having committed crimes prior to the one for which he was currently arrested.” The British police initially used a modified and complex version of a French technique based on eleven different bodily measurements, originally developed by the police expert Alphonse Bertillon. The precision mandated by this system overwhelmed the ordinary policeman, and even a tiny error in calibration could lead to wrong judgement.

Fingerprinting seemed to be a simpler, more viable option, Sengupta clarified. Paradoxically, however, the very uniqueness of the ridge patterns that made the procedure so reliable was also the greatest obstacle to its routine use in police work. “There seemed to be no way of classifying the innumerable patterns in a scheme that would be rational and reliable, as well as easily searchable, by ordinary police officers. In order to use fingerprints as a tool of detection, one needed a system that would allow the comparison of a suspect’s fingerprints with those on record.” For instance, a criminal could not be labelled ‘habitual’ unless past crimes could be “confidently attributed” to that individual. Fingerprints would help in this task only if criminal records could be *organised* by fingerprint patterns; a suspect’s prints could then be taken

and the database searched for a match. Similarly, when the police found fingerprints at a crime scene, this evidence was not useful unless it could be compared with that of known criminals whose prints were already on record.

This problem too was solved in India – by the Inspector-General of the Bengal Police, Edward Richard Henry, assisted by two Indian sub-inspectors, Azizul Haque and Hem Chandra Bose. In order to exert surveillance over members of suspect native groups, such as ‘criminal tribes’, Henry had introduced his own modification of the Bertillon system in Bengal, Sengupta stated. However, Henry soon found that there were great discrepancies in calibration by different measurers. Drawing upon Galton’s 1892 book *Finger Prints*, Henry added the left thumb print to his index, but the remaining measurements followed the Bertillon schema. In 1897, the persistent Henry “triumphantly announced that if one divided all fingerprint patterns into two basic categories of loop and whorl, then for ten digits, there were 1024 – and only 1024 – possible combinations of loops and whorls”. Since 1024 was the square of 32, “a cabinet containing thirty-two sets of thirty-two pigeon holes arranged horizontally would provide locations for all possible combinations”; a fairly simple search formula for this had also been developed.

Herschel later dedicated his booklet *Origin of Fingerprinting* to Henry, celebrating the “masterly developments” that had transformed his vision of an administrative tool into “a weapon of penetrating certainty for the sterner needs of Justice”; and he was inspired by his contact with Galton and Henry to remind the Government of India of the potential of his old hobby, Sengupta remarked. This time his proposal was warmly accepted, and the thumb impression became common on Indian legal documents and contracts. Henry also desired to extend fingerprinting beyond the domain of criminality: the procedure was “particularly well suited to the requirements of a country where the mass of the people are uneducated, and where false personation is an evil which even the penalties provided by the penal laws are powerless to control”. All military and civil pensioners were fingerprinted, as were people registering transfers of property and cultivators of the opium crop. Fingerprinting was also used for the authentication of employee records, contracts for indentured labour, and medical certificates; and from 1895, the fingerprints of illiterate people were used on money order receipts and postal savings accounts by the postal services.

Sengupta invoked a “frustrating opacity in the colonial panopticon”, a special instance where fingerprinting proved to be invaluable – the identification of *pardah-nashin* women (those who observe the custom of veiling). “The bodies of these subjects were beyond state scrutiny, and their identities not ordinarily open to verification. This led to worries about impersonation, especially with regard to pensions – an anxiety that was removed by the introduction of fingerprinting.”

The speaker argued that though most of the uses of fingerprinting were motivated by “a suspicion of the native” that was embedded in “biological racism”, the logic of governmentality has to be taken into account if we are to fully understand the ideological thrust behind the practice of fingerprinting in the ethos of colonial India. “The colonial state did not recognise natives as citizens, and the colonial state was under little pressure to engage with native civil society. The colonial state ignored metropolitan liberal principles of governance. In the words of James Mill, the best form of government for India was an ‘arbitrary’ one, ‘tempered by European honour and European intelligence’... The colonial state in India, in fact, seemed to be motivated by ideas of 18<sup>th</sup>-century ‘police science’, of which surveillance was the fulcrum; the dream of total surveillance was characteristic of colonial regimes, and in terms of colonial thinking, the aim was the ‘total surveyability’ of the colonial domain.”

