

Introduction

This volume presents a timeline of the city of Bombay/Mumbai in the twentieth century, anchored to its most adored public institution – cinema. Why are we compiling a timeline when it has been accepted, in different degrees and registers, by almost all shades of intellectual opinion, that dates are rigid and memories are porous, and that the latter needs to be prioritized over the former? How, then, does one create a timeline that is neither cast in stone nor vulnerable to the antics of ‘manufacturing a past’? It was an exercise fraught with anxieties and contestations, and, to an extent, bound to fail.

Timeline now is a Facebook tagline promising a ‘contemporary and personalized choice of making of the self’. That is a great leap from war relics, gazetteers and monumental memorials – the sense in which the term was rampant in earlier eras. Timeline today is also an online application that enables you to draw information from or browse sources like Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Vimeo, Google Maps and SoundCloud. So, timeline in the 21st century is already softened, to the extent that the line is simultaneously jagged and porous/absorbent. It seems as if technology has enabled all memories to have their own memorials for a brief while. At this juncture, therefore, evolving a timeline for an entity that is primarily defined by a certain land mass, in the context of its popular and public cultures which too are predominantly defined by specific processes of production and distribution, was an act of swimming against the current.

Cinema City, the parental project to which this volume belongs, is an inter-disciplinary, circular project of collating, reading, manufacturing, archiving, recycling, re-reading ... in the realms of art making, documentary practices and discursive exercises. Since 2008 more than a hundred artists, architects, filmmakers, researchers, commentators on culture, cityphiles and cineastes have been digging tunnels and excavating paths to unearth a configuration that can be broadly termed Cinema City: an interface between the city that produces cinema on an overwhelming scale and under an overarching organism, and the cinema that has developed a hegemony to define the notion of the urban. They are twin products of the twentieth century, reared and developed through its wars, moving people and moving goods, and technologies of reproduction.

The configuration remains elusive as it kept changing through our journey, but the map of the tunnelled paths we have walked along is tangible. In the other volume in this series we outline this map – by tracing the footprints in the trek towards the cinema city Bombay/Mumbai. The current volume is conceived as a navigation tool to aid in this task. It is envisaged as a compilation of the *found* resources that need to be taken into cognizance when embarking on the trek.

This volume is divided into sections by decades, and the decades in turn are separated by a series of calendars designed by visual artists, filmmakers and designers. The body of text is a stitching together of found information, received knowledge, scribbles and oracles from formal and informal, acknowledged and discarded sources. It is layered with images which too are either found in circulation in streets and bazaars, or from personal archives. The relationship between text and image, far from being umbilical, is associative -- in a playful way. Just as the body of written text incorporates both contemporary readings and deliberately dated markers, contemporary works are inserted alongside ‘period’ images in the body

of visuals. These incorporations and insertions appear with detectable marks of joints in order to snap the magical spell of *snippets from the past*.

The calendar project was undertaken as an exercise of collectively speculating on the public cultures of the 20th century. Although made individually and independently by the concerned artists, only when they are laid out together do these speculations create a distinguishable line of refraction from known history. This refraction, which is a result of interventions by multiple people, has helped to make the act of stitching together the *found* a critical exercise. Some of the calendars were made using stray images and texts found in the city's exuberant network of recycled goods; in other cases veteran artists masqueraded their older works as found images in the public domain; and in a few cases the text of the timeline itself initiated new imaginations and new images.

The deliberation on the *found* is in the method of stitching together, which in turn is governed by a speculation on the need of the trekkers -- the authors/artists, in this instance. Hence what we call a timeline of the cinema city Bombay/Mumbai is actually an artisanal tool-box with a whole range of possibilities for use, in parts or in its entirety, and is not to be taken as a narrative by itself.

dates.sites is thus becomes a deliberation on the contemporary with the aid of a speculated upon and collated past.

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