

AT THE FACADE WE COULD SEE HIM NO MORE..

Mochu



facade (n.)

1650s, "front of a building," from French façade (16c.), from Italian facciata "the front of a building," from faccia "face," from Vulgar Latin *facia (see face (n.)).

The labyrinth unsettles the one “in” it, so that either he or she becomes explicitly lost to the lost others there, or else, as with the vampire, who while at a certain location does not appear in the mirror there, even when he or she is apparently in a certain zone of the labyrinth, he or she is not in it. To be in a place without being in it (as is made manifest by one’s absence in the mirror there), and vice versa: while not being in a place, to be in it - is this not a good definition of haunting? One is never fully in the labyrinth, but haunts it.

Jalal Toufic, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*

In the last drawing by K. Ramanujam, the body of the man wearing a cowboy hat - Hatter - which is a standard figure in almost all his works, is replaced by that of a dog with scaly wings. Strangely, the new entity retains the face of Hatter. For his contemporary P. Gopinath, this image of metamorphosis was a kind of premonition, as he narrates the events on the morning of Ramanujam's death.¹ Though often assumed to be a kind of alter-ego to the artist, the composition of Ramanujam's works seem to suggest that Hatter embodies a time that exists independently of Ramanujam's life and therefore merits a different kind of biography. Hatter is an entity that inhabits realms that belong neither within the diegetic world of drawings nor outside of them. A spectral realm - as elaborated by the painter C. Douglas, another of Ramanujam's contemporaries - that would be 'the exterior of the interior and the interior of the exterior', or 'the other side where animals, children and death are.'²

Metamorphic change within a drawing or painting isn't always a case of shape-shifting in the sense of a physical reconfiguration of matter but might indicate a rearrangement of presences. What appears as a premonition about an impending future might actually be a premonition about the absence of it haunting us. An absent future may *become-present* spectrally. This crisis of presence might be the reason why one is beset by 'uneasy' or 'odd kind of' dreams preceding (As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect)³ or succeeding (Gopinath: 'but unfortunately I had a lot of odd kind of dreams coming in.') a metamorphosis. And in dreams, just like in haunting, this mechanics of precession and succession also falls into crisis. In his writings on hauntology, Mark Fisher identifies two directions: 'The first refers to that which is (in actuality is) no longer, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic compulsion to repeat, a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern). The second refers to that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior).'⁴ In this sense, dream states often resemble the leaky space-time of haunting or perhaps they provide some form of access to it: Vertigo, the excess of perspective in space simultaneous with a complete lack of perspective in time; lapses of memory, a sense that the dream is broken and that it needs to be synthetically re-patched after waking or the poltergeist-like sentience of objects gazing at and talking to us. Likewise, a recurring image within a dream might be said to be a haunting, just as a literal illustration of dreamscapes could also be taken as an image of haunting.

Hatter's journeys are all about navigating the Facades. Often assumed to represent doorways or gates, the Facades in Ramanujam's drawings, however, do not provide an entry into anywhere, nor do they serve as a passage or exit. This is because one does not continue to *be oneself* after encountering the Facades, therefore the notion of entry or exit would be meaningless. The encounter begins with the negotiations with Facade-Bots, the figures usually found in pairs on the Facades. Hatter is often seen in close interaction with such figures. Famous for their apotropaic assaults on Aristotelian logic and Cartesian space, the Bots delineate the Facade as a succession of endless edges that occupy no space, spectrally overlaying, dissolving or montaging dimensions in a manner suggesting spatio-temporal coordinates in psychedelic trips, hallucinations or epiphanic visions. For instance, during dreams of falling, some of the Facade-Bots specialise in creating the illusion of rapid waking for the dreaming subject, just before he or she hits the ground. In reality the subject is waking gradually, struggling out of the lucidity and concentrated paranoia of the dreamt event. The Bots exploit this 'postponement of the edge' and suck their dream-lime, the fluid that reinforces the uneasy concrete of the Facades. The sanctuaries thus carved out by the Facades turn into a universe complete in itself, known in Sanskrit as *Anyā Manas* or The Other Mind, simultaneously indicating absent-mindedness as well as an experience of possession. Most initiation rituals, festivals or dances focus on invoking such trance states where the restrictive psycho-physical laws ordinarily useful in conscious waking life get neutralised - as Joseph Campbell says: 'where one is "beside oneself", spellbound, set apart from one's logic of self-possession and overpowered by the force of a logic of "indissociation"'.⁵ Masks, ritualistic chants, energy-diagrams etc assist this process, filtering contaminations by invasive programs of all kinds: biological, chemical, social, political and conceptual, or those that exist as dark energy. In spite of their resemblance to classical threshold-machines like the Lamassu, Yali or Narasimha, the Facade-Bots would be closer to Kirtimukha (*The Face of Glory*), as they have been found to derive energy from constantly eating themselves to the point where only their faces remain.⁶ The residual face continues to consume itself further; fangs, tongues, nostrils, earlobes, hairs and saliva rapidly mingle with bacterial and viral colonies to bring forth a relentless fusion of modular facial monstrosities with a cannibalistic vibe. This cyclical face-to-flesh-to-face movement channels the flow of duration along an axis of recurrent action. Once conjoined with limbs, tails, wings and other muscular or bone tissue, they exhibit startling dexterity in hauntological warfare along multiple pictorial planes.