This “transparency” was sought through the construction of a “totalising classificatory grid” that could be used to order “people, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments”; the grid ensured that one could identify and situate people/things in definite ways.

Sengupta reiterated that this was particularly relevant to British India, where colonial administrators “lamented the indeterminacy of native concepts of identity”. Officials complained that “it is almost ludicrous to observe... how often the same things are called by different names, and different things by same names”; and E.M Forster, “hardly a typical Anglo-Indian”, observed with compelling accuracy that “nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else”. The colonial regime was keen to “reduce the chaotic diversity” of India into “an orderly system of names and identities”. In Britain, however, the state was resistant to the idea of subjecting free-born citizens to physical surveillance, and did not consider adopting fingerprinting for routine administrative use – an attitude that persisted,

except with regard to the identification of “aliens”/“asylum seekers”, till post-9/11.

The speaker suggested that this contrast in modes of governmentality was indeed based on colonial racism, but extended to “beyond the skin or the body”. The British viewed the Indian body not simply as an inferior, coloured entity, but as an organism that differed from the Western body in significant ways; it was a “peculiarly complex effect of environment, habits, beliefs and knowledges”. To this, one could add ‘character’ and ‘psychology’ – while fingerprinting was a corporeal technology, its rationale and justification were not based in notions of physical/racial difference, but on differences in character and behaviour.

“Despite some near-universal assumptions about the nature of Indians, British assessments of Indian character varied to a large extent,” Sengupta commented. A well-known instance is the general ethnic distinction made between the “manly martial races” of the north and the “mendacious natives” of Bengal. “But even the Bengali character was not necessarily understood in a monolithic way. This becomes clear if we compare the history of fingerprinting with another contemporary corporeal technology, surgery by mesmeric anaesthesia, practiced by the Scottish surgeon James Esdaile in Hooghly in the 1840s; he claimed he could perform extensive operations painlessly by putting the patient in a mesmeric trance.”

According to Sengupta, Esdaile considered Bengal to be the ideal site for his experiments because the difference in intellect and psychological sophistication between doctor and patient was so great that the effects of mesmerism could not be dismissed as a result of suggestibility or collusion between doctor and patient. For Esdaile, “the people in this part of the world seem to be peculiarly sensitive to the mesmeric power”; in addition, “a depressed state of the nervous system” facilitated the exertion of mesmeric influence, and this was pronounced in Bengalis.

Esdaile declared that his success could be attributed to his patients “being the simple, unsophisticated children of nature; neither thinking, questioning, nor remonstrating, but passively submitting to my pleasure, without in the smallest degree understanding my object or intentions”.

Thus, the history of the emergence of fingerprinting in India illuminates important aspects of colonial governmentality as it was differently practiced at the centre and at the

periphery of empire, Sengupta concluded. “Perhaps even more crucially, the history of fingerprinting can help us appreciate how colonial interventions on or with the native body were rooted in and woven into ideas about the mind, character and behaviour of the colonised... Colonial governmentality was based in complicated and multidimensional forms of racial differentiation that were rarely confined to the body, but strove always to link body with mind, organism with society and culture with environment.”

Initiating the discussion following the keynote lecture, Leo Lucassen remarked that Sengupta’s narrative was “a very British story”; and the British were not the only colonisers in the world, at that time. “Was their policy exceptional?” The parameters of the Sengupta’s argument could perhaps be usefully extended by comparisons with French and Dutch colonial policies.

Sengupta replied that his “lack of languages” had so far kept him from exploring this in detail. As far as he discerned, the “French story” was likely to be complicated, as there was a resistance to fingerprinting in metropolitan France for quite a while, on the ground that it was a British technique that the British were trying to impose. “Galton got on very well with Bertillon, and the latter finally agreed to introduce a fingerprint on his cards. But that was the extent of collaboration till World War I...” In other parts of the British Empire, such as South Africa, fingerprinting was definitely an identity practice, and had an important place in those colonial regimes.

