

Turbulence

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## In Turbulence

At some point during the closing half in the extra time of the Italy vs. France match in this year's FIFA World Cup final game on 8 July, the world changed. Again. The synapses in the brain of a man named Zinedine Zidane went into a state of momentary turbulence. A wave of rage surged into a headbutt that we mourned and saluted, seconds later, glued to television screens halfway across the world. The world seemed to change that instant, as it always does when the angel of the unexpected flaps his wings in the middle of a great game. Many prayers went unanswered that night.

All this was happening as e-mails bearing notes and queries about the book you now hold in your hands, or scan with your eyes on a screen, flew across the world. This book, a book titled *Turbulence*, was on its way into the world. A turbulence caught, distilled, held between covers, in these many pages, in this much ink, in these images, in this much white space.

Who knows what else was happening that night? What ripples had radiated out of that momentary collision between two footballers in Berlin? Or which wave had carried that headbutt with it, to crash on which distant shore of the global unconscious?

Someone had gone to sleep after a solitary vigil over a cache of explosives in Mumbai. An Israeli soldier stood at his checkpoint, somewhere along the border with Lebanon. A Hezbollah fighter spent a restless night thinking of his girlfriend. Perhaps a party of Bengali tourists in Srinagar sang songs just because it was too cold for them, and perversely, because Italy had won. Somewhere deep within the earth, below the ocean floor, not too far off the shoreline of Pandarang in Java, magma crackled. The seeds of a million cells of turbulence, inheritors of tsunamis, descendants of riots and curfews, progeny of hurricanes, modernity's questioning bastards, were germinating fractally, branching out into new constellations of storm. The world was at unrest. As it is, every night.

In the week and days that followed, bombs exploded in Mumbai, grenades were hurled at tourists in Srinagar, a war began in Lebanon, a tsunami hit Java, once again. There was rain. There was fire. There were signs of birth and death. There were quarrels and street fights, there were parties, the Richter scale quivered, there were demolitions. The twenty-first century rumbled on, as usual, turbulently.

If there were ever to be a weather report for our times, an audit of the climate in which we have grown accustomed to live, it would use the word *turbulence* often. We inhabit the vortex of storms, and smell sunshine. We are always prepared for rain. Our cities are sites of flood and fire. We live between tremors, power cuts and voltage surges. Agitations emerge and abate on our streets and on the airwaves, as if by accident. Books are burned, blogs are blocked, bourses dance mad tarantulas. We fly with seat belts fastened. Predictions are pronounced and dissembled in seconds. Bets are placed and lost, wagers made and found wanting. Insurance companies invoke acts of God. The more things change, the more they change.

The past decade, the first of our young turbulent new century, has opened up a series of transformations that seem to cumulatively define the contemporary, even as they themselves defy definition by virtue of the speed and immediacy with which they have made themselves manifest. Every mythic moment has begotten its Faustian other: globalisation has produced counter-globalisation, the crisis of the US empire was exposed on September 11 and via the quagmire in Iraq, the world of Islam is torn apart by internal strife and humiliation, the global West makes way for India Rising and Global China. Sovereignty, that old pillar of the modern state, stands in ruins, lost somewhere along the road from Westphalia to Beirut, along with all stable social theories of the world; citizenship, the university and liberal doctrines of rights. Property, the legal form of capital, is under attack not only from labour but also from modes of circulation and re-production. The kingdom of Piracy threatens the kingdom of Property. Massacres, media events, commodity fetishisms, security analysts and scam artists all clog the airwaves and the internet. In this world of exhilaration, death and survival, new practices have sought to define themselves, refusing to fall within old redemptive modes.

Turbulence is a practice for and of a time that has no name. This book, embodying that practice, is an eclectic index of an uncertain age. *Sarai Reader 06* uses Turbulence as a conceptual vantage point to interrogate all that is in the throes of terminal crisis, and to invoke all that is as yet unborn. We seek to examine turbulence as a global phenomenon, unbounded by the arbitrary lines that denote national and state boundaries in a political map of the world. We want to see areas of low and high pressure in politics, economy and culture that transcend borders, we want to investigate the flow of information and processes between downstream and upstream sites in societies and cultures globally, we want to witness surges and waves in ideas and practices as they crash against the shorelines of many dispersed locations. We want to inhabit moments of stillness and investigate the conditions that determine stasis in the middle of a tremendous upsurge of movement.

