

Perception, Temporality And Symbol: A Study Of *Man With Cockerel* By Ranbir Kaleka (2001-2002)

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram

Abstract

This article makes an early attempt to emerge a dialogue between neuroscientific theories of perception and video art while proposing alternate lenses to view Kaleka's installation in the context of Indian contemporary video art. The author proposes that Neuroaesthetics as a field may benefit from studying screendance and audience engagement because the conceptual complexity offered by screendance has the potential to throw light on cognitive and affective systems during emergent aesthetic episodes.

Time and symbol, two critical elements that pave the way for new perception, and how these elements transform into materiality in Kaleka's work are discussed. This discussion reveals in more depth, the illusory loop that Kaleka constructs in order to engage the audience in a deeper and more critical perception of the human condition at the interface of society, politics and economics with the techniques of video art. While the paper places greater emphasis on perception of an artwork by its audience, artists may be able to use the neurocognitive model analysis to develop different engagement strategies with their audiences. The author's intention is to delve into an expanded investigation of aesthetic experience and perception using the elusive links between art and science.

Keywords: Ranbir Kaleka, neuroaesthetics, VIMAP, temporality, action perception control

Introduction

Ranbir Kaleka is one of the leading media-artists of India, particularly known for the technique of projecting video onto his paintings. Kaleka's *Man with Cockerel* (2001-2002) inspires a few questions both from the use of its video loop technique as well as the painterly play of light in the black and white video of the man holding a cockerel. At first sight, it invokes the rustic village life still seen in remote parts of India, the closely entwined lives of human and animal/ bird. It is also reminiscent of cockfighting practices around the world since ancient times. While the practice has been both condemned and outlawed in India, it continues on a limited scale. Kaleka studied art history and painting and there are distinct influences of both the knowledge of art history and the techniques of light and shadow in painting.



In art history, the idea of the man holding a rooster recirculates ushering in multiple layers of meanings: Marc Chagall uses emotional associations in his paintings of roosters; Fernando Amorsolo's *Man with a Rooster* invokes a rustic and unhurried time returning to people their sense of heritage and M. F. Hussain's *Woman with a Rooster* subverts the issues surrounding vitality and fertility.

Also evident in his work is the influence of Indian cinema's narrative power, especially of its Neo-realist movement. The Neo-realist period in Indian cinema starting from the early 50s offered a close and scathing look at the socio-political identities of a newly independent country and its people. This wave of cinema co-evolved with both the national and regional literature of the times and focused on using the medium to critique socio-economic and politically relevant issues without mainstream song and dance sequences entirely. Visually, the movies contained slow narratives and vivid compositions of the intensity and beauty of human emotions and relationships. The protagonists in these movies also were not super-heroes, they were men and women in their daily lives woven together by social, moral, economic, and political threads (Chatterjee, 1989; Girish, 2021).

Analysing Kaleka's work in the context of the self and the autonomy of individuation, Kalita, N.R. writes, "In the collision between the projected and painted interfaces of video painting, Kaleka's arrangements are meticulous in resisting a pluralization of image-forms and media." In talking about his own work, Kaleka discusses his experiments with materiality in *Man with Cockerel*. Transcribing his words from a talk, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0VnIFBECpk>, 13.49 minutes)

"... this is again, working out with materiality, I projected this on various surfaces...I projected this on plexiglass and now what plexiglass did, it was sanded plexiglass, it refracted the image. So, a black and white image began to contain color, you could see color in the image even though there was no real color."

Kaleka seems to play with and allude to constructing a system as a means of facilitating the interaction of the material (plexiglass) with the real world, the society, the man in his environment- leading to the emergence of a particular causality from within the confines of a preset functioning- a dimensional leap from within the artwork itself. This particular notion seems to resonate with what Jane Bennett defines as 'vibrant materiality'. As Jane Bennett suggests, "to encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things", Kaleka spins materiality into the realm of the social and the political scenario within contemporary India inviting several reflections on materiality and plurality. Indian society is an amalgam of religions and several hundred years of struggle between the critique of materiality and the economics of transposing material commodities as a means of both survival and power. Materiality and

plurality cross-over in Kaleka's work as we examine it beyond the physical materiality, the work's production date and the social, political mediasphere during its creation, his personal process of investigation into the nature of things and the work's place in the canon of contemporary Indian art. Rather than take a stance on materiality or analyze the epistemological underpinnings of materiality to art, Kaleka is content with allowing frames of perception to emerge. Kaleka also does not dwell on the tangibility and lasting nature of materiality, his quest is in emerging the human condition at the interface of society, politics, economics and materiality. *Man with Cockerel* seems to emerge in a continuous transit from what resembles a rural character to the sounds of noisy urban life and vice versa, mapping the elusive spaces of a dual nation and its citizenship; the thresholds of colonial history and the industrial aspirations of the independent nation; the population divided by culture, ideology, religion, history and memory.