The reconfiguration of face is crucial in understanding the construction of the Facades. The elaborately detailed architectural doorways, gates and vehicles combined with the tiny faces lodged within them, and the faces of the characters assembled alongside, together as a whole constitute the Facade and its entrancing singularity. Because the Facade is the face and the face is the Facade, almost like a literal etymological illustration. For instance, a structural element like a beam or pillar all of a sudden sprouts a face or becomes a face, gigantic, looming heavy over a marching procession. Or elsewhere, a gate stretches open wide and red to become a mouth. It is not a mouth on a face but the face erupts from around the mouth, like parthenogenesis, composite with whiskers, hair follicles, skins, scales, bulging eyes and all. Creepers crawl out, curling upwards as though under water. Then a red disk with a thick black edge slips out of the mouth, and flies to the sky. It appears to be either a brightly glowing planet seen through the water from beneath or a rather burnt-out star nearing extinction. Resembling Italian grottoes or medieval European images of the *Mouth to Hell*, this entire eruption-complex of creeper-under-water-burnt-star-sky-face is the complete Face-Facade. Subsequently the space where Hatter reclines with his humanoid companion is *at* this red mouth, not inside it because it is only a facade with no interior. An absent interior haunts the mouth, giving the illusion of an inside that *isn't*; instead it is spectrally overlaid on an exterior. Meanwhile, windows above gates appear to be gazing back at us, like eyes. But the windows remain also dark holes that do not have the perceptual apparatus to 'look' at anything; instead the Facade in its entirety functions as a non-retinal gaze from another world, a sentience perhaps unknowable to us, as Jacques Derrida might say: 'another source of phenomenality, another degree zero of appearing'.⁷ Not unlike cinematic special-effects, dissolves, fades or flickers, spectral overlays abruptly propose worlds with undeciphered origins, merged seamlessly yet materially indeterminate and fallen out of time. This masterly deployment of spectrality-effects, thereby warping time and introducing new phenomenologies might be considered the more profound influence of cinema on Ramanujam rather than his oft-mentioned fascination for the dramatic sets in mythological films.



Ramanujam wearing a hat and painting; I searched for this photograph so much that by the time the hat was discovered, the artist had disappeared. But I also heard that during one of his journeys on a giant bird, his hat had been blown away by the wind, into the future.

If the anamorphically distorted skull in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is only visible as such from a particular position in space in relation to the painting, analogically, Ramanujam's hat is only visible from a particular position *in time*, forming a case of temporal anamorphosis. However, unlike an optical distortion in two-dimensions, objects of this kind are not simply stretched across linear time but their existence affords a new ontological status for time itself. Therefore once the hat is visible, the historical figure of the artist and his context may disappear, as the oneiric perspectives of the Facades come into play. In temporal anamorphosis, the connecting tissue between futures and pasts assumes new flesh and a sentient alloy of organic and inorganic matter takes charge. Objects and landscapes appear stained by a time without genesis, recomposed as if from scar tissue, synthetic and monstrous. Human narratives and historical forces are abruptly dislocated, spectrally keyed-in to a previously unknown elsewhere. Individuals, groups or entire civilizations may suddenly find themselves where they are not - as in a labyrinth - lost even to themselves. The horror of a man being chased by a spectre is compounded by the realisation that despite running as fast as possible he is still at the same spot along with the nagging feeling that all this has happened before. And as the future begins to match the past instant by instant, it dawns on him that he too has always been haunting the world without ever really being *in* it. Deterministic loops like this are exemplified by the folkloric ghosts whose feet are turned backwards, the horror of history repeating itself. In this manner Cholamandal becomes a site for the eruption of monstrous time, haunted and thrown out of joint due to the momentum of the hat's flight. The flow of memory is replaced by the untimeliness of nostalgia. Nostalgia is residue that *unsettles*, the face that remains after the snake eats its own tail, time masquerading as itself.