How do we anticipate, recover from, and remember these moments of sudden transformation? How do we look at the debris of the past and brace ourselves for the whirlwind coming our way from the future? How do we deal with the simultaneous pressures of knowing too much, or the anxiety of knowing too little about the world? How do we cope intellectually with the sudden dissolution of established ways of knowing and doing things? What does it mean to know and experience the pull of undercurrents; in society, politics, the economy? How do cities deal with the accumulation of complex infrastructural uncertainty? What happens when urban chaos strikes back at urban planning? How can we map the subterranean tectonic shifts and displacements that occur in culture and intellectual life? What are the histories of anxiety, exhilaration, dread, panic, ecstasy, disorientation and boredom like? How can we begin to narrate these histories? What does it take from us to tell stories, read poetry, make images and record experiences in the wake of turbulence?

These were the kinds of questions we wanted responses to when we invited contributions to Turbulence. In many ways, this desire grew out of a desire to revisit a landscape we had last traversed in *Sarai Reader 04: Crisis Media*; not so much in terms of reporting what was

going on from what could be called the ground zero of global consciousness, but to reflect on what it means to ride the storm out till its savage end. If *Reader 04* was about discovering a world in crisis, then *Reader 06* can be seen as being a book which takes the fact of a chaotic, turbulent world as a given, and then asks, Now what?f

In the last year or so, we have trawled through a rich lode of texts and images that came our way from many parts of the world in response to this question. We heard from Tehran, from Dhaka, from Lagos, from Sao Paulo, from Beirut, from Shillong, from New York, from New Orleans, from Vijayawada, from Chennai, from Mumbai and of course, from Delhi. These contributions spoke not only of hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes, but also of the little storms of ordinary, commonplace life. They remembered conflicts as far away in time as the *ghadar* of 1857 in northern India, just as much as they registered the war that had just erupted in Lebanon. They indexed encounters that Kashmiris have in Delhi, and interpreted the sounds of picks and shovels laying entire neighbourhoods to waste. They spoke of storms in the mind, in the world of numbers and figures, and of the tempests that visit the body. They gave accounts of cities turning against themselves, of zones of disquiet at borders and frontiers, of the rise and demise of utopias, and of crises of meaning and value in contemporary art and current poetry. They spoke of accidents, speculations, conspiracies, leakages, flashmobs and of the strange weather that we have been having lately. They spoke in voices that spanned the entire spectrum from sobriety to exhilaration by way of doubt and despair. They laughed out loud at the madness they inhabited. They came to us in the form of photographs and drawings, comics and reportage, essays and interviews, letters and manifestos.

At an early stage in its gestation this year, the *Reader* was invited to participate in a community of publications ; a project called the Documenta 12 magazines .

This year, Documenta 12 Magazines addresses the issue of Modernity? *Sarai Reader 06* interprets this issue with an emphasis on the question mark that follows the abstract noun of this marker of temporality. We see our time, the one that sits in on Modernity's wake, as an opportunity for questioning, for admitting to radical uncertainties, and looking askance at the claims of truth and beauty. We are happy that this *Reader* marks a diffuse, dispersed engagement with discourses in contemporary art by featuring a large number of contributions by artists, curators and critics, and by paying a degree of focused attention to the perils of practice in contemporary art and literature. We hope that this enterprise succeeds in its mission of introducing a modicum of turbulence into the discursive realm of Documenta 12.

A book about Turbulence has to be a turbulent book. It cannot have an overarching claim to structure, or a pretence to order, no matter how hard we try to quieten the clamour in its pages. This book has no desire to come to rest, no hurry to arrive at any still centre. It will headbutt and get a few yellow and red cards as it plays its game. The only design it tries to follow is one that privileges surprises and the strange serendipity that emerges from the juxtapositions of the flotsam and jetsam that remain as the residue of a storm.

The Editorial Collective  
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