Jane Caplan suggested that just as the British were suspicious of Bertillon’s schema, the French didn’t care for the fingerprint; but it was interesting that fingerprinting “is one of those technologies that everyone claims to have invented”, so the origin story of fingerprinting is from all kinds of places. For instance, in Latin America a major fingerprinting project was undertaken in Argentina and Uruguay, two countries that have characteristics of both the colonial and non-colonial state. This raises subtle questions about how fingerprints are understood, and the debate about them is a prolonged one, and different from the one produced in India; some work on this had been done by the scholar Kristin Ruggiero.

“One reason why India has a different story is that it was an extremely complex and sophisticated commercial society, and already running on

contract and law,” Caplan explained. “The extent to which relationships were regulated by law must have been much greater here than in other places where the only contract was between indentured labour and those who were misusing that labour.

According to Caplan, we also need to take into account “the completely unselfconscious characterisations of the Indian character, which I refrained from mentioning in my own lecture at this colloquium, because it is not up to me to reproduce these vis-à-vis the colonial forbears... Those who write about the laws of evidence in 19<sup>th</sup>-century India point out that these are textbooks on what you can expect to hear or rely upon from someone giving testimony in court.” Regarding Sengupta’s “racism concept”, Caplan asked if he was making a sharp distinction between a “physical” racism and a “mental” one, even while at the end of his lecture he did affirm that these two went together. Was Sengupta suggesting that the regime’s attitude would not have been racist if the British had just said that Indians had “strange” characteristics?

Sengupta clarified that such a suggestion was not his intent, and that he was trying to get past the “simple Simon-Cole sort of labelling of fingerprinting as a technique of racial monitoring”. While the practice did involve this kind of regulation, focusing on the body, his own research posited that it involved much more than the body – which was in fact “just one tool in a much larger constellation of racist concepts that spanned body and culture and psychology”.

Charles Merewether reminded Sengupta that the case of Brazil might also be of comparative interest; though most of the literature in this regard was in Portuguese, much of it had by now been translated into English. Mesmerism was culturally very important in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Brazil, particularly in Bahia in the north; it became a big problem of governmentality for the colonial Portuguese occupying power because it was seen as being linked to the “wayward desires and fetishism” of the Afro-Brazilian population. “So it actually becomes a kind of inverted model to yours, in some manner, because it seems to me that the positivistic sciences such as phrenology, as they were applied in Brazil, were actually a way of trying to regulate this kind of unruly combination of mesmerism and Afro-Brazilian religious practice.”

Linking this to the description of Esdaile in his research, Sengupta asserted that it was not just “one-dimensional positivistic science” at work here; Esdaile himself occasionally collaborated

with various kinds of folk healers even while he tried to keep his distance. “A certain unsavoury image of Eastern hocus-pocus clung to his mesmeric surgery. But he declares, ‘If I hadn’t been employing a totally scientific technique, rather like electricity, would I have been able to affect these mindless brutes?’ But what I did not go into in my lecture, as it was not central to the theme, is that he is arguing against associations with various kinds of Indian charlatans, to protect himself from criticism. But he doesn’t quite manage that, and has to face quite a bit of governmental criticism.”

With regard to colonial governmentality, Awadhendra Sharan commented that the “policing question” was important, but so was the way the state thought of the social and the individual. “There are changes in the way these are conceptualised by the state.” The formulation of difference between the colony and the metropolis is “rather limiting”, as it doesn’t take into account the relationship between the social and the individual as the colonial state imagines it. Sharan made reference to a study of colonial governmentality in the Philippines by Warwick Anderson, a historian of science and medicine. “This study describes how the relationship between the social/individual and the state changes over time. The state’s imagination of this relationship will be different in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1920s...”