In light of Frame Theory where Goffman (1974) argues that much of our behavior is cued by expectations which are determined by the frames which constitute the context of action, materiality adds an interesting dimension. In observing the *Man with the Cockerel*, we look for these 'frames' to give us clues: what is the place in which the action of holding the cockerel is set? what is the actor wearing? what time of day is it? what are the sounds in the larger ecosystem? are there other actors with different social roles? What is the actor projecting to the audience? Is the cockerel struggling to flee? is it about to be sacrificed? Will it be dead or alive? Adding to these questions, is the layer of materiality- the video in a time-loop- suggesting both the inevitability of time and the limits of materiality to the human experience.

Kaleka's work can be engaged with through multiple lenses within the larger umbrella of art and film perception. I have followed Kappenberg's (2015) suggestion to focus on the larger canvas:

"We should perhaps be less concerned with individual projects and whether they are Screendance or not, but rather consider a wider body of works and even include that which occurs in the everyday through interactions with cameras and screens, digital media, and the internet. If a person is caught on a CCTV camera in a public building, perhaps this is also part of the contemporary machinery of Screendance."

In the process of focusing on 'opening out the frames of references and the voices in the field of screendance' as part of 'The evolving critical landscape of the field', I have positioned my analysis at the junction of role of aesthetic experience in the appreciation of art. Here, the mechanisms underlying perception of art and the neural underpinnings of an aesthetic experience come to the forefront. As contemporary art and screendance both can have conceptually challenging

components, they serve as a perfect testing ground for theories of perception. In order to further unpack perception and the roles of the art work and viewer in aesthetic experience, I use the Vienna Integrated Model of Art Perception (VIMAP) which expands on the influential 2004 model proposed by Leder et al. The Leder et al., 2004 model used a modular structure and provided an integrative view of cognitive and affective processes involved in aesthetic appreciation while placing cognition within semantic context (Leder and Nadal, 2014). The VIMAP Model 2017 by Pelowski et al. expands on the 2004 and 2014 Leder et al; Leder and Nadal models.

Kaleka's work reflects realistic social scenarios interspersed with imagination and questions both art and meaning. In his own words (quoted later²), he emphasizes the need to understand his work through the psychological imprints from his childhood and the cognitive and affective components of his experiences. Using the VIMAP model allows for visual appreciation of the formal elements of screen based contemporary artwork while enabling deeper interpretations and categories for nuanced analysis of socio-cultural complexities that are unique to Kaleka's work. In this manner, a coherent and meaningful sensemaking of the aesthetic encounter of Kaleka's work becomes possible. In addition, the VIMAP model provides a strong framework for socio-cultural and individual positionality of diverse artists. Both the cognitive and affective aspects in his work elicit strong responses from two of India's foremost contemporary art critics. Therefore, in order to expand our understanding of Kaleka's work, I detail the devices he uses for shaping the viewer's perception and the current research regarding the neurocognitive control of perception. Secondly, I have also applied the neurocognitive VIMAP model of art perception at a superficial level to analyse the perception of Kaleka's art by Geeta Kapur and Nancy Adajania. After this, I expand more deeply into two aspects of aesthetic perception: the different symbols within his work and how the particular temporal framework used by the artist evokes multiple emergent meanings in the audience.

Neurocognitive Control Of Perception

Kaleka's use of video/ screen techniques gently yet confidently reshape perception for the viewer. He repeats, but the actions are different each time. He gives us temporary relief in the glad tidings of the placid lake and the birds that visit, and yet draws us back time and again in a slow drawing in of our bodies, beings, intellect, mental processes and self and personhood into the critical narrative symbol that his work depicts. Awareness of movement emerges as we watch, and the movement draws us into the socio-politics, but also in its return swings, and waves, draws us back into ourselves creating a perceptive structure of sorts it is these subtle acts of action that allow the viewer to be subconsciously, unconsciously and then slowly consciously be drawn into action perception. Kaleka's process of artistic inquiry -through the objects' material qualities, the visual juxtapositions and spatial politics define engagement at one level while the

viewer's engagement happens through shifts in perception and time. We have to respond simultaneously to the actions of the man and the cockerel as if they are 'performing' in real time, however they are constructs of fractional moments, recorded and revised.

