

The Flights of the Pink Flamingo or *Historiae Sub-Rosae* of Capital and the Twentieth Century

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There are some who choose to live in the wilderness that is the world being made and remade again and again god knows following whose agendas. One wonders why things are being fabricated and dismantled across the world with such insistence or worse still abandoned without rhyme or reason. One wonders what aims are being served by such acts – are these mere sketches in an artist's personal album building up towards a masterpiece? Or are these symptoms of confusions where the aims and goals towards which human action is mobilized are fuzzily understood, or are these symptoms of panic and paranoia? The measure of measuring, as the Raqs Media Collective puts it, is all about this – an auscultation of creative processes to audit the correlation between labour employed and labour's goals. Putative aims for human effort today are forms and configurations of energy that are calculated according to formulae and equations enshrined in textbooks. Following these, things are put up confidently, robustly; no unfinished Ajanta caves here. Or so we would want to believe. Instead Raqs would say that the derelict remains of materiality strewn across the globe in the age of Capital reveal only a series of distracted deployment of labour power, attention moving on before energy in the monument produced have reached apotheosis in use. All is partial, abandoned and in ruins. Let alone a few completed caves there seems nothing complete in whatever Capital does. One way of looking at this would be to detect a misfit between Capital's theories of what is good for humankind and humankind's own multifarious desires. There is no sublimation of life's goals in Capital's ways of working leading to the failure of whatever project Capital takes up. Capital's measures seem to be all awry. Cynics would say this is because Capital's theories of human good are a façade for its main aims – profiteering and therefore primitive accumulation remains Capital's sole aim from which profit can be extracted after which there is no interest left in the site of primitive accumulation. Capital moves on.

This is the aspect of Capital that Communist revolutionary and Marxist political economist Rosa Luxemburg highlights in her most celebrated work *The Accumulation of Capital*. For her Capitalism's functioning through the logic of primitive accumulation leads it to predate upon non-Capitalist societies in order to make up for its own failures at the centre of its operations. It operates from behind the mask of idealistic knowledge that could liberate humankind, sell it to the world at large, only to sabotage the project after primitive accumulation and profiteering is over. For Luxemburg this need of Capital's to make all humankind work according to its blueprint was bound to fail, *ergo* the fall of Capitalism. Hidden in her assumption is the realization that Capital might be overreaching its limits in trying to colonize cultures different from itself. Capital could engineer ideological hegemonies in home cultures but the chances for successful revolutions against Capital's failures were higher in cultures away from the centre. Maybe against she was arguing against Marx that the real organizational force for the world revolution of labour would come from outside the West. Labour would then reclaim its sublimation in the highest idealistic aims of the knowledge Capital employs and betrays and this reclamation would follow local logics rather than a universal mechanical template.

All of these considerations make Raqs' new work *The Capital of Accumulation* poignant coming as it does as a diagnosis of the history of the twentieth century read through the prism of the workings of Capital from that part of the world that Luxemburg had thought would redeem Capital. The installation assemblage was completed towards *The Promised City* project encompassing the cities of Berlin, Warsaw and Mumbai (capitals of

accumulation) conceptualized by the Polish Institute, Berlin, the Goethe--Institut, Warsaw and the Goethe--Institut, Mumbai. Its centerpiece consists of a diptych two--screen video installation, a set of photographs named *The Perpetual Recall of the Penultimate Afternoon* consisting of images of passages of the building in Berlin where Rosa was living when she disappeared, a sculptured chess board with only knights and dice to play with carved to the shape of a city skyline consisting of skyscrapers called *Rules to be Invented, Revoltage*, a light installation and *Over Time*, a calendar for the week, one page for each day but containing objects related to measuring and shaping in artisanal labour such as pencil sharpeners, erasers, U--clips, notebooks, rulers, dividers etc., each with a spirit level to measure the energies of work and accumulation. The physical installation pieces work at a tangent and allusively with the central video installation that consists of a series of images and sequences that add up to a forensic investigation of the workings of global Capital and the passages of lives through the competitive warfare in accumulation that Capital is. The individual's love of the world in knowledge and experience become the filter through which the history of the twentieth century passes articulated around the moment of Rosa's Spartacist revolt in Berlin and her death, the decimation of Warsaw by the Nazis and the ironies of the Rosa Luxemburg factory in Communist Poland now abandoned and Mumbai today. Commitments to a dream of redemption in holistic human experience in the adventure of life and learning lie broken and smashed leaving only an undergrowth of busy slave labour violently yanked off from living given only the ghostly symptom of Utopian desire in the petty tea--break thrown in as a grudging ill--mannered concession to life.