Wendy Chun brought up the concept of racism, asking what it was about “if not to create a total grid of visibility that is ever-more specific”. The lecture recalled for her Foucault’s claims in *Society Must Be Defended*, and changing notions of how race operated. Sengupta had mentioned “tantalisingly” that the colonial fingerprinting project was also about eugenics: would this be a way to understand difference? Chun pointed out that the theorist Alan Sekula makes a huge differentiation between Bertillon and Galton – the latter was far more about prediction, whereas the former was about identification. “Is the question of race that you are pursuing precisely one that tries to tease out and understand the limitations of that predictive model, and then a different model that’s more specific? Of course, Galton becomes incredibly disappointed that his theories of fingerprinting are not fully assimilated...”

Chun also invoked the contemporary moment when we have DNA ‘fingerprinting’ – “the keeping of it as a metaphor” – yet the devaluing of it as an evidentiary tool, within the courts. “What is so metaphorically powerful that it is disseminated and devaluated at the same time?”

Sengupta acknowledged that 'fingerprinting' as a word and as a basic concept of definitive identification has now entered into the vernacular; "it is no longer the description of a specialised procedure, but something that we all understand instinctively". DNA 'fingerprinting' as well as technological applications in computer science that also derive from the word, have become part of our daily language "exactly at the time when the technique itself is beginning to show various signs of a kind of obsolescence. But one shouldn't write its obituary just yet – partly because it is so cheap, it has persisted, especially in the land where fingerprinting is so criticised by theorists and lawyers and scholars; even to enter the US requires the giving of one's fingerprint. For the first time since 1900, the old Galton paradigm is beginning to be attacked by legal voices there..."

Sengupta reiterated that fingerprinting had a "curious history", in that Galton was only interested in heredity, and did not care at all about identification of individual bodies. "He was interested in them only insofar as they represent types. So he tried different techniques, including the famous composite photography in which he tries to identify *the 'criminal', the 'Jew', etc.*, by superimposing the features of multiple criminals and multiple Jews and then seeing what emerges as a final coalesced image. He claims that this composite identifies the type."

The speaker clarified that Galton's initial interest in fingerprinting was in finding out whether fingerprint patterns differ in terms of race and class. He continued to work on this project almost till the end of his life, but he never got definitive results; he confessed this in his book. "So he made the best of it by pushing the technology as an infallible means of identity. Eventually his aim is fulfilled, but even there he fails to get the British state to use it as widely as he would like. His wish was for Britain to have a national register, for civil servants to take fingerprints – it was one of his greatest regrets that fingerprinting became associated with crime and criminality. For him, that was just one aspect of the technology."

U. Kalpagam asked if it was possible that the idea of fingerprinting as a unique identification practice derived from Indian astrologers/palmists who read the hand: "... Something more sophisticated than just a particular corporeal type of interpretation? We have a strong identification history and culture unrelated to state practices but linked to ideas about individual destiny, and so on."

Sengupta replied that he had not thought about interpretation in terms of individual history. However, Herschel had mentioned palmistry, he

wrote that he joked about this with his contractor, but this was the only reference. "As he was a serious evangelical Christian, I doubt if he would explore any 'heathen' beliefs and practices... For him, the fingertip signature that Indians have used for hundreds of years – known in Bangla as *tip-shoi* – was the most compelling aspect. He does mention this, but initially he is not even interested in the fingertip. I am still mystified as to what his original intent was, other than to 'scare the native', as he says... I am willing to take him at his word when he says he didn't have a clue as to what his obsession would lead to..."

"But all this is largely speculation on my part. There is no independent confirmation of the research of his early days. As he moves about from station to station, he is mentioned in memoirs of civil servants in India of that time, and they say he had this peculiar 'fad' of collecting people's fingerprints. We have no other accounts of his early days, except his own."