As we watch, we are also engaged in a continuous process of decoding and encoding the information we are presented with. Experience of the art may result in several emotional and intellectual engagements, at the same time, our process of encoding and decoding information happens through the neural networks of our brains. The materiality of aesthetic experience can therefore also be understood through an active dialogue with neuroscientific studies of visual art experience and moving image where materiality of the neuronal network adds a dual layer of appreciation and questions as it weaves together neurobiological and cognitive explanations. Within the brain, large-scale neural networks modulate function in time scales ranging from milliseconds to seconds, with feedback from the environment and the task on hand. The unfolding of art experience also derives from such functional networks with the advantage of shaping these structures individually through various past experiences as well as the speed and long-range connections developed therein. Bottom-up processing retrieves sensory information from our immediate external environment to build our perceptions. Top-down processing allows for interpretation of sensory inputs based on pre-existing knowledge, experiences, and valuations.

In his work, Kaleka has taken an aspect of our ordinary visual experience and turned it into the object of a visual experience. Kaleka often mentions growing up in a 'Haveli, a traditional manor house, with historical and architectural value and how his childhood experiences shape his work:

"My brother and I were the only two children in the large house. Nothing major ever happened in the house, and time moved slowly, giving great significance to the tiniest 'non-event'. These types of phantasmagoric performances and the architecture of the haveli formed my inner life and sense of visual proportion. As I moved out from the village to the town, and then to the city, travelling to different regions of India, I actively collected orally narrated stories from strangers and friends. From the recesses of my mind where they had settled, the accumulated stories emerge as invented 'events', creating a psychological map of my mind and of the people amongst whom we lived."²

Aesthetic experiences individuate through multiple modes of seamless integration of information and attribution of value: understood as "emergent states, arising from interactions between sensory-motor, emotion-valuation, and meaning-knowledge neural systems" (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2014, p. 371) that have been

selected through several evolutionary pressures. Kandel, 2012, p 741 explains how the top-down and bottom-up processes complement each other in art perception: “Information processed from the bottom up relies in good part upon the built-in architecture of the early stages of the visual system, which is largely the same for all viewers of a work of art. In contrast, top-down processing relies on mechanisms that assign categories and meaning and on prior knowledge, which is stored as memory in other regions of the brain. As a result, top-down processing is unique for each viewer.” In a simplistic way, this means that bottom up processes come into play while observing the formal elements of an artwork/performance while top down processes mediate expectations and meaning.

Action perception also depends on multiple sources of information such as sensory, motor, and affective processes. Blake and Schiffman (2007) write that the perception of a human body in motion is influenced by reciprocal conceptually driven top-down and bottom-up processes while focusing on visual sensitivity to human motion. Several lines of evidence show that the sensory representations found in the perception of action align with motor representations during the planning of actions (Hommel et al. 2001). In studies of the neural correlates of dance appreciation using live performances, it was found that knowledge/semantic and physical contexts influence the subjective experience and the authors suggest that, “spectators covertly simulate the movements for which they have acquired visual experience, and that empathic abilities heighten motor resonance during dance observation” (Jola, Abedian-Amiri, Kuppaswamy, Pollick, & Grosbras, 2012). Artists have effectively used top-down and bottom-up processes of perception in their art by creating and shaping implicit and explicit messages of the moving body, emphasizing verticality, emotion and social messaging. For example, Kandel (2012, p737) discusses top-down processing where perceptions begin from the general and lead into the specific through active engagement with prior knowledge though the example of Gustav Klimt’s art.

“If, for example, we look at a landscape painted by Gustav Klimt, such as *A Field of Poppies*, it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the image from the internal content alone. What is immediately apparent is a homogenous expanse of green paint, punctuated with spots of red, blue, yellow, and white, stabilized by two small passages of white at the top edge of the canvas. Once we compare this image to what we know about painting, however, the content of the picture becomes perfectly clear. Considered in the tradition of landscape painting, specifically that of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist pointillists, what emerges from the mass of green and red splotches is a beautiful pastoral scene of a poppy field covered in flowers”.

