



# MEMOROPHILIA

A specific object with the ability to evoke an emotion or feeling in remembrance of a certain memory.

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## Who is Memory For ? Plotinus

Memory is for those who have forgotten

Plotinus (Enneads, 4, 3, 25 ff.)

## Australian Amnesia and the Memory of Micro-Organisms

New studies of 80 'Bradshaw' rock art works (which are estimated to be about 17,000 years old, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia) have shown their colors have not faded because the artworks are coated with a biofilm of bacteria and fungi.

The 'memory' of the paintings, and of the people who made them, is kept alive by these microscopic life forms. In their own way, these bacteria and fungi are antidotes to the legal fiction of Terra Nullius, or, 'empty land' which still stands uncorrected in the amnesiac Australian Constitution of 1901.

The history of human beings in Australia did not begin in 1788. It began at least 40,000 years ago.

Memory is for those who have forgotten.

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## Forgetfulness in the Flesh

How does one make a memory for the human animal? How does one impress something on this partly dull, partly scattered momentary understanding, this forgetfulness in the flesh, so that it remains present?

One burns something in, so that it remains in ones memory: only what does not cease to give pain remains in ones memory.

On the Genealogy of Morals  
Friedrich Nietzsche

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### Digressions from the Memory of a Minor Encounter Raqs Media Collective

Once, not so long ago, on a damp, rainy afternoon in Paris, a stroll took us across the Avenue d'Iéna, from contemporary art to ancient and medieval Asian art, from the Palais de Tokyo to the Musée Guimet. There, standing at the far end of the ground-floor section of the Guimet's permanent collection in front of a frieze from the Banteay Srei temple in Cambodia's Siem Reap province, we felt the sharp edge of estrangement in something that also felt downright familiar.

The Banteay Srei frieze narrates a story from the Mahabharata, a Sanskrit epic. The story is of two brothers, the demons Sunda and Upasunda, whose tussle over the attentions of Tilottama, an Apsara—a heavenly courtesan sent by the gods to destroy them with jealousy—was the cause of their downfall. Like most others who grew up listening to stories in India, we knew it well, even if only as an annotation to the main body of the epic. But it wasn't the details of the story that intrigued us that afternoon, nor the carved contours of Sunda and Upasunda's rage, not even the delicacy of the depiction of Tilottama's divisive seduction. Instead, standing before these stone images, made in a region roughly 3,500 miles to the east of where we live, in Delhi, and exhibited in a museum roughly 6,500 miles to the west, we felt compelled to think again about distance and proximity, and about how stories, images, and ideas travel.

The story of Sunda, Upasunda, and Tilottama was probably first told around 200 B.C. in the northwestern part of the South Asian subcontinent. Between the first telling of the story and the carving of the frieze in a clearing in the forests of Seam Riep in circa 967 lay a little more than a thousand years and an eastward journey of a few thousand miles. Between its carving and our sudden encounter

with it in Paris, there lay a little more than another millennium and a westward journey halfway across the world. These intervals in time and space were overlaid by an elaborate circuit that encompassed travel, conquest, migration and settlement, wars and violence, the clearing of forests, the quarrying of stone, slavery and indenture, skilled artisans, the faces and indiscretions of the men and women who would become the inspiration for jealous demons and divine courtesans, a few thousand years of history, the crossing of oceans, the rise and fall of several empires across different continents, and the repeated telling and forgetting of a minor story.

Contemporaneity, the sensation of being in a time together is an ancient, enigma of a feeling. It is the tug we feel when our times pull at us. But sometimes one has the sense of a paradoxically asynchronous contemporaneity—the strange tug of more than one time and place. As if an accumulation or thickening of our attachments to different times and spaces was manifesting itself in the form of some unique geological oddity, a richly striated cross section of a rock, sometimes sharp, sometimes blurred, marked by the passage of many epochs.

Standing before Sunda, Upasunda, and Tillottama in the Musée Guimet, we were in Siem Reap, in Indraprastha (an ancient name for Delhi, in whose vicinity much of the Mahabharata story is located), in New Delhi, in nineteenth-century Paris, and in the Paris of today. We were in many places and in many times. Sometimes art, the presence of an image, moves you. And you find yourself scattered all over the place, as a consequence.

How can we begin to think about being scattered?

Collections of objects from different parts of the world are indices of different instances of scattering. The minor encounter that we experienced in the Musée Guimet is one kind of scattering. It taught us that sometimes we encounter familiarity in the guise of strangeness and then suggested that we learn to question the easy

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