'In mourning that goes wrong, there is no true internalization'. Derrida speaks in the film *Ghost Dance* by Ken McMullen. 'That is to say, the dead are taken into us but don't become part of us...They can haunt our body and ventriloquise our speech...A ghost can be not only our unconscious, but more precisely, someone else's unconscious.'⁸ Hatter somehow knew that the masked carnival was a funeral procession abandoned midway, which later turned into a celebration without end. He then recalled the image of a man's corpse washed ashore, half-covered in sand, with colourful algae, moss and corals growing over his drenched coat and hat. In this cold town by the sea, people had been metamorphosing into some kind of deep sea creatures. Over time, they would abandon land and move into the sea. While waiting out this tedious transformation that took years, they would flay themselves off their human skin but continue to wear it as a coat. They haunted themselves, plankton eyes glowing behind their amphibious human masks. Perhaps it was the music, but Hatter had always felt that all carnival celebrations had some funerary quality to them, like some interrupted mourning. Similarly funerals always seemed to conceal a discreet celebratory impulse. Hatter could never say for certain if the man by the sea was dead or whether he had just left behind his skin and migrated into the sea. But one day in the midst of the carnival-funeral, a mask of the man's face surfaced, wearing a hat. To be haunted is to remember what one has never directly experienced. But what if our remembrance leads us to a time that predates human experience itself?



The funeral, according to Hatter, was merely a prelude to encounters with beings that did not cohere with human sensibility. James Ensor was a painter of death and haunting. The deep sea objects collected by his mother for her local souvenir shop in Oostende - shells, fossilised pufferfish, stuffed sting-rays, corals, lichen and algae - function as a kind of fuel that powers the flying skulls, rebellious skeletons and masked crowds in Ensor's world. Like some kind of netherworldly memorabilia, these objects seem to embody a timescale oblivious to the narratives of civilization, overgrowing, burying and consuming entire cultures as though incidentally, with no consciousness to accompany these actions. The real masquerade in Ensor's works is therefore not in the masked gatherings but in the operations of anonymous matter secretly working their way through human hosts. The atmosphere of paranoia and disquiet would then be not simply an effect of the claustrophobic crowd but a result of the infestation of parasitic materials beneath the panicked assembly. This is also the unconscious that haunts Hatter, an unconscious without genealogy or history, like the dense mesh of granular detail perforating the Facades. These microscopic details spreading across Hatter's worlds and the ambiguous beings that accompany him belong to the subterranean time of rocks, minerals, crystals and space dust. And it is the same haunted fuel that lends the hat the necessary escape velocity to fly across asynchronous time and space. Consequently the spectral overlays of Hatter's worlds are perhaps only a serendipitous effect of the more ancient crusades of matter, and it is on this nonhuman a-conscious foundation that the Facades are erected and their hauntology mobilized.



Notes

¹ P. Gopinath : ‘When I got up he had put on new clothes and pumping the borewell for water, but his body was shaking..So I asked him what happened. Body was shivering, so we put him on an easy-chair. And he used to get this shivering when he used to get a fever and we thought it’s like that. Then we gave him some milk to drink and then we thought something..happened. So we called everybody and then we took him to the doctor. By the time we reached there it was over, because he had a very bad physique..his health was not good.. So this worked against him so fast. We had a dog called Karuppan. It was sick. The previous day it was lying ill and we wanted to take it to the veterinary doctor. So Nandagopal had brought his car to take this dog but at that time this..Ramanujam was so sick so we took him in this car to the doctor. But strangely, the last picture he did was, Ramanujam with the body of a dog and the face of Ramanujam. A black dog coming into his picture..It’s really terrific! We didn’t know what to do..Because it was actually a premonition kind of thing, he had anticipated..about his end he had already visualised or something. Mr. Josef James had that picture..then he didn’t come at that time and he thought keep it in your house till he comes back and he’ll collect it. But unfortunately every night I had a lot of odd kind of dreams coming in. That picture was giving a lot of bad vibrations. So I told him (Josef James) you take your painting back because I’m not able to sleep and things like that.’ *A Gathering at the Carnival Shop, 2015.*

² The animal is where it looks, and its look does not reflect it, nor does it reflect the thing, but opens the animal onto the thing. The other side, then, which Rilke also calls “the pure relation,” is the purity of the relation: the fact of being, in this relation, outside oneself, in the thing itself, and not in a representation of the thing. Death in this sense would be the equivalent of what has been called intentionality. Because of death “we look out with a great animal gaze.” Through death the eyes turn back, and this return is the other side, and the other side is the fact of living no longer turned away, but turned back, introduced into the intimacy of conversion, not deprived of consciousness but established by consciousness outside it, cast into the ecstasy of this movement.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Work and Death’s Space.*

³ Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis.*

⁴ Mark Fisher, *What is hauntology?*

⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, (London : Secker & Warburg : 1960), 25.*

⁶ Shiva suggested that the monster should feed on the flesh of its own feet and hands. Forthwith, to this incredible banquet that incredible incarnation of blind voraciousness proceeded. Ravished by its congenital hunger, it ate and ate. And having devoured not only its feet and hands, but its arms and legs as well, it was still unable to stop. The teeth went on through its own belly and chest and neck, until only the face remained.

Heinrich Zimmer, ‘The Face of Glory’, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, 175-185*

⁷ Bernard Steigler in conversation with Jacques Derrida, *Spectrographies.*

⁸ Derrida mentions here that this is an expansion on the idea of Incorporation developed by Abraham and Maria Torok.