While it is not studied in this context, an interesting example for an artist's use of top-down and bottom-up processes to communicate with their audience, is the depiction of a giant roaring waterfall cascading thunderously down the mountains in South Indian Koodiyattam dance, recognized by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Stunningly minimalistic in approach, the Koodiyattam artist is seated and uses only two fingers of the right hand, the index and middle fingers moving together and alternately at several different speeds to conjure up the vision of the majestic waterfall. Viewers often leave the performance talking animatedly about the waterfall clueing us into bottom-up processes that come into play in their experience of the dance performance. The visual and aural (mizhavu drumming) sensory clues feed the bottom-up processes for the generation of the aesthetic experience of a gigantic waterfall. Even when the audience is comfortably seated, watching the performance, the human visual system has been shown to be tuned for gathering and responding to socially relevant information through studies focusing on the chameleon effect and the underlying mirror neuron system. The mirror neuron system is characterized by activity in the premotor and parietal cortices during the passive observation of movements (Gallese et al., 2004).

However, connoisseurs of Koodiyattam clue into several cultural, literary-analyses; metonymic and advanced musical knowledge for the same scene implying the role of top-down processes in their aesthetic experience.

The Vienna Integrated Model of Art Perception (VIMAP) connects “early bottom-up, artwork-derived processing sequence and outputs to top-down, viewer-derived contribution to the processing sequence” (Pelowski et al., 2017; p 82). The model also accounts for aesthetic appraisals, emotions, and physiological and neurological responses to art while expanding on earlier model of art experience by Leder et al., 2004. Therefore, the VIMAP model provides a framework with which the experience of Kaleka's art can be analysed. Given that Kaleka's work reflects the realistic social scenarios laced with layers of imagination and unexpected possibilities, I have used the framework of the model to dissect how the artist uses devices to modulate the audience's perception. While limited in scope, an attempt has been made to perform an initial analysis of the perception of two critics of the contemporary art scene in India, Geeta Kapur and Nancy Adajania, through their writing about Kaleka's Man and cockerel. Both critics have a positive, favorable response to the artwork and refer to aspects of Buddhist philosophy; while Geeta Kapur borders on existentialism, Nancy Adajania wrestles with phenomenology in the mix.

This is a first attempt to use the VIMAP model to parse the perception of an Indian contemporary artwork through the eyes of two culturally situated critics and in the present form does not aim to do more than that.

Geeta Kapur's excerpt³:

"A bald man with a placid, Buddha-like face, clutching and letting go then clutching and letting go a plumed fowl (*Man with Cockerel*, 2001): this rhythmically repeated, soft-gray image offers a tantalizing grasp of desire, an allegory on dispossession. Kalekas subject-matter is representational and yet, by the form and brevity of its videoed avatar, by a trick of durational fallacy, by sheer transience, it erases its signified meaning. The imaged body at the brink of dissolution and disappearance reads like an index of mortality. Its quotidian identity is subordinated to a fragile sense of being where no assertion, no action is necessary except that which trusts in a minimal continuum of survival. The language of representation enters the liminal zone and the encounter, sanguine, serene, evanescent, resembles a haiku where the hypothesis offered about a lived life needs no backing of proof".

Geeta quickly transitions from descriptions of the formal aspects of the artwork including her responses to colors, timing and the behavior of the cockerel as a first look at the artwork into a more nuanced offering of the discursive and curatorial frameworks of the contemporary art scene in India and the situational concerns while drawing from global references to derive meaning. Considering just this excerpt at face value, we see the early bottom-up processing lead into a more top-down drawing of connections and meaning-making. We see the emphasis on top-down processing, involving the "significance of the artwork, a viewer's ability to master, and the relation between art and the self" (Pelowski, 2017. p103).

A clear limitation to this exercise arises from being unable to parse if her use of the words: sanguine, serene, evanescent refer to emotional states that are aroused in her as she encounters the artwork or a transformative outcome she projects from her reference to Buddha. From a superficial mapping to VIMAP, Geeta Kapur's writing clearly allows us to speculate her attention and arousal, stage 2 perceptual analysis, stage 3 implicit memory integration (inferred from her references) followed by stage 4 explicit classification. According to VIMAP, these stages culminate in a stage of cognitive mastery. Several outcomes are outlined as part of the cognitive mastery stage, however given that there is only a short excerpt and no other data from Geeta Kapur's original encounter with the artwork, it is not possible to speculate further here.