Images threaten to accumulate in reverie and pain of loss in times where Capital has managed to make a slave out of even pulsations of energy, media signals that transmit images of everything in the world randomly hoping that some fool will take it up and help accumulation through his or her idealistic labour. Love is the thing that Capital predates upon and destroys ruthlessly and it is through love, the voice commenting on the passage of images that gives a meaning to the images on show, a direction and even shelter. The accumulative logic of images is thus distracted from their lifeless flight downwards in stasis by the voice speaking lovingly of the world to be given their proper place and direction in our own desires to be in the world harmoniously and happily. Love then for Rosa's dreams of the liberation of humankind in the freedom to experience all of the world, love for the human spirit that stages a play by Tagore in a Warsaw ghetto when all is well nigh over and love also for the pink flamingos who refuse to give up time--tested migratory routes and keep coming back to Bombay despite its concretizations – a thousand Rosas coming to a city where once the daughter of a Trade Union leader had been named after Luxemburg (how one is reminded of that splendid Rousseau painting of the same bird in African settings where they come from).

Love then for all that reminds us of the vibrancy of life when all seems lost. And above all love for all traces of human love to be felt in all that Capital has abandoned too soon...a certain cinema for example as Jean--Luc Godard would remind us constantly. Love under the rose bush entwined in all the undergrowths of Capital's working – some derelict yet still replete with an original desire for redemption in history and others which are beginning to bloom on the edges of the old order – a new age of knowing, experiencing and making with new tools of work and imagination. But also a fascination with the routes created by modernity through which things connect with one another, through which we let our desires fly into the world towards unknown recipients, a celebration of the passages of images and sounds that enrich our Berlin who could have known Rosa and maybe even

worked at the fabled UFA film studios or the very fact of friends and project makers, the joys of new technologies who have made this work possible.

In the ghostly passages of their images, Raqs acknowledge what they call the anacoustic, a chamber of sensory deprivation in its excesses and confusions, created by Capital to deafen us to the noise of history but fill it up over time with this noise – the noise of a city awakening, the noise of street talk, noise of work, the approach of Revoltage, the uprising of real surplus in the excess of human desire over Capital's petty aims. In the anacoustic, life threatens to turn into stone and indeed the anacoustic is nothing but a memorial to the excess of the revolutionary gesture that has been removed by force and cast into the undergrowth of history. Capital thinks the undergrowth is the unknown and the inorganic which will not bite back but its own workings have created an organic undergrowth from which her image comes back to us carried by those whose desires she had embodied, but also ironically by the mechanical ways of the manner in which the State archives events in territories under its command. Maybe all the way back from Berlin to Mumbai. The forensic investigation of the circumstances of her disappearance only lead back to the dreams she embodied – from one undergrowth of decline to another displaying original intentions and desires for a glorious history and so on suddenly to one where pencils, sharpeners, rulers, dividers accumulate towards another era of golden historical dreams – the relay of idealisms leading to Revoltage, the insertion of the full set of counters on the chess piece for the full game of history to be played out in the highest voltages of human desire where only a few petty minds work today.

Speaking of measures then, we leave the installations wondering about the measure of the world in experience in the collective form of work, knowing and ideation that can be the only truth of experience today. Raqs have been for the past few decades brought to us the world and its histories tirelessly in the most fascinating ways, imbuing things that threaten to accumulate pointlessly with their histories, histories of human desire for and arising of a glorious experiencing of the world. The loving voice maybe rediscovered in conversations within this collective, the voice that is threatened by the vertigo of sensory confusion that their work *LocationN* so chillingly catches and expresses with clocks set to various standard times only denoting mental exhaustion and the disappearance of the self in a babble of noise. Maybe this is one of the ideal sizes and configurations, the right measure of a collective within which history maybe redeemed. Outside of such sizes things are up for grabs for profiteering or worst still accumulate without any rhyme or reason.