

Future Contingent Propositions: Raqs Media Collective and *Perhaps (An Investigation Outside the Laws of Thought)*

'all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story from beginning to end yes completely false yes'¹

Raqs Media Collective's work often seems to circle around ideas about time and potential. It's interesting then, that for Gymnasium they have created a sculpture composed of interlocked portals or gates as this single structure seems to curiously encapsulate both concerns. Portals or gates are associated in the public imaginary both with shifts in time and space. A portal is a potentiality, a perhaps, something that includes the innate possibility of change.

In finding an entry point to this commission, Raqs alighted on George Boole, perhaps because he is widely cited as the father of the media age in terms of his influence on the programming logic which runs computers and perhaps because in his search to develop from Aristotelian logic he took influence from Indian logicians², thus creating a thread of confluence between differing times and geographies.

George Boole used the concept of gates, or questions, interrogating an individual statement - the answer of which is a Boolean yes or no, a one or a zero, true or false, on or off. The yes/no, true/ false aspect of Boolean logic was what made it applicable for creating logic gates and switches to inform computer programming, but ostensibly left little space for the contingent, the possible, the 'as-yet-undetermined'³ the perhaps..

However Boole's wife, Mary Everest Boole⁴ stated that he was concerned that his theories were seen as just mathematical tools : 'nearly all the logicians and mathematicians ignored the statement that the book was meant to throw light on the nature of the human mind; and treated the formula entirely as a wonderful new method of reducing to logical order masses of evidence about external fact.'⁵

¹ Samuel Beckett, *How It Is*, Ed. Edouard Magessa O'Reilly, (London: Routledge, 2001), p 191

² "Think what must have been the effect of the intense Hinduizing of three such men as Babbage, De Morgan, and George Boole on the mathematical atmosphere of 1830–65. What share had it in generating the [Vector Analysis](#) and the mathematics by which investigations in physical science are now conducted?", Boole, Mary Everest *Indian Thought and Western Science in the Nineteenth Century*, Boole, Mary Everest *Collected Works* eds. E. M. Cobham and E. S. Dummer, London, Daniel 1931 pp.947–967

³ In the early 20th century, the Polish formal logician [Jan Łukasiewicz](#) proposed three truth-values: the true, the false and the *as-yet-undetermined*.

⁴ a redoubtable mathematician in her own right.

⁵ .Boole, Mary Everest, *ibid*, p.953

Perhaps then he was more in tune with Kierkegaard's critique of logic: 'Actuality is not served thereby, for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual, cannot be admitted within the realm of logic.' ⁶

But maybe this does logic a disservice, as even Aristotle ⁷ was seen as moving towards modal logic – a form of logic that allows for more possibilities – more 'future contingent propositions' - statements about the future that are neither necessarily true nor necessarily false.. This moves us from a stark choice of impossible or necessary to allow for the contingent, the 'perhaps' which allows logic out of this bind and gives space for indetermination in reality.

Perhaps this is what the art of Raqs creates – future contingent propositions. It is in this indeterminate zone, between yes and no, true and false, that, it could be argued, all art resides and certainly where *Perhaps (An Investigation Outside the Laws of Thought)* situates itself.

If as Beckett suggests yes and no are the eternal tautology ⁸, different sides of the same coin, what does it take to get beyond this binary? As Jan Verwoert asks 'What philosophy of agency could be developed to act differently, to gain access to a utopian space of agency and potential beyond a codified set of options'⁹ This seems to be a space which is constantly being edged towards and intimated in projects by Raqs.

In other works the concern for time and potential shows itself differently. In 'The Ecliptic' (which is the term for the sun's arc across the sky - our diurnal timepiece) a clock is amended to produce evocative linguistic instants of time, rather than set intervals. A Bergsonian project of relative duration perhaps and another instance of trying to create a space between delineated options, the yes and the no, moment to moment. They are making a plea for a 'variegated sense of time' ¹⁰ one which requires a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to an experience. Perhaps this can be linked to the greek opposition between *chronos* and *kairos*, the former simply an empty motor of uniform linear temporal progression and the latter a qualitative form of time 'charged with promise and significance' ¹¹ into which we can intervene to create change.

⁶ *Concept of Anxiety*, Søren Kierkegaard, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 10

⁷ His 'sea battle' example (in *On Interpretation*, concerning the truth of the statement: "There will be a sea battle tomorrow".[35]sets up a form of logical trap which negates free will – everything is either impossible or necessary – Aristotle moves around this by reintroducing the future contingent of the perhaps..

⁸ "'Yes or no?" said Murphy. The eternal tautology. " , in Murphy, p. 41, Grove Press (1959)

⁹ From a lecture surrounding the Biennial exhibition 'Yes, No & Other Options', Art Sheffield 08 www.unitednationsplaza.org/video/96/ accessed 29.2.16

¹⁰ Raqs in 'Fear, Inequity and Time: A Sketch of how Art Answers the World's Questions', in Sarai Reader 08: Fear, p 239 also available at <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/images/pdf/99bc0851-5bae-4e33-b84f-2c19f2f1c161.pdf>

¹¹ from Paul Chan, 'A Time Apart' in Kaus Biesenback ed., *Greater New York* (New York: Moma/PS1, 2010) p 84-5. *Kairos* can also be seen in Walter Benjamin's 'Jetztzeit' which needs breaking free from the interminable flow of *chronos* by the artist or revolutionary. It also sounds a lot like Massumi's/ Deleuze and Guattari's 'Lines of flight' which creates art.

With 'Re-Run' time is inveigled to loop back on itself but also to leap out of line. A slow motion moving image remake of one of Cartier Bresson's 'decisive moments' – a bank run pre the take over of Shanghai by the People's Liberation Army in 1948. A classic example of the self – fulfilling prophecy, the fear that the bank may fail causes mass withdrawals which ensure this failure. 'The anticipation of the future produces conditions in the present which lead to the anticipated future.'¹² This seems horribly deterministic yet this moment of circularity is rendered fluid again as one face in the crowd (like a time traveller gifted with hindsight) slowly turns to look at us and makes contact across the intervening decades. Raqs suggest that 'The times of the past and the possibility of the future are both mortgaged and held hostage to the urgency of the unyielding present.' And this work is perhaps their attempt at a negotiation out of this hostage situation and at creating a sense of contemporaneity.

Agamben talks about 'the contemporary' as someone who is of the time but also not of it 'they adhere to time through a disjunction and an anachronism'¹³ as if they are too tied to their own time, they fail to be able to see it properly. This sounds a lot like the face in the crowd in Re-Run, who seems out of joint with the time. This idea extends to the notion that the 'contemporary' artist is perhaps able to point out those things we have become inured to, the perceive things afresh, to hold their gaze on the present through being slightly displaced within it.

In the sculpture and associated series of prints 'Happen-Stances', logic is bent and put under duress by contingency to offer this new perspective. The portals of 'Perhaps', could be seen as the embodiment of the potential of the future contingent proposition which brings in the indeterminate - by (per) chance (hap). They are a physical interpolation into the notional and digital logic gates which govern language, logic and media, which unlike the diagrammatical representations of Boole's thought, are intrinsically intertwined, disallowing the either/or and the yes /no in favour of a sense of overwhelming possibility.

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¹² Raqs statement on Re-Run at <https://vimeo.com/84205911>

¹³ Giorgio Agamben' 'What is the Contemporary' from *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford University Press, 2009)p 83