Nancy Adajania's excerpt⁴:

“...the painter and installer Ranbir Kaleka retains the sensuous quality of painterliness in his video installation, *Man with Cockerel*. Rendered with the hypnotic aura and pace of a black-and white silent film, the video operates with a minimal narrative, calibrated gestures. The action of the loop is simple, yet rewards phenomenological scrutiny: a man enters the frame, holding on to a cockerel, perfectly mirrored by his reflection. He looks at the viewer, as though for confirmation of his existence, his possession of the bird. At this point, his image breaks up; but as suddenly, reappears, while the cockerel makes good its escape. The synchrony between person and reflection breaks down, as the man pursues the runaway cockerel, leaving his reflection behind. A moment later, the reflection breaks down, as the man pursues the runaway cockerel, leaving his reflection behind. A moment later, the reflection follows the person in slow motion. The man returns, both bird and reflection under control: the sequence of escape and capture repeats itself. Why are these insistent images so lucid, yet difficult to grasp? Buddhist in desires that enslave the self to the object of its passion, turning existence into a chain of pursuit, possession, frustration and renewed pursuit. The brief point of choice, when the cycle might be broken, is perhaps indicated by the time lag when the reflection momentarily refuses to play mirror”.

Nancy Adajania alludes to more finer details in her description such as the ‘sensuous quality of painterliness’ and ‘pace of a black- and white silent film’. From a superficial mapping to VIMAP, Nancy Adajania’s description allows us to speculate her attention and arousal, stage 2 perceptual analysis, stage 3 implicit memory integration (inferred from her references) followed by stage 4 explicit classification (Phenomenology, Buddhism). Per VIMAP, these stages culminate in a stage of cognitive mastery. It appears that Nancy Adajania makes one of the outcomes in stage 5 visible in her writing. She asks, ‘Why are these insistent images so lucid, yet difficult to grasp? displaying the self-relevance response outcome. Once again, due to the limited material available for analysis, it is not possible to go beyond speculation.

However, both critics’ responses seem to align with the model’s conception of aesthetic appreciation as a complex interaction between perceptual, cognitive and affective processes. As suggested by the model, semantic context, time and space modulate the response and aesthetic experience of the critics to Kaleka’s screen-based work.

Within semantic context, I propose that two key elements: temporality and symbol serve as key influences to the perception of the viewer. In Kaleka’s work, temporality is constructed through a blend of culture, memory, architectural

frames, spatial play and the tools and techniques of video art. Symbol is constructed out of multiple devices as well. In the context of the work being discussed, there are three symbols that are embedded within the work- The device of agitation; Man and cockerel as a unified, twinned whole; The ephemeral bond between man and cockerel. How temporality and symbol come together to deepen perception, is further discussed below:

1 The Question Of Temporality

Man with Cockerel plays with time as history; as individual and cultural memory; as a way of rustic village life and the almost theatrical performance of the man holding the cockerel and his reflection disappearing. The artist's childhood spent in a haveli, the historical, cultural contexts and architecture of the haveli, the unfolding of a day within the haveli as the artist's memory and the influence of all these factors in the creation of *Man with Cockerel* are considered. A Brahminy kite frequents the scene, as do other birds, the water remains a constant, light, colors and moments seemingly change, but what is it that we have been called to witness in this court bounded by the screen? The birds fly by, the boat seamlessly navigates the waters of lake perhaps at dawn or a little later, the water goes on drawing us into eternity in its gentle lapping. We are subconsciously embedded into this tranquil scene, and for those who have lived through hot summers in the tropics, timelessness and time entwining through the long listless day is as normal as drinking a glass of water to quench thirst. In this strange time that the tropics reveal, life is stark, unbearable, poignant and yet strangely fertile and lustful. As Kaleka describes his lived experience of place and space, time and time-space through the architecture of a haveli, we begin to see the immediacy of his symbols through the windows of the haveli, scene after scene emerges in time, yet time movement is fractional, so slow, that the screen has actually not moved at all. In slowing time to a minute fraction, we see that the loop of symbol, is in fact not a repetition, but a restoration of a small instance in each of its shades, textures and meanings.

Here then, the nature of perception that Kaleka calls for, is the fineness of detail, the things we miss because we are blatantly fast, and allow ourselves to be wilfully blind in the way we process a moment. He slows it down for us masterfully, very much architectural in its spatiality and temporality, delivered in the materiality of the screen. In such slowness, there is no escaping from reality, there is no escaping from ourselves and our shallowness of grandiose belief in the value of greed and desire. Ganguly, D. K. writes, "We need to remember that the formation of loop cannot be simply created by repetition of audio-visual elements, neither the chaotic assemblage of the same would create a sensation of turbulence". If we observe temporality in the *Man with the cockerel* loop, it appears tangible and measurable. The passage of time in its acute shortness reveals less about the past and more about performing the present. However, to

me the most intriguing aspect through engaging with this temporality is the viewer's perception that can be revealed. How does Kaleka invoke memory in the viewer through his peculiar slicing of the experience of temporality? Using the loop expands time for the viewer, yet the image is minimal. The viewer is located precisely in that mental space of contemplation between time and timeless, haunted by the slow reflection of the man and cockerel receding into our interiority in an endless ebb and flow. Kaleka disturbs us with his central loop positioned in eternity, that the water seems to symbolize. Image and sound interpenetrate each other in interesting ways that are not particularly complementary.