Rana Dasgupta remarked that Sengupta's lecture suggests that fingerprinting was applied across classes; "all of us who've contemplated being fingerprinted ourselves understand that when you face that situation, you realise that there is a doubt about your identity that you weren't aware of before. It's a kind of insulting moment..." Were there any practices of resistance to fingerprinting that have been documented, or protests in newspapers, any kind of 'native' knowledge that arose at the time fingerprinting was applied?

Sengupta replied that he had not researched native "resistance"; and that even native "response" to fingerprinting comes to us via "rather biased" colonial sources. Afghan moneylenders – "Kabulis" – in Calcutta had apparently discovered a "wonderful way of forging fingerprints"; that might count as a form of resistance. These Kabulis' skill threatened to undermine the value of the new identification protocol. Frank Brewster, a fingerprint expert in Calcutta in the 1930s, who wrote extensively on the subject of fingerprinting, describes how the reliability of the technique can no longer be guaranteed in India because Kabulis have evolved such a "simple, dependable" method for forging the print that they could not be told from the originals – "except by Brewster himself, of course, but he couldn't be everywhere".

Sengupta added that other forms of resistance and response, or even "the logic of 'Look what wonderful things the *sahibs* can do!'" in the context of fingerprinting, were future areas he hoped to explore.

Radhika Singha affirmed that the exchange between Herschel and the contractor Konia Rajyadhar “was not just about the *sahib* frightening the native” – it was also about palmistry and comparing palms. “In palmistry also there is emphasis on the tips of the fingers and marks there as indices of unique destiny. Herschel wanted to convince himself that this was conveyed by the prints he collected. In that regard, there was some similarity to Galton’s quest. Also, Herschel did not collect prints at random during his travels; he collected from specific, prominent people: a Raja, a High Court judge, etc., to see if their lines showed a unique destiny. So in that sense there was an overlapping of interest in palmistry as well as in fingerprinting, as a ‘science’ of identification.”

Singha added that the fact of fingerprints in India being used in a wide variety of contexts did not necessarily mean that surveillance was more effective or extensive. In the West, because of welfare legislation people had much more incentive to come forward and verify themselves in a variety of situations. “Information was very deep and recessed.” Within colonial regimes, however, the state had to take shortcuts; it had to target and select. The contrast between the colonial government which was supposedly “all-encompassing” and a Western government that is “less intensely a grid” has to be worked through.

Sengupta clarified that Benedict Anderson’s argument about total surveyability, etc., “was more often an intention than a reality, obviously. If the history of the British empire in India teaches us anything, it is that the colonial regime failed to construct such a grid...”

“I wanted to show that they were eager to construct one as part of the colonial project of knowledge, mapping the land, its peoples.”

Regarding metropolitan governmentality and its relationship to the colonial state, Sengupta argued that it was essential to bring in the discourse of liberalism “In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Edward Higgs has shown in his book, an information state is gradually erected in Britain, but this excludes the body of the citizen from its scrutiny, by and large. And it is at the site of the body that the liberal resistance to identification practices is at its strongest...”

“Even in the 1950s and 1960s, the British state was collecting information about its citizens extensively, but the state did not necessarily know what the citizen looked like. Even within the system of conscription, the identity cards issued in

the context of two world wars do not carry any biometric data as we would understand it. They carried the name and address, etc., but no physical indices, not even colour of the eyes... Today the House of Lords and the Liberal Democrats are most resistant to the identity card project that the Labour government is desperate to implement...

“I do think we should beware of drawing too sharp a distinction between colonial governmentality and metropolitan governmentality,” Sengupta declared. “Empires weren’t run by scholars, it was pragmatic benefits that mattered the most – and in India, certain of these could be acquired by means that were not necessarily, or directly, relevant to Britain.”

Lucassen pointed out that in continental Europe, physical indices have been used systematically by the police “not just for criminals but also for aliens” – conclusions about contemporary identification and surveillance practices should not be drawn from research confined only to England.

Sengupta agreed. “If British India was peculiar, it was not as peculiar as Britain itself... We have to be careful not to generalise from the British experience. The continental attitude to identification even today has been very different; this can be noticed even anecdotally. The history has been very different too.”

**Day 02**