The visual of the man with the cockerel itself inspires a vantage point- a slower negotiation of life where one may delight in the sight of a kingfisher alighting by a small pond, a sparrow, or a rose-ringed parakeet chatting with its partner. However, the noisy soundtrack has the tendency to induce different images of everyday urban India where a vantage point is achieved by viewing life through the train window or seated in the hot humid back of a car caught in a traffic jam. Temporality of the reflection seems to be most critical; it is at once pervasive and ephemeral. Therefore, a critically important aspect to study with respect to perception would be the inherent experience of time perception. For instance, Man with the Cockerel confronts us with a temporally shrunken vision of the scene, while triggering our visual recognition of motion. The loop creates 2 layers of perception: a shifting/unshifting event in the scene, influenced by past perceptions of the artist himself, present in the video and a slower timescale of life which creates a pause in the audience's mental perception of the event of the man holding the cockerel where the cockerel seems to have settled down after perhaps an initial struggle against being caught. The direction of causation could run in either direction where the experience of motion lies in the awareness of location/position, or the experience of motion could also lie in perceiving multiple occupancy of time.

2 The Symbol:

In the words of Spanish priest and philosopher Raimon Panikkar:

“The symbol is not an objectifiable reality. A symbol is not an object. A symbol includes the subject for whom the symbol is symbol as much as the object which we may somewhat point out as part of the symbol...The symbol reveals the symbolized in the symbol itself, not outside, transcending thus the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism. The symbol is a matter of experience”¹

Three symbols that stand out in Kaleka's work are:

The Device Of Agitation As A Symbol

In traditional Indian art, arriving at the form that stands in as a symbol for a philosophical construct is a highly desired goal. This idea continues to be explored in Indian art cinema through the 80s. *Man with a Cockerel* is probably best understood by drawing parallels from the suggestions inherent in the works of directors such as Mani Kaul, Saeed Mirza and Ketan Mehta from the 70s and 80s. In the work of these directors, the use of imagery is for the purpose of a nuanced mood, the silence is neither comforting nor a spiritual stillness. It is instead an understated agitation captured in moving image almost as if it were still photography or painting. Mani Kaul has often likened his movies to paintings. An unusual sense of stillness is achieved through the slow pace of editing and fixed frames in *Man with Cockerel*, the stillness here is neither calming nor silent, much like frames found in Mani Kaul's "Uski Roti". *Uski Roti* (1970)⁵ films a woman sourcing and making bread for her husband, a trucker. She waits for him at a truck stop to hand over the bread. What starts out as an innocuous narrative slowly transforms, frame by frame, into the layers of complexity: her loneliness, the struggle of protecting her sister and knowing her husband spends more time with his mistress.

As she politely, timidly hands over the bread, the agitation becomes visible in the absence of everything that the viewer might anticipate in the scene. The agitation clues the audience to the dispensability of her existence, the tremendous loneliness and the horror yet to come. The agitation is coded in the handling of cinematic time-space. Arindam (2018)⁶ explains more deeply about the time aspect in Kaul's films as he writes, "The temporal dimension of Kaul's films vary radically from both Ghatak and Bresson and is informed by the notion of Shruti, a metric for tuning, borrowed from Indian classical music that explains the prominence of temps mort in his films."⁶

In a similar way, the sparseness of images and characters within the loop in Kaleka's work, create an agitation, through distinctly performing absences: Where is the backdrop of an idyllic village that the man and the cockerel suggest? Are the man and his cockerel displaced from their original setting to an unfriendly space where they are strangers? Is the man about to kill the cockerel after triumphantly curtailing its escape? Or is the cockerel his companion? Does the man's facial expression belie his thoughts or his message to the viewer? Are they performing their shifting identities? The question of identity is unraveled in the many complex layers of this agitation.

Through these absences, the device of agitation functions as a symbol of changing worlds. Symbol itself is a matter of experiencing and the experienced: the cross-section of lost opportunities and movement towards brave new world; the presence of the past in the present and its role in shaping the future; migration and the transience of human experience in different worlds- the artist

and the audience exchanging worlds of memories and realities through the artistic work. The device of agitation in the larger Indian context serves as a symbol created for contemporary exploration of themes and allows the audience to play with it, allowing them to access their memories, impressions, and perceptions in order to challenge traditions and systems that stand in the way of economic and social advancement.

Man And Cockerel As A Unified Twinned Symbol

The man is holding a cockerel as he walks into the frame, with a brief struggle, the cockerel escapes from his hands. In a following sequence, the loop plays back and the man appears to have caught the cockerel back. Interestingly, while the man was chasing the cockerel, his reflection remains in the sequence and as if the reflection has acquired a persona, it moves in slow motion following the man. We are tempted to fall into despair momentarily, each time the cockerel escapes, there is a pang of pain, leaving us to feel ourselves in its pathetic wings. We are left in a strange space of fear and emptiness, left alone with this stark element of human emotion, almost undefinable, and yet colossal in its presence. We get respite from the cockerel in the form of a heron retracing its steps, a few birds in flights and the lapping waters in the end. One intriguing moment is when the performance of the reflection does not synchronize with the performance of the man, what are we then invited to explore and witness? What do the twin identities of the man and his cockerel mean within the context of the societies which we are part of and our responses to the happenings in our own society as well as the larger global society?

Within the context of India banning cockfights, it could be read as a critique against the customs that bind Indian male bodies in their socially performative roles? It might suggest ambivalence, an uncertainty of relations between old and new lives/ identities/ laws and customs (Kappenberg, 2021, pers.comm). Kaleka challenges the limits of our own security, by drawing us deep into the elements of our own perception that we live comfortably with. In his introduction of a twinned symbol of man and cockerel in a series of looped sequences, he questions what we take for granted through the symbol as a mode of material inquiry. What if we replace the symbol with a man/ cockerel individually? The tension of the work would then be limited. However, through its use, an entwined interactive symbol such as man and cockerel in itself becomes a material model/ a technique that Kaleka uses brilliantly to confound our perception of reality.

The Ephemeral Bond Between Man And Cockerel As A Symbol

Both Man and cockerel are symbols of the inescapable reality of our lives, the bind that keeps us going in a loop of interconnections. The real symbol in Kaleka's work lies in the intangible, ephemeral yet irreversible bond that man and bird share, a predestiny of sorts that they must contend with, the confounding riddle of our existence. In choosing this seemingly non-threatening imagery that is perhaps an everyday incident that occurs over and over again, almost mindless in its nature,

and yet, so deeply embedded in the politics of survival or both subjects, the symbol allows us to transcend the ordinary and enter that which is extraordinary - that rare moment of sentience, when we open up to the paradoxes of reality with a critical eye. The symbol is an event, it is a relationship, an irreversible moment in time, yet left to us to reflectively engage with in a surreal, almost fiery loop of the ordinary. Kaleka calls us to witness the unremarkable by looping time, so that it suddenly takes on the weight and burden of becoming a symbol of our times. In that casual yet predetermined choice of subject, he elevates the everyday to the deeper politics of conscience, asking what is meaning, is meaning important to art?

Conclusions

For the perception of any artwork, there are a number of factors which deliver the artistic experience. These include background, culture, memories and associations of an individual viewer, associations of value and reward as well as expertise and relevant art-related knowledge. Through the perception of time and symbol, we are also able to bridge unexpected networks of the brain. Pushing the possibilities of human perception that emerge at the intersection of culture, technology and media art open up multiple ways to experience and study both art and cognition. At the heart of new perception, we are drawn back into the world of choreographed movement on screen, an elusive whole, that uses imagination to help us perceive reality with a more nuanced eye. We will need to explore screen-based movement as a medium, technique, tool as well as method that offers new freedoms of perception for creating a dialogue with neurocognitive models. Neuroaesthetics as a field may benefit from studying screendance presentations and viewer engagement of on-screen action as well as 'screen' itself as the conceptual complexity offered by screendance has the potential to throw light on cognitive and affective systems during emergent aesthetic experience.

The interplay and treatment of time and symbol feature as materiality in Kaleka's *Man with Cockerel*. Extending back from Kaleka's video installation into the field of screen dance, we recognize that screen dance offers the potential for time to become a tangible material that can be drawn as infinite symbols into itself, allowing new patterns of thought to emerge.

While the focus is only on the perception mechanisms of the audience, the neurocognitive model analysis described in the paper may also be used by artists as a tool to create strategies for multiple levels of engagement between their work and the audience.

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully thank Dr. Claudia Kappenberg for her insightful discussions and comments on the manuscript. I would like to thank Dr. SriSriVidhiya Kalyanasundaram for helpful suggestions on theories of Indian aesthetics.

Biography

Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram is a dance educator, choreographer and poet. Trained in Bharatanatyam, Butoh and Flamenco, Sandhiya has led and performed in several collaborative performances between dance styles, served on the Jury Panel for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival and enjoys working at the intersection of neuroscience and dance. She is currently experimenting with screen dance to explore the interconnections between body and the natural world.

References

- Blake R, Shiffrar M. Perception of human motion. *Annu Rev Psychol.* 2007; 58:47-73. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190152>
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Chatterjee, A., & Vartanian, O. (2014). Neuroaesthetics. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 18, 370–375. <https://doi.org/0.1016/j.tics.2014.03.003>
- Kappenberg, Claudia. 2015. The politics of discourse in hybrid art forms. *Art in Motion: Current Research in Screendance*. Ed. Franck Boulègue, Marisa C Hayes, Cambridge: University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center, . 21-29.
- Gallese, V., Keysers, C., Rizzolatti, G. 2004. A unifying view of the basis of social cognition. *Trends Cogn Sci* 8: 396–403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2004.07.002>
- Ganguly, D.K., 2019. The Re-articulation of Editing as a Formal Discipline: Narrative Possibilities in Contemporary Media Environment in Conference 'Dramaturgy and Media: Challenges and Prospects of Interaction', CILECT Congress, VGIK, Moscow'
- Girish, D, 2021, A New India Finds Its Voice in the Films of Bimal Roy, The Criterion collection, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7356-a-new-india-finds-its-voice-in-the-films-of-bimal-roy>
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, NY et al.: Harper & Row.
- Hommel B, Musseler J, Aschersleben G, Prinz W. 2001. The theory of event coding (TEC): a framework for perception and action planning. *Behav. Brain Sci.* 24:849–937. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0140525x01000103>

Jola, C., Abedian-Amiri, A., Kuppaswamy, A., Pollick, F. E., & Grosbras, M.- H. (2012). Motor simulation without motor expertise: Enhanced corticospinal excitability in visually experienced dance spectators. *PLoS ONE*, 7(3), Article e33343. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0033343>

Kalita, N.R. 2019. The Art of Re-Interpreting Self: Self Imagery in the Works of Indian Artists. *International Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* Vol. 1, No. 2. 69-79 <https://doi.org/10.31763/viperarts.v1i2.52>

Kandel, Eric R. 2012. *The age of insight: the quest to understand the unconscious in art, mind, and brain: from Vienna 1900 to the present*. New York: Random House.

Leder, H., Belke, B., Oeberst, A. and Augustin, D. 2004. A model of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic judgements. *British Journal of Psychology*, 95: 489-508. <https://doi.org/10.1348/0007126042369811>

Leder, H. and Nadal, M. 2014. Ten years of a model of aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic judgments: The aesthetic episode- Developments and challenges in empirical aesthetics. *British Journal of Psychology* 105: 443-464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12084>

Pelowski M, Markey PS, Forster M, Gerger G, Leder H. 2017. Move me, astonish me... delight my eyes and brain: The Vienna Integrated Model of top-down and bottom-up processes in Art Perception (VIMAP) and corresponding affective, evaluative, and neurophysiological correlates. *Phys Life Rev.* Jul; 21:80-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pprev.2017.02.003>

Sumita S. Chakravarty (1989) National identity and the realist aesthetic: Indian cinema of the fifties, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 11:3. 31-48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208909361313>

¹ Raimon Panikkar in Chapter1: Opening Address. In Book 'Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian traditions. Sunya, Purna and Pleroma' Ed. by Bettina Bäumer and John Dupuche. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005

² http://www.acaw.info/?page_id=37231

³ 'Inside the Black Box: images Caught in a Beam' a talk given by Geeta Kapur on video and light-based installations at School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi on 10th November 2005

⁴ ZOOM! Art in Contemporary India (catalogue excerpt p43) Culturgest-Lisbon, Portugal Apr 7 - Jun 6 2004 by Nancy Adajania

⁵ <https://mubi.com/films/our-daily-bread-1970>

⁶ <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/improvisations-on-a-scale-the-cinema-of-mani-kaul>